

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	12 JULY 2021		
TITLE:	DRAFT DESIGN GUIDE FOR SHOPFRONTS SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT
SERVICE:	PLANNING	WARDS:	ALL
LEAD OFFICER:	MARK WORRINGHAM	TEL:	0118 9373337
JOB TITLE:	PLANNING POLICY TEAM LEADER	E-MAIL:	mark.worringham@reading.gov.uk

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 With the new Reading Borough Local Plan having been adopted in November 2019, the Council is in the process of publishing a number of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), which give further guidance on the implementation of policies within the Local Plan.
- 1.2 This report seeks Committee's approval to undertake community involvement on a Draft Design Guide to Shopfronts SPD (Appendix 1), which gives user-friendly guidance on how planning applications for applications affecting shopfronts will be decided. Community involvement will then be undertaken, and will be considered in preparing a version for adoption.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Draft Design Guide for Shopfronts SPD (Appendix 1) be approved for consultation.
- 2.2 That the Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services be authorised to make any minor amendments necessary to the SPD that do not alter the policy direction, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport, prior to consultation.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 In November 2019, Reading Borough Council adopted a new Local Plan. This sets out planning policies and proposals up to 2036 and is the main consideration in determining a planning application.
- 3.2 Some of the policies within the Local Plan require additional detail to be provided to assist with their implementation. A Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is a type of planning policy document that provides this additional detail. A SPD cannot make policy on its own, and can only provide additional detail on how policies in the Local Plan will be implemented.
- 3.3 The Local Plan contains policy OU5: Shopfronts and Cash Machines, which is a high-level policy dealing with the matters that typically arise on proposals for shopfronts. It operates in tandem with other Local Plan policies, in particular policies
- EN1: Protection of the Historic Environment, EN3: Enhancement of Conservation Areas and EN6: New Development in a Historic Context which ensure that developments protect and enhance the historic environment; and
 - CC7: Design and the Public Realm, OU4: Advertisements, CR2: Design in Central Reading, CR7: Primary Frontages in Central Reading and CR8: Small Shop Units in Central Reading which ensure that developments do not have negative visual impacts.
- 3.4 Currently, Reading does not have an adopted Design Guide to Shopfronts SPD. This document will be critical in delivery of the Reading Heritage High Streets Heritage Action Zone, although it will apply to shopfronts across the whole Borough. Additionally, as the nature of the high street is changing this document will provide advice for conversions of shopfronts to residential use.
- 3.5 The Reading High Streets Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) programme is a heritage-led regeneration initiative lead by Historic England, working with local councils and the community to create economic growth and improve our historic high streets through physical interventions, community engagement and cultural programming. The programme is based around areas on the Oxford Road, Castle Street, Gun Street, the southern end of St Mary's Butts and Market Place. Existing shopfronts will form a major focus for improvements and this SPD will provide guidance for applicants and planning officers that will tie in with the delivery of that programme.

4. THE PROPOSAL

(a) Current Position

- 4.1 Due to the lack of an existing Design Guide to Shopfronts SPD, there is limited guidance for both applicants and planning officers in determining planning decisions, and it would be timely to produce the document now to establish such guidance, particularly as the Council

begins to deliver the Reading Heritage High Streets Action Zone programme.

(b) Option Proposed

4.2 Committee is recommended to approve a new draft Design Guide for Shopfronts SPD for consultation. Appendix 1 contains a full draft of the SPD.

4.3 If agreed, the document will be subject to a consultation, to begin in July. SPD consultations generally last for six weeks, but the Council's Statement of Community Involvement proposes that this be extended to eight weeks where a consultation takes place during the school summer holidays, and this will be the case here.

4.4 Responses received will be considered in preparing a final draft SPD for adoption, which is intended for later in Autumn 2021.

(c) Other Options Considered

4.5 The main alternative option is to continue without a Design Guide to Shopfronts SPD. However, this would fail to provide applicants and planning officers with specific guidance for shopfronts, which affects both the quality of planning applications received and the determination of planning applications. This would miss an opportunity make the policy context much clearer for those Reading shop owners applying for planning permission, and would fail to provide additional guidance in implementing the HSHAZ programme.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 Adoption of the SPD will guide future development in a way that will contribute to achieving the Council's priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan (2021-2022)¹. It will help with "keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe" by ensuring that the effects of development on the wider environment are controlled and will also help with creating an "inclusive economy" by enabling improvements to existing shops and the establishment of new high-quality shopfronts that contribute to the growth and success of the town.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Policies on climate change and sustainable design that apply to various forms of development are set out elsewhere, within the Local Plan and Sustainable Design and Construction SPD. Additionally, the draft Design Guide to Shopfronts SPD emphasises the use of sustainable materials as well as retention and restoration of existing elements to minimise environmental impact.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

¹ <https://www.reading.gov.uk/council/policies-finance-and-legal-information/corporate-plan/council-corporate-plan-2021-to-2022/#themes>

- 7.1 The Council's consultation process for planning policy, as set out in the Statement of Community Involvement (adopted March 2014), is that the widest and most intensive community involvement should take place at the earliest possible stage, to allow the community a genuine chance to influence the document. Therefore, significant and wide-ranging community involvement exercises took place during development of the new Local Plan. The draft SPD provides more details for implementation.
- 7.2 Consultation is expected to last a period of eight weeks as described in paragraph 4.3 above. The consultation will involve contacting all individuals and groups on our consultation lists, as well as publication on the website.

8. EQUALITY ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 The Sustainability Appraisal of the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan incorporates the requirement to carry out a screening stage of an Equality Impact Assessment. A full Sustainability Appraisal that examines the effects of the shopfronts policy (and any related design policies) has already been completed as part of the Local Plan, and therefore additional Equality Impact Assessment is not required. It is not expected that there will be any significant adverse impacts on specific groups due to any of the protected characteristics.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Regulation 12 and 13 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 set out the requirements for undertaking consultation on Supplementary Planning Documents, which must last for a period of at least six weeks. Once the SPD is adopted by the Council, it will hold weight in the determination of planning applications for any development in the Borough.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The SPD has been paid for by Planning Services.
- 10.2 Consultation exercises can be resource intensive. However, the Council's consultation process is based mainly on electronic communication, which helps to minimise resource costs.
- 10.3 The SPD does not contain any proposals that would have additional financial implications for the Council.

Value for Money (VFM)

- 10.4 The preparation of a new SPD will ensure that development is appropriately guided and that significant effects are minimised. Production of the SPD, in line with legislation, national policy and best practice, therefore represents good value for money.

Risk Assessment

10.5 There are no direct financial risks associated with the report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012
- National Planning Policy Framework
- Reading Borough Local Plan, adopted November 2019