



15 November 2023

Title	Local Plan Partial Update Consultation on Scope and Content
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Report author	Mark Worringham, Planning Policy Manager
Lead Councillor	Councillor Micky Leng, Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets
Corporate priority	Healthy Environment
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the Local Plan Partial Update Consultation on Scope and Content (Appendix 1) be approved for consultation. 2. That the Assistant Director for Planning, Transport and Public Protection be authorised to make any minor amendments necessary to the Local Plan Partial Update Consultation on Scope and Content in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Planning, prior to consultation. 3. That the amended Local Development Scheme (Appendix 2) be agreed.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Reading Borough Local Plan was adopted in 2019. There is a statutory requirement to undertake a review of a local plan within five years of adoption. A Local Plan Review to comply with this requirement identified that there was a need to undertake a Partial Update of the Local Plan, and this was agreed by this committee on 23rd March (Minute 36 refers). This committee also agreed a Local Development Scheme (LDS) which set out the timetable for undertaking the Partial Update. This included a 'regulation 18' consultation around the content of the update beginning in November or December 2023.
- 1.2. This report therefore recommends undertaking consultation on the scope and content of the Local Plan Partial Update. A proposed consultation document is set out at Appendix 1. This consults on the proposed approach to those policies that form part of the Partial Update, including matters such as the overall provision of housing as well as consulting on sites that have been put forward for consideration for development.
- 1.3. This report also recommends some small amendments to the agreed LDS. These updates mainly affect the timetable for production of supplementary planning documents (SPDs), and do not amend the timetable for undertaking the Partial Update. These are set out in Appendix 2.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. The Reading Borough Local Plan was adopted by Council on 4th November 2019 (Minute 28 refers). Since that point, the Local Plan has been the main consideration in determining planning applications within Reading.
- 2.2. There is a statutory duty for local planning authorities to review their local plans within five years of the adoption date. Such a review should determine whether there is a need to update the Local Plan in full or in part. A review of the Reading Borough Local Plan was

therefore required to be undertaken by 4th November 2024. This review was reported to this Committee on 23rd March 2023 (Minute 36 refers) and identified a need to carry out a Partial Update of the Local Plan.

- 2.3. Changes to national policy and guidance, in particular in relation to the level of housing need for the authority, represent particular reasons why plans or individual policies may require updating. There have been a variety of changes to national policy, including a new version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in July 2021 and an updated version of the standard methodology for assessing housing need which places particular emphasis on the largest urban areas (including Reading) for delivering housing. This was the main reason that a need to update the Local Plan was identified, but there are a number of individual reasons for the particular policies.
- 2.4. This Committee on 23rd March 2023 also agreed a Local Development Scheme (LDS) (Minute 36 refers), which sets out a timetable for carrying out the Local Plan Partial Update. It also expects publication of a number of supplementary planning documents (SPDs).

3. The Proposal

Current position

- 3.1 The LDS approved in March 2023 sets out the timetable for the Local Plan Partial Update. It identifies that a 'Regulation 18' consultation would take place between November/December 2023 and January 2024. Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 requires that local planning authorities consult on the subject of a local plan that the local planning authority proposes to prepare, but it does not require that this be a full draft. The LDS anticipates that this will be the first of two consultation stages on the Partial Update.
- 3.2 The LDS also expects publication of a Biodiversity and Natural Environment SPD in June 2023, a Sustainable Transport and Parking SPD in November 2023 and a Town Centre Public Realm Strategy SPD in November 2023.
- 3.3 In terms of the Partial Update, the Council undertook a call for sites to be nominated for development or other designations which took place between April and June 2023. This resulted in 17 additional sites being nominated for development within Reading Borough, as well as a number of changes to existing allocated sites. The additional sites nominated were as follows:

Site	Ward	Area (ha)	Proposed use
Aquis House, 49-51 Forbury Road and 33 Blagrove Street	Abbey	0.42	Offices & residential
Sapphire Plaza, Watlington Street and Royal Court, Kings Road	Abbey	0.40	Residential & commercial
Reading Link Retail Park, Rose Kiln Lane	Coley	2.03	Residential & retail
72 Berkeley Avenue	Coley	0.33	Residential
John Lewis Depot, Mill Lane	Katesgrove	0.37	Residential
Land at 9 Upper Crown Street	Katesgrove	0.35	Residential
Tunbridge Jones, Cradock Road	Katesgrove	0.69	Residential
Land at 132-134 Bath Road	Southcote	0.51	Residential or mixed residential & commercial
Land west of Milford Road	Thames	0.86	Residential
Crowne Plaza Reading, Caversham Bridge	Thames	1.29	Hotel with residential and/or residential care and/or filling station/EV charging
2 Norman Place	Thames	0.55	Residential

Reading Bridge House, George Street	Thames	0.40	Residential
Tesco Extra, Napier Road (part of car park)	Thames	0.88	Residential
Kennet Place, Kings Road	Thames	0.29	Residential conversion
Part of Reading College, Kings Road	Thames	0.51	Residential
Land at Green Park Village, Flagstaff Road	Whitley	0.24	Residential
Former Sales and Marketing Suite, Drake Way	Whitley	0.25	Residential

Local Plan Partial Update

- 3.4 The proposal is to undertake a consultation on scope and content for the Local Plan Partial Update, in line with the timetable set out in the LDS. This consultation will be undertaken under Regulation 18 of the Regulations. The proposed consultation document is set out at Appendix 1.
- 3.5 The consultation document does not include draft policies at this stage, rather it outlines the proposed approach for updating each of the policies that form part of the Partial Update and asks targeted questions to garner stakeholders' views on the proposed direction of travel. Draft policies will be contained in the Pre-Submission Draft stage, planned for August 2024.
- 3.6 The key question for the consultation is around housing provision. The consultation document therefore asks questions about the number of homes that the relevant updated policy (H1) should plan for. H1 currently provides for 689 homes per year. However, the new standard methodology referred to in paragraph 2.3 would result in a much increased figure of 877 homes per year. The Council has also commissioned evidence of local need which has resulted in an alternative figure of around 735 homes per year, whilst the estimated capacity is around 800 homes per year. The proposed approach is that housing provision should be based around the capacity figure of 800 per year.
- 3.7 The proposed consultation document includes proposals for additional sites for development or other uses. It asks for views on the potential inclusion of all additional sites that have been nominated through the call for sites, whilst being clear that the Council has not made a decision on whether or not the site should be included. This is the only opportunity to consult on these sites prior to producing a full draft document. Many of these sites may not be considered suitable for inclusion when a full draft is produced, and the consultation document includes substantial caveats, but it is vital that they are subject to community involvement to ensure that any decision on inclusion or exclusion is as robust as possible.
- 3.8 The recommended action is to agree the Draft Consultation on Scope and Content for consultation. Consultation would be undertaken between November 2023 and January 2024, and the results of consultation will inform the next stage of the plan, a Pre-Submission Draft.

Local Development Scheme

- 3.9 Some changes are required to the timescales set out in the LDS, in particular in relation to the SPDs. The Biodiversity and Natural Environment SPD is particularly related to the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain as part of the Environment Act 2021, but not all of the guidance and regulations are yet in place to allow this document to be drafted in full. Progress on the other two SPDs has slowed in order to prioritise the Local Plan process. It is proposed that the timescales of all three documents be amended to ensure that a draft come to the March meeting of this committee.
- 3.10 No changes are proposed to the Local Plan Partial Update timetable.
- 3.11 A tracked changes version of the LDS is set out in Appendix 2. The proposal is to approve this as the latest version.

Other options considered

- 3.12 The production of the Local Plan in line with the timetable identified in the LDS has already been agreed. Therefore, the alternative options are mainly around the format and content of the document.
- 3.13 In a general sense, an alternative option to the format of the consultation document would have been to have included full draft policies at this stage. However, this was not considered appropriate because it could have involved considerable work on policy drafting that may have been abortive if the overall policy direction was not considered appropriate once it had been subject to consultation. There will still be an opportunity for consultation on the draft policy wording when the Pre-Submission Draft is subject to consultation in August 2024.
- 3.14 In terms of the more specific content, there are a number of alternative options for each of the policy approaches within the document. Where these alternative options are reasonable and potentially achievable, they are described within the document itself, together with a summary of any implications of those options.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1. The Local Plan Partial Update, through setting out the way Reading will develop to 2036, will contribute to the following priorities in the Corporate Plan 2022/25:
- Healthy environment: through ensuring that policies are up to date to achieve the highest environmental standards in development, respond to the Environment Act and incorporate the approach of the Local Transport Plan;
 - Thriving communities: through ensuring that housing needs are met insofar as possible, including affordable housing of the right tenure to meet Reading's needs; and
 - Inclusive economy: through updating policies to meet development needs for economic development uses.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1. There is a requirement to undertake a sustainability appraisal of each stage of a Local Plan document. A sustainability appraisal assesses the impact of each policy, proposal and alternative option against a range of sustainability objectives covering environmental, economic and social matters. A Sustainability Appraisal of the Consultation on Scope and Content has been prepared and will be published alongside the consultation as a background document. The environmental and climate implications of each policy and option are considered as part of that document.
- 5.2. In general terms, the most significant climate implications are that proposed approach would see more ambitious proposals for the energy efficiency of developments. The proposed updates to policies CC2 and H5 seek to further improve the performance of non-residential and residential developments respectively to continue to ensure that Reading's policies are of a level of ambition necessary to address the Climate Emergency. In addition, updates are proposed to policies CC3 and CC4 to strengthen requirements around climate change adaptation and the provision of decentralised energy respectively.
- 5.3. In terms of the level of development proposed, the sustainability appraisal highlights that new development will have environmental and climate implications in terms of matters such as emissions, resource use and waste generation, and highlights the need for these to be mitigated as part of the planning application process, in part through the application of updated development management policies as outlined above.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1. It is vital that the widest community engagement on the Partial Update takes place at the very earliest stage, as this is an opportunity for the public and other consultees to have most influence on how the plan develops and what areas it deals with. It is proposed that this begins towards the end of November 2023, in line with the LDS. As this would involve consulting over the Christmas and New Year period, it is proposed that the statutory six-week period be increased to eight weeks. This would mean concluding the consultation in late January.
- 6.2. Consultation will take place in accordance with the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement, which was adopted in March 2014. This lists the following measures as being potentially appropriate for this stage of plan preparation.
 - Interactive workshops;
 - Questionnaires;
 - Leaflet drops across a defined area;
 - Exhibitions, particularly in locations and at times which would maximise the number of people not previously involved in planning matters attending, e.g. shopping centres;
 - Online resources, including interactive webpages or questionnaires;
 - Forum discussions, which could include specific groups such as developer/landowner forums.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1. As set out in relation to section 5, a Sustainability Appraisal of the Consultation on Scope and Content has been prepared and will be published alongside the consultation. One of the sustainability objectives that to "Avoid significant negative effects on groups or individuals with regard to race, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation", and it therefore addresses the equality implications of the policies.
- 7.2. In broad terms, the following implications have been identified:
 - Policy H2, Density and mix: the effects would be positive in terms of age due to increasing provision of family housing;
 - Policy H5, Housing standards: the effects would be positive due to updates to reflect the need for wheelchair accessible homes;
 - Policy H7, Accommodation for vulnerable people: the effect would be significantly positive due to any update to account for needs for people requiring care or other forms of specific accommodation;
 - Policy H8, Residential conversions: there would be both positive and negative effects in terms of age, as the retention of family housing benefitting children could come at the expense of HMOs which often house young adults;
 - Site Cen8, Crowne Plaza: effects on age would be positive of any of the options that include residential care.
 - Site Sou1, Reading Link Retail Park: effects on age would be positive if there is a focus on family housing.

8. Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1 There are none

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1. Local Plan documents, including updates, are produced under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The process for producing local plans is set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. Regulation 18 states that a local planning authority should consult on what a local plan should contain. This Local Plan Partial Update Proposed Approach has been produced within this Regulation 18 requirement.

9.2. Section 15 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) states that local planning authorities must prepare and maintain a Local Development Scheme. The LDS should specify:

- The local development documents that will be development plan documents;
- The subject matter and geographical area of the documents;
- Which documents are to be prepared jointly;
- Any matter or area for which the authority have agreed a joint committee;
- The timetable for the preparation of Local Development Documents; and
- Any other prescribed matters.

10. Financial Implications

10.1 The Local Plan Partial Update will be funded from existing budgets. The financial implications arising from the proposals set out in this report are set out below:-

1. Revenue Implications

	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000
Employee costs (see note1)	80	18	-22
Other running costs	100	10	-43
Capital financings costs	0	0	0
Expenditure	180	28	-65
Income from:			
Fees and charges (see note2)	0	0	0
Grant funding (specify)	0	0	0
Other income	0	0	0
Total Income	0	0	0
Net Cost(+)/saving (-)	180	28	-65

10.2 The net cost of the Local Plan is reflected in existing budgets.

2. Capital Implications

10.3 There are no capital implications.

3. Value for Money (VFM)

10.4 As part of the budget setting process, the business case included alternate options which could deliver different outcomes including not to undertake an update and to undertake an update with lower revenue implications. Value for money was tested and the revenue budget requirement to deliver the review was considered to be proportionate to the benefit it will deliver.

4. Risk Assessment

10.5 There are no risks as a result of the proposals in this report.

11. Timetable for Implementation

11.1. The timetable for carrying out the Local Plan Partial Update is set out in the Local Development Scheme, as agreed by this Committee on 23rd March 2023 (Minute 36 refers).

12. Background Papers

12.1. There are none.

Appendices

1. Local Plan Partial Update Consultation on Scope and Content
2. Local Development Scheme tracked changes version