



23 June 2025

Title	Local Plan Partial Update Main Modifications
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 Main Modifications (Appendix 1) and Proposals Map Modifications (Appendix 2) be approved for consultation. 2. That the Director for Planning, Transport and Public Protection be authorised to make any minor amendments necessary to the Main Modifications and Proposals Map Modifications that do not alter the policy direction as identified in any letter from the Planning Inspector, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets, prior to consultation.

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 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 Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport committee on 23rd March 2023 (Minute 36 refers). Consultation on Scope and Content was undertaken between November 2023 and January 2024, and consultation on a Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan Partial Update (LPPU) took place in November and December 2024.
- 1.2. The LPPU was submitted to the Secretary of State on 9th May 2025. This resulted in a public examination led by an independent Planning Inspector, including hearings held in November 2025 (stage 1) and February 2026 (stage 2).
- 1.3. The Inspector has identified a number of main modifications that are needed to make sure that the LPPU is sound and legally compliant. These main modifications need to be subject to consultation, and a proposed consultation document is set out in Appendix 1. The Inspector can then incorporate these main modifications in the final inspector's report.

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 as

reported to SEPT 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 new versions of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in July 2021, September 2023 and December 2023 (and subsequently also in December 2024). These make significant changes to how local plans are expected to identify housing need. 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.

3. The Proposal

Current position

- 3.1 The first consultation stage in undertaking the Partial Update was a Consultation on Scope and Content under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on 15th November 2023 approved this document for consultation (Minute 20 refers), and consultation was undertaken between 27th November 2023 and 31st January 2024.
- 3.2 The second consultation stage was a Pre-Submission Draft under Regulation 19. This was approved for consultation at Council on 15th October 2024 (Minute 22 refers). Consultation was subsequently carried out between 6th November and 18th December 2024.
- 3.3 Following consultation, the Local Plan Partial Update (LPPU) along with its evidence base was submitted to the Secretary of State on 9th May 2025. Submission of the document commences a period of public examination held by an independent Planning Inspector. The purpose of the examination was to establish whether the plan is sound, legally compliant and fulfils the statutory duty to co-operate. The Inspector appointed was Joanna Gilbert MA (Hons) MTP MRTPI.
- 3.4 The examination was conducted in two stages. Stage 1 covered legal and procedural matters and housing need, and included virtual hearings held on 11th and 12th November 2025. The Inspector provided a letter with her findings from Stage 1 on 24th November, which among other findings confirmed that the Council had complied with the duty to co-operate, and this enabled the examination to proceed to Stage 2.
- 3.5 Stage 2 covered all other matters, in particular the details of policies and sites. In-person hearings were held between 3rd and 12th February 2026, with an additional virtual hearing on 23rd February to allow a participant to speak who had been unavailable for the main hearings.
- 3.6 The Inspector has identified that 'main modifications' would be required to ensure that the plan is sound and legally compliant. Main modifications are those that would be significant enough to require consultation and to be subject to sustainability appraisal. It would be unusual for a plan to escape the need for main modifications, and such modifications have been identified with each of the most recent development plan documents in Reading. Through the examination process, the Inspector has identified where these modifications are required and liaised with the Council and, in some instances, other participants, to set out the drafting. A formal letter setting this out is expected imminently, but has not yet been received.
- 3.7 The main modifications are set out in Appendix 1, and they cover a range of matters, varying from fairly modest changes to wording to much more significant matters. The modifications of greatest significance are summarised below:
- Combination of the policies relating to energy efficiency, water consumption and related matters (CC2 and part of H5) into a single policy.

- Updating of policy CC3 to deal with heat networks rather than decentralised energy and bring the text of the policy up to date.
 - Reliance on the housing need figure from the national standard method (822 per year) rather than the local assessment of need (735 per year) which does not alter the amount of homes planned for which was always 825 per year.
 - Deletion site WR3a: 2 Ross Road and Part of Meadow Road as the landowner confirmed that they had no intention to develop for residential.
 - Deletion of sites WR3s: Land at Kentwood Hill and WR3t: Land at Armour Hill due to their designation as a Local Wildlife Site based on information about the species and habitats present.
 - Deletion of site CA1a: Reading University Boat Club, Thames Promenade due to its flood risk.
 - Extension of the allocation CR14x: Sapphire Plaza to include the adjacent Royal Court, owned by the same landowner where it is intended to bring forward a comprehensive development.
 - Changes to the amount of development on some sites, in particular to reflect the progress of these sites through the planning application process, for instance CR12d: Broad Street Mall and CR14r: John Lewis Depot, Mill Lane.
 - Updated housing trajectory to take into account the changes to sites outlines above as well as to include up to date planning permissions.
 - A number of changes around policy OU2 which relate to development in the vicinity of Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Burghfield to satisfy other stakeholders, in particular West Berkshire District Council, AWE and the Office for Nuclear Regulation.
 - Deletion of requirements for electric vehicle charging provision in new developments, which is now covered by the Building Regulations
 - Additional supporting text to policy OU1 to reflect the specifics around provision of new primary healthcare facilities.
- 3.8 There would also be consequential changes to the Proposals Map and these are set out in a separate schedule in Appendix 2.
- 3.9 At the stage of publication of this report, the Council had not yet received the formal letter requiring the main modifications as it is held up in internal processes in the Planning Inspectorate, but it is not anticipated that the letter will have any implications for the modifications in Appendix 1 and 2. Should that be the case however, delegation is sought to enable any minor changes as a result of the final letter can be made before consultation.

Option proposed

- 3.10 Main modifications require consultation before they can be incorporated into the LPPU. The proposal is therefore to consult on the main modifications set out in Appendix 1 and the proposals map modifications in Appendix 2. This is currently expected to run between 26 June and 7 August.
- 3.11 Consultation responses will be provided directly to the Inspector, and it will be for her to consider them in preparing her final report. Only when the final Inspector's Report which concludes that the plan is sound, legally compliant and fulfils the duty to co-operate has been received can the Council adopt the LPPU.

Other options considered

- 3.12 Alternative options are very limited. The Inspector has identified the main modifications she considers necessary to make the LPPU sound and legally compliant, and there is no

scope for the Council to make additional or alternative modifications, or to reject certain modifications. The only alternative option is not to undertake the main modifications consultation, which would mean that the examination process could proceed no further and the Council would not be able to adopt up-to-date planning policies which are considered essential for putting a robust basis in place for determining planning applications.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

4.1 The Local Plan Partial Update, through setting out the way Reading will develop to 2041, will contribute to the following priorities in the Council Plan 2025-28:

- Promote more equal communities in Reading: through ensuring that communities have access to the services and facilities to live a healthy life, including inclusion of a new policy requiring health impact assessments;
- Secure Reading's economic and cultural success: through meeting the development needs of Reading including delivery of 825 homes per year, including affordable housing, and employment needs totalling up to 253,000 sq m;
- Deliver a sustainable and healthy environment and reduce Reading's carbon footprint: through promoting a sustainable pattern of development with good accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport, with increases in green infrastructure and by seeking the highest standards of energy efficiency in new development; and
- Safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children; through measures including planning for the needs for residential care and other specialist accommodation, ensure accessible housing and identifying opportunities for new primary healthcare provision.

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 main modifications 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, there are relatively limited implications of the modifications themselves. The combining of the climate policies does not affect the overall standards sought. The changes to the decentralised energy policy are likely to have a positive effect in terms of referring to more up-to-date technologies. The removal of four sites will have implications for the environment in those locations, which in view of the identification of the sites at Kentwood Hill and Armour Hill as Local Wildlife Sites will be positive in nature in those cases.

5.3 The main modifications will be subject to a Sustainability Appraisal which assesses the modifications against a range of environmental, social and economic objectives, and this will be published alongside the consultation.

6 Community Engagement

6.1 There have already been two consultation stages on the Local Plan Partial Update, as set out in paragraphs 3.1 and 3.2.

6.2 'Main modifications' are those that would require additional consultation. A further six-week period of consultation is therefore required, which will be carried out in line with the Statement of Community Involvement (adopted October 2024), as for previous LPPU consultations. The consultation would be focused on the main modifications only, not the remainder of the Local Plan. The consultation period is proposed to be undertaken from

26 June to 7 August, albeit it is dependent on receipt of the final letter from the Inspector. As this is an extremely focussed consultation, no consultation events are planned.

7 Equality Implications

- 7.1 As set out in relation to section 5, a Sustainability Appraisal of the Pre-Submission Draft has been prepared and will be published alongside the consultation. One of the sustainability objectives is 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 appraisal of the main modifications against this objective therefore addresses the equality implications of the policies.
- 7.2 In general terms, there are relatively limited implications of the modifications themselves. These modifications generally make reasonably modest changes to proposed policies that will not have particular equality implications.

8 Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1 There are none.

9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 Local plans are produced under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Under Section 20(7C) of the Act, an Inspector can recommend main modifications, but only if requested to do so by the local authority. The process for producing local plans is set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. Regulations 23, 24 and 25 concern the process for examination of a Local Plan and publication of an Inspector’s Report.
- 9.2 A new system for preparing local plans was introduced as part of the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023, and The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026, which came into force on 26 March 2026, set out the detailed process. However, these do not apply to the current LPPU as it was submitted before the deadline for transition to the new system.

10 Financial Implications

- 10.1 Production of the LPPU prior to examination stage has been carried out within existing planning budgets. The holding of an examination is a significant cost to the Council and the full scale of the cost will only become known once the Inspector’s Report has been issued and the Planning Inspectorate provides an invoice. Up to the end of February 2026 (which includes all of the hearing dates) the total cost of the examination including Inspector time, venue cost, consultant support and additional evidence was around £75k. The costs associated with the proposed consultation on main modifications will be very limited and will be met from existing budgets.

11 Timetable for Implementation

- 11.1 The timetable for adoption of the LPPU will depend on when a final Inspector’s Report is received which confirms that the plan is sound, legally compliant and complies with the duty to co-operate. It is anticipated that this will be by the Autumn. Once the Report is received, the LPPU will be brought to full Council for adoption and this is currently expected to be at the October meeting.

12 Background Papers

- 12.1 There are none.

Appendices

1. Local Plan Partial Update Main Modifications
2. Local Plan Partial Update Proposals Map Modifications