



**23 June 2026**

<b>Title</b>	Adoption of the Town Centre Public Realm Strategy
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To make a decision
<b>Report status</b>	Public report
<b>Report author</b>	Mark Worringham, Planning Policy Manager
<b>Lead Councillor</b>	Councillor Micky Leng, Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets
<b>Corporate priority</b>	Healthy Environment
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That the responses to representations on the Draft Town Centre Public Realm Strategy within the Statement of Consultation (Appendix 2) be agreed.</li> <li>2. That the Town Centre Public Realm Strategy SPD (Appendix 3) be adopted.</li> </ol>

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report recommends that the Town Centre Public Realm Strategy Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (Appendix 3) be adopted. The document provides detailed policy and guidance to improve the quality of the public realm throughout central Reading, and will be used to supplement the Local Plan in making decisions on planning applications in the town centre. In addition, it will also inform works that affect the town centre public realm outside the development process, including the Council's own works. Consultation was undertaken in January and February 2025, and a summary of the comments received is included as Appendix 2.

## 2. Policy Context

- 2.1 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. A Partial Update of the Local Plan has been progressed and is currently at examination.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 The Local Plan places a considerable focus on Reading town centre to meet much of the development needs, including delivering at least 50% of the new homes across the plan period (up to 2036), meaning there is both a significant challenge and opportunity in terms of improving the quality of the public realm. The Local Plan also contains policy CR3 (Public Realm in Central Reading) which seeks to guide the quality of the public realm associated with new development. It seeks flexibility of open space and the public realm, requires the provision of water features, planting and hard landscaping, and has particular focus on the waterside areas and historic environment. Policy CR3 is not amended as part of the Partial Update.

- 2.4 The Transport Strategy, adopted in October 2024, identifies a number of schemes and initiatives of relevance to town centre public realm, in particular town and local centre public space enhancements to “*enhance the experience of visiting central Reading and local centres by focusing on sustainable travel modes and removing or reducing conflicts between motorised transport and walking and cycling*”.
- 2.5 An emerging Town Centre Strategy is of particular relevance to the Town Centre Public Realm Strategy, and will include a great deal of the strategic context to the strategy. A consultation version of the Town Centre Strategy was considered by Policy Committee on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2026.
- 2.6 A number of other policy documents have relevance for the public realm in the town centre, and these include:
- Minster Quarter Area Development Framework (2018);
  - Reading Prison Framework (2015);
  - Kenavon Drive Urban Design Concept Statement (2004);
  - Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (2020);
  - Rights of Way Improvement Plan (2007);
  - Culture and Heritage Strategy 2015-2030; and
  - Tree Strategy (2021).

### **3. The Proposal**

#### ***Current position***

- 3.1 Other than the high-level Local Plan policy, which contains no detail, there is no single document that guides the quality of public realm in the centre. As many of the key development sites that will deliver growth in the town centre are currently already at planning application or pre-application stage, or are expected to be soon, there is considered to be a lack of more specific guidance to ensure that all improvements are working to an agreed framework for where and how the public realm is to be improved. This includes the Council’s own interventions in the public realm outside the development process. Without a full strategy, there is a likelihood that decisions that affect the public realm are made on an ad-hoc basis, undermining the character and cohesiveness of central Reading.
- 3.2 A draft Town Centre Public Realm Strategy SPD was approved for consultation by Policy Committee on 18 December 2024 (Minute 43 refers). This covered the following elements:
- An audit of the existing public realm and pedestrian and cycle movement in the town centre;
  - An overall pedestrian and cycle movement framework, including defining a typology of streets and spaces;
  - A design manual to cover the following matters, and to guide both planning applications and investment decisions:
    - Reclaiming road space;
    - Paving;
    - Vegetation;
    - Tree planting;
    - Rain gardens;

- Street furniture;
  - Lighting;
  - Play provision;
  - Wayfinding and signage;
  - Public art and animation;
  - Street activation;
  - Meanwhile uses;
  - Hoarding; and
  - Maintenance.
- More detailed public realm proposals for five particularly significant streets and spaces, including illustrative proposals – the purpose is not to design every space but to use a small number of exemplar spaces to demonstrate how the proposals can be achieved:
    - St Mary’s Butts;
    - Market Place and Town Hall Square;
    - Queens Road and London Street Junction;
    - Station Road; and
    - Green space on River Kennet.
  - Less detailed guidelines on some other exemplar areas which demonstrate important principles of the strategy:
    - Trooper Potts Way & IDR junction;
    - Oxford Road;
    - Queen Victoria Street; and
    - Chain Street.
  - Action plan setting out both short-term and long-term implementation measures.

3.3 The consultation was carried out between 15 January and 26 February 2025. There were 41 representations on the document. A summary of the representations received is included as in Appendix 2. Some of the key matters that were raised in consultation are summarised below:

- Respondents had concerns about the impacts of the proposed public realm designs on the operation of bus services and stated the importance of ensuring buses remain highly accessible within the town centre, particularly for vulnerable users and older residents.
- Representations cited the poor quality of existing paving throughout the town centre, the blight of trade waste bins and the lack of effective maintenance.
- Respondents emphasised the need for safe continuous cycle routes, segregation from pedestrians, and secure bike parking.
- Many comments highlighted areas of the town centre that are unpleasant to walk in and present particular challenges for older residents, children, those with visual impairments and wheelchair users.

- Comments received emphasised the importance of valuing Reading's historic assets, improving the quality of public art and creating a sense of place around shared cultural identity.
- Respondents noted the importance of trees, planting, biodiversity, and riverside enhancements in improving quality of life within the town.
- Many groups and individuals expressed concern about funding and deliverability and raised the need for a clear action plan.
- Representations cited crime and antisocial behaviour as a significant problem within the town centre.
- Comments called for long-term upkeep of schemes, significant improvements to litter control and the use of more durable materials.
- Some respondents called for the Strategy to create an environment that better supports independent shops and creates a true mix of retailers.

3.4 A Statement of Consultation is included as Appendix 2 which summarises the representations received and includes a proposed Council response to each representation.

***Option proposed***

3.4 Committee is recommended to adopt the SPD, which is Appendix 3.

3.5 The SPD has been amended as a result of consultation, and the main amendments proposed are set out below:

- Clarification that proposals for specific areas and spaces are indicative, not prescriptive, and will be refined through collaboration with stakeholders as funding becomes available. The executive summary has been amended to clarify that the Strategy aims to outline best-practice design guidance that will be used to inform decisions as applications come forward.
- Updates throughout to account for recent development within the town centre since the consultation as some sites are now completed, under construction or have recently received planning permission.
- Amendments to reinforce the important contribution made by buses within the town centre and to seek a balance between the needs of bus operators and other public realm users.
- Strengthening inclusive design and universal access, with clearer consideration of wheelchair users, visually impaired people, cognitive impairments, and other additional needs.
- Highlighting the importance of protecting disabled parking, especially where general parking is reduced or removed.
- Changes regarding cycling infrastructure to emphasise the importance of visible cycle parking to deter theft and to note that one way cycle routes can reduce network connectivity.
- Increased reference to the importance of heritage, including the retention of historic signs.
- Reference to the importance of community safety and for schemes to consider the impacts of design on antisocial behaviour, including continued use of CCTV within the town centre.
- Correction of an error in the consultation document which omitted the bus lane on the Oxford Road between Zinzan Street and Prospect Street.

- 3.6 Once adopted, the SPD will be a material consideration in determining planning applications in the town centre. It will be taken into account alongside the Local Plan and other relevant development plans and SPDs.

### ***Other options considered***

- 3.7 The main alternative option is not to adopt the Town Centre Public Realm Strategy SPD. This would continue the current situation of decisions affecting the public realm being undertaken without reference to a comprehensive strategy. There are a large number of major town centre developments for which planning permission is likely to be determined in the coming years, and failure to produce this strategy now would therefore miss an opportunity to ensure that the associated public realm improvements link into a wider strategy for the town centre.
- 3.8 Under The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 (Commencement No. 11 and Saving and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2026, local planning authorities have up to 30 June 2026 to adopt any SPDs, which have been replaced in the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023 by a new system of supplementary plans, which have different production processes and are more limited in scope. Therefore, there is no option to proceed with a significantly different alternative version of the SPD that would require further consultation, as the Council would not be able to adopt it.

## **4. Contribution to Strategic Aims**

- 4.1 The Town Centre Public Realm Strategy, through providing a framework for improving public areas in the town centre, will contribute to the following priority in the Council Plan 2025-28:
- Deliver a sustainable and healthy environment and reduce Reading's carbon footprint: The Council Plan contains an objective to "further improve the physical environment of Reading by improving air quality, access to green space, and the quality of public spaces." The Town Centre Public Realm Strategy aims to significantly improve the quality of the public realm in Reading town centre.

## **5. Environmental and Climate Implications**

- 5.1 The Town Centre Public Realm Strategy SPD will have a number of direct positive implications for the natural environment and climate in the town centre, including the following:
- Increasing vegetation within landscaping in the town centre, and specifying appropriate tree and other planting including species which maximise benefit for wildlife and climate adaptation (for instance by providing larger canopies);
  - The provision of rain gardens, as set out in the design manual, will assist with adaptation to climate change by allowing water to drain away and reduce risk of flooding; and
  - Reclaiming road space, making the town centre easier to access and navigate by foot and cycle and therefore promoting more sustainable modes of travel.
- 5.2 Works to alter the public realm and replace existing paving, street furniture and other features will have implications in terms of carbon emissions. However, it is not intended that the strategy immediately leads to significant works other than where these would be required as part of development proposals, rather than that when there is a need to carry out replacement works, those works will be in line with the strategy.

## **6. Community Engagement**

- 6.1 Consultation was undertaken between 15 January and 26 February 2025, a period of six weeks. Consultation was undertaken in line with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (adopted 2014), which has now been replaced, but the general principles remain in place. Consultation involved publicising the document on the website and

sending to the Council's planning consultation list. The results of consultation are summarised in section 3 of this report and the responses received are in Appendix 2.

## **7. Equality Implications**

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out in Appendix 1 which highlights that there are expected to be positive impacts in terms of age and disability through public improvements that make the town centre more accessible and easier to navigate.

## **8. Other Relevant Considerations**

- 8.1 There are none.

## **9. Legal Implications**

- 9.1 Regulation 14 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 sets out the requirements for adoption of SPDs. Although these Regulations were revoked on 25 March 2026, Regulation 6 of The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 (Commencement No. 11 and Saving and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2026 saves the relevant Regulations for the preparation of a SPD up to 30 June 2026. Once an SPD is adopted by the Council, it will hold weight in the determination of planning applications for any development in the Borough. SPDs will continue to be in force alongside any local plans produced under the current system.

## **10. Financial Implications**

- 10.1 The SPD has been produced within existing budgets.

- 10.2 The SPD is intended to be used both as a document to guide private developers but also to inform the Council's decisions on its own interventions in the public realm, such as works to the highway or in public spaces. Therefore its contents will have potential direct financial implications to the Council in terms of choice of paving, lighting, planting, street furniture etc, as well as on maintenance. Cost has been considered in arriving at the recommendations in the Strategy with a view to avoiding additional cost pressures. Financial implications will vary across time and depending on the specifics, and it is not possible to summarise them at this point.

### ***1. Revenue Implications***

- 10.3 None in addition to those outlined above

### ***2. Capital Implications***

- 10.4 None in addition to those outlined above

### ***3. Value for Money (VFM)***

- 10.5 The production of a strategy which provides a comprehensive guide on improvements to the public realm is considered to represent good value for money because it would ensure that all improvements, including those by the Council, contribute towards a wider long-term plan and strategy.

### ***4. Risk Assessment***

- 10.6 There are no direct financial risks associated with the report.

## **11 Timetable for Implementation**

- 11.1 Once adopted, the SPD will be a material consideration in determining planning applications. There are no set timescales for specific interventions outlined in the document, and opportunities to undertake changes to the public realm will need to be identified alongside major developments or as funding and other considerations allow.

## **12 Background Papers**

- 12.1 There are none.

## **Appendices**

1. Equality Impact Assessment
2. Statement of Consultation on the Draft Town Centre Public Realm Strategy SPD
3. Town Centre Public Realm Strategy SPD for adoption

## Appendix 1: Equality Impact Assessment

### Provide basic details

**Name of proposal/activity/policy to be assessed:**

Adoption of the Town Centre Public Realm Strategy

**Directorate:** DEGNS – Directorate of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services

**Service:** Planning, Transport and Public Protection

**Name:** Mark Worringham

**Job Title:** Planning Policy Manager

**Date of assessment:** 10/03/2026

### Scope your proposal

**What is the aim of your policy or new service?**

To improve the quality of the public realm in central Reading

**Who will benefit from this proposal and how?**

The local community will benefit from an improvement in

**What outcomes will the change achieve and for whom?**

The change will enhance the quality of public realm in the town centre, which will benefit residents, visitors and businesses located in the town centre.

**Who are the main stakeholders and what do they want?**

Local residents, visitors, shoppers – an attractive, easy to navigate town centre with places to dwell and meet, spaces for events etc.

Local businesses – a public realm that enhances Reading as a visitor destination and increases footfall and dwell time

### Assess whether an EIA is Relevant

How does your proposal relate to eliminating discrimination; promoting equality of opportunity; promoting good community relations?

Do you have evidence or reason to believe that some (racial, disability, gender, sexuality, age and religious belief) groups may be affected differently than others? (Think about your monitoring information, research, national data/reports etc)

Yes  No

Is there already public concern about potentially discriminatory practices/impact or could there be? Think about your complaints, consultation, feedback.

Yes  No

If the answer is **Yes** to any of the above you need to do an Equality Impact Assessment.

If No you **MUST** complete this statement

N/A

## Assess the Impact of the Proposal

Your assessment must include:

- **Consultation**
- **Collection and Assessment of Data**
- **Judgement about whether the impact is negative or positive**

### Consultation

Relevant groups/experts	How were/will the views of these groups be obtained	Date when contacted
Local residents Local businesses	Through formal consultation in line with the Statement of Community Involvement	January 2025

### Collect and Assess your Data

<b>Describe how could this proposal impact on Racial groups</b> No specific impacts are identified. <b>Is there a negative impact?</b> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>
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<b>Describe how could this proposal impact on Gender/transgender (cover pregnancy and maternity, marriage)</b> No specific impacts are identified. <b>Is there a negative impact?</b> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>
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<b>Describe how could this proposal impact on Disability</b> The proposals in the strategy include reducing clutter, reclaiming road space, and creating more space for pedestrians and cyclists, which will also benefit those with limited mobility, including by making it easier to cross roads and navigate the town centre. <b>Is there a negative impact?</b> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>
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<b>Describe how could this proposal impact on Sexual orientation (cover civil partnership)</b> No specific impacts are identified. <b>Is there a negative impact?</b> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>
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<b>Describe how could this proposal impact on Age</b> The proposals in the strategy include reducing clutter, reclaiming road space, and creating more space for pedestrians and cyclists, which will also benefit those with limited mobility, including by making it easier to cross roads and navigate the town centre. <b>Is there a negative impact?</b> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>
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<b>Describe how could this proposal impact on Religious belief?</b> No specific impacts are identified. <b>Is there a negative impact?</b> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>
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### Make a Decision

Tick which applies

1. <b>No negative impact identified</b> Go to sign off <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2. <b>Negative impact identified but there is a justifiable reason</b> <input type="checkbox"/>

You must give due regard or weight but this does not necessarily mean that the equality duty overrides other clearly conflicting statutory duties that you must comply with.

**Reason**

N/A

**3. Negative impact identified or uncertain**

**What action will you take to eliminate or reduce the impact? Set out your actions and timescale?**

**How will you monitor for adverse impact in the future?**

Adverse impacts should be highlighted in changes in how streets and spaces in the town centre of Reading are used.

Signed (completing officer) Mark Worringham Date: 10/03/2026

Signed (Lead Officer) Mark Worringham Date: 10/03/2026