

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	COUNCIL		
DATE:	4 TH NOVEMBER 2019		
TITLE:	LOCAL PLAN ADOPTION		
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 The Council is replacing its existing development plans (the Core Strategy, Reading Central Area Action Plan and Sites and Detailed Policies Document) with a new single Local Plan to set out how Reading will develop up to 2036. Three consultations have been undertaken on this Local Plan between 2016 and 2018. The Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State on 29th March 2018, which marked the beginning of a public examination held by an independent Planning Inspector, including public hearings in September and October 2018.
- 1.2 The Inspector's Report was received on 24th September 2019, and the conclusion was that the Local Plan fulfils the duty to co-operate, and that, subject to a number of 'Main Modifications', it is sound and legally compliant. The report is included as Appendix 1. The Local Plan (Appendix 2) can therefore be adopted as modified, and used for determining planning applications.
- 1.3 Appendices:
Appendix 1: Report on the Examination of the Reading Local Plan
Appendix 2: Reading Borough Local Plan (Adoption version) and Proposals Map
Appendix 3: List of minor modifications

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Council note the Report of the Inspector who conducted the Examination into the Local Plan (Appendix 1) and that the Inspector has found the Local Plan, as amended by the Main Modifications, to be sound, legally compliant and that it fulfils the duty to co-operate;
- 2.2 That Council adopts the Local Plan and Proposals Map, incorporating the Main Modifications and minor modifications (Appendix 2).

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Local Plan sets out the planning policies for an area and is the main consideration in deciding planning applications. The local plan for Reading, previously referred to as the Local Development Framework, currently consists of three documents - the Core Strategy (adopted 2008, amended 2015), Reading Central Area Action Plan (RCAAP, adopted 2009) and Sites and Detailed Policies Document (adopted 2012, amended 2015).
- 3.2 The need to review the local plan as a single, comprehensive document was identified in a Local Development Scheme, which is the programme for producing planning policy documents, the latest version of which was agreed by Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on 23rd November 2016 (Minute 15 refers).

4. THE PROPOSAL

(a) Current Position

- 4.1 Production of the new, comprehensive Local Plan, commenced in 2015. The first stage was an Issues and Options paper, which was approved by Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on 24th November 2015 (Minute 22 refers), and consultation was carried out between January and March 2016. Around 200 representations were received.
- 4.2 The second stage was production of a full Draft Local Plan and Proposals Map for consultation. The Drafts were approved by Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on 4th April 2017 (Minute 26 refers), and consultation was carried out during May and June 2017. The Council received around 150 written responses to the Draft Local Plan.
- 4.3 The third stage was a Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan and Proposals Map, which was approved by Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on 22nd November 2017 (Minute 14 refers), and consultation on which was carried out between November 2017 and January 2018.

The Council received 193 written responses to the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan.

- 4.4 After consultation on the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan, the Council made a number of minor changes to the plan that did not alter the policy direction (see the Schedule of Minor Changes on the Council's website), as agreed by Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on 22nd November 2017 (Minute 14 refers), and submitted the Local Plan to the Secretary of State on 29th March 2018.
- 4.5 Submission of a Local Plan document marked the beginning of a public examination, during which an independent Inspector considers whether the plan is sound, legally compliant and fulfils the duty to co-operate. The Planning Inspector appointed to examine the Local Plan was Louise Gibbons, who set the programme, procedure and main issues for the examination.
- 4.6 The main focus of the examination was a set of public hearings held between 25th September and 5th October 2018 in the Town Hall, in which Council officers and those invited to take part spoke to discuss the soundness and legal compliance of the plan. An initial report on the examination hearings was discussed at Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on 21st November 2018 (Minute 23 refers).
- 4.7 The Inspector's view, as articulated through the hearings and in subsequent written advice, was that, in order for the Local Plan to be considered 'sound', a number of 'main modifications' needed to be made. These are modifications which needed to be subject to additional consultation. Policy Committee on 10th June 2019 approved these main modifications for consultation, and this consultation took place between 12th June and 24th July 2019.
- 4.8 There were 114 responses to the main modifications consultation, the majority of which were related to the Reading Golf Club site. These responses are available to view on the Council's website¹. The responses were passed directly to the Inspector to consider, and were taken into account in the preparation of the final report.
- 4.9 The final Inspector's Report was received on 24th September 2019, and is included as Appendix 1. It concludes that, subject to a number of main modifications, the Local Plan is sound, legally compliant and fulfils the duty to co-operate, and can therefore be adopted. The main modifications set out in the report are largely those that were subject to consultation in June and July, although there have been some very slight

¹ http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/10267/EM004-Main-Modifications-Representations-A-to-E/pdf/EM004_Main_Modifications_Representations_A_to_E.pdf;
http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/10268/EM004-Main-Modifications-Representations-F-to-G/pdf/EM004_Main_Modifications_Representations_F_to_G.pdf;
http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/10269/EM004-Main-Modifications-Representations-H-to-W/pdf/EM004_Main_Modifications_Representations_H_to_W.pdf

amendments, which have no significant implication for the operation of the policies. These are set out below:

- Changing references to “residential” in MM15 to “residential development”
- Adding reference to “bed spaces” in MM18 when discussing how figures in the site allocations have been derived.

- 4.10 In addition, the Council is able to make minor changes to the plan after receipt of the Inspector’s Report which do not materially affect the policies in the document, and a number of these have been made. These are largely factual corrections or updates, as the examination process has made clear that even quite slight changes to policy wording are often interpreted as changes requiring further consultation. They are set out in Appendix 3.
- 4.11 Appendix 2 is the version of the Local Plan proposed for adoption, incorporating all changes described above. A tracked changes version of this, showing the changes that have been made since the plan was submitted in March 2018, can be provided on request.
- 4.12 Whilst some policies approaches are largely continued from the existing documents, this Local Plan is more ambitious in a number of areas and makes some significant changes to the approach to development in Reading that are worth highlighting.
- 4.13 Firstly, the amount of housing that is planned has increased substantially, from 521 dwellings per year in the Core Strategy to 689 dwellings per year in the new Local Plan. The need for an up-to-date approach to housing need was one of the main reasons for preparing a new plan, and this figure represents a challenging but deliverable target to help to provide much needed housing. The plan cannot meet the full need of 699 dwellings per year, which leaves a small shortfall of 230 dwellings over the plan period to be met in neighbouring authorities.
- 4.14 In order to meet the need for housing, as well as uses such as employment, retail and leisure, there are a new set of allocated development sites across the town. This includes a number of as-yet unimplemented sites from the previous development plans, but also a range of wholly new development allocations.
- 4.15 The Local Plan raises the bar in terms of sustainability of new development. The main headline is the requirement for major new build residential to be developed to zero carbon homes standards², which places Reading as one of the most ambitious authorities in the country. Standards for minor residential development and major non-residential development are also raised. In addition, the plan requires the highest level of water efficiency set out in the Building Regulations for new

² As a baseline, this involves a 35% in emissions improvement over 2013 Building Regulations plus a contribution of £1,800 per tonne of carbon for carbon offsetting.

homes, and includes new requirements for charging points for low emission vehicles. These policies will form a key plank of Reading's response to the Climate Emergency.

- 4.16 Other standards for new housing are also increased. The Local Plan requires that new build housing complies with the nationally-described internal space standards, whereas the previous documents did not set any standards. The Local Plan also requires that new build housing be built to be accessible and adaptable as defined in the Building Regulations, with 5% of developments of 20 dwellings or more providing wheelchair user housing.
- 4.17 Affordable housing continues to be a major emphasis of Local Plan policies. The policy requirements remain broadly the same as those that were set out in the amended Core Strategy and Sites and Detailed Policies Document in 2015. However, since those documents, national policy has changed to seek to exempt sites of less than 10 dwellings from the need to provide affordable housing. This is a matter which, when it was introduced through a Ministerial Statement, this Council, together with West Berkshire District Council, challenged in the High Court. Although that challenge was successful, the decision was reversed in the Court of Appeal. Therefore, the Council needed to demonstrate to the Planning Inspector that there was a strong justification for an exception to national policy in Reading to continue to seek affordable housing from sites of one dwelling upwards. After substantial amounts of additional evidence were provided, the Inspector has supported the Council's position.
- 4.18 New policies are also included to address some of the types of development which have become more prevalent than at the time of the previous documents. This includes build-to-rent accommodation, the first example of which in Reading, Thames Quarter, is currently under construction. It also includes new student accommodation in off-campus locations, particularly the town centre.
- 4.19 The new Local Plan also includes a much stronger emphasis on heritage. The previous documents contained one development management policy on heritage assets, but did not provide a particularly positive approach. There are now six policies on aspects of the heritage of Reading, which include much more proactive proposals for enhancing assets and taking account of heritage in new development.
- 4.20 The above summary is by no means comprehensive, and there are a number of other changes to the policy approaches throughout the document.

(b) Option Proposed

- 4.21 Council is recommended to adopt the Local Plan, together with the Proposals Map, as the new development plan for the Borough. The Local

Plan is included at Appendix 2. This includes both the main modifications set out by the Inspector, and more minor changes referred to in paragraph 4.10. Once adopted, the Local Plan will be the main consideration in determining planning applications.

- 4.22 The adoption of the Local Plan will mean that the three current development plan documents (Core Strategy, Reading Central Area Action Plan and Sites and Detailed Policies Document) will be superseded, and will no longer be of relevance in decisions on planning applications.
- 4.23 Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, as amended by the Planning Act 2008, when the local planning authority adopts a development plan document it must:
- Prepare an adoption statement in accordance with Regulations;
 - Notify specified parties it has been adopted, and where and when it can be inspected;
 - Make the adopted Local Plan and adoption statement available for inspection at its principal offices and place them on the authority's website; and
 - Send a copy of the adoption statement to those who have asked to be notified of the adoption of the local plan.
- 4.24 These tasks will be carried out as soon as practicable after adoption.

(c) Other Options Considered

- 4.25 The only alternative option to adopting the Local Plan and Proposals Map incorporating the Main Modifications, is to not adopt the documents. There is no power to adopt the Local Plan without all of the Main Modifications.
- 4.26 This option is not appropriate as it would fail to address the key reasons why the Local Plan was necessary, which is that some policies are likely to be considered out of date, and there is a need to have a robust, up-to-date set of policies for decision making. This would fail to provide important guidance on key sites for development and protection and on key policy areas, leaving too much to be decided at planning application stage. The National Planning Policy Framework states that local authorities should grant permission where the plan is absent, silent, or where relevant policies are out of date. It is clear that, without up-to-date policies in place, it will become extremely difficult to resist inappropriate development.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The Local Plan, through setting out the way Reading will develop to 2036, will contribute to the following priorities in the Corporate Plan 2018-21:
- Securing the economic success of Reading;

- Improving access to decent housing to meet local needs;
- Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe;
- Promoting great education, leisure and cultural opportunities for people in Reading.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

6.1 The Council's consultation process for planning policy is set out in the adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI, adopted March 2014). Four consultation processes have been undertaken on the Local Plan. Consultation on the first stage, Issues and Options, took place in January, February and March 2016. Consultation on the Draft Local Plan started in May 2017, and on the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan in November 2017. Finally, consultation on the Main Modifications identified by the Inspector after the examination hearings, took place in June and July 2019. All consultation stages were in accordance with the SCI. Other than for Main Modifications, the results of which are summarised here, Statements of Consultation for each consultation period are available on the Council's website.

7. EQUALITY ASSESSMENT

7.1 The Sustainability Appraisal process that has been conducted alongside the 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 each policy and development site within the plan was submitted alongside the Local Plan on 29th March 2018³. It did not identify any significant adverse impacts on specific groups due to race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age or religious belief.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The need for improvement of Reading's environment and achieving a high level of sustainability is at the heart of the Local Plan, and one of the plan's specific objectives is to ensure new development and existing areas are accessible and sustainable, in accordance with the sustainability appraisal objectives, including reducing its effects on, and adapting to, climate change. The Climate Change Strategy has been taken onto account throughout the document. There are ambitious policies that seek to improve the environmental performance of new development, including expecting zero carbon homes from major housing developments.

8.2 The Local Plan has been subject to a Sustainability Appraisal, submitted alongside the Local Plan on 29th March 2018, to assess the environmental, social and economic effects of each policy and proposal, along with reasonable alternative options. In general, this confirms that

³ [http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/8050/Sustainability-Appraisal-of-the-Presubmission-Local-Plan-1117/pdf/Sustainability Appraisal of the Presubmission Local Plan 1117.pdf](http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/8050/Sustainability-Appraisal-of-the-Presubmission-Local-Plan-1117/pdf/Sustainability%20Appraisal%20of%20the%20Presubmission%20Local%20Plan%201117.pdf)

many policies will have positive environmental effects, and where significant negative effects arise, that these are mitigated through the plan.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Local plans are produced under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, as amended by the Localism Act 2011.
- 9.2 Section 112(3) of the Localism Act 2011 amends section 23(3) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 to enable local planning authorities to make minor changes to a development plan after receipt of the Inspector's Report, where those changes do not materially affect the policies in the document.
- 9.3 The process for producing local plans is set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. Regulation 25 deals with publication of the Inspector's Report, and the requirements of this regulation were complied with upon receipt by 30th September. Regulation 26 relates to adoption tasks, and provides that, as soon as reasonably practicable after adoption, local planning authorities should make the documents available to view in various places, and notify interested parties and the Secretary of State.
- 9.4 Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, any person aggrieved by a development plan may make an application to challenge the document, providing the application is made within three months of the date of adoption.
- 9.5 Adoption of the Local Plan will confer on it the status of the development plan. By law, planning applications have to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless other material considerations indicate otherwise. Following adoption, the Local Plan will therefore play a key role in determining planning applications in the Borough.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Production of the Local Plan other than the examination stage has been carried out within existing planning budgets, and this will include the minimal administrative costs related to adoption.
- 10.2 The holding of an examination is a significant cost to the Council, mostly in terms of Inspector time. The Planning Inspectorate had calculated the costs at £67,425 by July 2019, with an additional cost expected for work carried out after that date, to be confirmed. This cannot be fully met from existing budgets, and will result in an overspend of approximately £55,000, which will be managed as a budget pressure in 2019-20.

Value for Money (VFM)

- 10.3 The preparation of a Local Plan ensures that developments are appropriate to their area, that significant effects are mitigated, that contributions are made to local infrastructure, and that there are no significant environmental, social and economic effects. Robust policies will also reduce the likelihood of planning by appeal, which can result in the Council losing control over the form of some development, as well as significant financial implications. Production of the local plan, in line with legislation, national policy and best practice, therefore represents good value for money.

Risk Assessment

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

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004
- Localism Act 2011
- The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012
- National Planning Policy Framework
- Local Development Scheme 2016
- Inspector's Report for the Reading Borough Local Plan
- Various background documents (see www.reading.gov.uk/localplanexamination)