

## BUILT AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

### Reading Borough Council response to Issue 5:

Are the policies for the Built Environment justified, deliverable and consistent with national policy?



***Q1. Are Policies EN1, EN2, EN3, EN4 and EN6 consistent with national policy? Will the LP be effective in dealing with designated assets including assets at risk, listed buildings, conservation areas, parks and gardens, and non-designated heritage assets?***

Section 16 of the revised NPPF states that “plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay and other threats.” This positive strategy was also a key part of the 2012 NPPF. The proposed policies in the Local Plan (EN1-EN6, as well as CR15: The Reading Abbey Quarter) will guide decision-taking in order to conserve and enhance the Borough’s historic environment.

Policies EN1, EN2, EN3, EN4 and EN6 are supported by a separate Historic Environment Background Paper (EV024). EN1 deals with protection and, where possible, enhancement of designated assets including assets at risk, listed buildings, conservation areas, historic parks and gardens and non-designated heritage assets. EN2 deals specifically with areas of archaeological significance, EN3 with conservation areas, EN4 with locally important heritage assets and EN6 aims to guide new development within a historic context. The Historic Environment Background Paper describes policy and guidance and its relationship to each proposed policy, as well as results of previous consultations, consideration of alternative policy approaches, as well as current and future characteristics of Reading’s Historic Environment.

Given the considerable amount of work that has taken place with Historic England (HE) throughout Local Plan production, the Council is confident that modifications made at the request of Historic England (as listed in the Schedule of Minor Changes prior to Submission LP008) have resulted in policies that will effectively deal with heritage assets. Each of the proposed policies has undergone significant revision as a result of iterative feedback and communication with HE. A Statement of Common Ground with Historic England is included as Appendix 1 to this paper and summarises HE’s concerns and where changes made by the Council have resolved them. The outstanding representations from HE related to soundness are those to the evidence base (section 1.5), the lack of a policy setting out the important elements or characteristics of listed buildings and registered historic parks and gardens (section 4.2) and policy CR13a. These are summarised within the Statement of Consultation on the Pre-Submission Local Plan (LP006) together with the Council’s response.

***Q1a. Are the requirements of individual site allocations policies and other policies within the LP (for example CR14c, CR14e and CA2) consistent with these policies?***

The requirements of individual site allocations policies and other policies in the LP are consistent with policies EN1-EN6. Any additional requirement relating to heritage within site allocations is simply intended to draw attention to the asset itself and emphasise the requirements of historic environment policies EN1-EN6. Heritage policies are intended to mitigate the possible negative effects of

development on individual historic assets and prevent negative cumulative impacts on the historic environment as a whole.

CR14c: 17-23 Queen Victoria Street states that “development should avoid detrimental effects on the significance of the listed building.” This emphasises the requirements of Policy EN1.

CR14e: 3-10 Market Place, Abbey Hall and Abbey Square states that development should “enhance the Conservation Area and the setting of the adjacent listed buildings, take account of the high potential for archaeological significance” and preserve the historic building line.” These requirements are further supported by policies EN3, EN2 and EN1, respectively.

CA2: Caversham Park requires conservation of the Registered Historic Park and Garden and its features, as well as reinstatement of historic public footpaths. Use must be compatible with heritage and detailed plans will be dependent on more detailed historic assessment. This site is a key feature of the heritage of Reading. More information can be found in Section 4.88 of the Local Plan Background Paper (EV002). Historic England has expressed support for the requirements of the policy, as reflected in the Statement of Consultation on the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan (LP006). The Council would like to reiterate that dwelling numbers are mainly included as targets for monitoring and the text of the policy makes clear that more detailed heritage assessment may lead to a different conclusion on capacity. Caversham Park is further considered in the response to Issue 13.

***Q2. What evidence is there for the protection of significant views in Policy EN5? Will the policy be effective?***

Appendix 4 of the Historic Environment Background Paper (EV0024) provides a study of each of the views listed in Policy EN5. This “Assessment of Significant Views with a Heritage Interest” was completed by the Conservation Area Action Committee with the support and advice of Historic England and RBC. The study makes use of the methodology of the Oxford View Cones Study<sup>1</sup> developed by Historic England, the Oxford Preservation Trust and Oxford City Council. The study of each view provides a basis for its selection and an analysis of important heritage elements. The Council is confident that EN5 will result in positive effects for the historic environment by aiming to protect a limited number of Reading’s most significant views with a heritage element without going too far as to protect all views generally as this may unnecessarily deter development.

***Q3. How up to date is the assessment of sites for Local Green Space and Public Open Space in Policy EN7, and is it robust? What is the justification for including Public Open Space within the Policy, and is this consistent with national policy?***

The assessment of sites for Local Green Space and Public Open Space, as well as an analysis of various options, is contained in the Local Green Space and Public Open Space Background Paper (EV033). Of particular importance is the assessment

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20064/conservation/876/oxford\\_views\\_study](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20064/conservation/876/oxford_views_study)

matrix located in Appendix 1. Assessment of individual sites began in June 2016 and concluded in November 2017. The assessment methodology is described in Section 5.2. The Council is confident that the assessment is robust and the process included many periods of consultation, community workshops, desk based analysis and site visits. Respondents to the Local Plan consultations have broadly expressed support for the sites selected.

The Council believes that including Public Open Space within the same policy as Local Green Space (LGS) is consistent with national policy in that it identifies Local Green Spaces according to the requirements in paragraphs 76-78 of the 2012 NPPF. Local Green Spaces are identified as such because they meet the criteria listed in paragraph 77:

- a) In reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
- b) Demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquility or richness of wildlife; and
- c) Local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

Thus, those spaces identified as LGS meet the specific criteria and may be considered Reading's "best" open green spaces. Officers felt that other spaces not meeting the NPPF criteria were still worthy of specific protection. In order to protect both POS and LGS equally, while still recognising the special value of those meeting the LGS criteria, both have been included in EN7. There is nothing within the NPPF that prevents local authorities from specifically protecting those open spaces that do not qualify as LGS. Since there is no difference in the local policy protection, it is appropriate for both designations to be within a single policy, but the difference will be that LGS sites also benefit from the references in the NPPF. Respondents have expressed support for this designation structure during Local Plan consultation periods and workshops.

***Q3a. What are the implications of seeking school provision on the site annotated as EN7Nn, and is this proposal consistent with other policies in the LP?***

Planning application 171023 for a primary school at Mapledurham Playing Fields was approved in principle on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2018, subject to notification to the Secretary of State and completion of a Section 106 agreement, shortly following submission of the Local Plan. The proposed school would be sited in the north-west corner of the playing fields. The Committee Report<sup>2</sup> noted that, although open space is afforded strong protection by local policies, this is not an area identified in the Open Spaces Strategy (EV021 and EV022) as being deficient in open space. Additionally, the need of a primary school in this area was considered to carry great weight in accordance with Government guidance on school provision and for Local Planning Authorities to proactively plan for school places. The application was considered to have demonstrated that the loss of open space involved can be adequately compensated for by an increase in pitch carrying capacity. A suitable contribution has been agreed to deliver all mitigating environmental, parking, community, landscaping and ecological effects.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/8595/Item10/pdf/Item10.pdf>

Subject to final granting of the permission and its implementation, an area of land identified as Local Green Space would be developed. However, there are potential difficulties in redrawing the boundary at this stage. If the school were to not be implemented for any reason, it would leave the land unprotected from other developments that do not bring the same overriding benefits that a primary school would. The Council's view is that it should therefore continue to be identified in the Local Plan for the time being, and potentially amended when the plan is reviewed subject to implementation.

***Q4. What is the justification for the standards in the provision of open space in Table 4.3 relating to Policy EN9?***

Table 4.3, which forms part of the supporting text to policy EN9 on Provision of Open Space, is derived from the Open Spaces Strategy (2007) (EN021). These were based on the most up-to-date guidance at the time, after a consideration of the current amount and distribution of different types of open space in Reading. Section 7.4 of the Open Spaces Strategy in particular summarises the justification for the table.

It is recognised that the 2007 Open Spaces Strategy is now some years old. Therefore, the Council produced a 2018 Update Note (EN022) which looked at whether there have been significant changes, either on the ground or through new policy and guidance, since 2007 which would change the conclusions of the Open Spaces Strategy. This came to the conclusion that the changes that had occurred since 2007 were not significant enough to necessitate changes to the overall approach, including the content of table 4.3.

***Q5. What is the evidence for the identification of Major Landscape Features in Policy EN13?***

The evidence for the identification of Major Landscape Features in Policy EN13 is set out in section 4.22 (p78 to 82) of the Local Plan Background Paper (EV002). This defines the five features based on considerations such as the 2003 Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment, topography, flood extents and tree cover.

***Q5a. Do the requirements in Policy EN13 for a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment apply to all types of development, if so is this is justified?***

The requirement for a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment applies to all developments that affect the setting of the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. As the effects on the setting of the AONB can differ greatly according to scale, exact location and visual prominence of the site, it is not possible to derive a clear threshold above which developments require a LVIA, and it will need to be judged on a case-by-case basis. In Reading, little significant development is anticipated

close to the AONB boundary, and it is therefore likely to be a requirement that is invoked fairly rarely.

***Q6. Are the requirements of EN14 justified and will it be effective? Is it consistent with national policy?***

The justification for policy EN14 is set out in section 4.23 (pages 83-84) of the Local Plan Background Paper (EV002). This particularly links to the Council's 2010 Tree Strategy, which forms the basis for improving tree cover in Reading.

In terms of effectiveness, the policies largely carry forward the existing approach from policy CS38 of the Core Strategy (PP004), which focuses on protecting existing features, and policy DM18 of the Sites and Detailed Policies Document (PP006), which seeks additional tree planting. These policies have been in place for some years now, and the experience is that they have been effective in protecting important trees, hedges and woodlands, and securing additional tree planting. There has not been a revised estimate of the amount of tree cover to compare to the 17.8% recorded in 2010, but the Council regularly seeks, and secures through planning condition, tree planting and landscaping as part of developments.

The approach is consistent with national policy. The policy is consistent with paragraph 118 of the 2012 NPPF, which states that planning permission should be refused for

“development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland and the loss of aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland, unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss.”

In addition, the emphasis on increasing tree cover is in line with paragraph 114, which states that planning authorities “should set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure”.

As a part of mitigation measures for climate change, additional tree planting is also in line with national policy. Paragraph 99 states that:

“New development should be planned to avoid increased vulnerability to the range of impacts arising from climate change. When new development is brought forward in areas which are vulnerable, care should be taken to ensure that risks can be managed through suitable adaptation measures, including through the planning of green infrastructure.”

There is nothing in national policy that suggests that any part of EN14 would be inconsistent.

***Q7. Is the approach to air quality within the area as set out in EN15 justified, and will the policy be effective?***

The justification for policy EN15 is set out in section 4.24 (pages 84-88) of the Local Plan Background Paper (EV002). Essentially, this demonstrates that air quality remains a significant concern in Reading, particularly NO<sub>2</sub> levels linked to transport congestion, and that the Council is progressing a range of measures to deal with this issue, and continuing to keep its strategy under review.

The policy is expected to be effective. It is drafted to ensure that detrimental effects on air quality are mitigated, whether through the effects of new developments on air quality or through new sensitive receptors being exposed to existing poor air quality. This may involve use of planning obligations, and will draw on significant involvement from the Council's Environmental Protection team. This overall approach is largely carried forward from the policy DM19 of the existing Sites and Detailed Policies Document (PP006). Despite substantial levels of development since adoption of that document in 2012, as noted in the Local Plan Background Paper there has in general been improvement in air quality since 2013. This may be for a variety of reasons, but there is nonetheless good reason to believe that continuation of the policy approach will be effective.

It is worth noting that, although EN15 is a general development management policy on air quality, it is only part of a much wider approach to improving air quality in Reading, and its effectiveness should be seen in that context. Other policies within the Local Plan which will be of relevance include policies facilitating sustainable travel such as TR1, TR2 and TR4, policy TR5 on charging for low emission vehicles, and policy EN14 which requires tree planting and landscaping. The Air Quality Action Plan of 2009 includes a wide range of measures, many of which are implemented through such avenues as transport interventions and education or community engagement initiatives, and this would also be the case for the expected refresh of the strategy. Policy EN15 is therefore part of a wider multi-disciplinary approach.

***Q8. Is EN16 justified and will it be effective including in relation to available capacity within the sewer network and Blakes Lock SPS, and contaminated sites? Will the policy be effective in relation to all potential sources of pollution?***

The justification for policy EN16 is set out in section 4.25 (pages 88-92) of the Local Plan Background Paper (EV002).

Regarding capacity within the sewer network and Blakes Lock SPS, the Council has liaised with Thames Water throughout the Local Plan process, both through formal consultation routes and by providing anticipated development figures to feed into Thames Water's own forward planning work. Whilst some site-specific comments have been provided, Thames Water does not have any overall concerns with the Local Plan. The Water Quality Assessment (EV029) summarises the situation regarding general sewage treatment capacity, and section 4.2 makes clear that the

scale of growth anticipated can be accommodated. There are some sites where local upgrades may be needed to wastewater capacity, but these will be a matter that can be addressed as part of a specific development, which will likely require early liaison between a developer and Thames Water.

Thames Water have raised the issue of cumulative impact on Blakes Lock Sewage Pumping Station should all proposed development come forward in their Pre-Submission representations. However, this is not expected to represent a particular issue for deliverability of the Local Plan. Necessary upgrades to the SPS would need to be factored into TW's asset programme as and when required, and the Council will need to keep TW abreast of the expected rate of development throughout the plan period, and also ensure that early pre-application discussions take place and involve TW on significant developments.

In terms of contaminated sites, policy EN16 is expected to be effective. Dealing with potential contamination from historic uses is a relatively frequent occurrence in Reading as such a large proportion of development is on previously developed land. As a result, the Council has significant experience in ensuring that developments investigate and, where necessary, remediate contaminated land. Policy EN16 carries forward the existing approach within policy CS34 of the Core Strategy (PP004), which has been effective in ensuring that contaminated land is adequately dealt with at planning application stage. It is expected on the basis of current information that development on all of the allocated sites where contamination has been identified as a potential issue will be deliverable taking account of the need for remediation.

The policy should be effective in relation to all potential sources of pollution. The policy is worded to be inclusive of all potential forms of pollution, and all potential developments that could cause, or be sensitive to, pollution. The one area which respondents have suggested could be enhanced is in terms of light, for which see the Pre-Submission representation from Natural England. However, the policy still covers the general principles for developments that would cause or be sensitive to light pollution, and the suggested amendments are considered to not add particular value, rather a level of detail which may not be appropriate in all cases.

#### ***Q9. What is the justification for the noise rating level set out in Policy EN17?***

The justification for policy EN17 is summarised in section 4.26 (pages 92-93) of the Local Plan Background Paper (EV002). In essence, the noise rating level of at least -10dB below the measured background level has been set at that level in order to prevent cumulative impact. The addition of numerous different pieces of plant over time can result in the background level creeping up to levels which might cause adverse health impact, which is more likely in a densely occupied town such as Reading. Levels of -10dB ensure that the background level is not increased and nuisance is unlikely.



Planning Practice Guidance<sup>3</sup> identifies the cumulative impact of more than one source of noise as something to take into account, and this is particularly relevant in a dense urban authority such as Reading. PPG also notes that, where noise levels are already high, even a small increase in the overall noise level may have significant adverse effects. This is the case across much of Reading. The PPG is not in favour of fixed thresholds, as adverse impacts may be dependent on specific circumstances<sup>4</sup>. This is the reason that policy EN17 is set in relation to existing background noise, rather than setting a fixed level.

The specific figure of 10dB below measured background level has arisen from experience of the noise levels that are likely to cause disturbance in Reading. Although not previously set out in planning policy, this level has been used in practice as a general principle by the Council for a number of years, and is generally achievable.

A slight error has been identified in this policy in that it refers to noise source rating level when it should refer to noise source specific level. The specific level is the measured noise level, whereas the rating level is the specific level with correction factors included. The following change is therefore proposed:

*"Where noise generating equipment is proposed, the noise source ~~ratingspecific~~ level (plant noise level) should be at least 10dBA below the existing background level as measured at the nearest noise sensitive receptor."*

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<sup>3</sup> Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 30-006-20141224

<sup>4</sup> Paragraph: 010 Reference ID: 30-010-20140306

## APPENDIX 1: STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND WITH HISTORIC ENGLAND

## EXAMINATION INTO THE READING BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN

### STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND between HISTORIC ENGLAND and READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

July 2018

This Statement of Common Ground between Historic England (HE) and Reading Borough Council (RBC) relates to various policies and related supporting text of the Reading Borough Local Plan. HE made a number of representations at the Pre-Submission Draft stage detailed in the Statement of Consultation on the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan.

In response to some of these representations, RBC made minor changes to the Local Plan prior to its submission in March 2018. The full schedule of changes is set out in the Schedule of Minor Changes prior to Submission<sup>1</sup>, and the relevant changes are:

- No. 5 – 3.2 Spatial Strategy for Reading, Paragraph 3.2.11
- No. 10 – 4.2 Built and Natural Environment, Paragraph 4.2.2
- No. 12 – 4.2 Built and Natural Environment, Policy EN2: Areas of Archaeological Significance
- No. 13 – 4.2 Built and Natural Environment, Paragraph 4.2.23
- No. 47 – 4.7 Other Uses, Policy OU3: Telecommunications Development
- No. 54 – 5: Central Reading, Policy CR3: Public Realm in Central Reading
- No. 56 – 5: Central Reading, Policy CR10: Tall Buildings
- No. 94 – 8: Caversham and Emmer Green, Policy CA1: Sites for Development and Change of Use in Caversham and Emmer Green, CA1f: Rear of 1 & 3 Woodcote Road and 21 St Peter's Hill
- No. 97 – 9: East Reading, Paragraph 9.2.1

Both parties agree that the changes made resolve the concerns raised by HE on those aspects of the Local Plan. The following HE representations remain outstanding, as do RBC's responses to those representations as set out in the Statement of Consultation on the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan<sup>2</sup>:

- Section 1.5 – evidence base
- Section 4.2 – section heading
- Section 4.2 – lack of policy(ies) setting out the important elements or characteristics of listed buildings and registered historic parks and gardens to which development proposals should have regard and seek to conserve and enhance
- Paragraphs 4.2.10 & 4.2.11 – lack of explanation of the difference between designated and non-designated heritage assets
- Policies H8 and H9 – recommendation to strengthen policies
- Policy CR2 – lack of reference to the historic environment
- Policies CR11c, CR12e and CR13c – lack of reference to specific listed buildings
- Policy CR13a – concerns about possible residential use

Of these, HE considers its comments regarding the Evidence Base (Section 1.5), Section 4.2 and Policy CR13a to be matters of soundness. RBC's responses to each point stand.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/8660/LP008-Schedule-of-Minor-Changes-prior-to-Submission/pdf/LP008\\_Schedule\\_of\\_Minor\\_Changes\\_prior\\_to\\_Submission.pdf](http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/8660/LP008-Schedule-of-Minor-Changes-prior-to-Submission/pdf/LP008_Schedule_of_Minor_Changes_prior_to_Submission.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/8684/LP006-Statement-of-Consultation-on-PreSubmission-Draft-Local-Plan/pdf/LP006\\_Statement\\_of\\_Consultation\\_on\\_PreSubmission\\_Draft\\_Local\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/8684/LP006-Statement-of-Consultation-on-PreSubmission-Draft-Local-Plan/pdf/LP006_Statement_of_Consultation_on_PreSubmission_Draft_Local_Plan.pdf)

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