

READING BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN

Adopted November 2019



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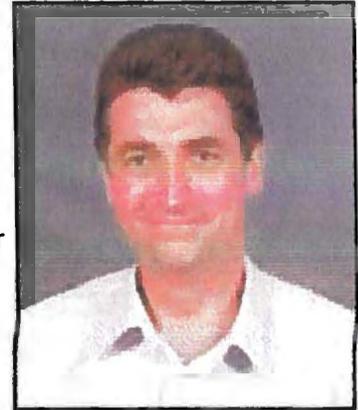


Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

FOREWORD

By Councillor Tony Page

The Local Plan is the document that guides development in Reading up to 2036, and it will therefore play a decisive role in how our town evolves over the next two decades. It will be the main point of reference for anyone wishing to undertake new buildings, changes or developments within Reading over that period.



This plan has been carefully developed to address some of the key issues facing Reading. In particular, this Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019, and set out its commitment to work towards achieving a carbon neutral Reading by 2030. We must therefore ensure that new development only takes place where it can help us in achieving that aim. The Local Plan contains sustainability policies that put it at the cutting edge of authorities across the country. We are proud in Reading to be in the top 5% of local authorities in Britain for cutting carbon emissions and the Local Plan will play a major part in building upon that success.

Over recent years, Reading has had great economic success, and this has resulted in considerable investment in the town. However, this success brings its own issues. In particular, Reading faces an acute housing crisis. There are not enough homes in general, and there is a particular need for genuinely affordable housing which represents more than half of our overall assessed housing need. The Local Plan is a major part of our response to this issue, and we continue to work with neighbouring councils to look at the needs of the Reading area as a whole.

Other critical issues to be considered include how to provide the employment space and supporting infrastructure to make sure that Reading continues to be an attractive place in which to work, to live and to study. The benefits of Reading's economic success also need to be shared out more equally with those communities in Reading that suffer high levels of deprivation and social exclusion.

The Plan also takes a positive approach to conserving and enhancing Reading's considerable but, in the past, often overlooked historic legacy. Reading has some truly significant historic sites, some of which are identified for future use and enhancement as part of this Plan. Improving Reading's environment is a major part of the Plan, both in terms of revitalising tired and run-down sites and areas, and in preserving those elements that are essential to our residents' quality of life.

This Plan will ensure that our town remains a great place in which to live, work and play for people living here now - and in the future. It provides an excellent basis for delivering on our Climate Emergency Declaration earlier this year, and achieving a sustainable and prosperous future for Reading.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Page".

Tony Page

**Deputy Leader, Reading Borough Council and
Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport**

layout, materials, hard and soft landscaping. There may be opportunities for areas of public realm to provide improved access to and visibility for heritage assets.

Pedestrianisation, traffic management and/or environmental enhancements will continue to be implemented on appropriate streets.

- 5.3.10 Open space and well-designed areas of public realm are key contributors to the character of any area, and this applies particularly to large built-up areas such as Reading. Such areas provide opportunities for informal sports and recreation, community focal points and meeting places and space for events to take place.
- 5.3.11 Reading benefits from some substantial areas of open space close to the town centre along the Thames, and some high-quality but smaller areas such as Forbury Gardens. Increasingly, the town centre is seeing new and improved town squares and similar spaces, with the provision of squares at the north and south entrance to the new station, and recent improvements to Market Place and Town Hall Square. Additional open space or generous public realm such as town squares or wider streets that can have multiple functions would assist in creating a sense of place in the centre, and are encouraged. Indeed, these types of space are likely to present the main opportunities for additional spaces in the centre. These can act as locations for leisure activities and public gatherings and events. The provision of new public open space should be accessible and of a usable size and shape. It should be capable of use for a range of activities, across a range of age groups. Improvements to the public realm may include works such as the provision of open space, the improvement of pedestrian access to existing open space, the provision of landscaping and green infrastructure, and wider streets that act as open space.
- 5.3.12 Reading's watercourses are also major assets which need to be built into the strategy, and their distinct characters should be respected. The Kennet generally runs through more urban higher-density areas, whilst the Thames retains its sense of tranquillity. These distinct characters have informed the Local Plan. It is essential that public access along watercourses is retained and expanded in the central area. Policy EN11 deals specifically with development close to watercourses, and applies to development across Reading, including the central area. Policy EN12 relates to biodiversity and the green network, with Reading's watercourses forming significant ecological assets. These policies highlight the importance of development enhancing the watercourses as important habitats, and this applies equally in the centre.

Leisure, Culture and Tourism in Central Reading

CR4: LEISURE, CULTURE AND TOURISM IN CENTRAL READING

The Central Core will be the prime focus for major leisure, cultural and tourism development¹⁰⁷. Leisure, cultural and tourism uses that would attract a wide range of people into the centre will be encouraged. Innovative solutions to leisure provision will be encouraged, particularly those that make best use of available (often limited) site area.

The River Thames is a prime location for new or improved tourist attractions, and as such, this area is suitable for informal recreation and sporting uses and associated small-scale development, as well as improvements to management and access. Development or improvements in this area will be expected to add to or maintain the setting and character of the Thames and to conserve and enhance ecological value.

¹⁰⁷ Leisure, cultural and tourism development are those uses within the 'main town centre uses' defined in the NPPF

- 5.3.13 This policy refers to those leisure, culture and tourism uses that are defined as ‘main town centre uses’ in the NPPF, excluding drinking uses, which are covered elsewhere. These facilities will assist in widening the variety of the offer of the centre, and would, in many cases, help to attract a greater range of people into the centre. For that reason, additional uses should be encouraged, and there are substantial opportunities within Central Reading to accommodate leisure and cultural uses, as well as new visitor accommodation. Policy RL2 directs major leisure, culture and tourism uses to Central Reading, and CR1 defines the Central Core as the most suitable part of the centre.
- 5.3.14 In order to diversify uses in the town centre and improve the Centre’s leisure offer, it is important to accommodate leisure, cultural and tourism activities that appeal to a wide range of age and social groups. Leisure and entertainment uses that would contribute to the 18-hour economy will be encouraged, and existing uses maintained. This should include a range of different, yet complementary evening and night-time economy uses to cater for all sections of Reading’s community, and offer alternative activities to drinking.
- 5.3.15 In all cases, new leisure development should be based on the principles of high quality and inclusive design, to assist in making the town centre more attractive and usable for local residents, shoppers, employees and leisure visitors. Blank and/ or uninteresting façades or shed-like structures will not be permitted. New development and/ or redevelopment in the Centre also provides opportunities for the creation of new spaces that may be used for formal or informal recreation and leisure.
- 5.3.16 In some cases, it may be appropriate to incorporate leisure and cultural uses within wider developments, to create effective mixed-use schemes. Where this is the case, the integration of these uses with existing developments will be encouraged, provided they do not give rise to adverse impacts on amenity.
- 5.3.17 Leisure, cultural and tourism development should not give rise to adverse impacts on the amenity of nearby residents and other town centre users, or to existing town centre spaces. Proposals will therefore be expected to mitigate any potential issues of noise disturbance (particularly night-time noise), traffic-related congestion, and anti-social behaviour and crime.

Drinking Establishments in Central Reading

CR5: DRINKING ESTABLISHMENTS IN CENTRAL READING

A range of complementary evening and night-time uses that appeal to all sections of Reading’s society, and contribute to the 18-hour welcome, will be provided. Such uses should not give rise to adverse impacts on the amenity of nearby residents and other town centre users. Those uses that are likely to have an adverse impact on amenity or the character and/ or function of the Central area, will not be permitted.

Proposals for pubs, bars and clubs should be accessible to current and proposed night-time public transport services.

- 5.3.18 Reading has become an important centre for evening drinking uses over recent years, drawing people from surrounding areas as well as from the urban area of Reading. The evening economy is a key part of the overall economy, and drinking uses have therefore been a major factor in Reading’s success. It is important to keep in mind that, despite some local issues, success as a centre for evening socialising has benefited Reading, and that Reading will continue to strive to maintain an 18-hour welcome for a range of users of the centre.