

READING BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN

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Reading
Borough Council

Working better with you

Undesignated Open Space

EN8: UNDESIGNATED OPEN SPACE

There will be a presumption in favour of retention of undesignated open space, which will include allotments. Development should not result in the loss of or jeopardise use and enjoyment of undesignated open space. Development may be permitted where it is clearly demonstrated that replacement open space, of a similar standard and function, can be provided at an accessible location close by, or that improvements to recreational facilities on remaining open space can be provided to a level sufficient to outweigh the loss of the open space. The quality of existing open space should not be eroded by insensitive development on adjoining land.

- 4.2.30 Reading has many areas of open space not identified in Policy EN7 (Local Green Space and Public Open Space) in both public and private ownership, which nevertheless provide important recreational and amenity resources. It is important that these areas are retained where possible.
- 4.2.31 This policy relates to all open space in the Borough; publicly or privately owned, apart from the Local Green Spaces and Public Open Spaces identified in Policy EN7. It applies not just to the loss of the space, but to a situation where development prevents the use of open space in close proximity through such effects as preventing public access or leading to unacceptable levels of overshadowing. Where a development proposal involves losing open space that is not specifically designated, appropriate replacement space should be provided where it is easily accessible to the people most affected. Alternatively, compensating improvements could be made to existing open space in the area. Undesignated open spaces within or adjacent to Conservation Areas or the setting of heritage assets are particularly valuable.
- 4.2.32 This policy also covers Reading's various allotment sites (apart from those identified as Local Green Space), with a presumption in favour of their retention. Compensatory provision for the loss of any allotments in line with the policy will need to consider whether it adequately replaces the role of the allotments that would be lost.

Provision of Open Space

EN9: PROVISION OF OPEN SPACE

All new development should make provision for appropriate open space based on the needs of the development. This can be achieved through on or off-site provision, contributions toward provision or improvement of existing leisure or recreational facilities.

On sites of 50 dwellings or more, or for developments where the availability and quality of existing open space has been identified as deficient, new provision will be sought. Development must ensure satisfactory provision of children's play areas and neighbourhood parks.

A secure maintenance arrangement shall be demonstrated to ensure that any open space is properly maintained throughout the life of the development. In exceptional circumstances

where the Council agrees to the adoption of the open space, a commuted sum for future maintenance will be required as part of any legal agreement.

On sites of less than 50 dwellings, or in areas not identified as deficient in the provision of open space, new open space provision, improvements or enhancements will be sought, including through appropriate contributions.

The provision of open space for all developments shall satisfy the most urgent need subject to considerations of particular deficiencies. The most up-to-date Open Spaces Strategy should guide provision type and size. New open space should:

- *Be in useable parcels of land and not be fragmented;*
- *Be safely and easily accessible and not severed by any physical barrier, including a road;*
- *Be accessible to the general public and be designed so as to feel that it is part of the public and not private realm;*
- *Create a safe environment, appropriately considering lighting and layout to reduce the fear of crime;*
- *Provide some informal landscaping for aesthetic, wildlife and recreational purposes; and*
- *Link into the Green Network where possible.*

4.2.33 It is essential that new developments make provision for open space to meet the needs of the residents/occupiers of the development. With a growing population resulting from new development, it follows that the amount and/or quality of open space in the Borough should increase over the plan period. Qualitative improvements might include the provision of supporting amenities e.g. benches, refreshment facilities, green infrastructure, etc.

4.2.34 The Open Space Audit carried out as part of the preparation of the Open Space Strategy also found significant deficiency in the provision of play areas and safe access to play areas in several parts of Borough, although some of these deficiencies have been addressed since publication of the Strategy. Special consideration needs to be given to ensuring adequate provision of play space as part of all development proposals.

4.2.35 Open space is unevenly distributed across the Borough. People in and around the town centre are still further away from public open space than guidelines recommend and parts of North Reading are very deficient in play areas. In many cases historical development patterns make it difficult to introduce new areas of public open space without large-scale redevelopment.

4.2.36 The Open Spaces Strategy identifies the following main issues:

- Access: the distribution of public open space leaves some areas underprovided:
 - In Central Reading, public open space is, by and large, where residents are not;
 - In North Reading, large areas are lacking children's play facilities;
 - Areas immediately to the West, North West, South and East of the town centre are amongst the most poorly supplied in the Borough; the problem is exacerbated by very dense housing; and
 - Severance lines, such as busy roads or railways, further restrict residents' access to open space.

- Quality: some of the existing parks and open spaces are of poor quality and lack facilities.
- Links to public open space: these are fragmented, so that some public open space is not linked by pedestrian infrastructure to homes, and wildlife corridors are incomplete.
- Wildlife: many links between habitats are incomplete and could be improved by wildlife corridors.

4.2.37 The space hierarchy in Figure 4.3 should be used as a benchmark for considering open space provision in the Borough, in terms of both quality and quantity, and should be considered in the context of up-to-date local assessments in line with the NPPF. Its objective is to assist in promoting some consistency in provision across the town, as well as helping to identify where households have limited access to public open space and where the quality of provision is inadequate.

4.2.38 Large, higher-tier parks are not substitutes for a good distribution of local parks. Clearly, an open space labelled ‘district park’ is also a neighbourhood park for households within a reasonable catchment. For residents living further away from a district park, access to local parks and other small recreational open spaces nearby must also be available.

4.2.39 The Open Spaces Strategy states that, ‘All guidelines recommend that at least some open space for children to play, *whether publicly or privately owned*, be available within 100-200m of every home. This will primarily affect very high-density developments, like flats, as almost all other houses have some form of garden’.

4.2.40 Policy H10 seeks to secure private and communal outdoor amenity areas on all residential developments, the extent of which will be guided by the site’s proximity to quality public open space. Conversely, this policy looks to secure public open space. In determining the appropriate form, location and extent of public open space for new development, consideration will be given to the extent of deprivation of private or communal garden areas within the proposed scheme.

Figure 4.3: Hierarchy and typology of open spaces of recreational value, and provision standards for Reading

	Description	Size	Transport mode	Radial catchment
Borough Park	Varied character and facilities; open parkland, natural, formal, sport, play and relaxation; catering	60 ha	Car; public transport; cycle	
District parks	Varied character and facilities (but fewer than above); natural, formal, sport, play and recreation	20 ha	Car; bus; cycle; foot	1.2 km
Local parks	Relaxation, play and ball games	2 ha or 1-2 ha equipped	Cycle; foot; wheelchair	0.8 km
Neighbourhood park	LEAP + informal space	0.1-0.2 ha equipped	Foot; wheelchair	0.4-0.8 km
Small recreational open spaces	‘low-grade’ recreation	0.1-0.2 ha	Foot; wheelchair	0.4-0.8 km
Linear open spaces	Relaxation; green link		Foot; cycle	
Semi-natural sites	Comparatively undisturbed sites, managed for wild flora and fauna		Cycle; foot; wheelchair	1.5-2.0 km

- 4.2.41 Improvements to the quality and facilities of existing open space and/or the provision of new open spaces should be secured through financial contributions as part of smaller developments, either through CIL or Section 106 agreements. As a minimum, the provision of safe access for new households to new or existing enhanced public open space should be a requirement. In larger scale commercial/retail developments, the integration of additional public spaces (such as civic squares) should be required.
- 4.2.42 Regeneration initiatives and housing redevelopments sometimes create opportunities to provide new open space or reorganise space through land swaps. Feasibility of this alternative should be considered in areas deficient in public open space.
- 4.2.43 There will be a presumption that the Council will not adopt additional areas of public open space except in exceptional circumstances. Developers will therefore need to make provision for the continuing future maintenance of these open spaces.

Provision of green space with development - overview of requirements

Policy EN9 provides for public open space in residential developments of over 50 dwellings. However, there are a variety of policies that ensure that all new residential development within the Borough makes some form of contribution to green infrastructure, through:

- *Private and communal green space in accordance with Policy H10*
- *Landscaping, in accordance with Policy CC7, and linked into a wider Green Network wherever possible in accordance with Policy EN12;*
- *Innovative solutions in the high density town centre such as green roofs, green walls and roof gardens in accordance with policies CR2 and CR10;*
- *Tree planting in accordance with policies CC3 and EN14*

Access to Open Space

EN10: ACCESS TO OPEN SPACE

In areas with relatively poor access to open space facilities (including as a result of severance lines), new development should make provision for, or contribute to, improvements to road and other crossings to improve access to green space and/or facilitate the creation or linking of safe off-road routes to parks.

- 4.2.44 There are a number of severance lines that act as barriers to access to open space, some of which were identified in the 2007 Open Spaces Strategy. New development proposals should be assessed in terms of accessibility to open space (as well as other services and facilities). Opportunities should be identified for development to improve or contribute to the improvement of access to open spaces, such as through providing or funding the provision of improvements to crossings, green routes, towpaths or pedestrianisation of streets.
- 4.2.45 The creation of a network of safe links for pedestrians and cyclists, that improves access to a choice of open spaces, is a key objective and an integral part of the Open Spaces Strategy. Not only will these routes increase open space usage and reduce trips by cars, they should be considered an intrinsic component of the overall open space structure and experience that Reading offers. Paths alongside the Kennet and Thames in particular, provide a unique opportunity to enhance the network of green links and corridors across the Borough.