

# 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

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## Terraced Housing in Central Reading

### **CR9: TERRACED HOUSING IN CENTRAL READING**

*The character of the following areas of traditional town centre terraced housing will be respected:*

- **CR9a: Blakes Cottages**
- **CR9b: Crane Wharf**
- **CR9c: Queen's Cottages**
- **CR9d: Sackville Street & Vachel Road**
- **CR9e: Stanshawe Road**

*Development should not result in a loss, or have a detrimental effect on the character of, these areas.*

5.3.33 The centre of Reading contains a number of small groupings of traditional terraced housing within the Inner Distribution Road. These areas make a unique contribution to the character of central Reading, and can be a pleasant surprise to first time visitors. These areas have merit in their own right: for instance, Sackville Street is a fine example of Reading patterned brickwork housing. In addition, Crane Wharf, Queen's Cottages and Blakes Cottages are old waterside housing areas abutting the towpath and displaying a distinct character and fabric worthy of retention and enhancement. However, there are a number of areas of distinct character in Reading, and it is the juxtaposition with the high-density, often modern, context in which these areas are found that marks them out and makes them most worthy of retention. The fact that it is the context of these areas that is the main reason for their significance makes a policy in the Local Plan a more appropriate mechanism than designation as conservation areas.

5.3.34 In addition, terraces provide opportunities for people who would not wish to live in a flat, to live in the centre. High land values mean that the development of many further houses with gardens in the core of the centre is unlikely, so these areas, where they are not already converted into flats, are important to preserve in terms of maintaining a mix and variety of housing in the centre.

## Tall Buildings

### **CR10: TALL BUILDINGS**

*In Reading, tall buildings are defined as 10 storeys of commercial floorspace or 12 storeys of residential (equating to 36 metres tall) or above. Tall buildings will meet all the requirements below.*

- i) *Within Reading Borough, tall buildings will only be appropriate within the 'areas of potential for tall buildings' as defined on the Proposals Map. These areas are as follows:*

- CR10a: Station Area Cluster**
- CR10b: Western Grouping**
- CR10c: Eastern Grouping**

**Figure 5.2 gives an 'at a glance' diagrammatic indication of the principles for each area set out in the following sections.**

**ii) CR10a, Station Area Cluster:**

**A new cluster of tall buildings with the station at its heart will signify the status of the station area as a major mixed-use destination and the main gateway to and most accessible part of Reading.**

**Tall buildings in this area should:**

- **Follow a pattern of the tallest buildings at the centre of the cluster, close to the station, and step down in height from that point towards the lower buildings at the fringes;**
- **Contribute to the creation of a coherent, attractive and sustainable cluster of buildings with a high quality of public realm;**
- **Ensure that adequate space is provided between the buildings to avoid the creation of an overly dense townscape and to allow buildings to be viewed as individual forms;**
- **Be designed to fit within a wider planning framework or master plan for the area, which allows separate parcels of land to come forward at different times in a co-ordinated manner.**

**iii) CR10b, Western Grouping:**

**A secondary cluster of tall buildings would be appropriate to create a distinctive grouping, to mark the area as the civic heart of Reading and a gateway to the centre.**

**Tall buildings in this area should:**

- **Contribute to the development of a cluster of tall buildings that is clearly subservient to the Station Area Cluster;**
- **Be generally lower in height than the tallest buildings planned for the Station Area Cluster;**
- **Be linked to the physical regeneration of a wider area and should not be proposed in isolation;**
- **Where buildings are to be integrated or front onto existing streets, include upper storeys of the taller structures that are set back from a base which is in line with the general surrounding building heights, particularly where the structure adjoins a conservation area;**
- **Not intrude on the key view between Greyfriars Church and St Giles Church, and a view from the open space in the Hosier Street development to St Mary's Church.**

**iv) CR10c, Eastern Grouping:**

**One or two landmark buildings situated at street corners or other gateway sites are appropriate to mark the extent of the business area.**

**Tall buildings in this area should:**

- **Be of a smaller scale than the tallest buildings around the station;**
- **Be slim in nature and avoid dominant massing;**
- **Avoid setting back upper storeys on Kings Road in order to align strategic views into and out of the centre;**

- *Not intrude on the view from Blakes Bridge towards Blakes Cottages.*

*One tall building has recently been developed (The Blade), and if the permitted tall building at 120 Kings Road is constructed, there will no longer be scope for additional tall buildings in this area.*

- v) *In addition to the area-specific requirements, all tall building proposals should be of excellent design and architectural quality, and should:*
- *Enhance Reading's skyline, through a distinctive profile and careful design of the upper and middle sections of the building;*
  - *Contribute to a human scale street environment, through paying careful attention to the lower section or base of the building, providing rich architectural detailing and reflecting their surroundings through the definition of any upper storey setback and reinforcing the articulation of the streetscape;*
  - *Contribute to high-quality views from distance, views from middle-distance and local views;*
  - *Take account of the context within which they sit, including the existing urban grain, streetscape and built form and local architectural style;*
  - *Avoid bulky, over-dominant massing;*
  - *Conserve and, where possible, enhance the setting of conservation areas and listed buildings;*
  - *Use high quality materials and finishes;*
  - *Create safe, pleasant and attractive spaces around them, and avoid detrimental impacts on the existing public realm;*
  - *Consider innovative ways of providing green infrastructure, such as green walls, green roofs and roof gardens;*
  - *Locate any car parking or vehicular servicing within or below the development;*
  - *Maximise the levels of energy efficiency in order to offset the generally energy intensive nature of such buildings;*
  - *Mitigate any wind speed or turbulence or overshadowing effects through design and siting;*
  - *Ensure adequate levels of daylight and sunlight are able to reach buildings and spaces within the development;*
  - *Avoid significant negative impacts on existing residential properties and the public realm in terms of outlook, privacy, daylight, sunlight, noise, light glare and night-time lighting;*
  - *Provide managed public access to an upper floor observatory and to ground floors where appropriate, and ensure that arrangements for access within the building are incorporated in the design stage;*
  - *Incorporate appropriate maintenance arrangements at the design stage.*

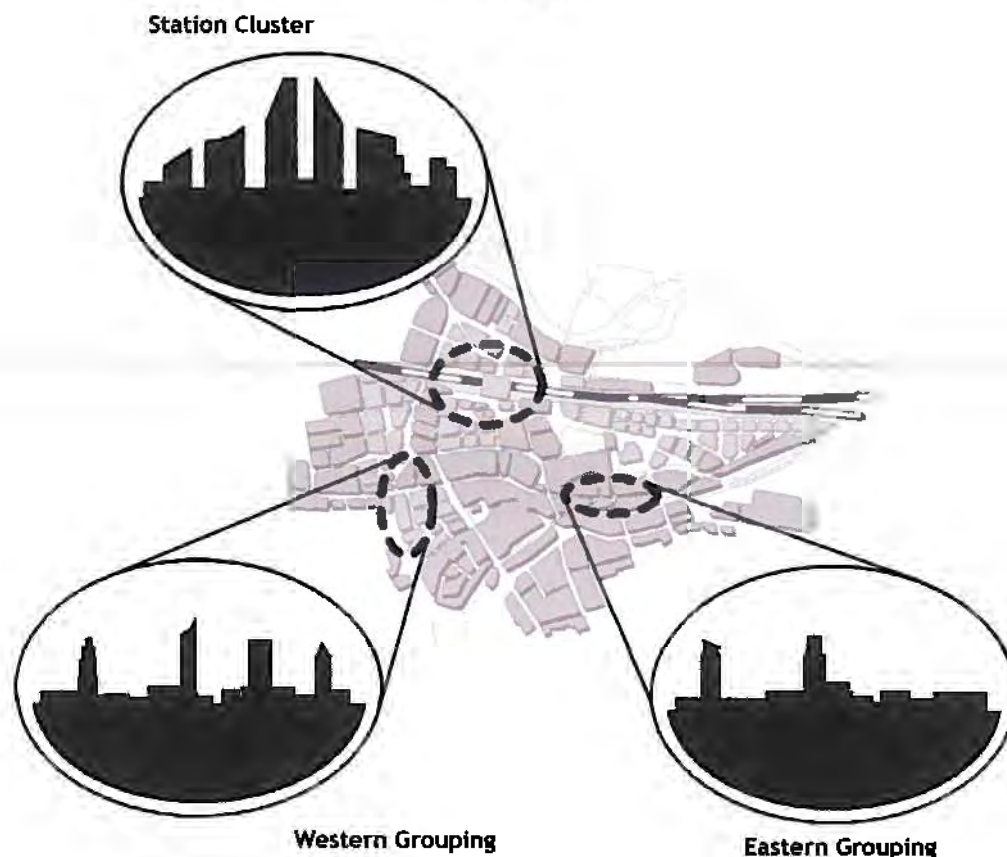
5.3.35 The vision for Reading seeks to build on the status of central Reading as the dynamic and creative core of the capital of the Thames Valley. Tall buildings have an important part to play in achieving this. They have a symbolic role in marking the centre out as a regionally-significant hub of activity, and a practical role in accommodating the level of development that this status entails in a highly accessible location. Within this context, proposals for tall buildings have markedly increased in recent years.

5.3.36 It is therefore essential that there is a strong and clear policy on tall buildings, based on an analysis of the effects of, and opportunities for, such buildings. A Tall Buildings Strategy was

produced in March 2008, and is available on the Council's website<sup>109</sup>.

- 5.3.37 It is vital that, given their prominence, new tall buildings are of the highest architectural quality. Tall buildings of mediocre architectural quality will not be acceptable. They need to make a positive contribution to the character of the centre of Reading and to views into the centre. They will be visible from a wide area and it is therefore essential that they are of the highest design quality.
- 5.3.38 The approach of three clusters of tall buildings with differing characteristics will help to provide variety and interest in visual terms, as well as creating a distinctive character for the business core of the centre. This approach has been subject to a thorough analysis of the suitability of the areas for tall buildings in terms of a number of factors, including townscape character, historic context, local and strategic views, market demand, topography, accessibility and other issues.
- 5.3.39 The heart of the business area, the station area, will be signified by the highest buildings and the densest cluster, due to its proximity to the station and public transport interchange. This will be the most extensive of the three clusters and will make a significant impact on the townscape around the station and on the town's skyline. It is important that a coherent, attractive and sustainable grouping of buildings is created within a high quality public realm.

**Figure 5.2: Diagrammatic indicative representation of the differing approach to tall buildings in each area**



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<sup>109</sup> [www.reading.gov.uk/planningpolicy](http://www.reading.gov.uk/planningpolicy)



Tall buildings should be considered within the context of a masterplan or planning framework for the area that, within the context of this policy, will provide further guidance on the relative heights, massing and spacing of the buildings, and the function and quality of public realm around them, along with their relationship with the major transport interchange improvements delivered at Reading Station.

- 5.3.40 The western and eastern groupings are located at the extents of the business area, and each will be signified by a smaller grouping of tall buildings, with a more residential emphasis.
- 5.3.41 The area-specific guidelines set out in CR10 parts (ii), (iii) and (iv) are illustrated in Figure 5.2, which shows ‘at a glance’ and in diagrammatic format the differences between the areas in terms of massing, spacing between buildings and heights. It should not be taken as a prescriptive guideline for the appearance of the skyline, merely a diagrammatic representation of the policy principles.

#### ***Skyline and views***

- 5.3.42 Different aspects of a tall building’s design are of significance when viewed from different distances, and this will be taken into account when designing and assessing proposals under part (v) of CR10. From longer distances, the overall massing and proportion is most important, and the relationship between the silhouette and the skyline should inform the design. In the case of mid-distance views, the overall composition and detail are perceived in balance, and the hierarchy and articulation of elevations are particularly important. Finally, for local views, the interrelationship of the building’s base and the immediate setting will be particularly visible, and the quality of materials and the detailing will be critical.
- 5.3.43 The contribution that tall buildings can make to views in terms of their locations should also be taken into account. Aligning tall buildings to terminate or frame views can create a strong reference point, allowing greater urban legibility.
- 5.3.44 There are some key panoramic views of the central area that tall buildings should make a positive contribution to. These include the views of the central area from Balmore Park, Caversham Park, Kings Meadow, Reading Bridge, and from Oxford Road to the west of the centre, the Whitley Street area to the south and Wokingham Road to the east.

#### ***Street environment***

- 5.3.45 Tall buildings need not prejudice the creation or retention of a human scale street environment, provided that they are carefully located, designed with a distinct top and bottom, and have regard to the effects on the microclimate. There are a number of design solutions that can be used to assist in creating a human scale street environment:
- Stepping down a large mass to its neighbours;
  - Setting back the upper floors to create the impression of a continuous streetscape;
  - Ensuring that the ground level is as active and interesting as possible;
  - Ensuring that the public realm is naturally surveyed;
  - Providing legible and accessible entrances;
  - Providing a richness to the detailing and high quality materials;
  - Articulating the lower floors to reflect the character of the street;
  - Mitigating against the adverse impacts a tall building can often make on the microclimate;
  - Providing a continuity of frontage, street line and definition and enclosure to the public realm; and
  - Providing green infrastructure for a comfortable microclimate, cleaner air and visual interest.

### ***Sustainable design and construction***

- 5.3.46 Tall buildings are inherently energy intensive, so there will need to be particular efforts made to ensure that tall buildings meet the requirements of Core Strategy policy CC2 or H5. Tall buildings should exploit opportunities of efficient services distribution and building energy simulation tools to reduce energy usage. Narrow span floor plates improve the availability of daylight and hence reduce dependence on artificial light. Individual control and opening of windows is challenging in taller buildings, but advances in façade technology has made this possible and allows for internal environments to be naturally ventilated at appropriate times of the year.

### ***Wind and solar effects of tall buildings***

- 5.3.47 Tall buildings can adversely affect the environmental quality of surrounding areas, particularly through the diversion of high speed winds to ground level and through overshadowing of other areas. However, good design and siting can successfully mitigate these impacts. A building, or grouping of buildings, should be modelled and simulated within its surrounding context, to examine environmental performance at an early design stage to highlight any potential issues that need to be addressed. Wind should be assessed against the Lawson Criteria. Sunlight and daylight should meet the criteria outlined in the 'Site layout planning for daylight and sunlight: a guide to good practice', published by the Building Research Establishment (BRE) and the British Standard Code of Practice for Daylighting (BS8206-2).
- 5.3.48 In terms of wind effects, the use of architectural devices such as screens, terraces and awnings as well as façade set-backs can be used to minimise the effects of high wind speed at the base of a tall building.
- 5.3.49 Solar issues will influence the orientation of a building, and there are various aspects that need to be considered. These will include solar gains where passive heating is desired, shading from solar gains where they are not desired, the need to maximise daylighting, and renewable energy generation by photovoltaic cells. In terms of effects of developments, the Building Research Establishment (BRE)<sup>110</sup> has guidelines on assessing daylight and sunlight effects of development, which the Council will apply flexibly given the high density of the central area.

### ***Other issues***

- 5.3.50 Tall buildings that include residential will need to take account of noise and air quality issues in the same way as all additional residential development. All developments will need to comply with the Civil Aviation Authority's aerodrome safeguarding criteria, where buildings should be below 242 metres AOD.
- 5.3.51 Given their prominence and to signify Reading's emerging status as regional capital of the Thames Valley, it is essential that the buildings and new spaces are designed to be of the highest architectural quality. Therefore (and having taken into account CABE's and Historic England's guidance on tall buildings) the Council considers that outline planning applications for tall buildings are appropriate only in cases where the applicant is seeking to establish the principle of (a) tall building(s) as an important element within the context of a robust and credible master plan for the area to be developed over a long period of time. In such cases principles must be established within the design and access statement accompanying the application, which demonstrate that excellent urban design and architecture will result.

<sup>110</sup> [www.bre.co.uk](http://www.bre.co.uk)

## 5.4 Central Reading Site-Specific Policies

### Station/River Major Opportunity Area

*VISION: The station/river area will be a flagship scheme, extending the centre and providing a mixed use destination in itself and centred on the new station and public transport interchange. It will integrate the transport links and areas northwards towards the River Thames and into the heart of the centre.*

#### CR11: STATION/RIVER MAJOR OPPORTUNITY AREA

*Development in the Station/River Major Opportunity Area will:*

- i) Contribute towards providing a high-density mix of uses to create a destination in itself and capitalise on its role as one of the most accessible locations in the south east. Development for education will be an acceptable part of the mix;*
- ii) Help facilitate greater pedestrian and cycle permeability, particularly on the key movement corridors. North-south links through the area centred on the new station, including across the IDR, are of particular importance;*
- iii) Provide developments that front onto and provide visual interest to existing and future pedestrian routes and open spaces;*
- iv) Safeguard land which is needed for mass rapid transit routes and stops;*
- v) Provide additional areas of open space where possible, with green infrastructure, including a direct landscaped link between the station and the River Thames;*
- vi) Give careful consideration to the areas of transition to low and medium density residential and conserve and, where possible, enhance listed buildings, conservation areas and historic gardens and their settings;*
- vii) Give careful consideration to the archaeological potential of the area and be supported by appropriate archaeological assessment which should inform the development;*
- viii) Demonstrate that it is part of a comprehensive approach to its sub-area, which does not prevent neighbouring sites from fulfilling the aspirations of this policy, and which contributes towards the provision of policy requirements that benefit the whole area, such as open space; and*
- ix) Give early consideration to the potential impact on water and wastewater infrastructure in conjunction with Thames Water, and make provision for upgrades where required.*

*Development of the station and interchange was completed in 2015. Development in surrounding areas will be in line with the following provisions for each sub-area:*