

# READING BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN

Adopted November 2019



[www.reading.gov.uk](http://www.reading.gov.uk)



**Reading**  
Borough Council

Working better with you

## Biodiversity and the Green Network

### EN12: BIODIVERSITY AND THE GREEN NETWORK

- a) *The identified Green Network, the key elements of which are shown on the Proposals Map, shall be maintained, protected, consolidated, extended and enhanced. Permission will not be granted for development that negatively affects the sites with identified interest or fragments the overall network. The Green Network comprises:*
- *Sites with identified biodiversity interest - Local Wildlife Sites, Local Nature Reserves, Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, protected and priority species and their habitats, Priority and Biodiversity Action Plan habitats, and the River Thames and all its tributaries (including the River Kennet and the Kennet & Avon Canal); and*
  - *Areas with potential for biodiversity value and which stitch the Green Network together - designated Local Green Space and open green spaces, and existing and potential Green Links.*

*New development shall demonstrate how the location and type of green space, landscaping and water features provided within a scheme have been arranged such that they maintain or link into the existing Green Network and contribute to its consolidation. Such features should be designed to maximise the opportunities for enhancing this network. All new development should maximise opportunities to create new assets and links into areas where opportunities are as yet unidentified on the Proposals Map.*

- b) *On all sites, development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity and geodiversity, and should provide a net gain for biodiversity wherever possible. Development should:*
- *Protect and wherever possible enhance features of biodiversity interest on and adjacent to the application site, incorporating and integrating them into development proposals wherever practicable; and*
  - *Provide new tree planting, wildlife friendly landscaping and ecological enhancements (such as wildlife ponds, bird and bat boxes) wherever practicable.*

*In exceptional circumstances where the need for development clearly outweighs the need to protect the value of the site, and it is demonstrated that the impacts cannot be: 1) avoided; 2) mitigated or; 3) compensated for on-site; then new development will provide off-site compensation to ensure that there is “no net loss” of biodiversity. Provision of off-site compensation shall be calculated in accordance with nationally or locally recognised guidance and metrics. It should not replace existing alternative habitats, and should be provided prior to development.*

4.2.54 Despite its primarily urban nature, Reading has a number of important wildlife habitats including woodlands, grasslands and wetlands. These are the remnants of a once much wider and more connected series of habitats that supported a greater diversity of species. As well as larger habitats, individual features of biodiversity interest can be present at a small scale within a variety of types of site. As set out elsewhere in this plan, there are significant needs for new development within Reading, but there is also a need to attain a balance between accommodating development activity, and preserving important biodiversity and geodiversity.

4.2.55 There are two main elements to this policy:

- Identifying the key areas of biodiversity importance and drawing them together into an interconnected 'Green Network' across Reading; and
- General development management guidance for all sites on biodiversity and geodiversity.

### **Existing features**

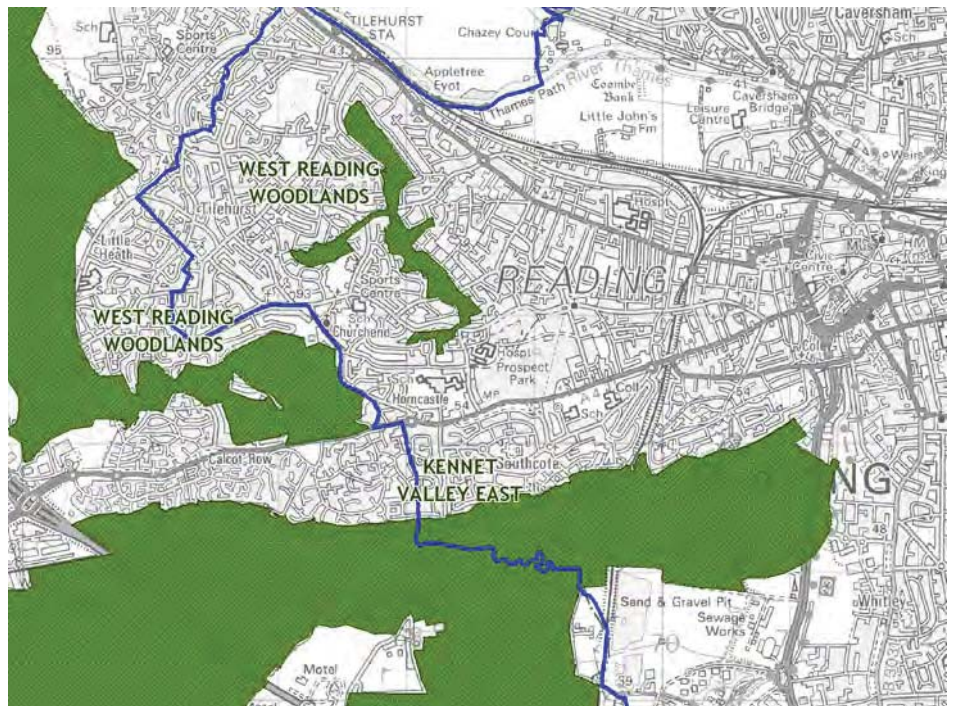
4.2.56 Whilst there are no nationally or internationally designated habitats in Reading, the Borough contains many sites that are important to the local and strategic context, and therefore need to be protected. These include:

- Local Nature Reserves and Local Wildlife Sites: these are designated by the local authority, in the latter case in conjunction with Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre;
- protected and priority species and their habitats and habitats identified as being important within Reading's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP);
- Biodiversity Opportunity Areas: these are those focus areas identified by the Berkshire Nature Conservation Forum and agreed by the South East England Biodiversity Forum (SEEBF), where biodiversity improvements are likely to have the most beneficial results at a strategic scale. Two BOAs cross into Reading Borough – the West Reading Woodlands and LNRs, and the Kennet Valley East (see Figure 4.4). The BOA designation identifies priorities for enhancement. The priorities for the areas in Reading are available to view on the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership website<sup>48</sup>, and, for these areas and for adjacent development, biodiversity enhancements under this policy should reflect those priorities.

4.2.57 The Council will manage LNRs and LWSs, to ensure that they remain protected against the adverse effects of development or related activity. It should be noted that the above designations are defined outside the Local Plan process, which means that they are potentially subject to change within the plan period, and the adopted Proposals Map may not show the latest boundaries. The Council, together with Natural England, the Berkshire Nature Conservation Forum

(BNCF) and Thames Valley Environment Records Centre (TVERC), will continue to keep LWSs and LNPs under review. BNCF will also keep the priorities for Biodiversity Opportunity Areas under review.

4.2.58 As well as the need to protect existing biodiversity value, this policy hinges on the concept of a 'Green Network'. This stitches together the known areas of biodiversity importance with areas where there is potential for increased



**Figure 4.4: Biodiversity Opportunity Areas in Reading**

<sup>48</sup> <http://berkshirelnp.org/index.php/what-we-do/strategy/biodiversity-opportunity-areas>

biodiversity significance into a network that allows wildlife to move between sites. This seeks to overcome the issue that sites of wildlife importance have become fragmented into a number of small, unconnected sites with isolated wildlife populations. Climate change is likely to increase the need for linkages, as species will increasingly need to move across the landscape to stay within their climatic range. The Green Network also fulfils other purposes such as storm water control and air pollution amelioration.

- 4.2.59 The Green Network incorporates both the existing designated areas already set out, but also areas with potential for biodiversity value and movement. It has been identified through a desk based study using GIS data held by TVERC and Reading Borough Council. The study was carried out by TVERC. This Green Network policy goes beyond site specific considerations and is aimed towards the broader context acknowledging that for these areas to achieve their true value and potential they need to work as part of a network with one area being successfully linked to another area, rather than remaining as isolated fragments. Therefore, its interconnectedness is critical.
- 4.2.60 Given the importance of the interconnectedness of the Network, new and potential 'green links' are crucial. These lie between assets both within and outside the Borough and either link these areas or have the potential to do so (e.g. through re-development or management). They include both public and private land, and may include lines of trees, riverbanks, road and railway verges, a series of well vegetated gardens, stepping stones of small patches of habitat, green roofs or watercourses and ponds, or other similar features.
- 4.2.61 The routes identified as Green Links on the Proposals Map either denote an existing link or illustrate an indicative location for where potential Green Links could be located to provide desired connectivity for wildlife between ecologically important areas. It should not necessarily be interpreted as a precise line, rather it may indicate an indicative potential connection between areas. In practice, most Green Links shown on the map are a mixture of existing and potential links, i.e. whilst there are existing aspects that contribute to the Network there is also significant potential for development to make a further contribution to improve the Network. There is therefore little difference in how existing and potential links should be treated in terms of the policy. Green Links do not mean or imply public access.
- 4.2.62 Opportunities will be sought in conjunction with development proposals, to enhance the quality and integrity of the Green Network. Proposals should seek ways to enhance and restore biodiversity and geology, and enhance the quality and integrity of sites (where appropriate), by maximising the inclusion of biodiversity and nature conservation features, as part of good design, and by locating those features carefully to best contribute towards the interconnectedness of the Network. In addition, it must be clearly demonstrated that such measures will be effectively managed and maintained, to a high standard, over the lifetime of the development, through the mechanism of landscape and ecological management plans agreed in writing by the Council.

### ***General Considerations***

- 4.2.63 As well as those habitats already defined, there are many undesignated sites where there may be important biodiversity interest. The overall principle here is that there should be no net loss of biodiversity, and a net gain, as supported by the NPPF, wherever it can be achieved. Ecological information supplied should be in accordance with the British standard for biodiversity management, BS42020. A mitigation hierarchy approach, as set out in paragraph 118 of the NPPF, will be used to consider the loss of on-site biodiversity. In exceptional

circumstances where the benefits of development outweigh the loss, and where the mitigation hierarchy has been followed, off-site compensation may be acceptable. There are established metrics for considering off-site mitigation at a national level, including those described in DEFRA's biodiversity offsetting guidance<sup>49</sup>, and more specific local metrics may be produced during the plan period.

- 4.2.64 For some types of development<sup>50</sup>, including all major schemes, an ecological survey report and/or bat survey will be required.

### Major Landscape Features and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

#### **EN13: MAJOR LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND AREAS OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY**

***Planning permission will not be granted for any development that would detract from the character or appearance of a Major Landscape Feature. The following areas, as shown on the Proposals Map, are defined as Major Landscape Features:***

- ***The Thames Valley;***
- ***The Kennet and Holy Brook Meadows;***
- ***The West Reading wooded ridgeline;***
- ***The East Reading wooded ridgeline; and***
- ***The North Reading dry valleys and Chilterns Escarpment.***

***Development which affects the setting of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) will be accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment that demonstrates that there is no detrimental impact on the North Wessex Downs or Chilterns AONBs in terms of scale, design, layout or location. None of Reading Borough falls within an AONB, but where the urban area meets the Chilterns AONB is shown on the Proposals Map.***

- 4.2.65 Reading is primarily an urban area, but it benefits from a number of natural features that have remained largely undeveloped. The urban context means that the preservation of these features as a backdrop is of particular importance. New development should seek to maintain and enhance the natural beauty and visual amenity of the identified major landscape features. The extent to which new development prevents or minimises the visual impact on major landscape features and other landscape values is largely dependent on the location, design and scale of proposals. Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) can provide a useful methodology for assessing landscape impact where the setting of an AONB would be affected. It should be noted that this policy does not rule out development in or close to these areas, but seeks to ensure that development only takes place where it can preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the feature.
- 4.2.66 Whilst no part of Reading Borough falls within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), there are two AONBs in close proximity. The Chilterns AONB runs along part of the boundary between Reading and South Oxfordshire, but does not cross it. It is vital that the rural-urban fringe at this point is managed to ensure that development does not jeopardise the characteristics of the AONB. The North Wessex Downs AONB is, at its closest point, 200m west of the Borough boundary at Tilehurst. Therefore there are fewer visual linkages, but development in this area must nevertheless take into account any impact on this AONB.

<sup>49</sup> See for example [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/69531/pb13745-bio-technical-paper.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69531/pb13745-bio-technical-paper.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> Please see the Council's Validation Checklist for when an Ecological Survey Report and/or Bat Survey will be required.