

READING BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN

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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.



Tony Page

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

4.3.11 The Core Employment Areas are the main areas of employment uses (excluding the town centre) within Reading. They are shown on the Proposals Map, and have been defined through an examination of the contribution that they make to the employment role of Reading. In order for these areas to maximise their contribution to the economy, there may be scope for inclusion of uses that are not strictly within an ‘employment’ classification as set out in 4.3.14 in order to support the economic role of the area, for instance through provision of services and facilities for workers and customers. Where this does not result in a loss of employment land, it will be acceptable subject to other policy considerations, such as the retail and leisure sequential approach. If a loss of employment land is proposed, it will need to be judged against policy EM3.

Loss of Employment Land

EM3: LOSS OF EMPLOYMENT LAND

Within the Core Employment Areas, the overall level of employment land should be maintained. Proposals that would result in a loss of such land will not be permitted other than in the exceptional circumstances described below.

Where, in exceptional circumstances, it can be demonstrated that a site in a Core Employment Area has no long-term prospect of employment use, a related alternative commercial use or a use which complements the employment use of the area may be considered that would not result in a significant reduction in jobs.

In other areas, the following matters will be considered when assessing proposals which would result in a loss of employment land: -

- (i) Is access by a choice of means of transport, including access to the strategic road network, poor, and likely to remain poor?*
- (ii) Is the continued use of the site for employment, including the potential for redevelopment for employment uses, viable?*
- (iii) Is there a surplus of a similar size and type of accommodation in Reading?*
- (iv) Would continued employment use of the site detrimentally affect the amenity and character of a residential area?*
- (v) Is the need for alternative uses stronger than the need for the retention of employment land?*
- (vi) Would the proposal result in a piecemeal loss of employment land where there is potential for a more comprehensive scheme?*

4.3.12 There is a need for a certain degree of flexibility with existing employment land to allow an appropriate balance of uses to develop in the right locations. For this reason, it is not appropriate to simply apply a blanket protection to all existing employment areas. However, the Core Employment Areas have been identified as those areas of greatest economic significance, providing space that is required to ensure that the Reading economy is balanced and that those activities which support higher value businesses are in close proximity. As a result, an overall loss of employment land in these core areas would risk undermining the local economy, and should not be permitted. It is worth emphasising that this policy does not primarily aim to protect a specific number of jobs (which could be replaced in a non-employment use), but is rather about balance of the economy.

- 4.3.13 The policy recognises that on some exceptional sites within the CEA, there may not be any long-term prospect of re-use or redevelopment for employment, and in these cases it is preferable for a site to be used for an alternative commercial use that complements the area than for it to be vacant in the long-term. Long term vacancy in this case can be taken to mean five years or more, as shorter time periods might be the result of short-term economic conditions. For example, some of the older industrial areas contain large sites that were tailored to the needs of a specific type of operation that no longer exists or operates in the same way, making it unviable to re-let, either in its existing form or sub-divided, in the long-term. If there is also no long-term prospect of redevelopment of these sites for employment, alternative commercial uses under this policy may be considered.
- 4.3.14 Elsewhere, a loss of employment land for other uses may be acceptable, depending on whether the land is still needed for employment purposes. Each application will need to be assessed on its merits, and the matters to be considered are set out in (i) to (vi) which should inform a balanced decision, not be used as a checklist where every item is fulfilled. Proposals should demonstrate how these factors justify the release of employment land.
- 4.3.15 Factors which may be taken into account in assessing these matters include:
- (i): proximity to the strategic road network, particularly for storage and distribution, access by public transport, foot and cycle, future transport infrastructure provision;
 - (ii): ownership constraints, prevailing market conditions including vacancy levels, response to marketing of site for employment use, physical constraints of site such as topography, other constraints such as utilities provision;
 - (iii): balancing supply and long-term demand, allowing for a degree of vacancy necessary in a healthy market;
 - (iv): effects on neighbouring uses of noise, pollution and air quality, intensity of activity;
 - (v): need for additional housing, community facilities and other uses; and
 - (vi): likelihood of development resulting in ‘islands’ of other uses in employment areas, whether a better environment would be created through a more comprehensive development.
- 4.3.16 ‘Employment land’ in the context of this policy is land which is primarily in B1, B2 or B8 use, or is a use not in the above use classes for which an employment area is the only realistic location. This is a judgement that will need to be made on a case-by-case basis, but relevant considerations will include the effects of noise and disturbance, odours etc, HGV movements and whether the use requires a building that would detract from the character of other areas, e.g. with high, blank frontages and very large building footprints.

Maintaining a Variety of Premises

EM4: MAINTAINING A VARIETY OF PREMISES

A range of types and sizes of units should be present in the Borough, and proposals should maintain or enhance this range. In particular, the overall level of start-up and grow-on space should be maintained and, where possible, increased, and any loss of small units should be offset by new provision. Proposals should maintain the overall level of storage and distribution uses in the South of Basingstoke Road (EM2c).

Subject to these considerations, proposals for redevelopment of older industrial units for more flexible employment premises will be acceptable.