

READING BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN

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Reading
Borough Council

Working better with you

Design and the Public Realm

CC7: DESIGN AND THE PUBLIC REALM

All development must be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located. The various components of development form, including: -

- *Layout: urban structure and urban grain;*
- *Landscape;*
- *Density and mix;*
- *Scale: height and massing; and*
- *Architectural detail and materials*

will be assessed to ensure that the development proposed makes a positive contribution to the following urban design objectives: -

- *Character - a place with its own identity and sense of place*
- *Continuity and enclosure*
- *Quality of the public realm and provision of green infrastructure and landscaping*
- *Ease of movement and permeability*
- *Legibility - clear image and easy to understand*
- *Adaptability - capable of adaptation over time*
- *Diversity - meets a wide range of needs.*

Developments will also be assessed to ensure that they: -

- *Respond positively to their local context and create or reinforce local character and distinctiveness, including protecting and enhancing the historic environment of the Borough and providing value to the public realm;*
- *Create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder or fear of crime does not undermine quality of life or community cohesion;*
- *Address the needs of all in society and are accessible, usable and easy to understand by them, including providing suitable access to, into and within, its facilities, for all potential users, including disabled people, so that they can use them safely and easily;*
- *Are visually attractive as a result of good high quality built forms and spaces, the inclusion of public art and appropriate materials and landscaping.*

Applications for major developments, or other relevant developments, should be accompanied by a design and access statement that deals with all the above matters.

4.1.29 Reading is an historic town with at least 1,100 years of history. It is a town that has evolved over time. It contains many historic areas and a diversity of areas of different ages often with their own distinctive character. This local plan promotes development within the Borough but requires that development should positively contribute to making the Borough a better place. It needs to involve the highest quality design that is sensitive to, and contributes to enhancing, the character of the area in which it is located.

- 4.1.30 The NPPF recognises that good design “is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people” (paragraph 56). It goes on to state that planning should ensure that developments:
- “will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
 - establish a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit;
 - optimise the potential of the site to accommodate development, create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses (including incorporation of green and other public space as part of developments) and support local facilities and transport networks;
 - respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation;
 - create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion; and
 - are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping.” (paragraph 58)
- 4.1.31 The NPPF importantly further places the onus on development to actively improve the area wherever possible. It states that “Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions” (paragraph 64).
- 4.1.32 An attractive built environment has been shown to encourage walking, cycling and other healthy behaviours²⁰. A high-quality public realm and a sense of place can incentivise active travel and create a sense of community cohesion by reducing social isolation, fear of crime and incidences of chronic disease. Suitable access allows everyone to participate equally and improves overall health and wellbeing. Sport England have produced a list of ten ‘active design’ principles, which provide a basis for considering how design can contribute to overall activity and health²¹.
- 4.1.33 The Borough contains many established, attractive areas which are highly valued by residents and which are worthy of protection from damaging and insensitive new development. While there may be capacity to accommodate new development in many parts of the Borough, it should only occur where proposals are of a scale, density and design that would not cause damage to the qualities, character and amenity of the areas in which they are situated. Such development should also provide attractive high quality buildings and public realm that positively contributes to the area in which it is located, in accordance with good urban design principles.
- 4.1.34 There will be a strong expectation that design issues will be dealt with at pre-application stage. Some major proposals will be referred to the Design Review Panel where there are significant design implications. Supplementary Planning Documents may be prepared for elements of design where necessary.
- 4.1.35 Where some elements are crucial to good design, but there is a risk that they may be lost or eroded in the future through works not requiring planning permission, planning conditions may be used to secure those elements. Planning conditions will also be used to secure appropriate materials and other details.

²⁰ RTPi Promoting Healthy Cities http://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/1119674/rtpi_promoting_healthy_cities.pdf

²¹ <https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/planning-for-sport/planning-tools-and-guidance/active-design/>