

READING BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN

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Reading
Borough Council

Working better with you

4.7 Other Uses

New and Existing Community Facilities

OU1: NEW AND EXISTING COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Proposals for new, extended or improved community facilities will be acceptable, particularly where this will involve co-location of facilities on a single site. Proposals for on-site intensification of important facilities, such as schools and healthcare uses, will be supported, subject to other policies in the plan. Proposals for additional development for further and higher education will only be acceptable where it can be demonstrated that it would not lead to a material increase in the need for student accommodation, or that it will be supported by an appropriate increase in existing or planned student accommodation.

On-site intensification of some facilities, particularly schools, may result in some loss of open areas. This may be acceptable where the impact on open areas is minimised, and the area has no specific use, or where that use can satisfactorily be accommodated elsewhere on the site, subject to other policies in the plan. The above does not include loss of sports pitches and playing fields, which should only be developed where:

- a) an assessment clearly shows the area to be surplus to requirements; or*
- b) the loss would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or*
- c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.*

New community facilities should be located where there is a choice of means of travel (including walking and cycling), and in existing centres where possible.

Where a proposal for a new school meets a clear need, and it would otherwise accord with national and local policy, it will be acceptable on sites identified for residential or other development.

Proposals involving the redevelopment of existing community facilities for non-community uses will not be permitted, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that there is no longer a need to retain that facility.

- 4.7.1** Quality of life for the residents of Reading is one of the key elements of the vision for the Borough. A good quality of life is not only desirable in itself, but also ensures that Reading remains attractive to investment. The provision of sufficient good quality community facilities is crucial to ensuring that Reading is a place in which people want to live and continue living.
- 4.7.2** Community facilities mean different things to different people. The term could encompass health facilities, education and training facilities (at all levels), youth and community centres and meeting places, libraries, places of worship, civic and administrative facilities and recycling facilities and civic amenity sites. Other uses such as open spaces, sport and recreational facilities, leisure facilities or pubs are often centrepieces of a community, although these are dealt with in other sections of the Local Plan.

- 4.7.3 The range and quality of facilities serving Reading’s communities should be improved. Retaining important facilities will be essential. Some community facilities appear on a list of assets of community value (under the Localism Act 2011), available on the Council’s website¹⁰³, and this may indicate the importance of a facility. The provision of a mix of compatible community services on a single site will also be encouraged.
- 4.7.4 Given the dense, built up nature of Reading and the lack of appropriate new sites, it is inevitable that some of the Borough’s community facility needs will have to be met through intensification of the use of existing sites. This has particularly been the case on school sites in recent years, and this is likely to continue to be an important aspect of new provision. In some cases, this may mean some development on open areas within the site. This can be acceptable in some cases, but needs to be balanced against the provision of adequate sports and play space, bearing in mind the national policy presumption against loss of playing fields in the NPPF, and other issues such as impact on biodiversity.
- 4.7.5 These facilities should be located in areas that are well serviced by a choice of means of transport, including public transport, walking and cycling. In the case of healthcare facilities, this should include the car. The most appropriate location for community facilities will be in or on the edge of existing centres identified in the network in policy RL1, which will maximise access for the greatest number of people. This will be particularly important for developments that seek to provide a range of different community uses. However, there may be circumstances in which an existing centre is not the most appropriate location, such as where there is a need to provide for an area that does not contain a defined centre. In these cases, community facilities should be located in areas of high accessibility, such as public transport corridors or within close proximity of public transport nodes.
- 4.7.6 A need has been identified for new education provision over the plan period, in particular a new 6 form entry secondary school ideally located close to the town centre (see the Infrastructure Delivery Plan for more information). Work is underway on identifying potential locations. Due to the scarcity of development sites in Reading, a site that would otherwise be appropriate may already be identified for development, particularly for residential. In these cases, development for a school should be supported due to the importance of meeting this need.
- 4.7.7 There are some types of community facilities that are essentially residential in character, such as nursing homes. These are dealt with in policy H5.
- 4.7.8 There are some significant sites in Reading where continued development to help fulfil the site’s role in providing for the community is likely to be needed, for instance Reading College. This will be acceptable, subject to other policies in the plan. Development at the University of Reading Whiteknights Campus is dealt with in policy ER2 and at the Royal Berkshire Hospital in policy ER3.
- 4.7.9 However, it must be recognised that further and higher education expansion can put pressure on the housing market. Given the scale of the need for new homes in Reading, this must be carefully managed. Therefore, applications for academic development that would lead to a material increase in additional students needing student accommodation should be supported by an appropriate increase in existing or planned student accommodation. This should be considered in line with policy H12.

¹⁰³ <http://www.reading.gov.uk/article/6211/List-of-Assets-of-Community-Value>