

READING BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN

Adopted November 2019



www.reading.gov.uk



Reading
Borough Council

Working better with you

5.3 General Policies for Central Reading

Definition of Central Reading

CR1: DEFINITION OF CENTRAL READING

The Central Area boundary as shown on the Proposals Map will mark the edge of the town centre other than where specified. However, for the purposes of application of the sequential test for main town centre uses, the following definitions as defined on the Proposals Map are used:

- *Retail development will take place in the Primary Shopping Area;*
- *Major office development of over 1,000 sq m will take place in the Office Core; and*
- *Other main town centre uses will take place in the Central Core.*

- 5.3.1 The policy identifies the boundaries of the town centre for the purposes of applying the sequential test, as set out in paragraph 86 of the NPPF. These boundaries are distinct from the boundary of 'Central Reading' as the area covered by section 5. Need has been identified for additional main town centre uses (see section 4.6) and the overall strategy is that the centre of Reading should be the main location for such main town centre uses. The spatial strategy for Central Reading (section 5.2) and the guidelines on Major Opportunity Areas (policies CR11-13) give guidance on the main locations for this floorspace. However, there is a need to define a Primary Shopping Area to set out the boundaries of what should be Reading's shopping core, and this will be set out on the Proposals Map.
- 5.3.2 The primary shopping area should be the focus for new retail investment. It will be the first location to be examined in applying the sequential approach to identifying sites for retail proposals, in line with the NPPF.
- 5.3.3 The sequential approach will also be applied to 'main town centre uses' other than retail, including leisure, cultural, visitor and arts facilities as well as offices. The general approach to these uses is set out in RL2, and involves concentration mainly on the centre. An office core and a central core will need to be defined to act as the focus for these uses in the centre and in order for the sequential approach to be applied. The office core will be slightly different from the central core for reasons set out in the spatial strategy.
- 5.3.4 It should be emphasised that the designation of, for example, a primary shopping area, does not mean that other types of development will not also be acceptable within this area. Mixing uses within the centre is at the heart of the strategy. The policy is purely in place to allow the application of the sequential test.

Design in Central Reading

CR2: DESIGN IN CENTRAL READING

Applications for development within Central Reading should demonstrate the following attributes:

- a. *Development will build on and respect the existing grid layout structure of the central area, providing continuity and enclosure through appropriate relationships between buildings and spaces, and frontages that engage with the street at lower levels, and contributing towards enhanced ease of movement through and around the central area;*

- b. Development will provide appropriate, well designed public spaces and other public realm, including squares, open spaces, streetscape, utilising high quality and well-maintained hard and soft landscaped areas, and public art, that provide suitable functions and interest, sense of place and safe and convenient linkages to adjoining areas;***
- c. Development should consider and, where possible, include ways of providing green infrastructure designed into the development, for instance through roof gardens, green walls and green roofs, to enhance the otherwise very urban environment;***
- d. The architectural details and materials used in the central area should be high quality and respect the form and quality of the detailing and materials in areas local to the development site;***
- e. Development and any associated public realm should contribute to the diversity of the central area, be capable of easy adaptation over time to meet changing circumstances, and be designed to enhance community safety; and***
- f. Development should be designed with consideration of adjacent development sites, and should not prevent or cause unreasonable burdens on the future development of those sites.***

5.3.5 Part of the strategy for Central Reading is to achieve a distinctive high quality environment, by integrating protection of the historic core, special character and market town intimacy of Reading with modern, intensive, well designed, well connected, highly accessible urban development with first class open spaces and other public realm that will help to cement its role as a modern and exciting 21st Century centre.

5.3.6 The role of high-quality urban design in achieving the vision for the centre is therefore clear. This Local Plan includes general policies that will be applicable everywhere, including Central Reading, including on matters such as design and the historic environment. As the largest concentration of heritage assets in the Borough, policies on heritage will in particular be highly relevant in the centre. In addition, the issue of urban design has been integrated into the whole Central Reading section, as it is not an entirely area-specific issue. However, there is a need for a policy to highlight those elements of the design issue specific to Central Reading.

5.3.7 A City Centre Framework was published in 2002 which set out an urban design framework for the central area. This was updated in 2008¹⁰⁶, and this work, along with the wide variety of documents produced for individual areas within the centre, has provided the basis for much of the Central Reading section of the Local Plan.

5.3.8 Policy CR2 picks up the elements that require more specific detail than is provided in other applicable design policies. For instance, the first criterion relates to one of the key themes, 'the urban grid', which was highlighted in the City Centre Framework. The existing grid structure has the advantages of catering flexibly for movement and positive urban place-making, and new development should build on and extend this pattern. Another example would be the need for flexible and adaptable buildings, which is particularly applicable to the centre, as the changing balance between the residential and office markets is particularly pronounced here, and buildings should be able to cope with those shifts through changes of use. Buildings

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/2857/City-Centre-Framework-2008/pdf/City-Centre-Framework-2008.pdf>

that are highly tailored to one particular use, would not be able to achieve this. Using urban design principles to enhance community safety and design out crime may also be particularly important in the central area, and the Secured By Design principles will assist in this.

Sustainable Design and Construction

- 5.3.9 Ensuring that the design and construction of new developments is sustainable in nature is an essential element of the strategy for Reading, and the Local Plan provides for this through Policies CC2 and H5. This policy will apply to the central area as much as any other part of the Borough. However, there are certain elements of the sustainable design agenda that are particularly relevant to the type of development typical of the centre, and to which particular attention should be paid. For instance, mixed-use developments and larger buildings tend to lend themselves to Combined Heat and Power systems, and these developments are particularly prevalent in the central area. In addition, the use of green and brown roofs or green walls will enhance the biodiversity value of developments in the centre, and other measures such as swift boxes may be appropriate to the town centre. Brown roofs in particular are of benefit to species such as black redstarts, one of the priority species in the Biodiversity Action Plan, which have been sighted in the central area.

Public Realm in Central Reading

CR3: PUBLIC REALM IN CENTRAL READING

Proposals for new development will need to make a positive contribution towards the quality of the public realm of the central area and will be assessed against the following criteria:

- i. All proposals on sites of more than 1 hectare within the central Reading boundary will need to provide new public open space or civic squares integrated with surrounding development. Smaller developments will contribute towards improvements to the public realm;*
- ii. Imaginative uses of open space and the public realm, which contribute to the offer of the centre, will be encouraged, and new open spaces should be of a size and shape to be flexible enough to accommodate such uses. The provision of water features, trees (including street trees) and other planting, as well as hard landscaping, to create high-quality spaces, will be expected, where appropriate;*
- iii. Development proposals adjacent to or in close proximity to a watercourse will retain and not impede existing continuous public access to and along the watercourses, and will provide legible continuous public access to and along the watercourses where this does not currently exist;*
- iv. The design of developments adjacent to a watercourse, including the refurbishment of existing buildings, will be required to enhance the appearance of the watercourses and to provide active elevations facing the watercourses. Development that turns its back on the watercourses and results in blank or mundane elevations facing the watercourses will not be permitted;*
- v. The public realm should conserve and enhance the historic environment of the centre and the significance of heritage assets therein and their setting, including through*