

READING BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN

Adopted November 2019



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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.



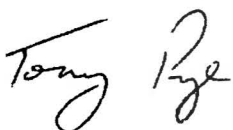
This plan has been carefully developed to address some of the key issues facing Reading. In particular, this Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019, and set out its commitment to work towards achieving a carbon neutral Reading by 2030. We must therefore ensure that new development only takes place 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

- 5.3.19 There is an identified need to ensure that the offer of the evening economy is diverse, in order to widen the range of people who are attracted to the centre in the evenings. Policy CR4 on leisure uses includes many uses which will widen the evening offer, and the policy on drinking establishments should be read in conjunction with that policy. The policy should encourage greater diversity in the offer of pubs, bars and nightclubs within the policy framework of strengthening leisure, culture and tourism in the centre.
- 5.3.20 Drinking establishments are included within 'main town centre uses', and therefore proposals for new facilities will need to follow a sequential approach in line with the NPPF and policy CR1. The preference in this approach is for a location within the Central Core where there will be fewer detrimental impacts on residential areas, and where those externalities that do result can be better managed and contained.
- 5.3.21 Should a conflict arise between two or more uses in the Central Core, priority will be given to those uses that cannot be accommodated elsewhere, including drinking establishments. Evening uses will still be expected to mitigate impacts on amenity, including anti-social behaviour and crime.

Living in Central Reading

CR6: LIVING IN CENTRAL READING

Proposals for residential development within the central area will be assessed against the following criteria:

- i) All proposals for residential development within the central area will be required to contribute towards a mix of different sized units within the development. This will be measured by the number of bedrooms provided within individual units. Ideally, a mixture of one, two and three bedroom units should be provided. As a guide, in developments of 15 dwellings or more, a maximum of 40% of units should be 1-bed/studios, and a minimum of 5% of units should be at least 3-bed, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that this would render a development unviable.*
- ii) Proposals for new residential development within the central area will be required to demonstrate how the issue of potential noise disturbance from neighbouring land uses and other sources, and air quality implications of residential development, have been considered and if necessary, mitigated. New residential development should not be located next to existing town centre uses where those uses would give rise to unacceptable levels of noise and disturbance to the occupiers of the new scheme, unless this can be mitigated.*
- iii) In meeting the requirement to provide affordable housing, in the central area an over-concentration of social renting for single persons will be avoided.*
- iv) Where proposals for serviced apartments and apart-hotels fall outside the C3 use class, they will be located within the Central Core. Such proposals will not be permitted unless the duration of occupation of residents is restricted, to ensure the units are used on a short stay basis and not as residential flats, and information monitoring the implementation of this restriction is regularly supplied.*

- 5.3.22 The centre of Reading is becoming ever more important as a residential location, and this applies not only to the inner areas surrounding the core, but increasingly the commercial and shopping core itself. This is to be welcomed, as it adds vitality to the centre at all hours and ensures that there is some feeling of ownership of the streets and spaces. Housing development in the centre will continue to occur over the plan period, with 7,600 new homes expected to 2036.
- 5.3.23 Town and city centres, unless they are the very largest centres, are never likely to be popular with large numbers of families. However, there will be families wishing to buck the trend, and other groups who would prefer larger accommodation in the centre. The policy therefore ensures that the range of housing in the centre is not unnecessarily limited. Whilst flats are likely to make up the vast majority of new housing development in the centre, developments should not be dominated by one-bedroom units, and a minimum proportion of three or more bed-units will allow for a wider variety of people living in the centre. The Berkshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2016) highlighted the need for a range of dwelling sizes.
- 5.3.24 An increasing residential population in the centre raises the issue of conflict with alternative uses, particularly in the evening. Research suggests that, far from being conflicting uses, a busy evening economy is a major attractor of potential residents, who are often young and childless. Measures to maximise the mitigation of potential noise and disturbance should be built into the design of both the potential source, and of those developments, particularly housing developments, likely to be affected. However, where the evening economy is at its strongest, the potential for noise and disturbance may be such that it cannot be mitigated through design and will make for an unacceptable living environment. In these cases, residential development adjacent to these areas should not take place.
- 5.3.25 In some cases, in order for the internal noise levels to be reasonable and not adversely affect health it would be necessary to provide a system of ventilation that entirely removes the necessity to open windows, even in very hot weather. Similarly, in terms of air quality, mitigation of impacts on residential development may be required, including means of ventilation that remove the need to open windows, and draw in the lowest levels of pollution possible, for instance from roof sources. This should be secured through the design of the proposal, and planning condition if necessary. Such systems will require additional energy use, which will need to be offset in order to comply with policy CC2 or H5. Section 106 agreements may be an appropriate mechanism to improve air quality or offset the subsequent environmental impact of the proposed development in the AQMAs, where it is in compliance with the CIL Regulations.
- 5.3.26 In terms of overall provision for affordable housing, new development in the centre will be treated no differently from any other housing development, and will follow Policy H3 on affordable housing. However, the policy seeks a proportion of affordable housing as social rented accommodation. This type of accommodation, particularly where it is for single people, often caters for the most vulnerable in society, who may not be suited to the high-pressure living environment of the centre. While this issue will still need to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, there is a need to avoid an over-concentration of one-bedroom social renting.
- 5.3.27 In recent years, Reading has seen a marked increase in proposals for serviced apartments, particularly in the centre. These uses fall halfway between hotels and housing, providing basic facilities for self-sufficient living but also the amenities of a hotel. They are attractive to

people who will stay in the area for weeks or months at a time. However, these uses should not be seen as a way of introducing flats by the back door and therefore avoiding the need to contribute towards the provision of affordable housing. There will need to be restrictions applied through Section 106 agreements or conditions to ensure that development does not change its character to a residential development without planning permission, and a requirement to provide regular monitoring information on length of occupancy.

Primary Frontages in Central Reading

CR7: PRIMARY FRONTAGES IN CENTRAL READING

Uses on the ground floor along the designated primary frontages as shown on the Proposals Map will be within one of the following use classes: A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, C1, D1, D2 or related sui generis uses, unless it would be an entrance to upper floors. New developments (or alterations to existing uses) that front onto any of the designated primary frontages will provide an active building frontage with a display window or glazed frontage at ground floor level, in order to contribute to the vibrancy of the town centre, and provide visual interest.

Frontages should be of a high visual quality. Any frontages that have the potential to hinder movement or cause unnecessary safety risk will not be permitted.

Proposals that would result in the loss of A1 or A2 use such that the proportion of the length of frontage within the street in A1 or A2 use falls below 50% will not be permitted, unless the proposal introduces a use that makes a positive contribution to the overall diversity of the centre. 50% of new primary frontages as shown on the Proposals Map should be in A1/A2 use.

- 5.3.28 Active frontages at ground floor level are key in creating the impression of a healthy centre, and in ensuring that locations are places that people want to visit and spend time in. On the key streets in the centre, it is vital that new development continues to reflect this, and that it offers visual interest on the frontage even if it is not an A1 retail unit. Ground floor uses on these frontages should be uses that create interest and activity, and typically complement town centre streets. Ensuring that uses contain frontage onto the street is essential in creating safe places and spaces, and making areas feel well-used.
- 5.3.29 Primary frontages (most of which are existing, but some will be created through new development) are illustrated on the Proposals Map. Whilst a wide range of uses, such as housing, are generally appropriate in the centre, the primary frontage should be occupied by those uses that make the greatest contribution to the vibrancy of the centre. These frontages will contain continuous glazed display windows. In the exceptional cases where this is not achievable, entrances and openings should be positioned at regular intervals along the ground floor, to assist in enlivening the street. New development should be designed to accord with existing building facades and lines, and avoid abnormal setbacks and gaps in the frontage. Frontages should remain uncluttered, so that they function effectively for all in society.