

Paula Amorelli
Planning Policy Team Leader
West Berkshire Council
By e-mail

Emma Gee
**Acting Executive Director of Economic
Growth and Neighbourhood Services**

Civic Offices, Bridge Street,
Reading, RG1 2LU
☎ 0118 937 3787

Our Ref:
Your Ref:

Direct: ☎ 0118 9373337
e-mail: Mark.Worringham@reading.gov.uk

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Your contact is: Mark Worringham, Planning Section

Dear Paula,

Re. West Berkshire Local Plan Examination – Reading's unmet needs

Following the discussion of Reading's unmet needs for housing at West Berkshire's Local Plan examination, I understand that the Inspector has asked the following:

“Council to provide written evidence that Reading Borough Council does not currently have any up to date quantified assessment of unmet need and therefore does not expect the Plan to make any provision towards meeting such need.”

This letter is intended to set out Reading Borough Council's (RBC's) position regarding unmet needs to assist the examination. It deals firstly with the position regarding unmet needs in the adopted Reading Borough Local Plan, then considers the situation with the emerging Partial Update of the Local Plan.

Currently identified unmet need

In the Reading Borough Local Plan (adopted 2019) a small shortfall of 230 dwellings is identified that is to be delivered within the West of Berkshire Housing Market Area (comprising West Berkshire, Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell Forest).

In its representation at proposed submission stage in February 2023, RBC supported the proposed policy SP12 on the basis that the flexibility in the dwelling range, in combination with other plans across the West of Berkshire area, would give sufficient flexibility to cover any unmet need from Reading. Although the range is now expressed as a minimum figure, this does not change RBC's position that the policy is supported.

The most up-to-date position is that RBC expects to deliver enough homes over the remainder of its adopted plan period (to 2036) to more than meet its own adopted housing provision plus any unmet need within its own boundaries. Reading's most recent Housing Trajectory was published as part of the Annual Monitoring Report 2023¹ and was correct to 31 March 2023. The full trajectory is included as an Appendix to this letter. In summary, it shows that, over the plan period 2013 to 2036, Reading is expecting to deliver 18,134 dwellings. This significantly exceeds the Local Plan requirement of 16,224

¹ [Annual Monitoring Report 2022-23 \(reading.gov.uk\)](https://www.reading.gov.uk/annual-monitoring-report-2022-23)

dwellings (which includes non-C3 residential accommodation needs such as residential care) by a margin of over 1,900 dwellings. This gives more than enough headroom to provide for the small unmet need figure of 230 dwellings.

A new Housing Trajectory incorporating changes up to 31 March 2024 has not yet been prepared, but it is not expected to significantly change this conclusion.

As such, RBC does not expect the West Berkshire Local Plan to make a specific provision for the unmet needs outlined in the adopted Reading Borough Local Plan, and is content with the dwelling figure as expressed in policy SP12 of a minimum of 515 dwellings per annum.

Local Plan Partial Update

RBC's response to the Proposed Submission consultation identified Reading's forthcoming Local Plan Review. This was undertaken in March 2023, and it identified a need to carry out a Partial Update of the Local Plan. The change to the approach to calculating local housing need was one of the principal reasons for the need to carry out this update.

A consultation on Scope and Content of the Local Plan Partial Update was carried out between November 2023 and January 2024 under Regulation 18. This highlighted the issue of housing need in particular. It outlined the potential levels of need which could inform the updated plan, in particular:

- The standard methodology figure for Reading, which at the time was 877 and has now increased to 878 homes per annum; and
- A draft local housing need figure of 735 homes per annum derived from ongoing work by ORS.

The proposed approach in the Regulation 18 consultation was that need would be based on the local housing need figure of 735 homes per annum, but that the proposed provision would be based on the estimated capacity in the Borough of 800 homes per annum, which would mean provision would exceed the identified needs. Importantly, the proposed approach was also to remove any reference to unmet needs being met outside Reading's boundaries.

At this stage, there is no further update that can be provided. The Housing Needs Assessment by ORS has not yet been provided in draft form. The Proposed Submission version of the Local Plan Partial Update (under Regulation 19) is expected to be published for consultation in November 2024, and an update to our Local Development Scheme to reflect this change will be considered by the Council's Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on 27 June.

Given this position, RBC also does not expect the West Berkshire Local Plan to make any provision for unmet needs to account for the position in the Local Plan Partial Update.

Conclusion

For clarity, RBC does not consider that there is a need to make any additional allowance for unmet need from Reading in the West Berkshire Local Plan.

I hope this information is of use, and please contact me if any further information is required.

Yours sincerely

Mark Worringham
Planning Policy Manager

Appendix 1: Reading Housing Trajectory 31 March 2023