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By e-mail

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Your contact is: Mark Worringham, Planning Section

Dear Ian

Re. Wokingham Local Plan Update – Reading's unmet needs

In June this year, following discussions around our respective emerging Local Plans, you requested a letter which formally sets out the position around Reading's housing need and supply, along the lines of what had been provided to West Berkshire's Local Plan examination. I apologise for the delay in providing this to you.

This letter is intended to set out Reading Borough Council's (RBC's) position regarding unmet needs to assist your Local Plan process. 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 Draft Plan stage in April 2020, RBC supported the proposed approach to meeting the housing needs in full, and identified that there is flexibility, in combination with other plans across the West of Berkshire area, would give sufficient flexibility to cover any unmet need from Reading.

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 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.

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

A new Housing Trajectory incorporating changes up to 31 March 2024 will be published in December 2024, but it is not expected to significantly change this conclusion.

As such, RBC does not expect the Wokingham Local Plan Update to make a specific provision for the unmet needs outlined in the adopted Reading Borough Local Plan.

Local Plan Partial Update

RBC undertook a Local Plan Review 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 (now published).

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.

The Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan Partial Update was published for consultation on 6th November 2024. This continues to rely on the need figure of 735 per year, but has updated the capacity of Reading based on more detailed work to 825 per year. The housing provision figure in policy H1 of 825 per year is based on the capacity, and the Local Plan Partial Update therefore proposed to deliver housing that would exceed its identified needs, and does not result in any unmet needs to be accommodated elsewhere.

As you will be aware, RBC wrote to a number of authorities including WBC on 23rd August, setting out the position above, but in order to understand whether there would be scope to accommodate any unmet needs that would arise in the event that the Partial Update were to be based on the standard method figure for Reading of 878 per year. For clarity, this is not the Local Plan approach, but the letter was intended to understand the implications of alternatives. Were the standard methodology to be used as the basis, unmet needs of 955 homes in total over the plan period to 2041 would arise. WBC responded to this letter on 25th October, and the response is noted.

Conclusion

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

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