

Agenda Item IMD18

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION REFERENCE IMD: 2017/18

TITLE	Wokingham Borough Council response to the Reading Borough Council Draft Local Plan
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Highways
DATE	10 July 2017
TIME	11:10 am
WARD	None specific
DIRECTOR	Interim Director of Environment, Josie Wragg

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To ensure that Reading Borough Council's Local Plan has minimal negative impacts upon Wokingham Borough and that any positive benefits are maximised.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Highways agrees that Wokingham Borough:

- 1) Raises a holding objection until such time as:
 - a) clarification is provided on the capacity work undertaken;
 - b) the shortfall in housing supply of 943 is met within Reading Borough; and
 - c) the lack of policy and accommodation provision for the Gypsy and Traveller community is addressed within Reading Borough
- 2) Supports further discussion and engagement across all authorities in the West Berkshire Housing Market Area.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Reading Borough Council has published their Draft Local Plan. The Draft Local Plan details the draft policies and spatial vision for Reading Borough. This follows from the Issues and Options consultation which ran from 22 January to 7 March 2016.

The report outlines Wokingham Borough Council's response to the likely unmet housing need in Reading Borough. Reading Borough is within the same Housing Market Area as Wokingham Borough, along with Bracknell Forest and West Berkshire. Any consideration of unmet need must be considered with all authorities within the Housing Market Area.

The report also considers Gypsy and Traveller provision, employment development, and transport infrastructure which are issues considered in the Draft Plan.

Four proposed housing site allocations in the Reading Borough Draft Local Plan are within close proximity to the Wokingham Borough boundary. Wokingham Borough Council therefore welcome the opportunity to discuss further any cross-boundary strategic issues such as education, air quality transport and flood risk associated with development at these locations so that the most appropriate, sustainable and deliverable

solutions can be identified.

Background:

Reading Borough Council has published its Draft Local Plan with a consultation running between 1 May and 14 June 2017. This is a Regulation 18 consultation under the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

The Draft Local Plan sets out the long term vision for the Borough, up until 2036 and includes proposed development management policies and proposed site allocations. Reading Borough Council falls within the West Berkshire Housing Market Area (HMA) with Wokingham Borough Council, West Berkshire Council and Bracknell Forest Council. All four authorities are working together to ensure that the Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) of the whole West Berkshire HMA is delivered. Reading Borough Council is a neighbouring local authority and the proposed Draft Local Plan includes proposed site allocations and development management policies which will have cross boundary strategic implications.

Analysis of Issues

Housing need

The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) identified the Objectively Assessed Need for the whole of the West Berkshire HMA and how it should be divided across the four authorities. The SHMA sets out that there is a need for 16,077 dwellings within Reading Borough in the period 2013-2036, equating to 699 dwellings per annum.

Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) received a letter in January 2017 from Reading Borough Council, which asked whether WBC, along with West Berkshire, would be in a position to take some of their potential unmet housing need. At that time, Wokingham Borough Council replied and emphasised that the issues should be discussed by all local authorities within the West Berkshire Housing Market Area, which should also include Bracknell Forest Council. Wokingham Borough Council acknowledges the efforts that Reading Borough Council has made to accommodate their need and the efforts made to engage with adjoining authorities. However, it is recommended that WBC take this opportunity to re-emphasise the need for this issue to be an ongoing discussion amongst all of the West Berkshire HMA authorities.

Reading's Draft Local Plan considers that 15,134 dwellings can be delivered over the planning period, this equates to 658 dwellings per year, a shortfall of 41 dwellings per year against the Objectively Assessed Need for housing arising from within Reading Borough.

WBC would welcome further clarification of the capacity work undertaken by Reading Borough Council in order to understand whether there is potential for them to identify the modest additional capacity required to fully accommodate their own shortfall. Unexpected windfalls, increasing density and/or utilising excess employment land may address the existing shortfall. It would also be helpful to understand the timing of any potential shortfall.

Site allocations

RBC proposes the allocation of four residential sites that either border or are in proximity to Wokingham Borough. The four proposed site allocations are ER1f – Hamilton Centre, Bulmershe Road (13-19 dwellings), ER1e – St Patrick’s Hall, Northcourt Avenue (450-500bed spaces, student accommodation), SR2 – Land North of Manor Road (680-1,020 dwellings) and SR4f – Land South West of Junction 11 of the M4. The form of any development around Land South West of Junction 11 is yet to be determined and RBC have allocated the land in case its required for uses associated with any major development that may take place around Grazeley¹. All of these developments should be given special consideration in the context of any Infrastructure Delivery Plan and the impacts to be mitigated upon Wokingham Borough Council in the Development Management Policies.

Gypsy and Traveller Provision

The Draft Plan identifies that there is currently one Travelling Showpeople site within Reading Borough and no Gypsy and Traveller sites. Reading Borough Council is currently awaiting the results of Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) and therefore does not have a published future need position at the current time. Wokingham Borough Council expresses concern that a Draft Plan has been published when there is no available need assessment regarding this key issue and therefore no evidence from which a strategy for meeting need can be devised. Instead, the Draft Plan states that it is Reading Borough Council’s intention to address the issue of Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople need before the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan (expected later in 2017) at which time the GTAA will be available. It is anticipated that the GTAA will identify a need for pitches arising from the high recent numbers of unauthorised encampments.

National policy sets out that local authorities should seek to meet any identified need unless there are exceptional reasons why it should not. RBC has not yet identified any sites for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation and remains open to suggestions for such sites. Given it is Reading Council’s understanding that there will be an identified need, Wokingham Borough Council expects Reading to have already begun work to identify potential sites for Gypsies and Travellers within its own borough boundary. Once the required need is fully known, Wokingham Borough Council emphasises that Reading Borough Council should seek to meet this in full. Duty to co-operate discussions concerning meeting any potential unmet need should only occur if there is clear and robust evidence that the need cannot be met within Reading’s own administrative area. Should this transpire engagement should occur with local authorities across the HMA. At the current time, in the absence of a needs assessment and associated strategy to meet any identified need, Wokingham cannot support this aspect of the plan and further work is required from Reading Borough Council.

¹ This is subject of discussion between Reading Borough Council, West Berkshire Council and Wokingham Borough Council. Expression of Interest:
<http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allid=409645>

Employment

Reading Borough Council falls within the same Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA) as Wokingham Borough, Bracknell Forest and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. Based on this identified FEMA, a Central Berkshire Economic Development Needs Assessment was produced for the area. This stated that Reading needs to plan for 52,775 sq m of additional office floor space and 148,440 sq m of additional industrial and warehouse floor space (between 2013-2036). Reading Borough Council's Draft Plan states that there is scope to meet this identified need in full and additional scope to overprovide office space by 66,000 sq m. Reading propose that this overprovision of office space can be seen as a contribution to the wider needs of the FEMA authorities. Therefore, there could be scope for any potential unmet office space need in Wokingham Borough to be accommodated in Reading.

The draft plan further states that major office developments (over 2,500 sq m) will be directed along a high-accessibility corridor focused on the A33, a new station at Green Park and forthcoming mass rapid transit links to the south. Any development along these transport corridors would have a major impact upon Wokingham Borough therefore Wokingham welcome the ongoing discussions with Reading as part of the Duty to Cooperate process.

Transport infrastructure

Wokingham Borough welcomes the continued inclusion of cross-boundary Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) routes, which are supported by Wokingham's own development plan and Local Transport Plan. The draft indicates a possible MRT route using the A3290 towards Winnersh and Wokingham. At present the draft plan does not show a MRT route using the A4 towards Woodley and beyond and Wokingham Borough would like to work with Reading to further extend the link eastwards. The links along the A4 and A3290 (and beyond onto the A329M) and the development of Park and Ride corridor at Thames Valley Park within Wokingham Borough is supported. These will require on-going co-operation between the two authorities.

Opportunities for cycling and walking between the two authorities are extremely important for encouraging the least environmentally damaging form of transport. Partnership across plan areas is extremely important to deliver walking and cycling schemes through development process and excellent examples like NCN 422 are examples of what can be achieved and WBC are supportive of strengthening this process through plan adoption.

It is also noted that the draft plan refers to a third Thames Crossing. Wokingham Borough Council is leading the in on-going dialogue with Reading Borough Council, Oxfordshire County Council, South Oxford District Council and the TV LEP regarding cross-border transport capacity improvements such as the bridge. Additional highways capacity to the east of Reading will alleviate traffic congestion and have economic benefits for the wider region. The Council anticipates continuing to work with Reading Borough and wider authorities on this and other relevant strategic infrastructure planning matters in the future.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions

to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None anticipated

Cross-Council Implications
Decisions in Reading Borough on the location of sites for residential and other types of development could affect how the authority needs to resolve impacts on services such as transport, education, etc. within the borough.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Director of Corporate Services	No comment
Monitoring Officer	No comment
Leader of the Council	No comment

List of Background Papers
Information published by Reading Borough Council relating to the Draft Local Plan– see http://www.reading.gov.uk/newlocalplan

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