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19th January 2022

Submitted via email to: LPU@Wokingham.gov.uk

To whom it may concern,

**Wokingham Borough Council – Local Plan Update: Revised Growth Strategy Consultation
(November 2021 – January 2022)**

We thank you for the invitation to respond to the above consultation.

Please accept this letter as the consultation response submitted on behalf of the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (TVCC) and our membership from the TVCC's regional [Reading & Wokingham Chamber](#). See "About the TVCC" below.

Our response has been prepared following direct engagement with selected members, including the President of the Reading & Wokingham Chamber, Wokingham-based businesses, and relevant professionals (e.g., planning consultancies, transportation operators, landowners, academic institutions, etc). Our response has also been informed by our own policy development work in preparing our [2022 Business Manifesto](#)¹ wider business consultation and our [Local Policy Priority Statement for Reading & Wokingham](#)². We invite you to review both these documents in the context of the Local Plan Update and this consultation response.

General Comments

Vision and Objectives (page 11 and later from page 42):

We commend and broadly welcome the WBC's "vision for the right kind of growth" (page 43) and the objectives outlined (pages 44/5). Our own LPPS seeks to "promote initiatives that support a green recovery, and proposals that are helping to build a local economy centred around net-zero, sustainability principles and social purpose".

We emphasise the importance of balancing physical and economic growth with the need and demand for sustainable development. Future proofing the Borough to deliver the sustainable communities and Net-Zero economy now demanded must be paramount component of the Local Plan.

¹ <https://www.thamesvalleychamber.co.uk/business-manifesto/>

² Each year our local Chambers, in consultation with its members and key stakeholders, reviews its priorities and publishes a Local Policy Priority Statement. For more information, please visit our website - <https://www.thamesvalleychamber.co.uk/local-chamber-policy-priorities/>

We know WBC will be reviewing concepts such as the ‘20-Minute Neighbourhood’³ to strengthen the liveability of neighbourhoods and the economic, social and environment benefits that can provide, including boosting local economies, improving people’s mental health and wellbeing, increased social connectivity in communities and helping to reduce our impact on the environment.

- Objective 1 (page 11): We support the submission by Reading Buses and encourage WBC to accommodate high quality and direct public transport links (especially road/rail) and a transition to a low-carbon economy. We encourage WBC to take full consideration of the need for transport links to cover both residential *and employment areas* to help create seamless connectivity and complement the ‘20-Minute Neighbourhood’.
- We support proposals that strength public transport connections to Heathrow airport.
- Objective 2: We broadly support appropriate policies that help reduce the need to travel and widen travel choice but emphasise the importance that the ambition must come with the appropriate and sustained investment in those choices and an ongoing and appropriate consultation with all stakeholders – including business.
- Objective 5: we support initiatives that re-imagine Wokingham town centre and encourage appropriate levels of investment and active town centre management that will help secure their future vitality, vibrancy, and employment opportunities.
- Objective 9: we encourage and support proposals that can help secure the appropriate mix of development and the highest standard of urban design, planning, and infrastructure provision. We include here reference to the quality of both digital and physical infrastructure (water, waste, gas, electric, and transport infrastructure). We also appreciate this comment does cover other objectives.

Other Matters (page 40):

We recommend you consider an explicit reference to the Western Rail Link to Heathrow (WRLtH) in the plan (we could not find any reference to this scheme which will have a major, beneficial impact on the economic and spatial development of the Thames Valley and the Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) area. By way of example (see page 74) you reference “*development and each neighbourhood should be designed to prioritise and promote active and sustainable method of travel*”. Current schemes like Crossrail (Elizabeth line) and future schemes like the WRLtH are the very substance of your place-shaping principles, clear commitments to net zero carbon development (page 6) and vision for sustainability (page 42).

Specific Policy Comments

Policy SS3: Hall Farm / Loddon Valley Strategic Development Location (pages 24/5 and page 73):

We largely support the proposals for the phased expansion of the Thames Valley Science Park (TVSP) for employment uses. TVCC have supported the proposals for the development of Shinfield Studios and other, earlier, components of the Park. We have and will continue to support partners (including the Borough Council, Department for International Trade, University of Reading, and the investors). There remains, to our knowledge and understanding, sustained appetite from investors to support the Council, across many key sectors (e.g., life sciences) important to the Thames Valley, help realise the full potential of the TVSP.

³ <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/the-20-minute-neighbourhood>

Housing

Whilst we consider not best placed to comment on specific sites, we do wish to make the following comment. The Plan proposes additional dwellings and associated infrastructure. We encourage and support WBC proposals to take into full consideration the current and future economic growth within the Borough boundary (notably developments at TVSP and Green Park) but also crucially beyond (e.g., Bracknell and Reading) to help ensure housing sites are located to provide the choice (i.e., in the range of housing types provided) and ready access in accordance with your vision and objectives.

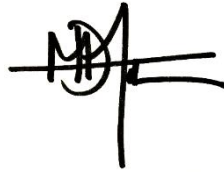
On behalf of the TVCC and our membership we commend our comments to the WBC and look forward to progress on adoption and the exciting implementation phases.

Finally, we offer the open invitation to engage our members and update the business community in our membership of progress and implementation.

Yours Sincerely,



Paul Britton
Chief Executive
Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce



Marcus Johnson
Local President
Reading & Wokingham Chamber of Commerce

About the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce

The Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (TVCC) is one of the largest accredited Chambers within the UK and the only accredited Chamber of Commerce for the Thames Valley region. The Chamber is a proven centre of excellence for trade and inward investment services.

Representing over 4,000 companies in membership, with an economy estimated in size to be more than £83,848m (2015), it is home to over 115,000 businesses, including: 11 of the world's top 15 tech companies; the No.1 University in the world (Oxford); fastest growing city (Reading) in the UK (EY); once again, the two highest performing cities (Oxford and Reading) according to PwC; the second largest trading city in the UK (Slough); the most productive city per capita (Slough) (Centre for Cities) and the No.1 region, outside of London, for attracting inward investment. In addition, the Thames Valley Chamber credits a range of impressive statistics:

- 295,000 combined number of staff employed by members
- 5000+ number of active trade customers
- £1,692,474,094– the value of international trade enabled in 2018
- Average 150 new trade customers each year
- 178 countries trading with our customers
- 83 sectors represented by members and international trade customers
- Consistently one of the UK's most attractive locations for attracting inward investment
- 65% of international companies setting up or expanding in the Thames Valley have been supported by TVCC.