

31st January 2024

Submitted via email: planningpolicy@reading.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam,

Reading Borough Council - Partial Update to Local Plan – TVCC Submission

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Council's consultation on its partial update to the Reading Borough Council Local Plan.

The Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (TVCC) has consulted with selected key businesses located in Reading and those with an interest in the Local Plan. Our comments below reflect the collective response.

In referencing the TVCC's [Business Manifesto](#), (2024) we are encouraged to see some common themes. However, we draw your attention, specifically, the continued and active support for the timely delivery of the Western Rail Link to Heathrow (WRLtH). We cannot readily see a reference to this most important scheme to Reading and the wider region in the [Transport / other sections](#). This is a fundamental 'gap' from an economic and environmental, perspective. We would encourage you to advocate the environmental benefits the scheme will bring to Heathrow Airport and its environs.

With reference our [Local Policy Priority Statement for Berkshire \(2024\)](#), we agree with the Plan's ambition (RL2/3) to encourage policies that "support initiatives that will help re-imagine the County towns and attract the appropriate levels of investment to secure their future vitality, vibrancy, and employment opportunities".

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Specific Questions

Q6: Do you agree that we should update the cross-cutting policies listed?

We agree. We also draw your attention to the Chamber's [State of the Region Report](#) (published 2023) on sustainability and the work of the business-led Thames Valley's Sustainability working group that has informed this major research. We believe this can provide the Borough, and the Plan, with some important background information on how business sees its pathway to next zero and how companies are considering climate change and sustainability.

Q23. Do you agree that we should update the employment policies listed?

We agree. It is very important to maintain an up-to-date assessment and information on employment need and requirements. This must focus on ensuring that the Plan has the right quality, quantity, and availability (esp. by location) of employment land to meet existing and future needs. As we state, elsewhere, the changing demand for employment – exacerbated by the most recent COVID-19 pandemic – necessitates ensure up-to-date information is available and meets business needs to invest and expand.

Q24. Are you aware of anything else that should be factored into an update to policy EM1?

Whilst reference is made that the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected demand (or rather reduced need for a period) for office space, the Plan appears not to identify that the pandemic increased the demand for light industrial and distribution sites. We believe the two are linked, and demand for light industrial and distribution remains, especially associated with home delivery, given more people are and remain working from home / greater flexible working of many companies.

Q25. Do you have any comments on how policy EM2 should be updated?

We maintain that whilst not always possible, the location of new employment should be positioned close to key transport hubs, or existing transport links, i.e. town centre and business/industrial parks where possible.

Q44. Do you agree with the proposed updates to policy TR1 to reflect the Transport Strategy 2040?

We Agree.

Q45. Do you agree with the proposed updates to policy TR2 to show an updated list of major transport projects?

We agree.

Q56. Do you agree that we should update policy CR2 as described? Are there other changes that are required?

We agree.

Q80: Do you agree that we should update policy ER2 regarding Whiteknights Campus as described?

In relation to this question, and section ER2, we welcome the proposal to update policy ER2 to reflect the University's current plans and strategy. As one of the region's 'anchor institutions' we understand the University's needs and objectives are constantly evolving, and it is important that the planning policy for Whiteknights Campus reflects this and enables the University to be best placed to continue their investment. We support the University's own submission and refer you to the more detailed points they make - inter alia – we recommend that the supporting text be updated in several areas, including referencing their forthcoming Estates Strategy. We encourage the Council's continued engagement with the University on these matters prior to the next stage of the consultation.

Q81. Do you agree that we should update policy ER3 regarding Royal Berkshire Hospital as described?

We agree. The Royal Berkshire Hospital is on the Government's New Hospital Programme, as a new hospital for the County is required. We know that the ageing estate places a significant strain on requirements of the Hospital to maintain (existing) and large parts of the site do not currently meet standards for future space requirements to deliver state of the art healthcare. Through this Plan, and its wider policy priorities, the Borough Council, must continue to take every step to enable the Hospital to deliver its priorities for meeting its future needs and ensure Berkshire has a hospital fit for purpose for the 21st century. We support the Royal Berkshire's own submission and refer you to the more detailed points they make.

Q82. Have all the relevant areas of infrastructure been correctly identified?

We believe so. However, we wish to emphasise the point that, from our direct experience of supporting companies wishing to invest into Reading, and the wider Thames Valley, the ability to provide the right amount of power supply and at the appropriate time is severely restricting, and in some cases damaging, investment capability. In essence the region simply doesn't have sufficient power (especially electricity) to meet present and future demand.

The ability to deliver the power requirements business requires in a timely and efficient manner - that doesn't restrict slowdown investment – must be paramount focus for the Council / this Local Plan.

We thank you for the opportunity to respond to your consultation and look forward to being kept up to date on its progress.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Britton
Chief Executive