

West Berkshire Local Plan
Local Plan Review Development Plan Document

Duty to Cooperate Statement

November 2022

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1. Introduction to the Duty to Cooperate

- 1.1 Section 110 of the Localism Act <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/section/110> (which amended the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/section/110/enacted>) places a legal duty on local planning authorities and other prescribed bodies to cooperate with each other when preparing development plan documents in order to address strategic planning issues relevant to their areas. This duty to co-operate:
- relates to development or use of land that would have a significant impact on at least two local planning areas;
 - requires that councils set out planning policies to address such issues;
 - requires that councils and other bodies ‘engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis’ to develop strategic policies; and
 - requires councils to consider joint approaches to plan making.
- 1.2 The preparation of development plans are governed by the Town & Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/767/contents/made>. This sets out the list of prescribed bodies to which the duty also applies.
- 1.3 Relevant planning policy issues to be considered under the Duty to Cooperate are explained in the NPPF July 2021 (paras 24 to 27) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>. (24) Local planning authorities and county councils (in two-tier areas) are under a duty to cooperate with each other, and with other prescribed bodies, on strategic matters that cross administrative boundaries.
- (25). Strategic policy-making authorities should collaborate to identify the relevant strategic matters which they need to address in their plans. They should also engage with their local communities and relevant bodies including Local Enterprise Partnerships, Local Nature Partnerships, the Marine Management Organisation, county councils, infrastructure providers, elected Mayors and combined authorities (in cases where Mayors or combined authorities do not have plan-making powers).
- (26). Effective and on-going joint working between strategic policy-making authorities and relevant bodies is integral to the production of a positively prepared and justified strategy. In particular, joint working should help to determine where additional infrastructure is necessary, and whether development needs that cannot be met wholly within a particular plan area could be met elsewhere.
- (27). In order to demonstrate effective and on-going joint working, strategic policymaking authorities should prepare and maintain one or more

statements of common ground, documenting the cross-boundary matters being addressed and progress in cooperating to address these. These should be produced using the approach set out in national planning guidance, and be made publicly available throughout the plan-making process to provide transparency.

1.4 Paragraph 20 of the NPPF sets out the strategic issues where co-operation might be appropriate and this includes:

- The housing (including affordable housing) and jobs needed in the area;
- The provision of retail, leisure and other commercial development;
- The provision of infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat);
- The provision of health, security, community and cultural infrastructure and other local facilities; and
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation, conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, including landscape.

1.5 The Duty to Cooperate is tested at examination whenever an Authority prepares or reviews its Local Plan. The National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-making#maintaining-effective-cooperation> makes clear that in demonstrating compliance with the duty an Authority needs to submit robust evidence of the efforts they have made to cooperate on strategic cross boundary issues. A plan will be found unsound if the Duty has not been complied with. There are two elements to this test:

- The legal requirement under Section 33A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (the Duty cannot be retrofitted)
- The NPPF soundness assessment of how effective the cooperation has been

1.6 Cooperation needs to have resulted in a positively prepared plan with an effective outcome. The Council will also need to show how it has considered joint plan-making arrangements, what decisions were reached and why.

2. Our Strategic Context

2.1 West Berkshire (see Appendix 1a) is a unitary authority of 704 (square kilometers) or 272 (square miles), which is located in the south east of England. Forming half of the former county of Berkshire, the District covers towns such as Newbury and Thatcham and the urban areas of Tilehurst, Purley on Thames and Calcot in the east of the District, close to

Reading. At the same time, about 90% of the District is rural in character. The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a nationally important and legally protected landscape, designated for the quality of its scenic beauty and covers 74% of the District. The District benefits from a high degree of strategic accessibility afforded by the M4 motorway and A34 and in addition, the proximity of Heathrow airport provides enhanced national and international connectivity. These locational factors, combined with high quality urban and rural areas, contribute towards making the area a popular place to live and work.

- 2.2 Outside of the main urban areas about 44% of the total population are located in the rural area, dispersed across a large number of towns, villages and smaller settlements each of which has its own identity, as well as its own specific needs and concerns. This rural dimension is very important in shaping the character of West Berkshire, its communities, economy and environment. It also creates synergies with our neighbouring authorities to the north, south and west with cross border working taking place with authorities in Oxfordshire, Hampshire and Wiltshire through the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Council of Partners (see Appendix 1b).
- 2.3 Economic influences are particularly significant at a strategic level. West Berkshire is part of the Thames Valley Berkshire sub region which is recognised as the most dynamic and competitive sub-regional economy in the UK. This economic domination means that the most significant economic influences lie to the east, notably Reading, with economic linkages to the north, south and west of the District much less strong. Our strategic partnership working reflects this situation and we are a key player in the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Economic Partnership (TVB LEP). In partnership with other unitary authorities across Berkshire and authorities outside West Berkshire within one hours drive as well as the LEP. Recent joint working has focused on meeting unmet employment needs and working with 13 authorities and other strategic organisations within a one hour drive of West Berkshire. Previous work has been on wider economic and housing needs as well as leisure, retail and other commercial needs.
- 2.4 West Berkshire is strategically well connected in transport terms. At the centre of the District is an important road interchange where the east-west M4 motorway intersects with the north-south A34. There are also road connections to larger centres such as Reading, Oxford, Swindon, Basingstoke and London. In addition, mainline railway services to London and the south west of England run through the south of the District.
- 2.5 Geography plays an important role in shaping cross border movements. Some of the western and northern parts of West Berkshire look towards Swindon and Oxford. Additionally, of the southern communities gravitate towards Basingstoke, highlighting the complex nature of cross border arrangements that inevitably have to exist. A cross-border working group exists between West Berkshire Council, Hampshire County Council, and Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council on areas of common concern – including the exploration of sustainable solutions to the growth of traffic on the A339.
- 2.6 The Council works in partnership on various transport related joint activities given some of the eastern communities of West Berkshire have a boundary co-terminus

with the urban area of Reading. This work is particularly related to the need to deliver sustainable transport solutions to reduce and manage the growth of congestion around the A4 and the M4 and surrounding transport corridors.

- 2.7 The settlements in the Eastern Area – Purley on Thames, Tilehurst, Calcot and Theale have a close functional relationship with Reading. Whilst many residents in this area use facilities and services in Reading, there is a significant movement the other way in terms of school children, with West Berkshire schools educating a significant number of Reading pupils.
- 2.8 Kennet Valley Meadows in Calcot are an important part of West Berkshire and Reading's green infrastructure, so joint working is important to conserve and enhance the management of this area, particularly as this forms part of a Biodiversity Opportunity Area. As a member of the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership the Council works at the landscape scale in order to make positive changes for biodiversity.
- 2.9 Additional cross border working takes place with Basingstoke and Deane, Wokingham, and Reading relating to the monitoring of housing completions within the consultation zones of AWE in Aldermaston and AWE in Burghfield.
- 2.10 Assessing the future need for Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople site provision within the District also benefits from joint working arrangements. A shared methodology (2015) has been used amongst all Berkshire authorities to inform the quantity and types of site allocated in this Plan.
- 2.11 There are no Special Protection Areas (SPA) within West Berkshire, although there is a very small part of the District around Beech Hill within 5km of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. Development in this area will need to be regulated in accordance with the Thames Basin Heaths Delivery Framework. Since the level of development expected to come forward in this area of the District is extremely low, the Council will explore opportunities for cross boundary working with Wokingham Borough Council in this regard.
- 2.12 The strategic context of West Berkshire means that there continues to be pressure on house prices, the need for affordable housing, the job market, transport and the environment. The area is therefore seen as one that will continue to seek to accommodate growth within sensitive environmental and policy constraints.

3. Preparation of the Local Plan Review

- 3.1 The Core Strategy aimed to build upon the existing settlement pattern across West Berkshire and direct most development to Newbury, Thatcham and the settlements in the east of the District close to Reading. The existing urban areas are regarded as the most suitable locations for future development by virtue of their existing access to services and facilities, thereby providing the opportunity to reduce out-commuting and the need to travel. The Housing Site Allocations DPD supports the delivery of housing as set out in the Council's adopted Core Strategy by allocating non-strategic housing sites across the District in accordance with the spatial strategy set out in the Core Strategy. This means that the sites allocated are in the

areas that the Core Strategy sets out, based on evidence, as suitable for some level of future growth and that the proposals will conform to the policy details set out in the Core Strategy. Sites for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople were also proposed for allocation.

- 3.2 The LPR is intended as a comprehensive review of local planning for West Berkshire, but incorporating some of the allocations and policies of the two previous adopted DPDs (Core Strategy and Housing Allocations) and updating them where necessary. Additional sites and policies have been added based on new evidence and changed or updated guidance. A climate emergency was declared by West Berkshire in 2019 and the LPR has tackling climate change and related themes running through the document.

4. Identifying our strategic planning issues

- 4.1 West Berkshire Council started reviewing its Local Plan to cover the period up to 2036 in February 2018. The review of the Local Plan was intended to cover the future levels of need for new homes (including market, affordable and specialist housing and Gypsy and Traveller accommodation) and employment land and other land uses up to 2036 (now 2039) and to provide an appropriate basis for housing, employment land and infrastructure provision over that period. The Review is wide ranging and in summary, involved: a review of the existing Core Strategy strategic objectives; a review of the existing spatial strategy for the District; a review of all of the existing Core Strategy and Housing Site Allocations DPD policies to ensure their continued consistency with national policy. The introduction of additional development management policies in response to the review of the saved development management policies not replaced by the Core Strategy or the Housing Site Allocations DPD. There have also been new policies in response to recent changes in national planning policy and guidance.
- 4.2 In November 2018 the Council produced a paper which set out how we would deal with the review of the Local Plan covering a wide range of key topics including the vision for the LPR and the strategic objectives. There was a review of the spatial strategy which including suggested work and approaches to the local plan, including the scale of development across the district, the housing requirement, Local Housing Need, housing land supply, employment land requirement, reviewing the spatial distribution of development and the spatial areas. The settlement hierarchy along with settlement boundaries were reviewed and the approach to identifying potential housing and employment land allocations was also set out using the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment. The council were at the time also working jointly with Reading and Wokingham on a potential garden village type development to deliver a sustainable community with housing, employment and social and community facilities called Grazely with draft master planning being undertaken.

4.3 The outcome of this process was to agree the following strategic issues for the LPR

Tackling climate change

- To mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change and minimise demand for energy and other resources.

Sustainable and Quality Development

- To ensure provision of sustainable developments of high quality design, construction and efficiency (including land use) which contribute to an attractive, safe and accessible environment for all.

Housing Needs

- Work together with the other Berkshire authorities within the Western Berkshire Housing Market Area, to ensure that the assessed need for market and affordable housing up to 2036 will be met across the District.
- The approach to meeting needs for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation.
- Providing the right type of accommodation for the changing demographic structure of the population including the challenges presented by an aging population and smaller household size.

Economy

- To facilitate and support a strong, diverse and sustainable economic base across the District, including the provision of employment land which provides for a range of local job opportunities.
- To enhance the vitality and viability of town, district and local centres in West Berkshire as places for shopping, leisure and community activities.

AONB

- Together with partners, to continue to conserve and enhance the North Wessex Downs AONB, with landscape led development delivering wider environmental, economic and social benefits.

Green Infrastructure and Healthy Living

- To ensure that West Berkshire contains a strong network of multi-functional green infrastructure which provides health and environmental benefits and enhances the overall quality of life of sustainable communities.

Transport

- To make provision for transport networks that support sustainable growth West Berkshire and to promote low emission transport choices.

Infrastructure requirements

- To ensure that infrastructure needs (physical and social) arising from the growth in West Berkshire are provided to support and keep pace with development in accordance with the detail set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.
- Ensuring development proposals do not adversely impact the water and wastewater network.

4.4 It is acknowledged that some of these issues are very broad and all encompassing, whereas others are narrower and more focused in their nature. In taking them all forward under the Duty it soon became clear that some were more critical for the preparation of the LPR than others and therefore required more attention and this has varied over time. Work on some of the more site specific issues, such as Grazeley and the need to change the strategic and cross boundary approach, once it was determined it could not go forward.

4.5 At the same time, when the strategic issues were drawn up it was acknowledged that they may evolve as work progressed and that further cross boundary working could also be identified. Our approach to strategic planning is being prioritised and undertaken on the following basis as part of the Local Plan Review.

5. West of Berkshire Spatial Planning Framework, Expression of Interest in Garden Village and subsequent work

5.1 Work on the Berkshire SHMA identified two housing market areas, and identified a high level of need for new housing within each HMA. It was therefore clear that the authorities in the Western Berkshire HMA needed to work together to consider how this level of growth may be accommodated. This led to two key pieces of work – an overall spatial planning framework to examine options for growth, and an expression of interest in a Garden Village at Grazeley.

5.2 The DCLG and Homes and Communities Agency invited expressions of interest in 2016 for providing new garden villages, with a deadline of 31st July. With the SHMA having been published in February 2016 and it having shown a high level of need for new homes, there was a clear opportunity for the local authorities in the area to explore the potential for a new garden village to help to accommodate growth accompanied by new infrastructure investment

5.3 The site at Grazeley, which was already being discussed through the Spatial Planning Framework, was identified as having good potential for a successful bid. The site straddled the boundary between Wokingham and West Berkshire just outside the Reading boundary, so a bid on behalf of the three authorities was made. The Expression of Interest noted the potential for up to 15,000 new homes, supported by economic development uses and strong transport and infrastructure provision. Unfortunately the bid was not successful.

5.4 Western Berkshire Retail and Commercial Leisure Assessment

(1) The four authorities in the Western Berkshire HMA (West Berkshire District Council, Reading Borough Council, Wokingham Borough Council and Bracknell Forest Borough Council (BFBC)) commissioned a joint retail and commercial leisure assessment, with BFBC being the lead authority. GVA were appointed to carry out the assessment in January 2016. The purpose was to establish the level of need for new retail and commercial leisure provision across the area up to 2036.

6 Western Berkshire Councils Statement of Common Ground

- 6.1 As the Western Berkshire authorities continued to work together on moving forward local plans and policy development a joint Statement of Common Ground was agreed and produced for the authority areas (Appendix 2). The document covers a wide range of topics including: Housing and employment need and supply, Gypsy and Traveller and Showpeople accommodation needs and supply, retail leisure and town centres, strategic transport infrastructure, utilities provision, landscape and the atomic weapons establishments.
- 6.2 In the statement of common ground there is general agreement that each authority will seek to meet their own employment needs, or initially did not see issues preventing them meeting those needs. Unfortunately due to a variety of constraints which will be identified in other council evidence such as the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA), West Berkshire Council cannot meet its own identified employment needs. Since the 2020 Employment Land Review further work has been undertaken to update the Employment Land Review, which has suggested new figures for different employment uses. There is now a potential deficit for office, B2 and B8 warehousing/logistics uses over the plan period. The figures for the deficits are: Office 51,000 sq m and 22,000 sq m for B2 and B8 warehousing/logistics uses, this is partly due to the expected changes in the economy during and since the Covid pandemic, although it is difficult to be certain.
- 6.3 Given this shortfall the council has been meeting local planning authorities within one hours drive of Newbury to discuss if they could contribute to meeting this unmet need; they are; Test Valley, Reading, Wiltshire and Swindon, South Oxfordshire, Vale of the White Horse, Wokingham, Basingstoke and Deane, Hart, Buckinghamshire, Oxford City, Rushmoor, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and Bracknell Forest (who were mid examination of their Local Plan). Many of the councils were at an early stage in reviewing their local plans and updating, refreshing or re-assessing their evidence, including on employment needs and land requirements to meet those needs. Many felt that they could not meet the identified need that their latest evidence suggested would be appropriate. The meetings were initially at officer level, although relevant leading members at the different authorities were informed of WBC's employment land needs and that the meetings were needed. One authority at officer level has indicated that there may be a possibility of a statement of common ground covering offices

possibly to meet some of our unmet need, but further work is still required on this.

- 6.4 As much of the updated evidence relating to the need for employment land has only recently been finalised the work on duty to co-operate is yet to be finalised and formally agreed with all the relevant authorities. This duty to cooperate work will continue until a position is reached where the Local Plan Review is submitted to the Secretary of State, and then still continue.

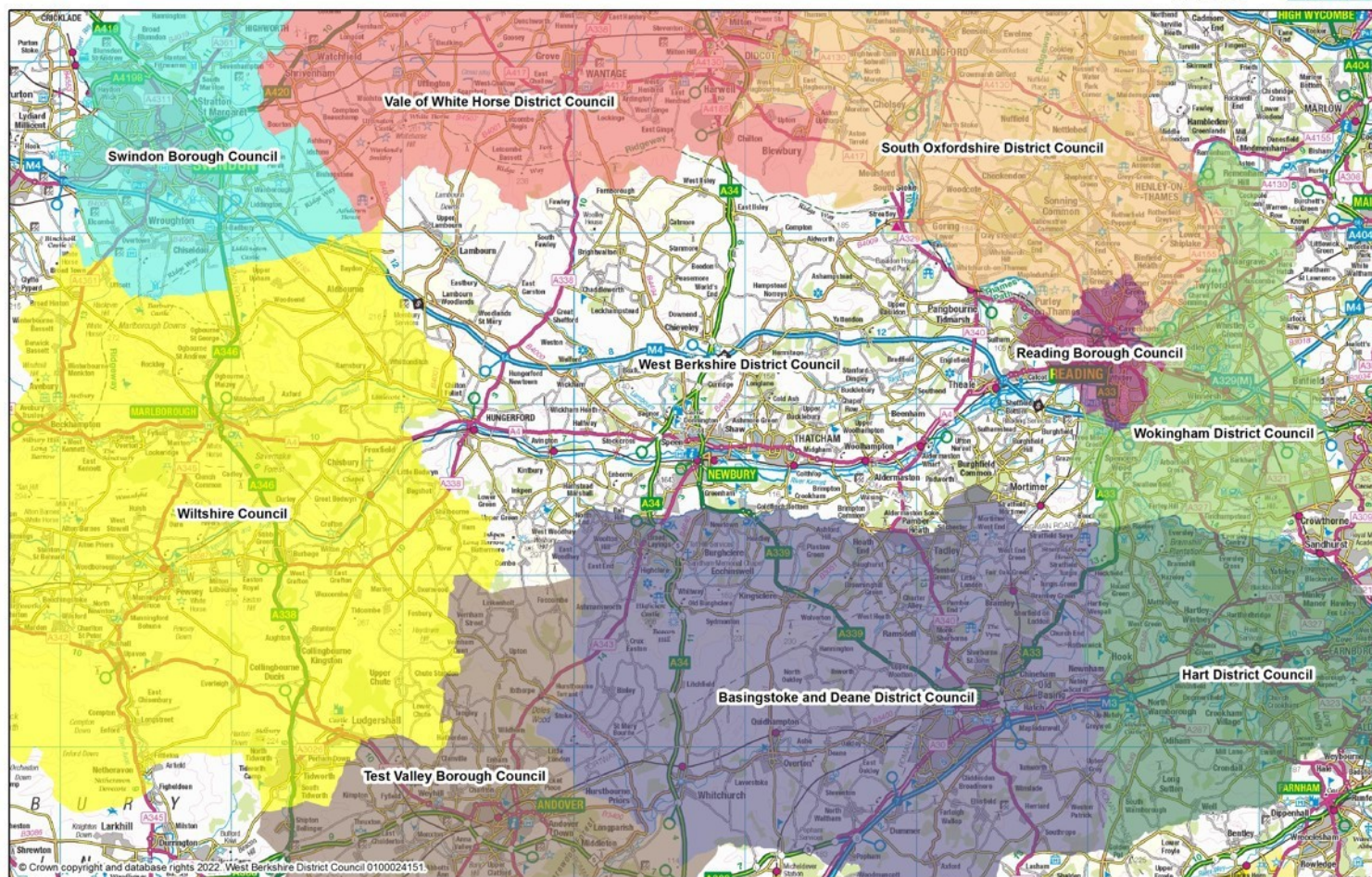
7 Conclusions

- 7.1 For many topic areas the Western Berkshire Councils Statement of Common Ground (WBCSoCG) is still a valid and up to date summary document. West Berkshire Council considers that it can meet its own local housing need. However for employment uses there is still some work that needs completing before we submit the plan and it is hoped to enter into formal statements of common ground on the topic. Although not discussed in detail in this paper the input from and coordinated work with Natural England will continue with the intention to enter into a statement of common ground with them before the LPR is submitted to the Secretary of State. Their work with the council has covered responding formally to Regulation 18 draft plan consultations, green and blue infrastructure as well as the recently important nutrient neutrality and Habitats Regulations Assessments.

Appendix 1a: Map of strategic planning area

Surrounding Local Authorities

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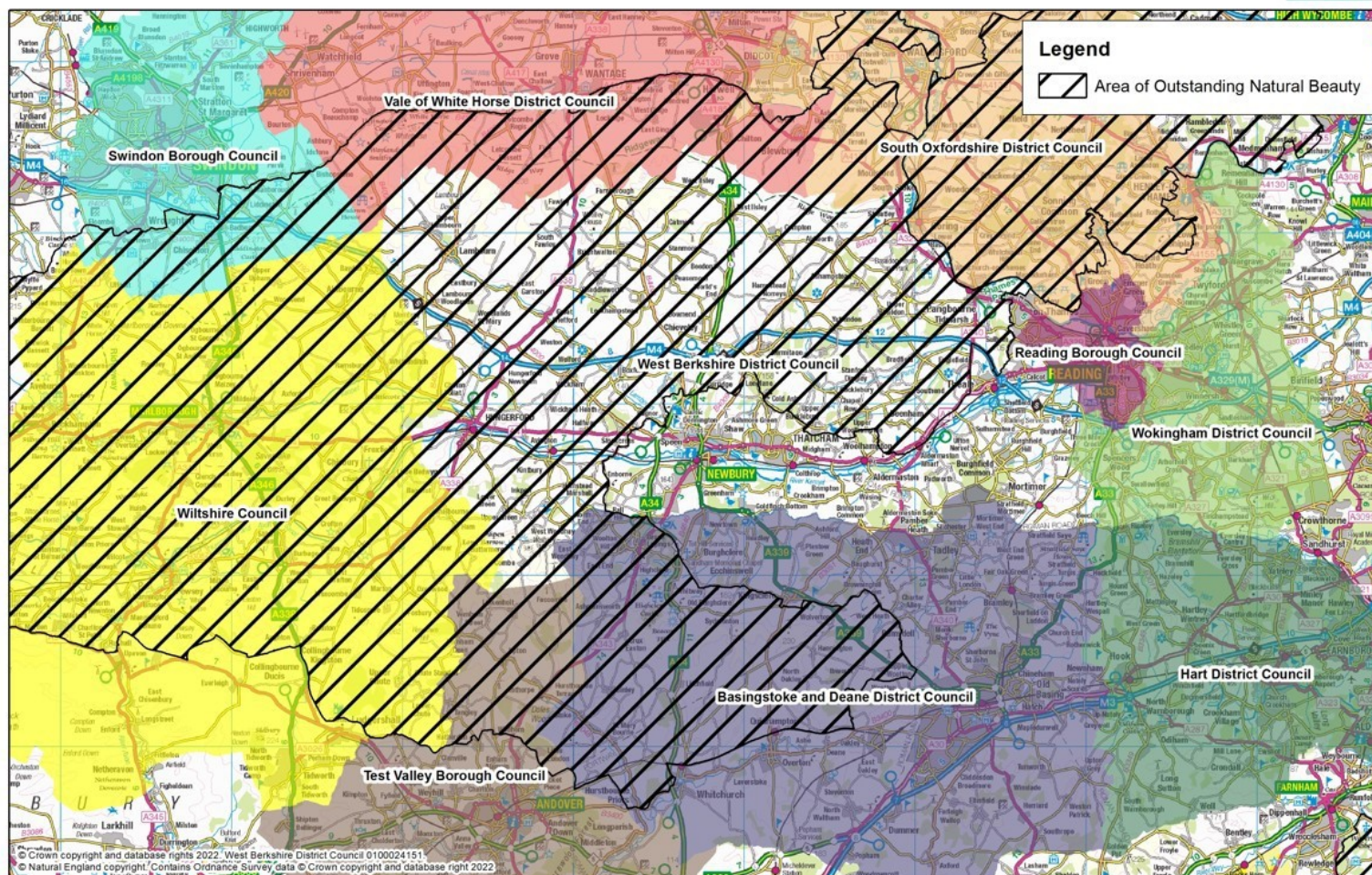


Appendix 1b: Map of Strategic Planning Partners for the North Wessex Downs AONB

Surrounding Local Authorities

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Appendix 2: Statement of Common Ground for Western Berkshire Councils

WEST OF BERKSHIRE AREA STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND

FOR LOCAL PLAN-MAKING

August 2021



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1. PARTIES TO THIS STATEMENT

1.1 The following are parties to this Statement of Common Ground (SOCG):

- Bracknell Forest Council (BFC)
- Reading Borough Council (RBC)
- West Berkshire District Council (WBDC)
- Wokingham Borough Council (WBC)

2. SIGNATORIES TO THIS STATEMENT

2.1 The following are the signatories for each organisation:

BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL

Name: Councillor Chris Turrell

Position: Executive Member for Planning and Transport



Signature:



Date: 24.06.21

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

Name: Councillor Tony Page

Position: Deputy Leader and Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment,
Planning and Transport



Signature:

Date: 22/06/2021

WEST BERKSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name: Councillor Richard Somner

Position: Executive Member for Planning, Transport and Countryside

Signature: 

Date: 23rd June 2021

WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Name: Steve Moore

Position: Director of Place and Growth

Signature:

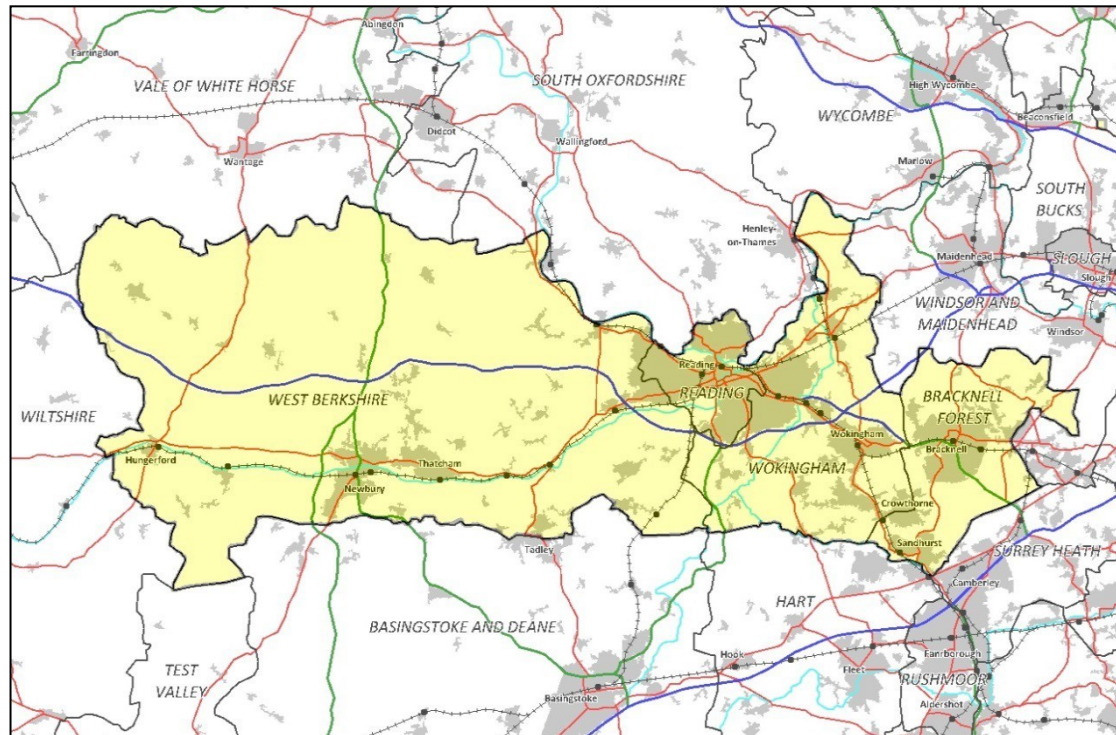


Date: 24/08/2021

3. STRATEGIC GEOGRAPHY

- 3.1 This SOCG (unless otherwise stated) covers the West of Berkshire area, which consists of the entire local authority areas of Bracknell Forest, Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham. Figure 1 below shows the geographic area covered.

Figure 1: Area covered by this Statement



- 3.2 The four authorities and the places within them have close relationships with one another, and are well-linked by road corridors such as the M4, A329(M) and A33, as well as railway lines including the Great Western Mainline, London-Penzance line and the Reading-Waterloo line, and navigable waterways in the River Thames and the Kennet and Avon canal.
- 3.3 A Western Berkshire HMA was defined by the Berkshire (including South Bucks) Strategic Housing Market Assessment, published in February 2016. This was tasked with identifying the Housing Market Area or Areas (HMA) in which the six Berkshire authorities (which also included Windsor and Maidenhead and Slough) and South Bucks were located. It determined that there were two HMAs within the area – a Western Berkshire HMA and an Eastern Berkshire and South Bucks HMA. The Western Berkshire HMA consisted of the four local authorities shown in figure 1. The Eastern Berkshire HMA consisted of the three local authorities Slough, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) and South Bucks.
- 3.4 The following factors were of particular significance in defining the area:

- Difference in house prices and change in house prices, which highlighted that the Eastern Berkshire area had a much stronger relationship with London than the Western Berkshire area;
- Migration data, which showed 75-78% self-containment of migration flows (excluding long distance moves) within the Western Berkshire area;
- Commuting data also show reasonable levels of self-containment of 69-70% within the Western Berkshire area.

The area was defined on a best-fit basis to correspond to local authority boundaries, as recommended by guidance, and reflecting the fact that not all key data were available at below local authority level.

- 3.5 Other HMA groupings around Western Berkshire at the time were also well-defined, including; Oxfordshire; Wiltshire; Basingstoke and Deane; and Hart, Rushmoor and Surrey Heath. This helped to confirm the boundaries of the identified HMA as appropriate.
- 3.6 The evidence around the defined HMA has been discussed at Local Plan examinations for RBWM (beginning in 2018 and ongoing) and Reading (in 2018-19). In the case of Reading, the Inspector was “satisfied that the conclusions of the SHMA is robust in relation to its definition of the HMA for Western Berkshire”¹. The RBWM Inspector is yet to report.
- 3.7 Evidence has shown that the appropriate functional grouping of authorities differs somewhat when economic matters are considered. The Berkshire Functional Economic Market Area Study (February 2016) defined Functional Economic Market Areas (FEMAs) covering the Berkshire authorities. It found that West Berkshire was a FEMA in its own right, whilst Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell Forest fell within a Central Berkshire FEMA that also included Windsor and Maidenhead. Windsor and Maidenhead falls within two FEMAs, as it is also part of an Eastern Berkshire FEMA with Slough and South Bucks.
- 3.8 It is considered that the West of Berkshire area (equating to the Western Berkshire HMA as defined in the SHMA) provides the most appropriate geography on which to base the SOCG, as it is a functional geography for housing and largely encompasses economic relationships. Other geographies can be brought into the SOCG as the situation demand, for example the consideration of impacts on international nature conservation designations. There is already a great deal of work that has been done on a West of Berkshire basis, including the West of Berkshire Spatial Planning Framework (December 2016) and assessment of retail and leisure needs. All six Berkshire

¹ Reading Borough Local Plan Inspector’s Report, paragraph 10

authorities have worked jointly through the Berkshire Members Strategic Planning Group (as well as at officer level through various groupings), and that group determined that the authorities should work within the Western and Eastern HMAs for the purposes of SOCGs. The West of Berkshire area has additional working relationships through the West of Berkshire Strategic Planning Group.

4. STRATEGIC MATTERS

4.1 The parties have identified the following as strategic matters covered by this SOCG:

- A. Housing need and supply
- B. Employment need and supply
- C. Gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople accommodation need and supply
- D. Retail, leisure and town centres
- E. Strategic transport infrastructure
- F. Education and healthcare provision
- G. Utilities provision
- H. Flood risk
- I. Biodiversity
- J. Landscape (including Green Belt and AONB)
- K. Open space and green infrastructure
- L. Historic environment
- M. Climate change
- N. Atomic Weapons Establishment Aldermaston and Burghfield
- O. Minerals and waste

A. HOUSING NEED AND SUPPLY

4.2 The situation in terms of housing needs and plan targets within the West of Berkshire area is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of annual housing needs and plan targets

Authority	Housing need (per annum)	Source	Adopted or emerging plan target (post NPPF)	Unmet need per annum
Bracknell Forest	572	Standard methodology	614	0
Reading	699	Berkshire SHMA (2016)	689	10

Authority	Housing need (per annum)	Source	Adopted or emerging plan target (post NPPF)	Unmet need per annum
West Berkshire	509	Standard methodology	520-575	0
Wokingham	768	Standard methodology	772	0 ²

NB: Standard methodology calculations are for the period 2021-31 and based on the 2014-based household projections and affordability ratios published in April 2021

- 4.3 The housing need figures calculated under the standard methodology change at least once per year when new household projections or affordability ratios are published at a national level. Therefore, the figures in table 1 are liable to change and are not necessarily fixed for plan-making purposes, until such time as the respective plan is adopted (and only then for the five year period before a review is required). Reading's need as set out in the Local Plan derives from the 2016 SHMA, as Reading's Local Plan was submitted before the cut-off for using the standard methodology.
- 4.4 In terms of the spatial distribution of housing, the starting point is that each authority will seek to meet its own needs in the first instance. However, there may be scope for major development locations to be established that help to meet the housing needs of more than one authority or for the most sustainable pattern of development to result in the redistributed housing need. Cross-boundary working between the four authorities will continue to be necessary to explore these options.
- 4.5 The Reading Borough Local Plan (adopted 2019), plans for at least 689 homes per annum, which falls below the need of 699 identified by the SHMA. This means a shortfall of 230 dwellings in total, or 10 per annum over the plan period, although the shortfall is expected to arise towards the end of the plan period. A Memorandum of Understanding was originally signed by the four West of Berkshire authorities in October 2017 that recognised the level of unmet need, and agreed that the West of Berkshire area should meet its housing needs in full. This has now been replaced by a revised Memorandum of Understanding signed in August 2021. This continues to recognise Reading's unmet need set out in the Local Plan and the principle that the need should be met within the West of Berkshire area. However, it is important to note that this agreement relates only to Reading's need as calculated by the SHMA, not by any alternative calculations of need, which will need to be subject to separate discussions.

² Housing provision figures in the Draft Local Plan are a minimum, and the Plan identifies sufficient sources of supply to meet the housing need. However, please see comments in paragraph 4.6.

- 4.6 Due to the extension of the emergency planning arrangements around AWE Burghfield in May 2020, the strategy set out within the Wokingham Draft Local Plan (February 2020) is no longer considered achievable. WBC has started the process of reviewing alternative strategies. At the time of agreeing this statement, it is not possible to confirm whether sufficient developable housing land can be identified to accommodate all housing needs or whether that need, if it is to be met, can be achieved with a consistent trajectory.
- 4.7 The four authorities have also worked together on how to assess capacity for housing (as well as economic development uses). WBDC, RBC and WBC, together with RBWM and Slough Borough Council (SBC), jointly developed a methodology for Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessments, which was finalised in November 2016. This follows Planning Practice Guidance, but provides more guidance from a local perspective. This should form the basis for carrying out such assessments within those authorities. BFC has its own methodology which it developed in advance of the joint methodology, but the methodologies are broadly compatible, and BFC was involved in the development of the joint methodology.
- 4.8 WBC, BFC and WBDC have also commissioned needs assessments for affordable housing and other housing needs. The Wokingham Borough Local Housing Needs Assessment was produced in January 2020, whilst the Bracknell Forest Housing Needs Assessment reported in July 2020 (and was amended in March 2021 to correct a small error). The West Berkshire Updated Housing Needs Evidence was produced in May 2020.
- 4.9 SBC, RBWM and Chiltern and South Bucks District Councils³ have been co-operating on a Wider Area Growth Study that examines how growth, including unmet need, can be accommodated. Part 1, defining the area of search, reported in June 2019. Part 2, examining supply, capacity and constraints, has not yet reported. The four Western Berkshire authorities have been involved as stakeholders, and will work together to understand any implications for the area.

B. EMPLOYMENT NEED AND SUPPLY

- 4.10 The six Berkshire authorities co-operated on a Functional Economic Market Area study which reported in 2016, that defined the functional areas for consideration of economic development needs. These differed from the Housing Market Areas. It defined three Functional Economic Market Areas (FEMAs), as follows:

³ On 1 April 2020, Chiltern and South Bucks District Councils ceased to exist and were replaced by Buckinghamshire Council

- A Western Berkshire FEMA (consisting of West Berkshire only);
- A Central Berkshire FEMA (consisting of Reading, Wokingham, Bracknell Forest and Windsor and Maidenhead); and
- An Eastern Berkshire FEMA (consisting of Slough, South Bucks, and, again, Windsor and Maidenhead).

As Windsor and Maidenhead's economy looked two ways, the study essentially considered that the authority formed an overlap between two FEMAs and should be defined within both.

4.11 The area covered by this Statement therefore incorporates all or part of two FEMAs, one of which also includes the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM). RBWM is not a signatory to this statement, but relevant information is included below to allow for a picture of the whole HELAA.

4.12 The situation in terms of employment needs and plan targets within the West and Central Berkshire FEMAs is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of economic development needs and plan targets

Authority	Economic development floorspace need to 2036 (sq m net)	Source	Plan target (sq m net)	Unmet need (sq m net)
West Berkshire	62,000 (office) 65,000 (industrial, storage & distribution)	West Berkshire Employment Land Review	62,000 (office) 65,000 (industrial, storage & distribution) (DRAFT)	None
WEST BERKS FEMA TOTAL	62,000 (office) 65,000 (industrial, storage & distribution)	West Berkshire Employment Land Review	62,000 (office) 65,000 (industrial, storage & distribution)	None
Bracknell Forest	18,000 (office) 46,000 (industrial & warehouse) (or 12 ha)	Bracknell Forest Employment Land Needs Study	68,000 (BIDS)	None
Reading	53,000 (office) 148,000 (industrial & warehouse) To 2036	Central Berks EDNA	53,000-112,000 (office) 148,000 (industrial & warehouse)	Up to 59,000 sq m <u>surplus</u> (office)
Windsor and Maidenhead	81,223 (office) 24,543 (manufacturing B2) 24,921 (warehousing B8) To 2033	Sensitivity analysis of Central & Eastern Berks EDNAs	81,300 (B1) 24,500 (B2) 24,900 (B8)	None

Authority	Economic development floorspace need to 2036 (sq m net)	Source	Plan target (sq m net)	Unmet need (sq m net)
Wokingham	No additional need (office) 19,245 (industrial & warehouse) (or 5 ha)	Wokingham Employment Land Needs Study	Not specified	N/A
CENTRAL BERKS FEMA TOTAL	152,223 (office) 262,709 (industrial & warehouse)	Various	Not specified	None

4.13 Originally, all six Berkshire authorities co-operated jointly on three Economic Development Needs Assessments that considered the need for additional floorspace for economic development uses, and expressed this as a range made up of three scenarios. However, several authorities were concerned about the realism of the identified development needs, based on each authority's knowledge of local circumstances. Some authorities have subsequently carried out additional work on the EDNA results which comes to different conclusions. RBWM carried out a local sensitivity test in producing their local plan, whilst BFC, WBC and WBDC commissioned updated assessments of employment land needs in their areas. The Wokingham Employment Land Needs Study reported in January 2020, with the Bracknell Forest Employment Land Needs Study produced in April 2020. The Employment Land Review for West Berkshire reported in August 2020. The case for each authority will need to be considered individually.

4.14 The situation at the current time is that no authority anticipates a specific unmet need for employment arising that will need to be met in another authority. As three of the four authorities are in the process of plan preparation, any changes to this situation will be reflected in a future review of this SOCG. There is a potential surplus of office space in Reading, due largely to existing permissions, which could contribute towards meeting any unmet needs in other authorities in the Central Berkshire FEMA, should that arise.

4.15 The six Berkshire local authorities are co-operating with the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (TVBLEP) on the Berkshire Local Industrial Strategy (BLIS). This looks at how economic growth to 2030 is to be achieved, and it was secured local approval in October 2019.

C. GYPSY, TRAVELLER AND TRAVELLING SHOWPEOPLE ACCOMMODATION NEED AND SUPPLY

4.16 The identified need for gypsy and traveller accommodation is set out in table 3 below, together with identified sites in each authority to meet this need.

Table 3: Summary of needs for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople and plan targets

Authority	Needs (net)	Plan target (net)	Unmet need (net)
Bracknell Forest (to 2037)⁴	3 permanent pitches (PPTS) 8 permanent pitches (cultural) 0 travelling showpeople plots Transit site (as part of a cross boundary solution)	8 permanent pitches (cultural) Transit site	Transit site (as part of a cross-boundary solution)
Reading (to 2036)⁵	10 permanent pitches (PPTS) 17 permanent pitches (cultural) 5 transit pitches 2 travelling showpeople plots	2 travelling showpeople plots	10 permanent pitches (PPTS) 17 permanent pitches (cultural) 5 transit pitches
West Berkshire (to 2036)	TBC, pending April 2021 up date to GTAA	TBC	TBC
Wokingham (to 2036)⁶	26 permanent pitches (PPTS) 90 permanent pitches (cultural) 5 transit pitches	10-74 pitches	None

4.17 There is no agreed position across the authorities in terms of meeting needs for gypsies and travellers across authority boundaries. Each authority will seek to meet its own needs in respect of permanent pitches in the first instance. Where that is not possible, as has for instance been the case in the Reading Borough Local Plan, there will need to be further discussions around unmet needs, but there is no presumption that any specific authority(ies) will meet these needs.

4.18 It should also be recognised that gypsy and traveller issues are not necessarily tied to the HMA boundaries, and discussions around unmet needs may also take in authorities outside West of Berkshire.

D. RETAIL, LEISURE AND TOWN CENTRES

4.19 The four main town centres within the area are Reading, Newbury, Bracknell and Wokingham. Bracknell town centre has recently undergone a significant retail expansion, and regeneration is ongoing, whilst Wokingham town centre is also currently undergoing regeneration to strengthen the town's current

⁴ Need derived from [Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment, October 2017](#)

⁵ [Reading Gypsy and Traveller, Travelling Showpeople and Houseboat Dweller Accommodation Assessment, September 2017](#)

⁶ [Wokingham Borough Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment, September 2017](#)

role and adapt to changes in the role of town centres. The town centre of Reading will continue to be a focus for meeting much of the town's development needs. In general, Reading serves a regional role, whilst the other town centres serve catchments based on the respective towns and their local areas. These four main town centres are supported by a network of smaller district and local centres which fulfil a more limited role.

- 4.20 The authorities recognise that planning for town centre development such as retail and leisure is a strategic matter, as catchments do not generally reflect local authority boundaries. Significant development in one centre, or an out of centre location, may detrimentally affect the vitality and viability of other centres, which may be in neighbouring authorities.
- 4.21 The four authorities have co-operated on the production of a Western Berkshire Retail and Commercial Leisure Assessment, which reported in April 2017. This examined quantitative and qualitative need for new floorspace and facilities within the four authorities, and forms a basis for plan-making. BFC has subsequently commissioned and published a Retail Needs Technical Review (November 2020)⁷ which looks at the original assumptions made and the possible impact of the opening of the Lexicon. Whilst it touches on the possible impact of Covid-19, it is too early to draw any firm conclusions.
- 4.22 The levels of identified need and the amount each local plan plans for are set out in table 4. It should be noted that changes to planning use classes in 2020 to form the new commercial use Class E and the impacts of Covid-19 have made it more difficult to plan specifically for retail and some forms of leisure, and have therefore created considerable uncertainty in the context in which local plans are prepared.

Table 4: Summary of retail needs and plan targets

Authority	Retail floorspace need to 2036 (sq m net)	Plan target (sq m net)	Unmet need (sq m net)
Bracknell Forest	9,100 (comparison) to 2031 1,900 (convenience) to 2031	Not specified	0
Reading	54,400 (comparison) -19,500 (convenience)	34,900 (total)	0
West Berkshire	25,600 (comparison) -2,100 (convenience)	0	0

⁷ [Bracknell Forest Retail Needs Technical Review, November 2020](#)

Authority	Retail floorspace need to 2036 (sq m net)	Plan target (sq m net)	Unmet need (sq m net)
Wokingham	5,000 (comparison) 12,000 (convenience)	Not specified	TBC
WESTERN BERKS HMA TOTAL	94,100 (comparison) -7,700 (convenience)	Not specified	TBC

4.23 In terms of leisure, particular qualitative needs highlighted were only in Reading (additional cinema facilities and entertainment venue) and West Berkshire (small-scale 'boutique' cinema provision in Newbury and/or Hungerford).

4.24 The authorities do not intend for significant changes in the existing network and hierarchy of centres, but that the focus of new development will be on better serving centre's existing catchments. New facilities can also support new strategic development areas, and, depending on the location, may require cross-boundary co-ordination.

E. STRATEGIC TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

4.25 The four authorities co-operate with one another, and with SBC, RBWM and TVBLEP, through the Berkshire Strategic Transport Forum at officer level and the Berkshire Local Transport Body (BTLB) which includes local members and business representatives. The BTLB is responsible for prioritising funding for local major transport schemes devolved from the Department for Transport in Berkshire.

4.26 The following have been identified as strategic transport priorities in the area:

- Rail station at Green Park (under construction);
- Infrastructure and/or regeneration of rail station at Twyford;
- New road/public transport/pedestrian/cycling infrastructure in key areas for development;
- Third Thames River Crossing to the East of Reading and associated infrastructure;
- An A33 corridor study to examine opportunities for improvement;
- Improvements to the M4, M3, A34, A4 and A329(M) corridors and the key routes to these;

- New/expanded park and ride facilities (including North Reading, West Reading and Coppid Beech);
- Expanded existing park and ride facilities (including at Winnersh Triangle, Theale and Mere oak);
- Fast-track public transport corridors, including future phases of the South Reading Mass Rapid Transit scheme;
- Alternatives to the private car/modal shift through the provision of joined-up public transport, walking and cycling facilities; and
- Specific transport infrastructure required to support strategic development sites with cross-boundary implications.

4.27 The list above is not exclusive, and where other strategic priorities emerge, the authorities will co-operate on assessing and understanding the issue and identifying transport solutions.

4.28 Delivery of transport schemes will require co-operation and potentially forward-funding from Government and statutory bodies such as Homes England, Highways England and Network Rail to enable the area to meet its growth requirements. Part of the benefit of this Statement is the co-ordinated approach which enables the four authorities to approach government statutory bodies with a single voice. All four authorities also co-operate through Transport for the South East, a partnership covering Berkshire, Kent, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Surrey, East Sussex and West Sussex consisting of local authorities, local enterprise partnerships and representatives of protected landscapes and national delivery agencies.

4.29 The nature of the area may mean that there are instances where development on one side of an authority boundary have infrastructure implications on the other side, and may mean that funding through Section 106, CIL or other funding routes needs to be considered on a cross-boundary basis. This applies to other forms of infrastructure as well as transport. The authorities will continue to explore this as and when it arises.

F. EDUCATION AND HEALTHCARE PROVISION

4.30 The amount of growth expected to take place within the West of Berkshire area will have implications for infrastructure provision, including for education and healthcare. Education and healthcare facilities serve areas which typically cross local authority boundaries, and this is therefore an important strategic matter.

4.31 Each unitary authority is a local education authority, responsible for schools within its own area. The following represent approximate guidelines for the

new education provision required as a result of residential development, as set out in the West of Berkshire Spatial Planning Framework. However, it will vary from case to case, and will be influenced by the type of homes being planned for and capacity of existing schools.

Table 5: Approximate provision level for new education

Type of provision	Approximate provision level
Primary	1 x 1FE per 1,000 dwellings
Secondary	1 x 6FE per 5,000 dwellings
Special Education Needs	Approx. 1% of child population
Other	Further and higher education; lifelong learning.

- 4.32 Wokingham, West Berkshire and Reading are covered by the Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), whilst Bracknell Forest is covered by the Berkshire East CCG, along with Windsor and Maidenhead and Slough. New development may give rise to needs for additional primary healthcare provision, and this will need to be discussed with the relevant CCG.

G. UTILITIES PROVISION

- 4.33 The Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) has undertaken a Utility Infrastructure Study Update Report 2018⁸ to cover the area of the six Berkshire unitary authorities. This gives a gap-analysis of current electricity, gas, potable and foul water infrastructure capacity, considers potential future demands of growth in Thames Valley Berkshire and how these may be met.
- 4.34 In overall terms, there was considered to be adequate electricity infrastructure to deliver the anticipated growth. At district level, sufficient capacity in Bracknell Forest, Reading and Wokingham was identified, but growth in West Berkshire would require further works involving reinforcing the local 132 kV networks, which would need to be programmed at an early stage to avoid restricting growth. With the growth in low-emission vehicles, the capacity for charging and demand management issues will need to continue to be considered.
- 4.35 For gas infrastructure, upgrades were identified as being likely to be required in networks affecting West Berkshire, Reading and Wokingham. Capacity in Bracknell Forest was considered to be sufficient. However, this will need to be considered in the context of the need to reduce reliance on fossil fuels to tackle the climate emergency.

⁸ [Utility Infrastructure Study Update Report 2018](#)

- 4.36 In terms of potable water, there are no significant concerns across the area, although there will need to be further consideration in some cases as the scale and timing of growth becomes clearer. For foul water, the main capacity issues are likely to come in Wokingham, but there may be a need for upgrades across the area. The responsibility for securing necessary reinforcement as of April 2018 lies with Thames Water.
- 4.37 The authorities will continue to work together on strategic infrastructure provision, which will also include provision of communications infrastructure (including digital infrastructure, 4G/5G and superfast broadband), and on sharing relevant monitoring data.

H. FLOOD RISK

- 4.38 The floodplains of the principal watercourses in West of Berkshire (the Rivers Thames, Kennet and Loddon, as well as smaller tributaries) cross local authority boundaries. Development which affects the flood plain in one authority may have implications for flood risk in another authority.
- 4.39 Each authority is responsible for its own Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. The dates of the most recent assessments are set out below:

Table 6: Summary of Strategic Flood Risk Assessments

Authority	Assessment	Date
Bracknell Forest	Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment ⁹ plus two further Addendums Level 2 SFRA, plus an Addendum	July 2018 September 2019
Reading	Strategic Flood Risk Assessment ¹⁰	June 2017
West Berkshire	Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment ¹¹	June 2019
Wokingham	Strategic Flood Risk Assessment ¹²	February 2020

- 4.40 A summary of fluvial flood risk across the area is shown on Figure 2. It shows that each authority contains significant areas at risk of flooding. It should be noted that in all authorities, flood risk affects many of the areas which are less constrained by designations such as Green Belt and AONB.
- 4.41 Given that areas at risk of flooding overlap local authority boundaries, significant levels of development in one authority may have implications for

⁹ [Bracknell Forest Level 1 SFRA](#)

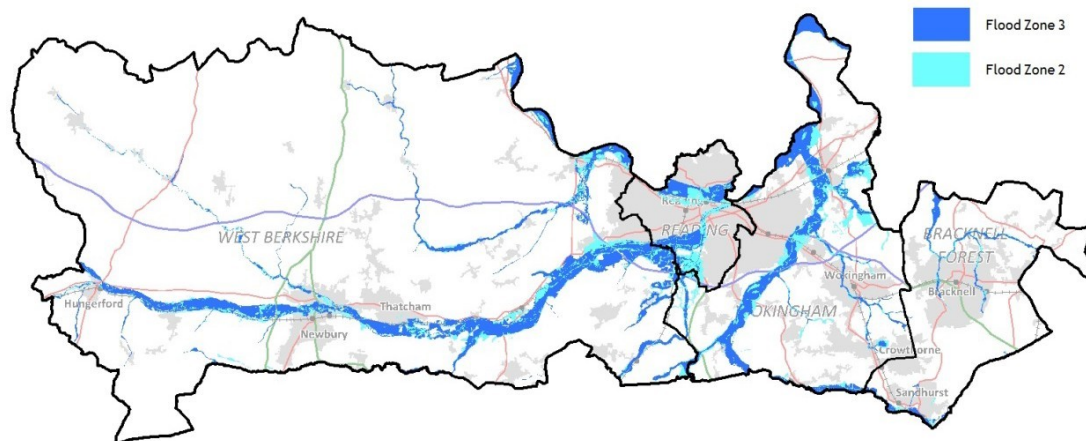
¹⁰ [Reading SFRA](#)

¹¹ [West Berkshire Level 1 SFRA](#)

¹² [Wokingham SFRA](#)

flood risk in another. It is therefore vital that consideration of flood risk across local authority boundaries is taken into account when considering strategic development proposals. BFBC have also undertaken a Cumulative Flood Risk Assessment¹³ in December 2020 which considers cross-boundary issues.

Figure 2: Flood Zones 2 and 3



- 4.42. It should also be noted that there are other sources of flooding not highlighted above, and these may also have strategic implications on which joint working will be required.

I. BIODIVERSITY

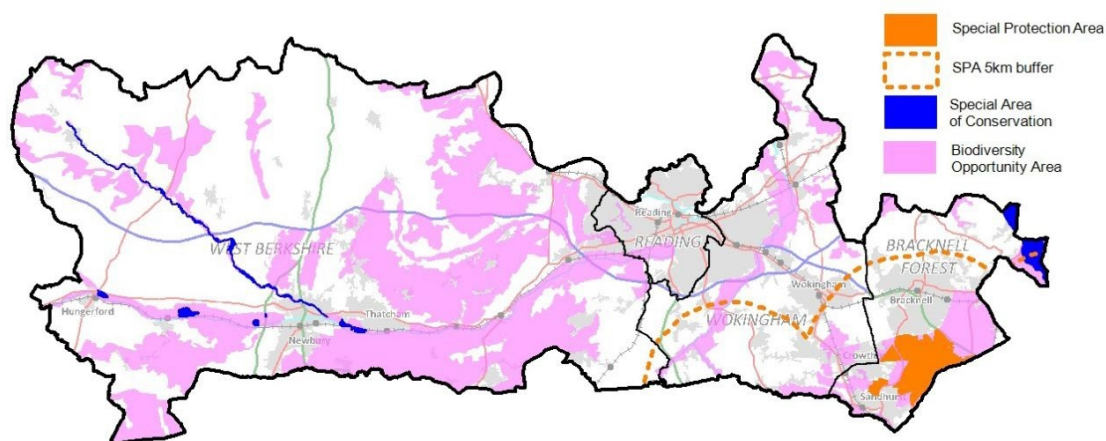
- 4.43 There are habitat designations of national and international importance within the area, which themselves cross local authority boundaries and/or may be subject to impacts from developments over a wide area.
- 4.44 The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area is designated for its role in supporting populations of ground nesting birds. The designation includes areas within Bracknell Forest and very close to Wokingham, as well as a number of other local authorities within Berkshire, Hampshire and Surrey. A 5km buffer has been set by Natural England around the SPA in order to prevent detrimental impacts upon the habitat through increased recreational use, through provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) monies, and this also includes a small part of West Berkshire. BFC and WBC are part of the Thames Basin Heaths Joint Strategic Partnership, along with other affected local authorities, and co-operate within that grouping. This SOCG does not therefore deal with the recreational impacts further, but there are also cumulative air quality impacts upon the species of interest and habitat sites

¹³ [Cumulative Flood Risk Assessment, December 2020](#)

from development across the area which are being taken into account through air quality assessments.

- 4.45 BFC has been proactive in securing SANG capacity for Wokingham development sites in the past and will continue to do so on a case-by-case basis. There are a number of third party controlled SANGs in the north of Bracknell Forest which can provide SANG capacity for Wokingham sites if needed.
- 4.46 There are also Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) in the area, which include the River Kennet (wholly in West Berkshire), the Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain (mostly within West Berkshire) and Windsor Forest and Great Park (which is partly within Bracknell Forest), and the Thames Basin Heaths SPA also partly overlaps with designated SAC. There are also a significant number of other internationally-designated sites in close proximity to the West of Berkshire, impacts on which will need to be assessed. Should assessments identify the need for a cross boundary approach to mitigation measures or monitoring, local authorities will work cooperatively to address this.
- 4.47 Internationally designated sites, as well as those with national designations such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), will be protected in Local Plans, as will those features identified as being of particular local significance. Authorities will plan for protection and enhancement of biodiversity in a way that acknowledges the cross-boundary nature of habitats and wildlife links.
- 4.48 Biodiversity Opportunity Areas are those focus areas identified by the Berkshire Nature Conservation Forum and agreed by the South East England Biodiversity Forum (SEEBF), where biodiversity improvements are likely to have the most beneficial results at a strategic scale. These include land in all four authorities, and often cross local authority boundaries. The authorities will co-operate on identifying opportunities for improvement within Local Plans where these areas cross authority boundaries. Cooperative working across the four authorities, and also with others, will also apply in establishing Nature Recovery Networks, which are a part of the Environment Bill 2019-2021.

Figure 3: Strategic Biodiversity Designations

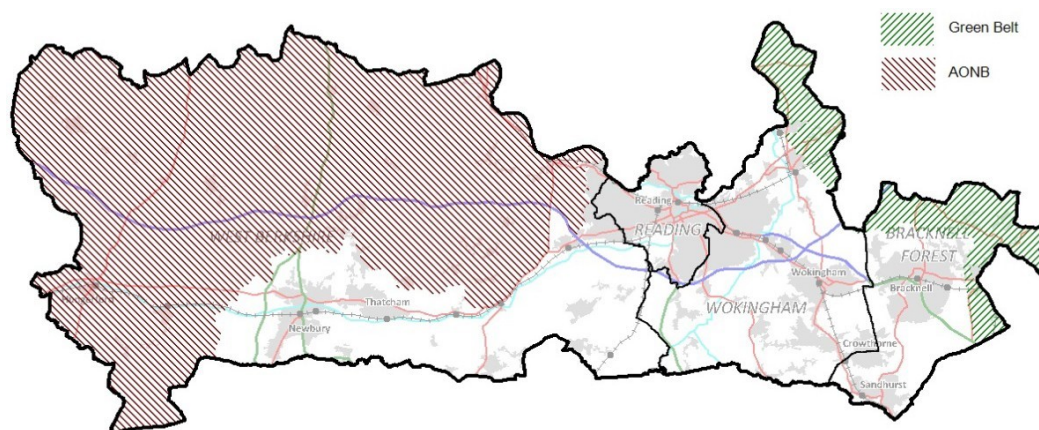


J. LANDSCAPE (INCLUDING GREEN BELT AND AONB)

- 4.49 The main strategic landscape constraints for this part of Berkshire are for Green Belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The extent of AONB and Green Belt is shown on Figure 3.
- 4.50 Wokingham and Bracknell Forest Boroughs both contain land designated as part of the Metropolitan Green Belt. Approximately 380 ha (35%) of Bracknell Forest and 270 ha (15%) of Wokingham are within the designated Green Belt. BFC and WBC jointly produced a Green Belt Review in June 2016, which tests areas of the Green Belt in each authority against the five purposes set for it in national policy to determine the extent to which it is contributing to those purposes. This forms a consistent basis for further consideration of Green Belt boundaries in the two authorities.
- 4.51 A significant proportion (74%) of West Berkshire is within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Together with the other constituent local authorities in Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire, WBDC works in partnership, at a strategic level, as a core member of the North Wessex Downs AONB Council of Partners to manage and implement the statutory North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. In addition the authority also contains 25,000 ha of Ancient Woodland which is not just constrained to the NWDAONB.
- 4.52 No part of Reading is within Green Belt or AONB, but the Borough's north west boundary does adjoin the Chilterns AONB, as do parts of West Berkshire and Wokingham's northern extents.
- 4.53 The main river corridors (the Thames and Kennet) also form strategic landscape features crossing local authority boundaries. The Thames corridor, which passes through West Berkshire, Reading and Wokingham, has a wide flood plain, and the river and immediate environs have a particular function for leisure. The Kennet corridor, which runs through West Berkshire and

Reading, includes the Kennet and Avon Canal, and therefore has a navigation role, as well as important biodiversity significance. The authorities agree that the character and function of these river corridors will be conserved and enhanced.

Figure 4: Green Belt and AONB in West of Berkshire



K. OPEN SPACE AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

- 4.54 Green infrastructure is “a strategically planned and managed network of green spaces and other environmental features vital to the sustainability of any urban area”¹⁴. It includes formal parks and open spaces as well as much less formal amenity areas and natural features. The use of the term network makes it clear that there are likely to be areas where green infrastructure crosses administrative boundaries, and where there will be a need for the authorities to co-operate, particularly where they form part of an urban area, such as the wider Reading area. Examples include the Kennet meadows, spanning the boundary between West Berkshire and Reading, and the University of Reading campus in Reading and Wokingham.
- 4.55 The planning for, and protection of, more formal areas of open space is generally a matter for each local authority to consider through their own Local Plan process. There are instances, particularly where authority boundaries pass through urban areas, where an area of open space in one authority partially serves a community in another. This will be a matter for co-operation between authorities on a case-by-case basis.
- 4.56 The provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) is related to the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, and therefore is addressed in the comments in paragraph 4.44.

¹⁴ Definition from the Eco Towns Worksheet

L. HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

- 4.57 West of Berkshire has a rich and varied historic environment with a wealth of heritage assets across the whole area, having been continuously settled since prehistoric times. Almost all settlements in the area, as well as many of the surrounding rural areas, have identified heritage assets of both national and local interest. In general, the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment will be a matter for each individual authority to deal with within its boundaries, in conjunction with stakeholders such as Historic England. However, there are heritage assets and their settings which span or adjoin boundaries, which will require co-operation between authorities. This will be undertaken as and when required, and does not require further agreement within this statement.

M. CLIMATE CHANGE

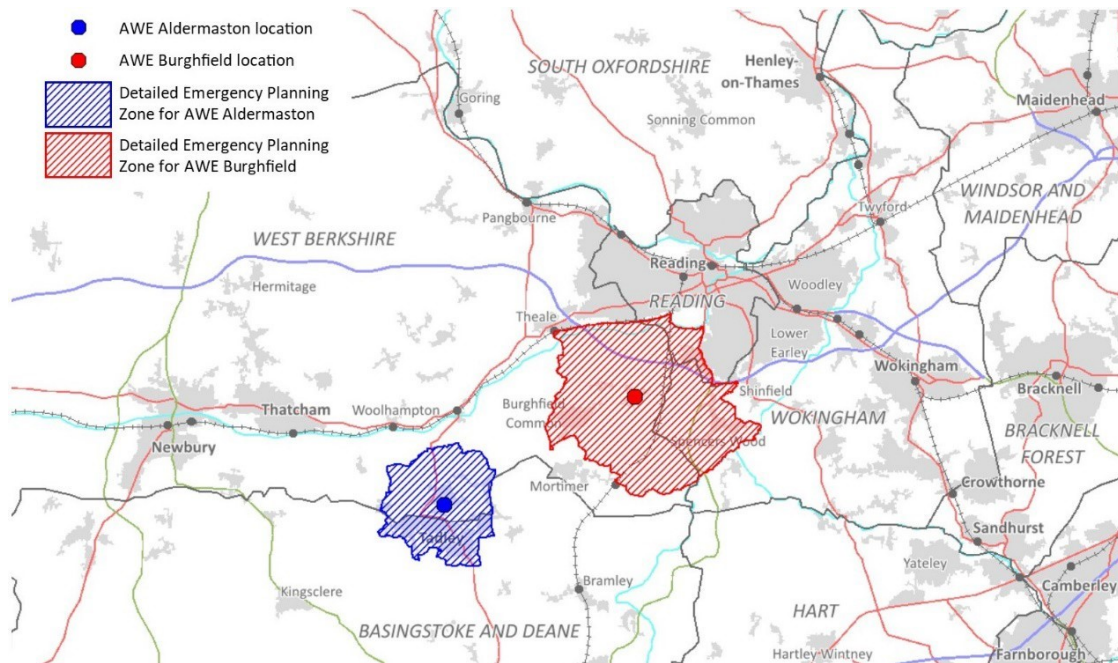
- 4.58 Climate change, by its nature, is a matter which crosses authority, as well as national, boundaries, and which is listed as one of the matters that may need to be subject to the duty to co-operate. Three of the authorities have declared a climate emergency – RBC in February 2019, WBC and WBDC in July 2019. The four authorities agree that they will set out policies to both reduce the contribution to and adapt to climate change, and will work together to share evidence wherever possible. Individual policy approaches will be a matter for each authority to consider. Should cross boundary issues come to light, such as those relating to infrastructure or individual projects, the authorities agree to engage. No further agreement is required within this statement.

N. ATOMIC WEAPONS ESTABLISHMENT

- 4.59 The Atomic Weapons Establishment is a key part of the UK's nuclear deterrent, and is responsible for the design, manufacture, maintenance and decommissioning of nuclear warheads. It operates two sites in the area, at Aldermaston and Burghfield. Both locations are situated within West Berkshire, with the AWE Burghfield site located close to the boundary with both Wokingham and Reading, whilst the AWE Aldermaston site adjoins the boundary with Basingstoke and Deane. For this reason, planning for any development that may affect those facilities is a strategic matter.
- 4.60 The Detailed Emergency Planning Zone for the Burghfield site changed in March 2020 in response to a review under the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2019 (REPPiR 2019). WBDC, as the authority responsible for the off-site emergency plan, led on defining the DEPZ and also leads on joint emergency planning guidance for the authorities. The DEPZ around the Burghfield site includes areas in West Berkshire, Wokingham and Reading, whilst the DEPZ around the Aldermaston site includes areas in West Berkshire and Basingstoke and Deane.

- 4.61 The affected authorities liaise on an ongoing basis with one another and with the Office for Nuclear Regulation as well as AWE, both in terms of land use planning and emergency planning, and this will continue.

Figure 5: Detailed Emergency Planning Zone for AWE Aldermaston and AWE Burghfield



O. MINERALS AND WASTE

- 4.62 WBDC is producing its own Minerals and Waste Local Plan to be submitted by July 2021, whilst RBC, WBC, BFC and RBWM are producing a Joint Central and Eastern Berkshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan, which was submitted for examination on 25th February 2021. Statements of Common Ground relevant to the production of those plans have been produced separately.

5. GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

- 5.1 The West of Berkshire Strategic Planning Group, which consists of the portfolio holders for strategic planning and senior officers including Chief Executives and planning leads from the four authorities, meets periodically to discuss strategic planning matters. This Group will take the lead on preparing and updating the SOCG, and proposals to update the SOCG will be brought to that group in the first instance.
- 5.2 The signatories to the SOCG will generally be the four lead members for strategic planning in each local authority. These are the same lead members who sit on the West of Berkshire Strategic Planning Group.

6. TIMETABLE FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER CO-OPERATION

- 6.1 The SOCG will be updated as and when required to feed into the Local Plan processes of the four authorities. The key milestones for Local Plan production in each authority are summarised below. Reading's Local Plan was adopted in November 2019, whilst the other three authorities are expecting to submit during 2021 or 2022.

Table 7: Local Plan Timetables (NB for current plans where several DPDs exist, only Core Strategy shown)

Authority	Current Plan Adopted	Review date	Reg 18 consultation	Reg 19 consultation	Submission	Adoption
Bracknell Forest	Core Strategy Feb 2008	TBC	Jun/July 2016 Feb/Mar 2018 Sept 2018 Oct-Dec 2019	Mar - May 2021	Early summer 2021	Spring 2022
Reading	Local Plan Nov 2019	Summer 2024	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
West Berkshire	Core Strategy Jul 2012	TBC	Nov 2018 Dec 2020	May 2021 July	Dec 2021	Dec 2022
Wokingham	Core Strategy Jan 2010	TBC	Aug 2016 Nov 2018 Feb 2020 Late summer/ autumn 2021	TBC	TBC	TBC

- 6.2 With the current Local Plan timescales in mind, it is expected that this statement will need to be reviewed regularly to update on plan progress and reflect any changes in the context. It may also need to be reviewed to reflect proposed national planning changes.
- 6.3 Further co-operation will be undertaken throughout these local plan production processes and beyond. Each authority is subject to the duty to co-operate with the other authorities within the area, outside it and with a number of other organisations. Three of the four authorities have published documents setting out how they will undertake the duty to co-operate for emerging local plans and identifying the strategic issues and key partners, and these have informed this SOCG. More information can be found in the following documents:

- [Bracknell Forest Duty to Co-operate Framework \(February 2016\)](#)
- [Reading Duty to Co-operate Scoping Strategy \(December 2015\)](#)
- [Wokingham Duty to Co-operate Statement \(July 2016\)](#)

7. FURTHER INFORMATION

7.1 Further information can be found in the locations set out below.

Information on development plans in each authority

- [Bracknell Forest Council](#)
- [Reading Borough Council](#)
- [West Berkshire District Council](#)
- [Wokingham Borough Council](#)

Cross-boundary evidence documents

- [West of Berkshire Spatial Planning Framework, December 2016](#)
- [Berkshire \(including South Bucks\) Strategic Housing Market Assessment, February 2016](#)
- [Western Berkshire OAN Sensitivity Report, March 2018](#)
- [Berkshire Functional Economic Market Area Study, February 2016](#)
- [West Berkshire Economic Development Needs Assessment, October 2016](#)
- [Central Berkshire Economic Development Needs Assessment, October 2016](#)
- Western Berkshire Retail and Commercial Leisure Assessment, April 2017:
 - [Main report](#)
 - [Plans and appendices 1](#)
 - [Plans and appendices 2](#)
 - [Plans and appendices 3](#)
 - [Household survey results](#)
 - [Bracknell in-centre survey results](#)
- [Bracknell Forest and Wokingham Borough Joint Green Belt Review, June 2016](#)
- [Berkshire HELAA Methodology, November 2016](#)

- [Berkshire Utility Infrastructure Study Update Report, May 2018](#)
- October 2017 [Memorandum of Understanding regarding Reading's unmet need](#) (see Appendix 5)
- [add new MOU when available]

Other evidence

- [Bracknell Forest evidence base documents](#)
- [Reading evidence base documents](#)
- [West Berkshire evidence base documents](#)
- [Wokingham evidence base documents](#)

Appendix 3: Glossary of bodies engaged

There are a number of organisations who have played a particularly key role in helping to identify and develop the strategic issues and priorities to be considered as part of the Local Plan Review and will also be key in helping in their monitoring and delivery. These include:

Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council

We primarily work with the Borough Council at both an officer and member level on dealing with specific issues, such as any cross boundary concerns relating to transport and traffic on the A339 or regarding AWE Aldermaston and AWE Burghfield. We coordinate the officer level off site planning group for AWE Aldermaston and AWE Burghfield. We also work together at both an officer and member level as constituent members of the North Wessex Downs AONB Council of Partners (CoP). They have recently been engaged on duty to co-operate meeting associated with the unmet employment land requirements.

Berkshire Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT)

Berkshire Local Nature Partnership (BLNP) -

Please go to <http://berkshirelnp.org/index.php/homepage/the-partners> for further details. We have been fully engaged with the BLNP at both a member and officer level. The Council's Executive Portfolio Holder for Countryside sits on the BLNP Executive Board and the Council's Principal Ecologist sits on the BLNP Steering Group. The Partnership includes representatives from Natural England, Thames Water, Environment Agency, BBOWT and the AONB.

Berkshire Local Transport Body (BLTB)

The Berkshire Local Transport Body (BLTB) is a partnership of the six Berkshire authorities and Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership which has been established to prioritise funding for local major transport schemes devolved from the Department for Transport. Slough Borough Council is the Accountable Body for the BLTB. The Council's Executive Portfolio Holder for Transport sits on the Body. For full details of membership, agendas and meeting minutes please go to <http://www.slough.gov.uk/moderngov/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=601>

Berkshire Strategic Transport Forum (BSTF)

The Berkshire Strategic Transport Forum (BSTF) brings together the six Berkshire authorities and Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership, the Department for Transport (DfT), Network Rail, Highways England, Heathrow Airport Limited, and some train and bus operating companies to discuss and consult on matters of mutual interest relating to strategic transport issues in Thames Valley Berkshire. It operates at two levels – one with elected members and business representatives, and the other with senior transport officers. The Berkshire Chief Executives' Group has recognised the importance of these arrangements by nominating one of its members to chair the officers' meeting and liaise with the LEP and the members. The membership of the BLTB and of the Berkshire Strategic Transport (Members') Forum is identical, and the two bodies operate in tandem with each other.

Bracknell Forest Borough Council

We use the Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Planning (MoU) signed by all the Berkshire unitary authorities as a starting point to guide our approach to cooperation. The MoU provides a framework for joint working between the Berkshire authorities and it allows refined Agreements to be agreed between individual authorities on specific areas where they consider it appropriate. In accordance with the MoU, which was formally adopted by West Berkshire Council on 19th December 2013, we use existing partnerships and working groups to take issues forward as appropriate. At an officer level these include the Berkshire Development Plans Group (DPG) which provides a co-ordinating role for planning policy officers across Berkshire to discuss matters of mutual interest on a bi monthly basis. This reports to the Berkshire Heads of Planning (BHoP) which provides a strategic planning policy overview for chief planning officers across Berkshire to discuss matters of mutual interest. BHoP periodically keeps Lead Councillors informed on how mechanisms for fulfilling the duty to co-operate are progressing and being taken forward. At a member level there are regular meetings of Berkshire Leaders (and occasional meeting of portfolio holders for specific issues). In addition, a Member Reference Group has been set up to move the outcomes of the SHMA forward into capacity work across the Housing Market Areas and beyond.

Environment Agency

The Environment Agency has responsibility for water quality and resources and we primarily work with it at an officer rather than member level. The Agency have been working with the councils on flood risk environmental matters in their remit, including green and blue infrastructure and responding to Reg 18 consultations on the LPR. The continued use of one to one discussions will be important at the planning application stage and in the delivery of the LPR.

Hampshire County Council

We primarily work with Hampshire County Council at both an officer and member level on dealing with transport issues relating to the A339 and the updating of the freight network. We also work together at both an officer and member level as constituent members of the North Wessex Downs AONB Council of Partners (CoP).

Hart District Council

We continue to work with the District Council at an officer level, although a memorandum of understanding was prepared by Hart District Council in 2013 which made clear there were no strategic issues that needed to be considered between us. They have recently been engaged on duty to co-operate meeting associated with the unmet employment land requirements and nutrient neutrality.

Highways England (formerly Highways Agency)

As the government agency charged with managing motorways and A roads, we have worked with the Highways England at an officer level to provide comments on potential housing and employment sites in advance of any formal public consultation and the organisation has also been involved at all formal stages of the process to date.. The continued use of one to one discussions will be important at the planning application stage and in the delivery of the LPR.

Natural England

Natural England is the government's adviser on the natural environment, providing practical scientific advice on how to look after England's landscapes and wildlife. We have worked with Natural England at an officer level to provide comments on potential sites in advance of any formal public consultation and it has also been involved at all formal stages of the process to date. They have been involved in considering the impact of proposed allocations on the North Wessex Downs AONB. Consultations on Habitats Regulation matters are undertaken particularly recently in relation to nutrient neutrality, they have responded to WBC's initial screening of the Habitats Regulation Assessment for the LPR. The continued use of one to one discussions will be important at the planning application stage and in the delivery of the LPR. We also work together as constituent members of the North Wessex Downs AONB Council of Partners (CoP).

North Wessex Downs AONB Council of Partners (NWD AONB)

The Council of Partners includes member representatives (with officer support) of the nine local authorities which have the administrative responsibilities for the area covered by the North Wessex Downs. It also includes representatives of Natural England, community and parish councils, farming and rural businesses, nature conservation, historic environment, rural recreation and tourism. All have signed a Charter which sets out how we work together for the long term benefit of the AONB and all who live and work in it. The current list of members can be found here -

<http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/About-Us/minutes-of-meetings.html>

The Council of Partners has no independent executive powers. Its work is carried out with the prior approval of its constituent local authorities and DEFRA (the funding partners). Minutes of its meetings can be found here -

<http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/About-Us/minutes-of-meetings.html>

The Partnership is underpinned by a small AONB delivery team.

Preparation of a Management Plan for the North Wessex Downs AONB (AONB) is a statutory requirement placed upon the constituent local authorities by the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000. The review, production and publication of the Management Plan, together with the coordination of its delivery, has been delegated by the Council to the Council of Partners. The delivery of the AONB Management Plan is monitored by the Partnership through an annual review of the delivery of the AONB Business Plan, and achievements are reported through the AONB's Annual Report.

Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR)

The ONR is responsible for regulation of nuclear safety and security across the UK and is responsible for advising on land use planning (LUP) applications in the vicinity of licensed nuclear installations. The aim is to ensure that developments around nuclear installations do not result in populations rising to unacceptable levels.

The ONR administers the government's policy on the control of development and provides advice to the Council, who take this into account in considering whether or not to approve planning applications. Please go to - <http://www.onr.org.uk/land-use-planning.htm> for further details.

We have primarily worked with the ONR at an officer level through the off site planning group for AWE Aldermaston and AWE Burghfield which consists of emergency planning officers from West Berkshire, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, Reading Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council. This meets on a quarterly basis, with planning policy officers attending as appropriate.

Oxfordshire County Council

As part of the work on our Local Plan Review we work with the County Council on transport related issues at both an officer and member level. We do this primarily through the Berkshire Strategic Transport Forum (BSTF). We set up individual meetings to discuss specific issues when appropriate such as the updating of the freight network. We also work together at both an officer and member level as constituent members of the North Wessex Downs AONB Council of Partners (CoP).

Reading Borough Council

We use the Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Planning (MoU) signed by all the Berkshire unitary authorities as a starting point to guide our approach to cooperation. The MoU provides a framework for joint working between the Berkshire authorities and it allows refined Agreements to be agreed between individual authorities on specific areas where they consider it appropriate. In accordance with the MoU, which was formally adopted by West Berkshire Council on 19th December 2013, we use existing partnerships and working groups to take issues forward as appropriate. At an officer level these include the Berkshire Development Plans Group (DPG) which provides a co-ordinating role for planning policy officers across Berkshire to discuss matters of mutual interest on a bi monthly basis. This reports to the Berkshire Heads of Planning (BHoP) which provides a strategic planning policy overview for chief planning officers across Berkshire to discuss matters of mutual interest. BHoP periodically keeps Lead Councillors informed on how mechanisms for fulfilling the duty to co-operate are progressing and being taken forward. At a member level there are regular meetings of Berkshire Leaders (and occasional meeting of portfolio holders for specific issues). Reading has also been a signatory to the statement of common ground in 2021 in relation to strategic planning matters as set out in Appendix 2 They have recently been engaged on duty to co-operate meeting associated with the unmet employment land requirements.

Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

We use the Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Planning (MoU) signed by all the Berkshire unitary authorities as a starting point to guide our approach to cooperation. The MoU provides a framework for joint working between the Berkshire authorities and it allows refined Agreements to be agreed between individual authorities on specific areas where they consider it appropriate. In accordance with the MoU, which was formally adopted by West Berkshire Council on 19th December 2013, we use existing partnerships and working groups to take issues forward as appropriate. At an officer level these include the Berkshire Development Plans Group (DPG) which provides a co-ordinating role for planning policy officers across Berkshire to discuss matters of mutual interest on a bi monthly basis. This reports to the Berkshire Heads of Planning (BHoP) which provides a strategic planning policy overview for chief planning officers across Berkshire to discuss matters of mutual interest. BHoP periodically keeps Lead Councillors informed on how mechanisms for fulfilling the duty to co-operate are progressing and being taken forward. At a member level there are regular meetings of Berkshire Leaders (and occasional meeting of portfolio holders for specific issues). They have recently been engaged on duty to co-operate meeting associated with the unmet employment land requirements.

Slough Borough Council

We use the Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Planning (MoU) signed by all the Berkshire unitary authorities as a starting point to guide our approach to cooperation.

The MoU provides a framework for joint working between the Berkshire authorities and it allows refined Agreements to be agreed between individual authorities on specific areas where they consider it appropriate. In accordance with the MoU, which was formally adopted by West Berkshire Council on 19th December 2013, we use existing partnerships and working groups to take issues forward as appropriate. At an officer level these include the Berkshire Development Plans Group (DPG) which provides a co-ordinating role for planning policy officers across Berkshire to discuss matters of mutual interest on a bi monthly basis. This reports to the Berkshire Heads of Planning (BHoP) which provides a strategic planning policy overview for chief planning officers across Berkshire to discuss matters of mutual interest. BHoP periodically keeps Lead Councillors informed on how mechanisms for fulfilling the duty to co-operate are progressing and being taken forward. At a member level there are regular meetings of Berkshire Leaders (and occasional meeting of portfolio holders for specific issues). They have recently been engaged on duty to co-operate work associated with the unmet employment land requirements.

Buckinghamshire Unitary Authority and part predecessor South Buckinghamshire District Council

We have primarily worked with the new unitary council district council at both an officer and member level during the preparation of the Berkshire SHMA once it was identified as part of the area covered. South Bucks later indicated that it did not want to be actively involved in the Berkshire SHMA but was pursuing alternative options which were linked to it taking forward a joint local plan with Chiltern District Council. It also declined to take part in the jointly commissioned work on the Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA). More recently we have been working with them on meeting our unmet employment land provision as well as strategic cross boundary planning matters.

South Oxfordshire District Council

As part of the work on our Local Plan Review we work with the District Council on transport and economic related issues at both an officer and member level. We also set up individual meetings with the District Council to discuss specific issues when appropriate, such as the cross boundary implications of housing growth or employment matters particularly recently WBC unmet employment land requirements. We also work together at both an officer and member level as constituent members of the North Wessex Downs AONB Council of Partners (CoP).

Test Valley Borough Council

We will set up individual meetings with the Borough Council to discuss specific issues when appropriate and recently have engaged with them on the LPR particularly in relation to unmet employment need requirements and nutrient neutrality , although issues relating to other local plan topics have been discussed. We also work together at both an officer and member level as constituent members of the North Wessex Downs AONB Council of Partners (CoP).

Thames Valley Berkshire Local Economic Partnership (TVB LEP)

<http://thamesvalleyberkshire.co.uk/>

We are engaged at both an officer and member level with the TVB LEP.

Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC)

TVERC is a 'not for profit' organisation covering Berkshire and Oxfordshire. It is run by a partnership and is one of a national network of local records centres. Its funding partners

include all the local authorities in Oxfordshire & Berkshire plus Natural England and the Environment Agency. It also works closely with the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust. TVERC provides the following services for the Council –

- Provision of sites, species and habitat data
- Data collection and management
- Data analysis and presentation
- Supporting recorders and volunteers
- Local Wildlife Sites surveys
- Review of Ancient Woodland inventory
- Roadside nature reserves surveys

All this information has informed the SA/SEA work as part of the site selection process. It also forms part of the regular data collected and monitored as part of the Council's Annual Monitoring Report.

Thames Water

As the statutory water and waste water provider we have worked with Thames Water at an officer level to provide comments on potential housing sites in advance of any formal public consultation and the organisation has also been involved at all formal stages of the process to date. The continued use of one to one discussions will be important at the planning application stage and in the delivery of the LPR.

Vale of White Horse District Council

As part of the work on our wider Local Plan we work with the District Council on transport and economic related issues at both an officer and member level. We also set up individual meetings with the Vale of White Horse District Council to discuss specific issues when appropriate, such as the cross boundary implications of housing growth more recently on meeting WBC unmet employment land requirements. We also work together at both an officer and member level as constituent members of the North Wessex Downs AONB Council of Partners (CoP).

Wiltshire Council

As part of the work on our wider Local Plan we work with Wiltshire Council particularly on transport related issues at both an officer and member level. We do this primarily through the Berkshire Strategic Transport Forum (BSTF). We set up individual meetings to discuss specific issues when appropriate such as the updating of the freight network more recently on meeting WBC unmet employment land requirements. We also work together at both an officer and member level as constituent members of the North Wessex Downs AONB Council of Partners (CoP).

Wokingham Borough Council

We use the Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Planning (MoU) signed by all the Berkshire unitary authorities as a starting point to guide our approach to cooperation. The MoU provides a framework for joint working between the Berkshire authorities and it allows refined Agreements to be agreed between individual authorities on specific areas where they consider it appropriate. In accordance with the MoU, which was formally adopted by West Berkshire Council on 19th December 2013, we use existing partnerships and working groups to take issues forward as appropriate. At an officer level these include the Berkshire Development Plans Group (DPG) which provides a co-ordinating role for planning policy officers across Berkshire to discuss matters of mutual interest on a bi monthly basis. This reports to the Berkshire Heads of Planning (BHoP)

which provides a strategic planning policy overview for chief planning officers across Berkshire to discuss matters of mutual interest. To date, together with the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Economic Partnership, the Group has been instrumental in coordinating the work of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and the identification of a Functional Economic Market Area. BHoP periodically keeps Lead Councillors informed on how mechanisms for fulfilling the duty to co-operate are progressing and being taken forward. At a member level there are regular meetings of Berkshire Leaders (and occasional meeting of portfolio holders for specific issues). In addition, a Member Reference Group has been set up to move the outcomes of the SHMA forward into capacity work across the Housing Market Areas and beyond. They have recently been engaged on duty to co-operate meetings associated with the unmet employment land requirements.

Other bodies

As part of the Duty to Cooperate process the Council has also engaged with a number of other bodies and these include:

- Berkshire Association of Local Councils
- British Aggregates Association
- Cemex (UK)
- Centrica PLC (British Gas)
- Civil Aviation Authority
- Community Council For Berkshire
- Country Land & Business Association
- English Heritage
- Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT)
- Grundon Waste Management Ltd
- Gypsy Council
- Highways Agency
- Home Builders Federation
- Homes and Communities Agency - South and West
- Marine Management Organisation
- Mayor of London
- Mineral Products Association Ltd
- National Farmers Union
- National Grid
- Network Rail
- Newbury and District Clinical Commissioning Group
- NHS England
- North and West Reading Clinical Commissioning Group
- North Wessex Downs AONB
- Office for Nuclear Regulation
- Office of Rail Regulation
- Openreach newSites
- Police and Crime Commissioner
- Renewable UK Association
- Royal Berkshire Ambulance NHS Trust
- Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service
- Scottish and Southern Energy Plc

- Showmen's Guild of Great Britain
- Swindon Borough Council
- Thames Valley Police
- The Coal Authority
- The National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups
- Transport for London
- Veolia Environmental Services
- Wales and West Utilities
- West Berkshire Disability Alliance

Appendix 4

Memorandum of Understanding between the Berkshire Unitary Authorities on Strategic Planning and the “Duty to Co-operate” on Planning Matters in Berkshire

As single tier authorities, the six Berkshire unitary authorities are both local and strategic planning authorities for their areas. The Localism Act 2011 brings significant changes to strategic planning in England. Strategic planning remains an essential part of the planning system. The Act provides for a bottom up approach to strategic planning in a local area through the “duty to co-operate.”

The Act sets out that a local planning authority has a duty to co-operate by:

“engaging constructively, actively and on an on-going basis in the preparation of development plan and other documents and in activities that can reasonably be considered to prepare the way for the preparation of such documents for strategic matters.”

The requirements of the Localism Act are complemented by the guidance in paragraphs 178-181 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), although these are additional to those within the Act. The NPPF includes reference to local authorities considering agreements on joint approaches to the undertaking of activities and to considering whether to agree to prepare joint local development documents. The duty involves a continuous process of engagement from initial thinking through to implementation. It should result in meeting development requirements, including unmet requirements from neighbouring authorities, where it is practical to do so. Authorities should also consider producing plans or policies prepared as part of a joint committee, a memorandum of understanding or a jointly prepared strategy which is presented as evidence of an agreed position.

The Duty to Co-operate has become the first matter that is tested at a local plan examination. Failure to co-operate will result in delay and increased costs in bringing forward up to date local plans thereby increasing the risks at planning appeals.

In the light of the duty the Berkshire Unitary Authorities have formulated and agreed the following memorandum of understanding:

- A. **Agreeing Strategic/Cross Boundary Issues:** The authorities will endeavour to agree appropriate Berkshire, or part of Berkshire, baseline positions on relevant strategic planning matters as a starting point for the potential development of strategic planning policies for all or part of Berkshire.
- B. **Joint Evidence Base:** The authorities will develop an evidence base that provides potential for sharing across authorities where it is prudent and appropriate to do so relating to strategic planning matters. This might include issues such as demographics, population projections, housing market assessments, gypsy and traveller needs, employment, retail and transport studies, infrastructure plans, minerals and waste (see separate Memorandum of Understanding), strategic environmental and green infrastructure, decentralised

energy infrastructure and other issues of cross boundary interest. This could include the joint commissioning by two or more Berkshire authorities of studies into these matters.

- C. **Other Authorities Plans:** Where it will add weight, the authorities will consider, assess and make joint representations on the strategic aspects of local plans prepared by authorities adjoining Berkshire, especially on minerals and waste matters;
- D. **Joint Strategies:** The authorities will consider opportunities to develop joint strategies and deliver agreed or joint positions or policies in relation to specific topics or development needs where the evidence demonstrates that this is appropriate, (e.g. planning for the SPA or AWE).
- E. **Statements of Common Ground:** The authorities will involve their neighbouring authorities and other partner organisations (e.g. the Berkshire LEP, Environment Agency, Highways Authority, etc.) to which the duty to co-operate applies in the identification of issues and options, in resolving objections and preparing statements of common ground in relation to the preparation of individual local plan documents and other planning policy documents.

The operation of this Memorandum of Understanding will be the responsibility of Berkshire Development Plans Group (DPG), reporting to the Berkshire Heads of Planning (BHoP). In turn, BHoP will periodically (at least once a year) keep Lead Councilors informed on how mechanisms for fulfilling the duty to co-operate are progressing and being taken forward.

This Memorandum of Understanding provides a framework for joint working between the Berkshire authorities and it allows refined Agreements to be agreed between individual authorities on specific areas where they consider it appropriate.

Signed:

Bracknell Forest Council

Reading Borough Council

Royal Borough of Windsor Maidenhead

Slough Council

West Berkshire Council

Wokingham Borough Council

