

Proposal Document – East Thames Valley BRMA

Review

1.0 Proposal

- 1.1 I propose a change to the eastern boundary of the BRMA to exclude Virginia Water and include it instead in the proposed Walton BRMA.
- 1.2 I propose a change to the southern boundary of the BRMA to include Windlesham in the Blackwater Valley BRMA.
- 1.3 I propose a change to the western boundary of the BRMA to encompass Cranbourne and North Ascot in the East Thames Valley BRMA, currently in the Reading BRMA.
- 1.4 Finally, it is proposed to adjust the western boundary so as to exclude the villages and hamlets around White Waltham, Waltham St Lawrence and Shurlock Row from the current Reading BRMA and include them within an extended East Thames Valley BRMA.

2.0 Map of existing BRMA

- 2.1 See Fig. 1.

3.0 Map of existing BRMA with proposed changes overlaid

- 3.1 For a BRMA overview see Fig. 2.
- 3.2 For details of the proposed change at Virginia Water as described in paragraph 1.1, see Fig 3.
- 3.3 For details of the proposed change at Windlesham as described in paragraph 1.2, see Fig 4
- 3.4 For details of the proposed change at Cranbourne and North Ascot as described in paragraph 1.3, see Fig 5.
- 3.5 For details of the proposed changes as described in paragraph 1.4 above, see Fig 6.

4.0 Overview of the proposed BRMA

- 4.1 The proposed East Thames Valley BRMA is a mixed urban and rural area. At its widest point the BRMA is approximately 15 miles from east to west and is approximately 15 miles from north to south.
- 4.2 The proposed East Thames Valley BRMA is centred on the M4 corridor and the conurbations of Slough, Maidenhead and Windsor in the northern sector of the BRMA, and Ascot and Sunninghill in the

southern part of the BRMA, separated from the northern portion by Windsor Great Park.

4.3 Slough is the primary centre of the East Thames Valley BRMA. It is an important economic centre due to its transport links and proximity to the capital. The economy in the town has developed into the information sector, housing many offices for national and international businesses. Slough Trading Estate is the largest in Europe and an important business centre. The town grew dramatically after WWII as it was developed to house Londoners who lost their homes due to bombing raids.

4.4 The majority of the BRMA is bordered by physical barriers such as the M40, M25, M3 and the River Thames. The remaining boundary skirts around the residential areas of Egham, Virginia Water and Windlesham, before passing through the more rural area between Maidenhead and Reading.

5.0 Legislation - Rent Officers (Housing Benefit Functions) Amendment (No.2) Order 2008.

5.1 A Broad Rental Market Area is an area *'within which a person could reasonably be expected to live having regard to facilities and services for the purposes of health, education, recreation, personal banking and shopping, taking account of the distance of travel, by public and private transport, to and from those facilities and services.'*

5.2 A BRMA must contain *'residential premises of a variety of types, including such premises held on a variety of tenures', plus 'sufficient privately rented residential premises, to ensure that, in the rent officer's opinion, the LHA (LRR) for the area is representative of the rents that a landlord might reasonably be expected to obtain in that area'.*

6.0 Identification of facilities and services

6.1 I have plotted the facilities and services on a map, which can be seen at Fig. 7. (Health, Education, Recreation, Banking and Shopping are referred to as HERBS in this report).

6.2 The map at Fig. 7 indicates that a large cluster of HERBS is to be found in Slough, with other significant clusters found in the towns of Maidenhead and Windsor.

6.3 The majority of the primary health care facilities in the proposed BRMA are provided by Berkshire East Primary Care Trust (PCT), with services in the north being provided by Buckinghamshire PCT, and a small area in the south being covered by Surrey PCT. The main hospital within the BRMA is Wexham Park Hospital in Slough, which provides a large A&E department. This is supported by Heatherwood Hospital in Ascot, and St. Mark's Hospital in Maidenhead.

- 6.4 Fig.7 also demonstrates that both primary and secondary school facilities are spread widely across the BRMA. The primary schools are distributed throughout both the urban and more rural areas, while the secondary schools are distributed in the urban band across the centre of the BRMA. Primary schools are identified on the map as “Key Stage 2” and secondary schools as “Key Stage 4”.
- 6.5 Post-16 education is provided by both further education colleges, and secondary schools within the BRMA. Along with further education, higher education courses and vocational courses are on offer at East Berkshire College in Windsor, and BCA in Maidenhead.
- 6.6 There is a wide distribution of recreation facilities throughout the BRMA, as demonstrated by the map at Fig.7. There are leisure centres, swimming pools, recreation grounds and sports clubs spread evenly across the BRMA and the higher order services are provided in the main urban centres. Slough has an Empire cinema in the Queensmere centre, while Maidenhead has an Odeon cinema. Windsor is home to the Theatre Royal and there is a smaller theatre, the Novello, in Ascot. Windsor is home to two major tourist attractions; Windsor Castle and Legoland. The other major attraction within the BRMA is the Ascot Racecourse, toward the south of the BRMA.
- 6.7 The main concentration of banking services can be found in Slough, Maidenhead and Windsor. Banks and building societies found here include Barclays, NatWest, Lloyds TSB, Royal Bank of Scotland, HSBC, Halifax, and the Nationwide Building Society. Post offices provide limited banking facilities and are widespread, as are ATMs.
- 6.8 Queensmere Observatory in Slough is the principle provider of retail services, with additional services being provided by Windsor Royal Shopping in Windsor, and the Nicholson’s Shopping Centre in Maidenhead. Large supermarket chains can be found within the main towns.while convenience stores can be found in villages throughout the BRMA.

7.0 Access to facilities and services

- 7.1 The maps indicate that the HERBS are accessible from all portions of the BRMA. A network of arterial A and B roads connect the different sectors of the BRMA with one another. The A308, A4094, B4447 and A4130 connect the north west of the BRMA to Maidenhead. The A355, B416, A412 and B470 connects the north east with Slough. The south is joined to Windsor by the A332 and the B3022.
- 7.2 First Great Western Trains manage the rail services within the Slough and Maidenhead area providing connections between the 12 stations in the north of the BRMA. There are two stations in the southern part of the BRMA and the service is managed by South West Trains.

- 7.3 There are several bus operators within the BRMA; the main operator is First Bus, and this is supported by the smaller services of Courtney Coaches and White Bus Service.
- 7.4 Maidenhead and Slough are linked by the A4 and the M4, as well as the railway line. It takes 7 minutes to travel between the two by train, and 13 minutes by car.
- 7.5 The table at Fig.8 shows distances and times of travel throughout the BRMA, based on a journey made at 10am on a weekday. The table shows that the all public journey times are within an hour, and all journeys by private car take fewer than 30 minutes.
- 7.6 The table indicates that Staines, in the Walton BRMA, is most easily accessed from Virginia Water. It takes 8 minutes by train and 12 minutes to drive the 4.5 mile journey. This is more accessible than Slough, for example, which takes 58 minutes by bus and 23 minutes by car. For this reason I propose the change referred to in paragraph 1.1, and demonstrated in Fig.5, to include Virginia Water in the Walton BRMA.
- 7.7 The table also shows that Slough is not easily accessed from Windlesham, taking 1 hour 21 minutes on the bus, but rather Camberley, identified as the main cluster of HERBS in the Blackwater Valley BRMA, is most easily accessed at 20 minutes by bus and 12 minutes by car. It is for this reason that I propose the change mentioned in paragraph 1.2; to exclude Windlesham from the East Thames Valley BRMA and include it in Black Water Valley BRMA. This change is demonstrated in Fig.4.
- 7.8 As a consequence of the proposed changes to Windlesham, times and travel distances from neighbouring Sunninghill were then considered to establish whether this also offered more reasonable access to a centre other than Slough.
- 7.9 The table indicates that Sunninghill is connected to Windsor by a direct bus taking 26 minutes, and from there one can connect to Slough in 50 minutes. By private car the distance is 7.3 miles and takes 15 minutes to Windsor and is 10.5 miles and takes 22 minutes to Slough. Times and distances from Sunninghill to other service centres outside the BRMA were also tested, an example of this is Staines. From Sunninghill to Staines (Walton BRMA) it takes 17 minutes over a distance of 8 miles by car and 60 minutes by bus. The bus journey requires a change at Ascot. Another example is Sunninghill to Guildford (in the Guildford BRMA). This journey takes 30 minutes by car over a distance of 14.4 miles. Journey times by public transport take virtually an hour and a half; this involves a combined bus and train journey. On balance, it is more reasonable for Sunninghill to access services within the East Thames Valley BRMA and therefore there is no justification to make any proposed changes to Sunninghill.

- 7.10 The table also shows that Slough is more accessible from Cranbourne than Reading (in the Reading BRMA), and for that reason it is proposed in paragraph 1.3 to exclude Cranbourne from the Reading BRMA and include it in the East Thames Valley BRMA, as shown in detail at Fig.3. The public transport journey time to Slough is 54 minutes, going via Windsor. Conversely the journey time to Reading is 1 hour 21 minutes. The drive time to Reading is 31 minutes; twice that of the 15 minute journey to Slough.
- 7.11 Our final proposal as described at paragraph 1.4 arises from the fact that the facilities and services provided in the towns of Maidenhead, Windsor and Slough are more accessible to residents than those located in Reading. For example, the journey by car to Maidenhead or Slough from White Waltham is 6 miles and takes 15 minutes and 11.6 miles taking 21 minutes respectively, whereas the same journey to Reading is 9.9 miles and takes 24 minutes. Looking at public transport options, the area is served by bus number 4 operated by Courtney Coaches. This service is a circular route starting and terminating in Maidenhead, a journey that takes 15 minutes from White Waltham. However, if residents wanted to access Reading they would have to take the number 4 to Maidenhead and then get a train to Reading which would mean a total journey time of 38 minutes.
- 7.12 In summary, the maps and tables lead me to conclude that the distances and times of travel are reasonable to access the facilities and services in the proposed BRMA.

8.0 Variety of property types and tenures

- 8.1 The table at Fig.9 shows a breakdown of property types and tenures in the proposed BRMA.
- 8.2 The table indicates that the property types within the proposed BRMA are evenly spread between detached, semi detached and terraced properties, though there are significantly fewer flats and maisonettes than houses and bungalows. Of the flats, maisonettes and/or apartments the vast majority are purpose built.
- 8.3 Within the household tenure section of the table it can be seen there are a greater number of owner occupied properties, but social and privately rented properties account for 26% of total tenures.
- 8.4 In summary, the table leads me to conclude that there is a variety of property types and tenures in the proposed BRMA.

9.0 Sufficient privately rented premises

- 9.1 The table at Fig.9 shows a total of 12,794 privately rented premises in the proposed BRMA which is sufficient in my opinion.

9.2 In accordance with our published guidance, we expect to collect 20% of lettings in the private rented sector market. In this case we would have 2559 pieces of lettings information to include on our list of rents. I consider this amount to be sufficient to enable me to ensure that the LHA (LRR) for the area is representative of the rents that a landlord might reasonably be expected to obtain in the proposed BRMA.

J C Hodgkinson
Review Manager
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