

# **Proposal Document – Reading BRMA Review**

## **1.0 Proposal**

- 1.1 It is proposed to adjust the boundary to the east of Reading to exclude Cranbourne and North Ascot from the Reading BRMA. These will instead form part of the adjoining East Thames Valley BRMA.
- 1.2 It is also proposed to adjust the eastern boundary so as to exclude the villages and hamlets around White Waltham, Waltham St Lawrence and Shurlock Row from the 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 See Fig. 2.

## **4.0 Overview of the proposed BRMA**

- 4.1 The Reading BRMA covers an area approximately 23 miles east to west and 17 miles north to south. It stretches from Woolhampton and Ashampstead in the west to Waltham and Bracknell in the east and from Cookley Green and Northend in the north to Mortimer and Crowthorne in the south. Although situated mainly in Berkshire and Oxfordshire it includes small parts of Buckinghamshire and Hampshire. The area falls within the responsibility of the following councils: Basingstoke and Deane BC, Bracknell Forest BC, Hart DC, Reading BC, South Oxfordshire DC, Windsor and Maidenhead Royal BC, West Berkshire Council, Wokingham DC and Wycombe DC although Basingstoke and Deane and Hart have very small areas involved.
- 4.2 The BRMA encompasses the large town of Reading and the smaller towns of Bracknell, Henley-on-Thames and Wokingham. Reading, which lies at the heart of the Thames Valley, is well-known for its large IT companies (including Microsoft and Oracle), the modern Oracle shopping and leisure complex and the annual Reading Music Festival. Reading's role as a commuter town is assisted by ready access to the M4 and the presence of Reading main rail station, one of the country's busiest rail hubs.
- 4.3 Although the Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell areas are highly urbanised, other parts of the BRMA exhibit a largely rural landscape interspersed with smaller settlements and areas of woodland. Reading lies at the confluence of the Rivers Thames and Kennet. The Kennet and Avon Canal ends at Reading. The River Thames passes through

the Goring gap (which marks the edge of the Chiltern Hills) and then flows through Reading and on to Henley-on-Thames where the famous annual regatta is held.

- 4.4 The towns and rural parts of the Reading BRMA are connected by an extensive bus network. There are a number of bus operators, including Reading Buses, Arriva, First and Thames Travel. Such provision is supplemented by community transport such as Reading's ReadiBus service. The rail network includes stations at the major towns and a number of large villages. Reading itself has two town centre stations (Reading mainline and Reading West) as well as stations which are on the outskirts of the town (Tilehurst and Earley stations). Three train operators are responsible for services in the area.

#### **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. 5.

- 6.2 The map indicates that facilities and services are predominantly concentrated in the urban centre of Reading, with more modest clusters of HERBS at the towns of Bracknell, Henley-on-Thames and Wokingham. A number of the larger villages, including Crowthorne, Pangbourne and Twyford, show small clusters of HERBS.

- 6.3 The NHS South Central Strategic Health Authority covers health services within the BRMA. Three Primary Care Trusts (PCT) actually provide services within the area - Berkshire West, Berkshire East and Oxfordshire.

- 6.4 The main hospital within the BRMA is the extensively redeveloped Royal Berkshire Hospital which is situated in Reading and is run by the Royal Berkshire NHS Trust. The hospital offers a comprehensive service with a 24 hour Accident and Emergency Department, a maternity department and stroke, cancer and cardiac units. There is

also the Townlands Hospital at Henley-on-Thames run by Oxfordshire PCT. This provides minor surgery and outpatient care and has a minor injuries unit.

- 6.5 A number of local education authorities are responsible for education in the Reading BRMA. These LEAs are Bracknell Forest, Oxfordshire, Reading, West Berkshire, Windsor and Maidenhead and Wokingham.
- 6.6 The BRMA is served by both primary and secondary schools as identified in Fig. 5 of the appendices as Key Stage 2 for primary schools and Key Stage 4 for secondary schools.
- 6.7 Post-16 education within the BRMA is provided at secondary schools and at Reading College, Bracknell and Wokingham College and Henley Sixth Form College (which takes students from a large geographical area). Reading College provides FE courses, a Sixth Form Academy and an Arts and Design Centre. Bracknell and Wokingham College, whose courses include apprenticeships, has a number of centres in addition to those at Bracknell and Wokingham. Although the University of West London (formerly Thames Valley University) retains a foothold in the Reading area's higher education sector, the main university is the University of Reading (situated a short distance to the east of the town centre).
- 6.8 The Reading BRMA offers a wide variety of recreational facilities. Open spaces, playing fields, recreation grounds and parks provide many kinds of outdoor recreation. There are also a number of golf courses. The River Thames and the Kennet and Avon Canal provide boating, cycling, fishing and walking. Watersports and dingy sailing also take place on lakes in the area. Many of the entertainment and other recreational venues are located in and around the town of Reading. The town has theatres, museums, a cinema multiplex (at Oracle's Riverside) leisure centres, swimming pools and golf courses. The town also has the Palmer Park Sports Stadium with athletics track and velodrome and the Madejski Stadium which is home to both Reading FC and the London Irish rugby union club. On the eastern side of Reading, and on the way to Wokingham, is another cinema multiplex. Reading town centre has a large number of bars, clubs and restaurants with cafes and eateries alongside the Oracle's Riverside.
- 6.9 Although Reading has the greatest concentration of recreational facilities, the other main population centres are significant. Bracknell has a multiplex cinema, an arts centre, a leisure centre, the Coral Reef leisure pool complex, the John Nike ski slope and ice-rink and the Look Out Discovery Centre with its interactive science and nature displays, wooded walks and cycle trails. Leisure provision in Wokingham includes a leisure centre, the Carnival Pool and the Devonshire Golf Complex, while Henley has a theatre, cinema, leisure centre and the River and Rowing Museum. Additional facilities within the area include the sports centre in the village of Crowthorne.

- 6.10 Access to banking services is widespread within the BRMA with a choice of banks to be found in the larger and some of the smaller population centres. The widest selection of banks is to be found in the town of Reading.
- 6.11 Reading is the principal shopping centre within the BRMA and the main shopping street is pedestrianised. A large number of leading retailers are to be found along its main streets and within the Broad Street Mall and Oracle shopping centres. John Lewis, Debenhams, House of Fraser, Marks and Spencer and Bhs all have department stores in the town. There are a number of retail parks within the Reading area, including Brunel Retail Park with its Morrison's supermarket.
- 6.12 The other main shopping destination within the area is Bracknell. The town has some major chain stores and Bentall's department store. The latter is linked into the Princess Square shopping centre which includes a Sainsbury's supermarket. Just outside Bracknell town centre is the Peel Centre retail park with its Morrison's supermarket. Wokingham and Henley-on-Thames offer a range of more modest-sized, often independent, shops. Pangbourne and Twyford have smaller facilities.
- 6.13 The largest choice of leading supermarkets is to be found in, or close to, the town of Reading. The town has two Asda and two Tesco superstores, a Morrison's, several Waitrose stores, and Sainsbury's Savacentre hypermarket. Bracknell has a choice of leading supermarkets whilst Henley-on-Thames and Wokingham each have a Waitrose. There is also a Waitrose store at Twyford. The larger population centres also have one or more of the smaller supermarkets and many of the larger villages retain several food shops. Tilehurst village, although on the outskirts of Reading, has two small Co-operative stores, a butcher and a baker.

## **7.0 Access to facilities and services**

- 7.1 The area is well served by transport links. Reading lies at the heart of a road network which links the other parts of the BRMA to Reading and to each other. The M4 transects the area from east to west and passes just to the south of Reading. From the motorway it is possible to access the A329M which runs from east Reading to the outskirts of Bracknell where it joins the A329 into the town. The A329 itself transects the BRMA area, linking Reading with the Pangbourne and Streatley areas to the north west and the Wokingham and Bracknell areas to the south east. The A4, which can be accessed from the M4 at junction 12 also transects the BRMA, linking Reading with the Theale and Woolhampton areas to the south west and the Charvil and Twyford areas to the north east. The A321, which crosses the A4 at Twyford, runs north south directly linking Henley-on-Thames with Wokingham and Crowthorne. Henley is also served by the A4155 from the Caversham area of Reading. At Caversham this road connects with the

A4074 which runs north-west to Woodcote and the BRMA border. For areas due south of Reading there is the arterial A33 route which serves the Swallowfield and Riseley areas.

- 7.2 The map at Fig. 1 indicates that the smaller towns and villages are also linked by road network to Reading. The network supports public transport routes within the BRMA which link the population centres to each other and to rural locations. Although many journeys are necessarily by bus there are rail stations at all the main population centres and at a number of villages, including Goring and Streatley, Mortimer, Theale, Twyford and Midgham/ Woolhampton.
- 7.3 The table at Fig. 6 shows distances and times of travel by private and public transport to Reading from other locations within the BRMA.
- 7.4 The table indicates that travel times to Reading by car, even from outlying locations, are 26 minutes or less. Travel times by a minimum of one form of public transport are 53 minutes or less.
- 7.5 The proposal to exclude Cranbourne and North Ascot from Reading BRMA and to include them within East Thames Valley BRMA (see Figs 2 and 4) is based on reasonableness of access to HERBS. An analysis of distances and travel times by private and public transport, show that both Cranbourne and North Ascot enjoy more reasonable access to Slough in the East Thames Valley BRMA than to Reading. The journey time by car from Cranbourne to Slough takes half the time of the journey from Cranbourne to Reading. Cranbourne to Slough by bus are around half as quick as those to Reading (see Fig. 7). North Ascot is also nearer Slough and there are no reasonable grounds for treating it separately from Ascot which already lies within the East Thames Valley BRMA.
- 7.6 Our proposal as described at paragraph 1.2 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.
- 7.7 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. 7 shows a breakdown of property types and tenures in the proposed BRMA.
- 8.2 The table indicates that there is a mix of property types, such as houses, bungalows, flats (both purpose built and converted), semi-detached and detached houses and a variety of tenures such as owner occupation, local authority renting, social renting and private renting.
- 8.3 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. 7 shows a total of 19,169 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 3,832 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.

John Hodgkinson  
**Review and Assurance Manager**  
November 2010.