

# West Berkshire Local Plan Review Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) Consultation

## Matters Relating to Duty to Co-operate

### Background

1.0 Swindon Borough Council (SBC) has received a formal request under Duty to Co-operate (Section 110 of the Localism Act) to try and assist with meeting West Berkshire's unmet employment land and space requirements over the plan period. Swindon is one of a number of Local Planning Authorities which have been asked within a 60-minute 'drive time' of Newbury. This drive time area includes a very large geographical catchment and one of the reasons SBC have been asked under DtC to respond to the request.

1.1 West Berkshire describe the shortfall as substantial and consists of:

#### **Office shortfall: 50,816sqm**

(requirement – allocations = shortfall

$$50,816 - 0 = 50,816\text{sqm})$$

#### **Industrial shortfall: 32,709sqm**

(requirement – allocations = shortfall

$$91,109 - 58,400 = 32,709\text{sqm}$$

$$23\text{ha} - 14.6\text{ha} = 8.4\text{ha})$$

1.2 The Councils of West Berkshire, Swindon Borough and Wiltshire have met on occasions prior to the drafting of the Regulation 19 consultation document and more recently during the Regulation 19 consultation period mainly on matters of evidence and employment need clarification.

1.3 Swindon Town is located approximately 37 minutes from Newbury (28.5 miles) via the M4. SBC does not share an administrative boundary with West Berkshire although the wider Wiltshire area shares an eastern boundary (importantly AONB) with West Berkshire.

### **Swindon Borough Council and Plan Making**

1.4 SBC is currently in the process of developing a new Local Plan to replace the adopted Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026. The Council updated its Local Development Scheme in December 2022 and is in the process of working towards a Regulation 18 Local Plan consultation in Autumn 2023. This work will build upon and update evidence work undertaken as part of an initial Local Plan review process, to include work upon a long-range economic growth vision / strategy, review of the Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA), town centre uses and technical work on employment land needs and supply. The development of this evidence is at an early stage.

1.5 Swindon is recognised as a 'growth town' with strong economic ambitions but the Council needs to be clear on what its updated forecast needs are for its revised plan period and how these can be met effectively and sustainably within the Borough and importantly prior to accommodating the needs of other authorities, including West Berkshire. The final evidence

base for the new Swindon Local Plan will underpin the framework for meeting local economic needs within the Borough and will also analyse strategic growth options and pressures. Fundamentally the Council is keen to maximise opportunities for people to live and work locally and sustainably with access to a diverse and high performing economic base.

### **West Berkshire Local Plan**

1.6 The Council has reviewed the economic technical evidence with the plan including:

- *Berkshire Functional Economic Market Area Study: Lichfield Report – Feb 2016*
- *West Berkshire – Employment Land Review: Addendum: Stantec / Urba – December 2022)*
- Retail Background Paper (December 2022)

A brief review of the Newbury Town Centre Masterplan has also been undertaken.

1.7 Its is noted that while the West Berkshire Travel to Work area is relatively self-contained and based upon historic data there may be some strategic economic connections (flow of goods and labour) along the M4 corridor between larger urban conurbations. West Berkshire settlements such as Newbury are also spatially well related to Reading, Basingstoke and other South East orientated locations by road connections and proximity.

1.8 On the office market generally the evidence would indicate that the West Berkshire office market is driven by demand from smaller occupiers delivering potentially people servicing jobs in the future and this type of market can be very local or location specific. It is clear that Newbury as a major settlement has seen significant office losses driven by a number of factors including changes in permitted development rights. Although the shortfall in office provision in the short term is not considered significant due to current deflated market demand linked to recent macro-economic factors the medium / longer-term needs are potentially more significant.

1.9 It is however encouraging that the Council is taking positive steps with regard to plan policies and the Newbury Town Centre Masterplan to support regeneration and transformation. The town centre masterplan focuses specific attention on becoming a more entrepreneurial town delivering new office space and focuses particularly on delivering smaller, fit-for-purpose, flexible office space for small businesses, start-ups and those looking for occasional workspace closer to home. Meeting local office needs through a proactive policy, regeneration and investment framework is considered as proving West Berkshire with good opportunities to develop local jobs in a sustainable manner.

1.10 With regard to the overall industrial market SBC understands that some of the pressures around space demand are for more 'footloose' distribution and logistics businesses particularly within the context of firms being priced out of high value areas. It would be good to more fully understand the extent that distribution / logistic demands are specifically driven by close proximity to Reading and London markets rather than being attracted to site options further afield. Wider industrial demands will also be driven by local business needs.

1.11 SBC is supportive of West Berkshire's broad plan ambitions but the full application of strategy (including master-planning), flexible Local Plan policies and other tools may yield further positive outcomes to support local economic ambitions and reduce needs shortfalls.

1.12 On the basis of this note and the current early stage in the development of the new Swindon Local Plan with an updated evidence base, the Council is unable to assist West Berkshire Council with meeting its office and industrial shortfalls. The Council is of course happy to keep communications open under Duty to Cooperate.

Stephen Hay

Planning Policy Manager (Interim)

Economy and Development  
Swindon Borough Council

