



New Runnymede Local Plan

Key Issues and Spatial Priorities

Key Issues and Challenges

Through analysing a range of baseline information and emerging evidence on the current and future state of the area, a number of key issues and challenges facing Runnymede have been identified, and are summarised below. These have informed the matters being consulted upon in the new Local Plan Scoping Consultation:

1. Housing Choice, Availability and Affordability

Many people are finding it hard to access decent and suitable housing, either to buy or to rent, because prices are so high. The lack of housing that is affordable for residents and workers not only affects people's quality of life, but it also directly impacts Runnymede's economy. The provision of additional affordable housing in Runnymede is a major factor influencing the overall level of additional homes needed, caused by a combination of high market prices (both purchase and rental) and insufficient supply in recent decades.

One of the core issues is therefore how to supply around 34% of the total housing supply needed as affordable to rent dwellings for households unable to afford market housing; and a further 5% as affordable to own dwellings, as evidenced in the latest Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA).

The housing needs of different groups will also need to be planned for. For example, pitches and plots for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople, products for custom and self-builders and families with children.

Furthermore, as population projections for Runnymede show a substantial increase in the older population over the Local Plan period, specialist older person housing will be needed, as well as ensuring that an appropriate proportion of new homes are designed to be inclusive e.g. accessible and adaptable for wheelchair users.

Identifying sufficient land to meet these wide-ranging housing needs will be challenging given the constraints present in the area, particularly Green Belt and flood risk constraints.

2. Sustainable Economic Growth and Thriving Centres

Work underpinning the HEDNA shows that Runnymede has a highly skilled resident workforce, and benefits from low unemployment levels and relatively strong productivity. Runnymede is home to some nationally leading and significant businesses and economic sectors.

Forecasts estimate much lower Gross Value Added growth for Runnymede than historic performance, but that growth is expected to outperform the UK and South East during the Plan period.

Runnymede is, however, experiencing a weakening office market. The future focus for office activities will be to retain, refurbish and support incremental growth, rather than identify large-scale development opportunities.

The industrial and logistics sector is performing more strongly – there is potential to accommodate expansion in existing industrial areas where policy and environmental constraints allow, but this will need to be balanced with potential impacts on the local road network.

Creative tech presents an opportunity to build on emerging cluster specialisms, and information and communication presents an opportunity to support an existing strength. If it goes ahead, the Heathrow expansion will bring both opportunities and threats which could have significant implications for the next Local Plan.

The distribution of growth across sectors will have a substantial effect on the sites and premises implications that a Local Plan should address, to help create a prosperous and sustainable local economy supported by, for example, sufficient digital and transport infrastructure. Whilst further redevelopment and intensification of existing employment areas is a possibility, new site allocations are likely to be required to meet future commercial needs, but there are development constraints in the form of Green Belt and flood risk in particular.

The Local Plan should also support the cultural, visitor and tourism economy, including links and access to destinations including Thorpe Park and Windsor Great Park. Finally, the Local Plan can help support green growth, including the low-carbon economy, through supporting the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy technologies and delivering energy-efficient buildings.

The Retail Study indicates that the Council needs to plan for less, not more retail and leisure floorspace, with an emphasis on repurposing and diversifying existing land uses on the high street. The Local Plan has a role to play in ensuring a full range of potential needs and opportunities for development is considered, including the scope to accommodate floorspace which broadens the mix of uses that will draw footfall.

3. Climate Resilience and Nature Recovery

Achieving national and locally set net zero goals will be challenging, but the Council's Climate Change Study indicates that there is scope for a new Local Plan to help mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Evidence shows that for Runnymede, key carbon emitters include transport and domestic heating. A Local Plan can help reduce emissions by locating new development in more accessible locations served by public transport; by promoting new and improved connections by active travel infrastructure; improving EV charging infrastructure; and by supporting energy-efficient buildings served by low and renewable energy technologies, for example.

Action on climate change must also consider planning for resilience to the expected future impacts of climate change. The changing climate will mean the Runnymede area is potentially exposed to increased incidents of flooding, overheating, water shortages, wildfires and extreme weather events. Reducing the impact of these changes on our communities and businesses will be critical, and there are opportunities to achieve this alongside reducing emissions, improving people's health and wellbeing, and supporting nature recovery.

The Surrey Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) was adopted in March 2026, which plans for the restoration, recovery and enhancement of nature across the whole county. It provides a key source of evidence helping the Council understand locations important for conserving and restoring biodiversity when delivering Local Plans, and guides the delivery of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) across the area.

The Runnymede area supports nationally and internationally important heritage assets and valued habitats. It contains many areas of wildlife significance, and is within the catchment area of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA). The provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) to mitigate the impacts of new development is an ongoing challenge – without sufficient SANG capacity, new development situated within the catchment area cannot proceed.

4. Residents' Health and Wellbeing

Whilst the health of people in Runnymede is generally better than national trends, residents still have important health and wellbeing needs that the built and natural environment can play a key role in addressing. There are pockets of deprivation present in some areas of Runnymede; growing rates of obesity are being observed; and it is increasingly important to encourage physical activity in both children and adults. It is also important to plan for Runnymede's ageing population, and the health needs that will generate.

These issues can be addressed through planning policies which seek to deliver additional and improved green spaces and leisure facilities; which improve the built environment through regeneration; and which deliver higher standards and types of housing (e.g. accessible/adaptable dwellings).

5. Transport and Connectivity

Being able to access attractive walking, wheeling and cycling opportunities/ infrastructure, as well as frequent and reliable public transport, are key challenges for residents across much of Runnymede. This is particularly true in less connected areas of Runnymede, where improvements are needed to better connect settlements.

Further investment and improvement across the area is needed in public transport and active travel infrastructure to make these modes more reliable, safer and more attractive, thereby enabling greater use. This issue should be taken into account when considering options for site allocations in the new Local Plan, and when designing new development.

6. Delivering Other Supporting Infrastructure

Viability pressures faced by developers may impact the level of developer contributions that can be sought from new development. However, it is increasingly important that new development is supported by adequate infrastructure, so that Runnymede's healthcare, wastewater, education and other community and public infrastructure can continue to meet people's needs.

It will be challenging to ensure the level of growth required – including that delivered on grey belt land – is supported by infrastructure. The Council is aware that this is a pressing issue for local communities across Runnymede.

Proposed Spatial Priorities for the Local Plan

Runnymede's key strategic challenge is balancing significant housing and economic growth pressures with substantial environmental constraints, particularly flood risk and Green Belt. The Local Plan must therefore prioritise sustainable, resilient growth, improved housing affordability, and environmental enhancement to ensure long-term quality of life and resilience.

The following proposed spatial priorities for the Local Plan shape and articulate what it is the Local Plan will seek to achieve. They have been informed by the key issues and challenges facing the area and our communities, as set out above, and are also shaped by the Council's corporate business plan and supporting strategies.

1. **Help to deliver genuinely affordable and diverse housing:** maximising the supply of social rented housing should be a priority to address the affordability gap and drivers of homelessness, whilst also addressing the needs of other groups, including older persons, those seeking shared accommodation, students, minority groups such as Gypsy and Travelling Showpeople, and self-builders.

2. **Adopt a spatial strategy that delivers sustainable patterns of development supported by new or improved infrastructure:** which positively responds to the growth and development needs of the area.
3. **Strengthen climate resilience and flood management:** by integrating sustainable drainage and natural flood management into new development; and avoiding increasing risk downstream; and through a strict application of the sequential and exception tests, and by focusing growth in lower-risk areas, including town centres/brownfield sites where appropriate.
4. **Enhance and connect Runnymede's natural environment:** by supporting the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG); protecting and enhancing habitats such as the Thames corridor and floodplain habitats; and improving ecological connectivity.
5. **Protect and enhance water and environmental quality:** by addressing pollution and runoff rates and requiring development to improve water quality outcomes.
6. **Regenerate town centres and prioritise brownfield land:** by focusing growth in Runnymede's town centres and on brownfield land in the first instance (subject to flood risk); supporting mixed-use development and the efficient use of land.
7. **Deliver sustainable transport and reduce car dependency:** by linking new development to sustainable transport provision (or enhancing provision); incorporating new/integrate with existing active travel networks; and by focusing growth near to local facilities and services.
8. **Support economic growth while maintaining quality of life:** leverage proximity to Heathrow / Thames Valley corridor, but balance this with environmental and infrastructure capacity to accommodate growth.
9. **Improve the quality and resilience of existing housing stock:** for example, through applying climate-resilient design principles and quality standards as part of regeneration and retrofit proposals (where planning permission is required).
10. **Promote healthier, safer and more inclusive communities:** by addressing homelessness and housing instability; anti-social behaviour through designing-out crime; ensuring access to high-quality green spaces; and integrating new development with community and public service infrastructure.