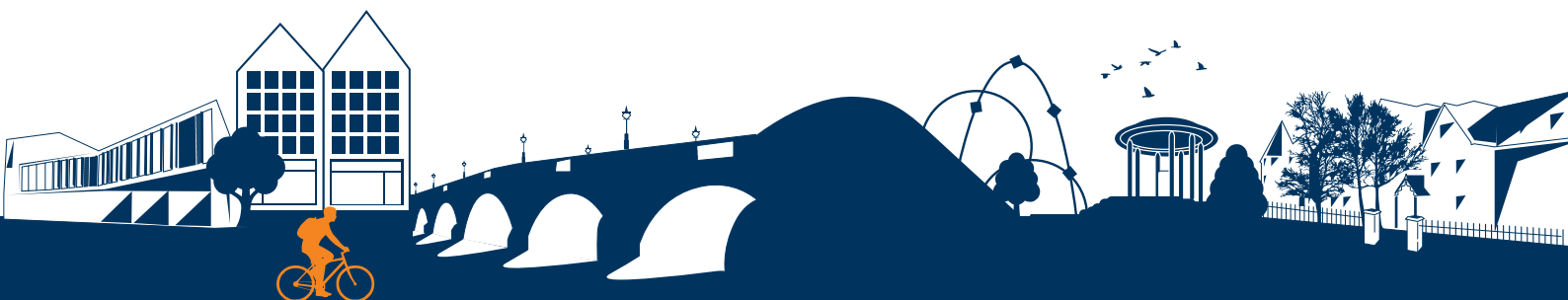


New Runnymede Local Plan



Scoping Consultation **Summary** Document

September 2026



What should
Runnymede look like
in the **future?**



What is a Local Plan and what's changed since the existing one was adopted?

A Local Plan is a document prepared by a local planning authority, in consultation with the community, which guides development and land use changes across the whole or part of an authority area over a period of no less than 10 years.

It forms part of a wider Development Plan for the area, and identifies how much housing and commercial development should be built over the plan period, and indicates where and when this should happen. It also identifies areas which should be protected and enhanced. Its policies are a material consideration for decision-makers when determining planning applications.

We need to prepare a new Local Plan in light of several changes that have happened since the adoption of the existing [2030 Local Plan](#)¹ including significant reforms to plan-making legislation and to national planning policy (including the introduction of 'National Decision-Making Policies' and 'Strategic Development Strategies'); and to address new development needs and trends.

Its preparation will be informed by a wide-ranging evidence base helping us to understand the current and future characteristics and needs of the area. A new Local Plan will also need to have regard to newly emerging plans and strategies prepared by other organisations, including Surrey County Council (West Surrey Council from 1 April 2027), government agencies and infrastructure providers.

Purpose of the scoping consultation

This 'scoping consultation' is being carried out in accordance with national legislation, to provide an opportunity for residents and organisations to help shape the new Runnymede Local Plan at an early stage of its development.

The consultation provides an opportunity to share views on the locally-specific subject matters which a future Local Plan for the Runnymede area should help address. We also want to know how you would like to be engaged during the plan-making process.

At this stage, we are not making decisions about specifics, but asking for views on the key issues facing the area, and how a Local Plan could help address them. Specific policy wording, potential site allocations and development requirements will be consulted on at a future stage of plan-making called the 'Plan Content and Evidence (PCE) Stage'.

Your feedback to this scoping consultation will help ensure the Local Plan focuses on the right priorities for local communities and other stakeholders.

Compared to the existing 2030 Local Plan, the range of policy issues that a new Plan will be able to address will be significantly reduced. This is because Local Plans are not allowed to repeat National Decision-Making Policies (NDMPs) in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), so issues addressed by them are, in the main, out of scope.

¹ <https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/planning-policy/runnymede-2030-local-plan>

Essentially, where the NDMPs are clear on how a decision-maker should react to development proposals, the Local Plan should not repeat these policies.

Examples of matters which are considered to be out of scope – and thus outside the control or scope of the Local Plan, are described as follows:

Matters considered to be outside the control of the new Local Plan:

- Matters being addressed through Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). A NSIP is a major infrastructure development that bypasses normal local planning requirements. Local examples of NSIPs are the expansion of Heathrow Airport and the River Thames Scheme.
- Matters relating to the regulation of the activities of statutory providers such as water or power companies.
- Matters which replicate or go beyond requirements of other consenting regimes (such as Building Regulations) unless national planning policy says we can do so.
- Allocating land or including policies which would be covered by a minerals and waste plan prior to the adoption of a Local Plan.
- Setting out the circumstances when submission of development viability assessment is necessary other than to set out review mechanisms to reassess viability where developer contributions are reduced below plan requirements.
- Providing additional advice on control of development outside of urban areas - as described in Topic Area 1 later in this consultation material.
- Matters relating to pollution control, including ground conditions, air, noise, water or light and the 'agent of change' principle (see glossary for definition).
- Matters relating to the assessment of effects of proposals on heritage assets, unless there are locally specific design issues to be addressed. However, the Local Plan can continue to identify Runnymede's heritage features - including non-designated heritage assets - and key issues facing them, and create a positive strategy for their conservation and enhancement.

For each topic, we have set out the locally-specific issues we think are important and why, and where relevant, reflected on whether the issues are already addressed by NDMPs (and are likely to be 'out of scope') or whether Local Plans are capable of addressing the issue (thus being 'in scope').

Topics or issues which the new Local Plan could address may evolve during plan preparation as new evidence emerges, including via responses to consultations like this.

A set of questions follows each topic area, to gauge your views on whether we have identified the key issues correctly (and if not, what we have missed) and whether you agree on whether they are in or out of scope. We recommend that you read the

detailed topic paper in order to fully understand what we consider to be in or out of scope for a new Local Plan.

The questions are repeated in one place on the digital representation form, but hard copies are also available. You can choose which questions you answer, and you do not have to answer all of them.

Topic Area 1 - A strategy for growth

We need to prepare a new Local Plan in light of new housing numbers from the Government, to support sustainable economic growth, and to ensure all our planning policies are based on up-to-date evidence.

National planning policies set out how we should seek opportunities to meet our development needs in full. The new Plan will therefore need to ensure that enough high-quality homes, offices, shops and supporting infrastructure come forward in the right places at the right time, to meet a broad spectrum of future needs, incomes and circumstances.

A new spatial strategy will need to balance this development growth with the need to protect local nature and heritage assets, whilst managing flood risk and constraints like the extent of the Green Belt. The spatial strategy will also need to ensure accessibility to community facilities and public services.

The new Local Plan will need to set out this spatial strategy for growth and other locally-specific planning policies for a period of no less than 10 years from the point of adoption of the Plan – we think a shorter 10-year period is more appropriate for our area.

The main issues that are likely to frame the approach to the spatial strategy are summarised below:

Main issues framing the approach to a sustainable spatial strategy

- Accessibility of potential development locations to day-to-day services and facilities by walking/cycling and public transport and whether less accessible locations can be made accessible by walking/cycling and public transport;
- Whether land around stations is available for development (whether in an urban or Green Belt location);
- The performance of Green Belt and potential identification of Grey Belt;
- How much development can be accommodated within the boundaries of the areas which are defined as settlements.
- Extent and severity of risk of flooding (as well as other environmental constraints);
- Availability and location of land to mitigate impacts to the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area.
- Capacity of local and wider infrastructure to absorb or grow to accommodate development. This includes the highway network, health facilities, walking and cycling infrastructure and public transport.
- The options available to expand existing settlements in a sustainable way, and/or the ability of the borough to accommodate a new settlement.

We think our initial approach should be to focus development within our main urban areas and other smaller centres - taking opportunities to intensify and densify those areas with good levels of connectivity, whilst contributing positively to local character. Our priority is the appropriate redevelopment of previously developed, 'brownfield' land.

We will also consider other sustainably located, previously developed land outside of our urban areas. However, as it is unlikely we will have enough brownfield land, so we will then need to look at potential areas of Green Belt and Grey Belt land informed by the outcomes of a Green/Grey Belt Review.

We currently do not know how much development will be directed to any area in particular, as further evidence is required to assess the suitability and appropriateness of potential locations. The draft spatial strategy and site allocations will make it clear where new development is proposed to take place, and this will be consulted on at future stages of plan-making.

We believe detailed development management policies which help determine planning applications for development sites in the Green Belt will be out of scope for the new Local Plan, as they are largely superseded by national planning policies in the new NPPF.

The following questions about this topic are included on the response form:

Q1: Do you agree that the new Local Plan should cover a period of 10 years from the point of adoption of the Plan? If not, please explain why a different time period would be more appropriate.

Q2. Do you have any views on where development should be directed in the Runnymede area, and how places should evolve to meet our identified development needs in full?

Q3. Do you agree with what the Council believes is in scope for this matter and which a new Local Plan should address? If not, please explain why.

Q4. Do you agree with what the Council believes is out of scope for this matter? If not, please explain why.

Topic Area 2 - Climate resilience and nature

Local planning authorities have a duty under the Climate Change Act to ensure planning policy contributes to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change. Since the existing Local Plan was adopted, we declared a climate change emergency, and are delivering on a climate change action plan.

We also have a duty (under the Environment Act) to conserve and enhance biodiversity, helping to drive nature's recovery. There are several sites across Runnymede which are designated in recognition of their importance for wildlife, as well as many other natural assets such as local green spaces and watercourses.

The [Runnymede Place Portrait](#)² goes into more detail about our natural environment and how a changing climate could impact the Runnymede area.

Through the new Local Plan, we will help tackle greenhouse gas emissions, recognising that in Runnymede, transport and heating buildings are key contributors to our carbon footprint. The new Local Plan will also contain policies which ensure new development is adapted to the effects of climate change such as more extreme weather events, which can bring increased risk of flooding, heatwaves, wildfires and drought.

Local planning policies can help contribute towards mitigating and adapting to climate change in Runnymede in the following ways:

- Proposing development patterns through a spatial strategy and site allocations which can help contribute to significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions e.g. by considering the distribution and location of development to reduce the need to travel and maximise opportunities to travel by foot, bike or public transport.
- Avoiding increased vulnerability and improving resilience to the effects of extreme weather and long-term climate trends such as heatwaves, wildfires, drought and flood risk e.g. by locating new development to minimise the risk of flooding (taking into account climate change predictions for increased fluvial, groundwater and surface water flood risk).
- Addressing specific risks from climate change in proposed allocations for development, and necessary adaptations, both of which should be considered for the anticipated lifetime of the development.
- Setting stronger energy and water efficiency standards for new development where they have a clear and robustly costed rationale and will not have an adverse impact on the viability and deliverability of development. The existing 2030 Local Plan set the higher water efficiency standard for new dwellings, and it is anticipated that the next Local Plan could do the same, taking into account the significant future shortfall of water resources anticipated in the area (described in the latest [Water Resources Management Plan](#)³).

² <https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/runnymede-digital-place-portrait>

³ <https://affinitywater.uk.engagementhq.com/wrmp>

- Identifying opportunities for green infrastructure provision and nature-based solutions which can safeguard and improve carbon storage, support nature recovery and resilience, and which take account of the Surrey Local Nature Recovery Strategy (see below for more details).
- Support the transition to clean power by making provision for new/enhanced renewable and low carbon energy development and associated infrastructure e.g. water supply and electricity infrastructure, and setting out measures to avoid constraints on the operation/future expansion of this infrastructure (although this may be better addressed at a sub-regional scale by Spatial Development Strategies).

Local planning policies in association with other evidence at the most appropriate level (e.g. Local Nature Recovery Strategies or River Basin Management Plans) can expand on NDMPs and help drive nature's recovery and contribute to wider environmental outcomes in the following ways:

- Set out the hierarchy of sites/areas of importance for their landscape, geological, or biodiversity value in the area.
- Identify opportunities for conservation, enhancing and recovery of landscapes, sensitive waterbodies, habitats and valuable biodiversity e.g. through the use of nature-based solutions, as described in the Surrey Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Steer the location of development, including through site allocations, in ways that use land of least environmental value e.g. away from Runnymede's limited amounts of higher quality agricultural land.
- Set out standards for green infrastructure and outdoor recreational provision (including allotments), and potentially site-specific Biodiversity Net Gain standards which exceed national requirements where justified by evidence.

The following questions about this topic are included on the response form:

Q5. Do you agree with what the Council believes is in scope for this matter and which a new Local Plan should address? If not, please explain why.

Q6. Do you agree with what the Council believes is out of scope for this matter? If not, please explain why.

Q7. Are there any further locally specific approaches or measures that should be considered in the development of the next Local Plan to address the impacts of climate change?

Q8. Are there any further locally specific approaches or measures that should be considered in the development of the next Local Plan to protect and enhance the natural environment, and help drive nature recovery?

Topic Area 3 - Meeting housing needs

Our latest evidence suggests that housing provision is a key issue for Runnymede. Runnymede's current 'local housing need' is 640 homes per year, calculated using the 'standard method' - a formula set by the Government based on local housing stock and affordability.

This is the 'unconstrained' figure – it is a starting point for establishing the 'housing requirement figure' i.e. the minimum number of homes that the Local Plan seeks to provide during the plan period, for which land will be allocated. This figure is informed and justified by evidence on land availability, constraints on development, and any other relevant matters.

As well as the quantity of homes we need, our Housing Needs Assessment predicts the type, tenure and size of homes that a new Local Plan will need to plan for, to meet a wide range of needs.

This evidence suggests that our Local Plan policies should set out a higher target for affordable housing delivery, including for 'social rented' homes (designed to be cheaper than market-rate rent).

There continues to be a need for specialist forms of accommodation, including housing for older people, purpose-built student accommodation, and traveller pitches and plots. Our Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment looks specifically at the pitch and plot needs of the Traveller community.

Our existing Local Plan sets requirements for a proportion of new dwellings to be designed to be adaptable and accessible for wheelchair users over the development's lifetime. We will look to adopt a similar policy in the new Local Plan.

We will also look at how Local Plan policies could help control applications for smaller Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), to avoid an over-proliferation of this type of development, which could lead to adverse impacts on local communities, loss of family housing and noise.

The following questions about this topic are included on the response form:

Q9. Do you agree that delivering a range of homes to meet needs, including increasing the number and range of affordable homes, is a key issue that the Local Plan should seek to address? If not, please explain why.

Q10. Do you agree with what the Council believes is in scope to address this matter and which a new Local Plan should address? If not, please explain why.

Q11. Do you agree with what the Council believes is out of scope for this matter? If not, please explain why.

Q12. Are there any further locally specific approaches or measures that should be considered to increase the number and range of affordable homes, and ensure that new homes remain affordable in the longer-term?

Q13. Do you think the Council should consider introducing an Article 4 Direction to ensure that proposals for smaller HMOs (i.e. 3-6 people living separately within the

same house) require planning permission, so that potential impacts can be fully assessed and considered?

Q14. Are there any further locally specific approaches or measures that could be considered to better support the provision of [self and custom-build homes \(Opens in new tab\)](#)?

Topic Area 4: Contributing to sustainable economic growth

Runnymede is an attractive and competitive place to conduct business, due in part to its locational advantages and good skills base. Runnymede is home to several leading research establishments and UK and European headquarters, and has a strong presence in the knowledge-based and 'createch' sectors.

The existing Runnymede 2030 Local Plan identifies several 'Strategic Employment Areas' (SEAs) which aim to preserve these locations for employment uses. However, our records show that offices are being lost to other uses - mainly residential - due to flexible permitted development rights, including in our SEAs and in areas around Egham and Chertsey in particular.

Retail, leisure, entertainment facilities, arts, office, culture and tourism development is currently concentrated in a network of centres across Runnymede, mainly in Addlestone, Chertsey and Egham town centres, where the existing Local Plan directs this type of growth. But leisure uses also occur outside these centres, including at Thorpe Park, Savill Gardens, Runnymede Meadows, Windsor Great Park and at various golf courses and other open spaces.

The new Local Plan will need to set out a clear economic vision and strategy which will positively contribute to sustainable economic growth, having regard to a range of strategies and plans, such as the National Industrial Strategy and the Council's Economic Development Strategy.

Our latest evidence suggests the way we use our employment space and centres has changed post-Brexit and Covid-19, particularly with tendencies to now work from home, and a move to internet shopping. A new Local Plan will need to support diversification of uses and identify regeneration opportunities to keep our centres vibrant places to live in, work in, and enjoy.

The new Plan will also need to protect existing and deliver additional employment floorspace over the plan period, reflecting up-to-date evidence of need in our Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA), and Retail Study.

National planning policies in the new NPPF will mean that several policies in the existing 2030 Local Plan will not need to be retained, such as those which set policies for the sequential and impact tests for main town centre uses; and those which deal with hot food takeaways. However, there is still scope to define the location and extent of town centres and 'primary shopping areas' (where retail development is to be concentrated), and areas suited for greater diversity and/or intensification of uses.

The following questions about this topic are included on the response form:

Q15. Do you agree with what the Council believes is in scope and which a new Local Plan could address to contribute towards a sustainable local economy? If not, please explain why.

Q16. Do you agree with what the Council believes is in scope and which a new Local Plan could address to ensure the vitality of Runnymede's town centres? If not, please explain why.

Q17. Do you agree with what the Council believes is out of scope for these matters? If not, please explain why.

Q18. In addition to protecting our Strategic Employment Areas, are there any other employment sites/areas that you think the Council should consider protecting? If so, please provide details, and why you think that they need to be retained.

Q19. Given the changing nature of town centres and the future challenges that they face, do you have any suggestions that could inform a strategy/vision for Runnymede's town centres, which could in turn inform the new Local Plan?

Topic Area 5 - Transport & other infrastructure

Runnymede is served by a range of transport routes, and benefits from many community facilities and public service infrastructure such as schools and libraries.

To support the new Local Plan, we will work with infrastructure providers such as utility providers, the Highway and Education Authority, NHS Integrated Care Boards and internal teams such as Community Services, to prepare an Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP). The IDP will help us understand the capacity of our existing infrastructure – including the transport network - to support the spatial strategy in the Local Plan, and what new or improved infrastructure might be needed to support planned growth.

A range of plans, strategies and studies will inform the IDP, including on transport, water supply, wastewater treatment, green infrastructure, public open space and outdoor sports provision, built community facilities and public services infrastructure.

In terms of transport, national planning policy directs us to take a ‘vision-led’ approach – starting with a collective ambition for how a place should look and feel, and then identifying a range of transport solutions to deliver those outcomes, prioritising active travel modes and sustainable transport measures in accordance with Surrey’s latest Local Transport Plan.

Surrey Local Transport Plan’s approach to transport planning:

- **Avoid** unnecessary travel by reducing the number and length of trips needed. The Plan aims to achieve this through improving planning for homes and employment sites, travel planning and levels of digital connectivity.
- **Shift** travel choices to more sustainable modes of transport, including public transport, walking and cycling, away from car use.
- **Improve** the energy efficiency of vehicles and operational efficiency of roads through technology improvements.

The new Local Plan will need to include up-to-date policies to secure improvements to infrastructure to support new development. This can be on-site as part of larger developments, or via payments towards off-site infrastructure improvements. The level of developer contributions required will need to be informed by a viability assessment, to ensure the rates do not prevent development from being delivered.

Due to a large funding gap associated with infrastructure delivery, our existing IDP and a supplementary planning document prepared by the Council differentiated between the critical, essential, high-priority and desirable infrastructure required to support growth. This helped us prioritise the delivery of on-site infrastructure and off-site developer contributions, including funds generated by planning obligations and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

The following questions about this topic are included on the response form:

Q20. Do you agree with what the Council believes is in scope which regards to transport infrastructure, which a new Local Plan could address? If not, please explain why.

Q21. Do you agree with what the Council believes is in scope with regards to other supporting infrastructure, which a new Local Plan could address? If not, please explain why.

Q22. Do you agree with what the Council believes is out of scope for these matters? If not, please explain why.

Q23. What do you consider to be the key transport issues which need to be addressed to help new development come forward?

Q24. What are the types and sizes of development proposal that you think could generate a 'significant amount of movement' in Runnymede?

Q25. Are there any other key infrastructure improvements that you think the next Local Plan covering the Runnymede area should seek to address, or safeguard land to deliver?

Topic Area 6 - Creating well-designed places

Delivering well-designed, high-quality places can be challenging given the number of considerations which need to be balanced, such as delivering enough homes to meet our needs, and making efficient use of land.

The existing 2030 Local Plan sets out several principles for well-designed places, across a number of policies, supported by our Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). New national planning policy and guidance will largely supersede these – with ‘substantial weight’ to be given to principles covering context, liveability, climate, nature, built form, public space, and identity.

New national planning policies also aim to conserve and enhance the historic environment. Whilst the new Local Plan can continue to identify Runnymede’s main heritage features and key issues facing them, national decision-making policies will largely supersede the heritage policies in our existing 2030 Local Plan.

At the same time, new national planning policies expect Local Plans to identify ways of accommodating as much as possible of the development we need on previously developed land, including by potentially setting minimum density standards. We will need to consider how this is best accommodated, accounting for the prevailing character and local context of each relevant area.

There is, however, scope to prepare locally specific design policies and standards to add further detail to these national policies, in response to local issues which would benefit from clear design expectations. For example, where an allocation site falls within a Conservation Area, site-specific requirements could help conserve and enhance the significance of the Area.

Design tools such as design guides, design codes, and masterplans can also be prepared to establish locally specific design principles and identify opportunities for making effective use of land. For example, we expect Longcross Garden Village to be informed by a site-specific design code.

We will need a better understanding of the emerging spatial strategy and potential development sites before we decide which tools will be necessary. We will also need to gather evidence to better understand existing context and character in emerging growth areas, and the capacity for sensitive change, including through increased densities.

Where design tools are considered to be necessary, we will work closely with local communities to ensure local aspirations are taken into account.

The following questions about this topic are included on the response form:

Q26. Do you agree with what the Council believes is in scope with regards to achieving well-designed buildings and places, which a new Local Plan could address? If not, please explain why.

Q27. Do you agree with what the Council believes is out of scope for this matter? If not, please explain why.

Q28. Do you agree that the focus of Runnymede design tools (e.g. masterplans or codes) should be on areas that provide the greatest opportunities for growth or change?

Q29. Do you have any views on design codes or other design tools for the different settlement areas in the Runnymede area, and whether these should come through the Local Plan, a Supplementary Plan, or Neighbourhood Plans?

Q30. Do you have any views on where in the Runnymede area density could be uplifted and/or where building upwards could help to help meet identified development needs?

Working towards a new Local Plan vision

Local planning authorities must prepare a vision as part of the Local Plan, to help set the direction for change for an area over the plan period. The vision provides the framework which will guide the Local Plan's spatial strategy and policy development.

It should set out key aims and objectives for the Runnymede area over the plan period; but it can also be used to reflect longer-term ambitions stretching beyond the plan period.

Pulling together the themes discussed in earlier sections of this consultation, and considering your comments, we will develop a vision for Runnymede that acknowledges the need for sustainable development, and which protects and enhances the characteristics and features we most value.

To help identify key priorities for Runnymede, we have considered national planning policies, and issues specific to the Runnymede area (informed by baseline information and other local evidence). We have also drawn from baseline information, to assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) that are relevant to the Runnymede area.

This SWOT analysis⁴ has been informed by internal engagement to understand wider corporate priorities, values and objectives that may be relevant for the vision (the SWOT analysis can be found at the back of this summary pack).

This exercise has helped us understand the context of the area and identify factors that are likely to have greatest impact on the direction of growth over the plan period (and potentially beyond). These are captured in the 'Key issues and spatial priorities' section⁵ at the back of this summary pack.

The following questions about this topic are included on the response form:

Q31: Do you agree that the SWOT analysis has identified all relevant strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the Runnymede area? If not, please suggest how it should be changed.

Q32: Do you agree with the locally specific issues and priorities identified by the Council that could be reflected in the draft vision? If not, please suggest how they should be changed.

⁴ Available at: <https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/downloads/file/3170/rbc-new-local-plan-swot-analysis>

⁵ Available at: <https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/downloads/file/3173/rbc-new-local-plan-issues-and-priorities>

How we plan to engage with you

We want to ensure that residents, businesses and other stakeholders have an opportunity to comment on the Local Plan, and shape what it contains.

The plan-making process includes two further consultations prior to the plan being submitted for examination:

- **June 2027:** Consultation on 'Proposed Plan content and evidence'
- **April 2028:** Consultation on 'Proposed Local Plan'

Anyone can make written representations at each of these stages, and participate in additional engagement activity taking place as part of these consultation stages.

The consultation material will be published on our website and made available in hard copy at the Civic Offices in Addlestone, and in other community facilities such as libraries across the Runnymede area.

Statutory consultees, and other organisations and individuals on our Planning Policy Consultation Database, will be automatically notified of these consultations.

In addition, we will publicise the consultations using social media (such as Facebook and LinkedIn), on noticeboards, through relevant Council communications and printed materials, and through press releases sent to local media.

The Council has drafted a Local Plan Engagement Strategy⁶ which analyses the demographic make-up of the Runnymede area, identifies its 'hard-to-reach' and historically underrepresented groups, and sets out ways of engaging with these groups and other stakeholders throughout the plan-making process. The aim of the strategy is to maximise involvement in the preparation of the new Local Plan.

The Council has also prepared a Strategic Cross-boundary Scoping Statement⁷, describing how we intend to maintain effective cooperation addressing cross-boundary issues affecting Runnymede. It outlines which bodies we are proposing to engage with, on what topics, and the ways in which we propose to engage with these bodies.

The Government is promoting a 'digital-first' plan-making system to help reduce the time it takes to produce local plans. We would therefore like written comments to be submitted online through our local plan engagement software wherever possible. This allows a much larger number of responses to be analysed more quickly.

However, we still plan to hold meetings and correspond with key stakeholders in the usual way throughout the plan-making process. This will help enable cooperation with other plan-making bodies, and support the development of a robust evidence base.

⁶ Available at: <https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/scoping-consultation/scoping-consultation-documents>

⁷ Available at: <https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/scoping-consultation/scoping-consultation-documents>

The following questions about this topic are included on the response form:

Q33: Are there other ways we should publicise the Local Plan consultations?

Q34: Is there a group or community you are aware of that find it harder to participate? If so, what steps could we take to help those groups engage?

Q35: Do you agree that our Strategic Cross-boundary Scoping Statement identifies relevant strategic matters and sets out the correct consultees and approach for engagement on these matters? If not, please explain why.

Q36: Are there any other comments you wish to make about how you would like us to engage with you during the preparation of the Local Plan?

Q37: Do you have any other views on what the new Plan should contain, which have not been covered elsewhere in the consultation?

Draft SWOT Analysis

The baseline information and evidence which the Council has gathered to date has informed the following objective assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats/challenges (SWOT) that are relevant to the area which a new Runnymede Local Plan will cover. This has helped identify Runnymede's key spatial priorities, which will, in turn, inform the new Local Plan's vision, objectives and policy requirements.

The SWOT analysis may change and evolve once feedback from the scoping consultation is taken into account.

Strengths

- Overall, Runnymede offers an attractive living environment with a strong identity.
- Relatively affluent area with most neighbourhoods in the least deprived category nationally.
- Relatively resilient local economy, despite a number of market shocks over recent years, with generally high employment, earnings, productivity and economic output.
- Skilled workforce and sustained business investment in some sectors – economically active population likely to outpace Surrey and UK averages.
- Established strength in the information and communications sector, and emerging 'createch'⁸ sector.
- Strategic location near London, with good road, rail, and Heathrow connectivity in the main.
- Strong education offer, including high-performing schools, colleges and Royal Holloway University of London.
- Wide range of leisure, tourism and recreation assets, such as Thorpe Park, Savill Garden, Virginia Water Lake, Runnymede Meadows and Pleasure Grounds, River Thames.
- Rich and diverse natural environment with locally, nationally and internationally important habitats and ecological connectivity with the wider Thames Valley.
- Rich historic and cultural landscape, including wide range of locally, nationally and internationally significant heritage assets.
- Declining carbon footprint and generally improving air quality (despite localised issues).
- Generally good quality and well-valued parks and open spaces providing a range of play and leisure options, and community facilities meeting the needs of various groups.
- Active and well-organised community groups, including neighbourhood planning forums.
- Runnymede's air quality is generally good and improving (but affected by localised exceedances associated with road traffic and strategic transport infrastructure).

Weaknesses

- Significant development constraints from Green Belt and flood risk.
- Severe housing affordability issues (both house prices and rents) and limited land supply (reflecting wider regional trends).
- Mismatch between housing supply and need leads to issues such as overcrowding and unsuitable housing.
- High unmet demand for diverse housing mix and types, particularly smaller homes and affordable housing to rent.
- Shortfall in accessible/adaptable homes for those with disabilities or whose health deteriorates over time, and ongoing need for specialist accommodation.

⁸ 'Createch' is where creativity meets technology – it combines creative sectors like film, with the technology sector, and is an area of growth for the UK (as identified in the [UK Modern Industrial Strategy](#)).

- Rising levels of homelessness reflecting wider regional affordability and housing pressures, leading to increased reliance on temporary accommodation.
- Pockets of deprivation with poorer health, education and employment outcomes.
- Uneven economic outcomes across some groups and areas, with strain caused by cost of living and unemployment.
- Weakened office market (accelerated by the pandemic and permitted development rights), has reduced town centre competitiveness.
- Longer-term trends of decline in habitat quality across some sites – particularly floodplain meadows and wetlands (though stabilising in places).
- Heavy reliance on car travel and use of strategic road network, contributing to congestion, localised environmental pollution, and emissions (transport is Runnymede's largest source of emissions).
- Limited public transport connectivity in some areas relative to others, particularly radial links (including to Heathrow airport).
- Some watercourses are below 'good ecological status' - impacted by artificial medication, nutrient enrichment and urbanisation - including the River Thames.
- Moderate increases in crime relative to wider area, concentrated in urban areas and key service locations, has affected perceptions of safety.
- Council housing stock not yet fully meeting national standards – ongoing investment to achieve full compliance and tenant satisfaction.
- Community and public service infrastructure capacity constraints in some parts of Runnymede.
- Features some parks and open spaces of poor/average quality - require ongoing improvement and investment.
- Slowing progress on emissions reduction, with transport and housing dominant sources.

Opportunities

- Respond to demographic change by delivering a more balance housing mix, including specialist, and accessible/adaptable homes.
- Expand and diversify affordable housing delivery, including through Council-led development.
- Modernise housing stock through active investment programme (including decarbonisation) and improve access to sustainable housing solutions.
- Reduce emissions through prioritising sustainable transport and active travel modes; directing growth to accessible locations; and improving energy efficiency of development.
- Support transition to low-carbon and renewable energy and improved energy security through appropriate land-use policies.
- Contributing to nature recovery (including by supporting the Surrey Local Nature Recovery Strategy), habitat restoration, tree planting, and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), particularly along Thames corridor and through improvements to and expansions of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), which in turn improves climate and flood risk resilience.
- Prioritise regeneration/intensification of brownfield land in urban areas, particularly its centres, to support housing delivery, contribute to centre vitality, and reduce Green Belt pressure.
- Deliver housing and supporting infrastructure through Longcross Garden Village, which has now secured outline planning permission.
- Transition town centres to mixed-use/multi-functional, more resilient destinations, which evolve with changing consumer behaviour.
- Leverage proximity to Heathrow and Thames Valley corridor to achieve sustainable economic growth and skills development.
- Support sector growth - particularly createch and innovation sectors – and strengthen tourism, hospitality and visitor economy (e.g. by building on wayfinding programme).
- Develop and nurture coordination between West Surrey institutions (e.g. RHUL and Surrey University) and sector clusters (e.g. TV studios) to support knowledge transfer, employment and innovation.
- Support a modal shift towards sustainable transport and active travel, as well as electric vehicles, by improving infrastructure and connectivity e.g. through the Runnymede Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and Local Street Improvement Programme.

- Work with infrastructure providers to identify capacity issues and secure the necessary funding, including through developer contributions and grant funding, to improve capacity.
- Benefit from the River Thames Scheme (RTS) – through flood mitigation, green and active infrastructure, and leisure and recreation.
- Enhance lower quality open spaces, and outdoor sports and recreation provision, to meet needs.
- Protect employment space via Article 4 Direction (coming into force in 2027).

Threats/challenges

- Predicting demographic change and planning to meet the wide-ranging needs of e.g. an ageing population, diverse groups, and evolving household make-up.
- Demand and need for affordable housing is outstripping supply, coupled with the increasingly limited capacity of housing associations to deliver the affordable homes; and viability pressures facing the sector.
- Worsening affordability, which could lead to further displacement and homelessness.
- Growth in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in some areas of Runnymede can be beneficial, but high concentrations of HMOs can also have negative impacts on residents and visitors in these areas.
- Uncertainty in higher education sector affects ability to project future housing demand.
- Increased propensity to commute amongst university students places pressure on road network.
- Rise of working from home and hybrid working impacts office demand and disperses economic activity away from town centres towards suburbs.
- Accommodating growing demand for logistics/warehousing could place pressure on road network.
- Potential expansion at Heathrow could lead to increased noise pollution, congestion and additional demand for housing/employment floorspace which haven't yet been accounted for.
- Financial pressures on Council services due to funding constraints, servicing demographic change and rising demand (e.g. for temporary accommodation).
- Development and health increasingly impacted by climate change including through flood risk, heat island effect, water availability and quality, increased storm activity and wildfires.
- Constraints from 'dry islands' (areas surrounded by land at high risk of flooding) limiting development in some areas.
- Growing pressure on infrastructure to accommodate growth (including from Grey Belt development).
- Balancing development viability pressures (affected by rising construction costs) and level of developer contributions required to secure supporting infrastructure.
- Limited capacity of existing SANG to avoid development impacts on the Special Protection Area.
- Changing consumer habits impacting vacancy rates in Runnymede's centres and high streets.
- Significant future shortfall in water resources in the South East supply area – pressure from population growth, climate change and increased demand.
- Ongoing pressure on Green Belt land due to shortage of available sites in the urban area, compounded by introduction of grey belt designation.
- Loss of employment floorspace due to expanded permitted development rights, impacting the local economy.
- Plan-making in an uncertain policy and legislation landscape (e.g. due to planning and housing reform), whilst in a period of local government reorganisation, with added complexity in conforming to an emerging Spatial Development Strategy.
- Ongoing car dependence leading to increasing congestion and pollution.
- Challenges in achieving local and national net zero targets without increased pace of change.

Draft 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 & 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 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 & 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 the Borough, 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.

Key Spatial Priorities

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 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 the Borough'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 (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.

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