

# Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update

Interim SA Report  
Non-technical Summary

February 2020

## Quality information

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# Introduction

AECOM is commissioned to undertake Sustainability Appraisal (SA) in support of the emerging Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU).

Once in place, the LPU will establish a spatial strategy for growth and change for the period to 2036, allocate sites to deliver the strategy and establish the policies against which planning applications will be determined.

SA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to minimising adverse effects and maximising the positives. Local Plans must be subject to SA.

Central to the SA process is preparation of an SA Report for publication alongside the Draft Plan. At the current time, an early draft version of the plan is published for consultation, with an 'Interim' SA Report published alongside.

This report is the Non-technical Summary (NTS) of the Interim SAI Report.

## Structure of the Interim SA Report / this NTS

SA reporting essentially involves answering the following questions in turn:

1) What has plan-making / SA involved **up to this point**?

- including in relation to 'reasonable alternatives'.

2) What are the SA findings **at this stage**?

- i.e. in relation to the draft plan.

3) What happens **next**?

Each of these questions is answered in turn below. Firstly though there is a need to set the scene further by answering the question: *What's the scope of the SA?*

## What's the scope of the SA?

The scope of the SA is reflected in a list of topics and objectives. Taken together, this list indicates the parameters of SA, providing a methodological 'framework' for appraisal.

The SA framework is presented within the table below.

*The SA framework*

Topic	Objective(s)
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve accessibility to services, amenities and facilities in particular by safe walking and cycling routes</li> <li>• Raise educational attainment, skills and training opportunities</li> </ul>
Air and wider environmental quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimise impacts arising from pollution and improve and prevent where possible</li> </ul>
Biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and enhance biodiversity, including wildlife and river corridors and networks and to maximise opportunities for building in beneficial features for biodiversity including limiting the impact of climate change</li> </ul>
Climate change adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce the risk of flooding and the resulting detriment to public well-being, the economy and the environment by ensuring no inappropriate development in any areas at risk of flooding and use sustainable drainage solutions and other solutions in line with advice from the Environment Agency where necessary</li> </ul>
Climate change mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase energy efficiency and the proportion of energy generated from renewable sources in the Borough [N.B. transport emissions considered below]</li> </ul>
Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce poverty and social exclusion</li> <li>• Improve the health and wellbeing of the population</li> <li>• Ensure a safe and secure environment</li> <li>• Create and sustain vibrant and locally distinctive communities</li> </ul>
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure high and stable levels of employment</li> <li>• Encourage 'smart' economic growth'</li> <li>• Maintain a buoyant and competitive economy with a range of jobs without adversely affecting the quality of life</li> </ul>
Historic environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect and enhance the historic environment, ensuring new development makes a positive contribution, or leads to no material harm, taking into account the setting of assets and links with the wider landscape</li> </ul>
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make provision for local housing needs by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent sustainably constructed and affordable home</li> </ul>
Land, soils and natural resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve efficiency in land use through the re-use of previously developed land, existing buildings, including the re-use of resources and remediation of previously developed land</li> <li>• Sustainably use resources (including renewable and non-renewable resources)</li> <li>• Maintain and where appropriate improve soil quality, and to ensure land affected by contamination is remediated to a condition suitable for use</li> <li>• Address waste by reducing and minimising waste as a priority and then managing waste in accordance with the waste hierarchy</li> </ul>
Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect and enhance valued landscapes and the integrity of established character areas, ensuring new development makes a positive contribution, or leads to no material harm, also recalling links with the historic environment</li> </ul>
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce road congestion on the local and strategic road network (SRN), and minimise air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from transport, by improving carefully locating new development, minimising the need to travel and supporting 'sustainable transport' modes including safe walking and cycling routes and public transport</li> </ul>
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain, and, where appropriate improve water quality (including groundwater and surface water) and to achieve sustainable water resource management of both surface and groundwater flows</li> </ul>

## Plan-making / SA up to this point

An important element of the required SA process involves assessing 'reasonable alternatives' in time to inform development of the draft proposals, and then publishing information on reasonable alternatives for consultation alongside the draft proposals.

As such, Part 1 of the Interim SA Report explains how work was undertaken to develop and appraise a 'reasonable' range of alternative approaches to the allocation of land for development, or 'spatial strategy alternatives'.

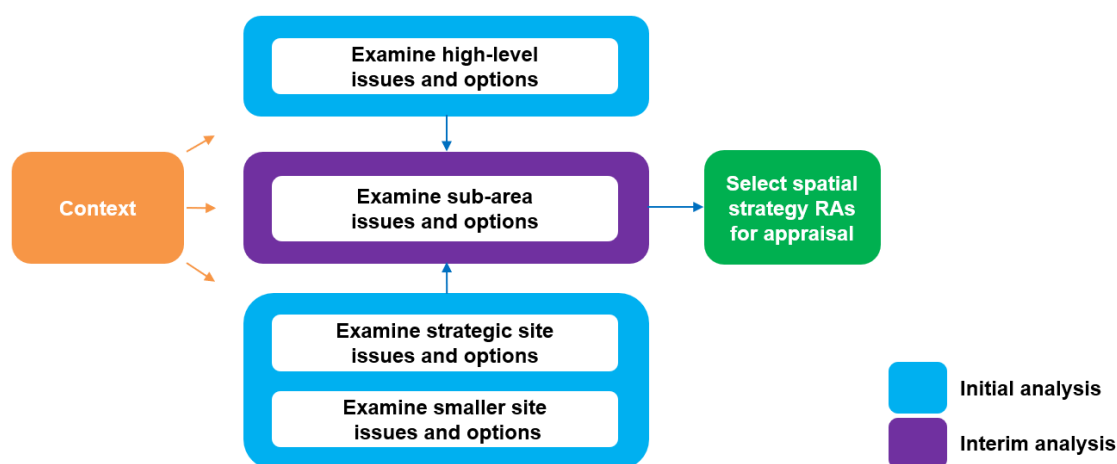
Specifically, Part 1 of the report –

- 1) Explains the process of **establishing** the reasonable alternatives
- 2) Presents the outcomes of **appraising** the reasonable alternatives
- 3) Explains reasons for **establishing** the preferred option, in light of the appraisal

### Establishing the reasonable alternatives

The main report explains how the reasonable spatial strategy alternatives were established subsequent to a step-wise process, which is summarised in the figure below.

#### *Establishing reasonable spatial strategy alternatives*



The first step was to consider high-level issues/options ('top down' factors) and the site options in contention for allocation ('bottom-up' factors); the second step was then to consider options for sub-areas (or, more precisely, clusters of site options) in isolation; finally, in light of these steps, it was possible to establish a single set of borough-wide reasonable spatial strategy alternatives.

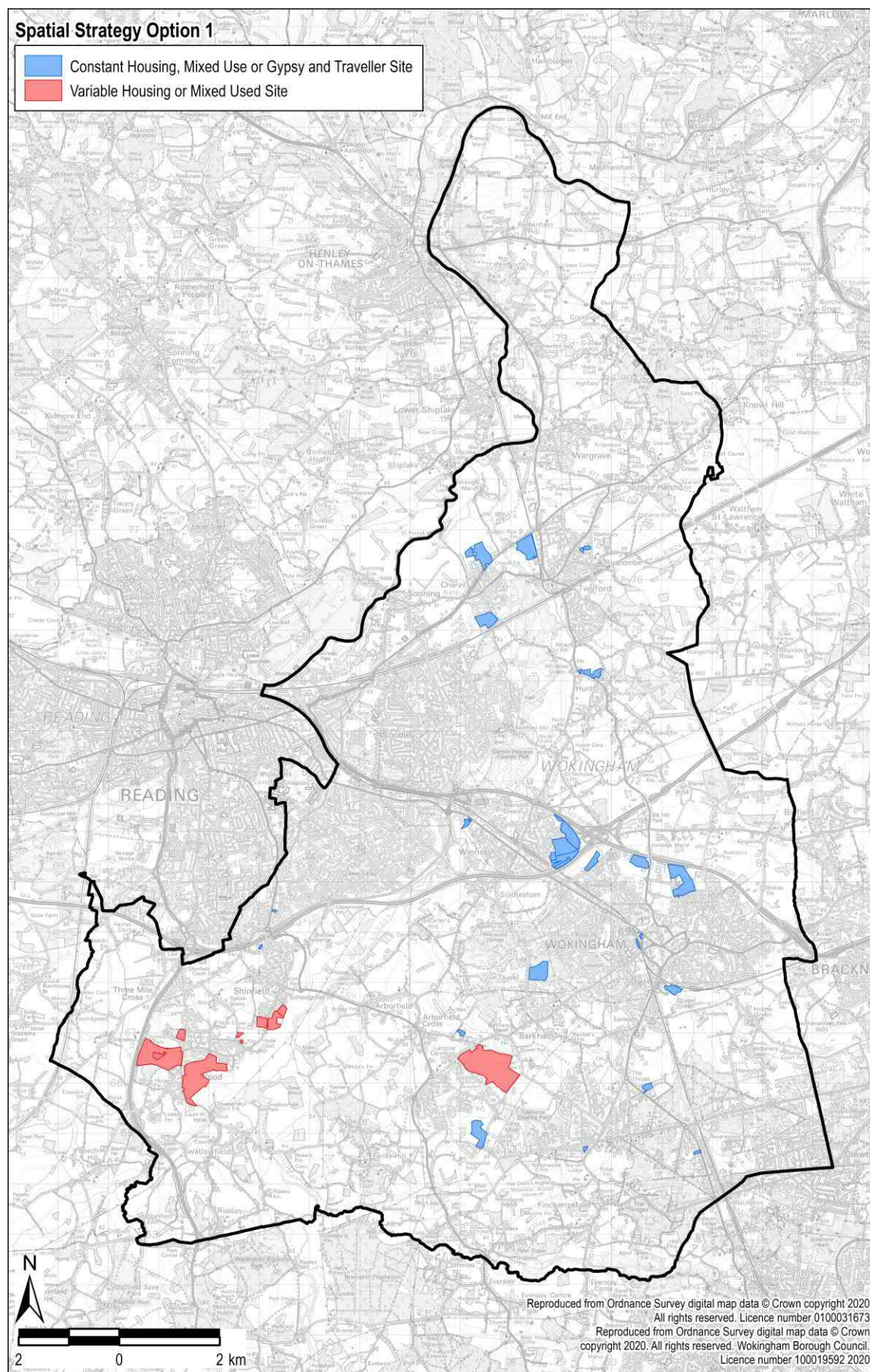
Ultimately nine reasonable spatial strategy alternatives were established, which are presented in summary within the table below and across the subsequent maps.

*The reasonable spatial strategy alternatives (with constant elements of supply greyed-out)*

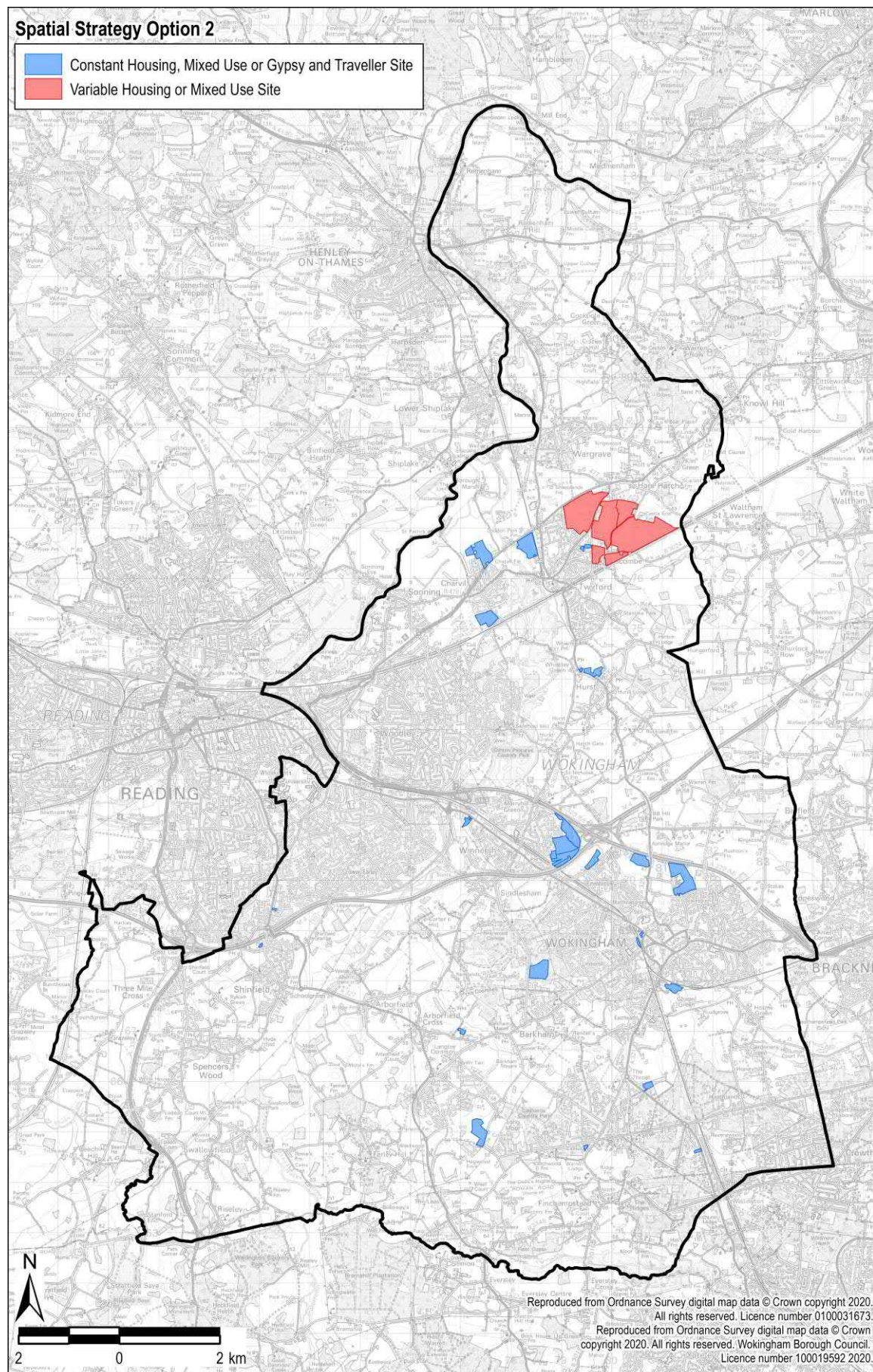
	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5	Option 6	Option 7	Option 8	Option 9
Completions	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250
Commitments	9107	9107	9107	9107	9107	9107	9107	9107	9107
Windfall	1383	1383	1383	1383	1383	1383	1383	1383	1383
Additional windfall within Wokingham TC	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
A4 corridor	330	1830	1830	1830	1830	1830	1830	330	330
Woodley	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hurst	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
North of Wokingham	250	250	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
Wokingham urban area	101	101	101	101	101	101	101	101	101
South of Wokingham	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Winnersh	270	270	270	270	270	270	270	270	270
South of the M4, west of Wokingham	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35
South of the M4, west of the A33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3750	3750
South of the M4, east of the A33	976	15	211	15	211	976	976	15	15
Arborfield area	655	155	155	655	655	155	655	155	655
Nine Mile Ride*	19	19	19	19	19	19	19	19	19
Swallowfield and Riseley	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Finchampstead	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total homes*</b>	<b>14513</b>	<b>14552</b>	<b>14748</b>	<b>15052</b>	<b>15248</b>	<b>15513</b>	<b>16013</b>	<b>16802</b>	<b>17302</b>
<b>Total homes* p.a.</b>	<b>806</b>	<b>808</b>	<b>819</b>	<b>836</b>	<b>847</b>	<b>862</b>	<b>890</b>	<b>933</b>	<b>961</b>
<b>% above LHN (804)</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>% above LHN (769)</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>25%</b>
* Includes 24 Gypsy and Traveller pitches	Increasing growth →								



*Spatial strategy option 1: Expansion of Shinfield Parish SDL plus Barkham Square*

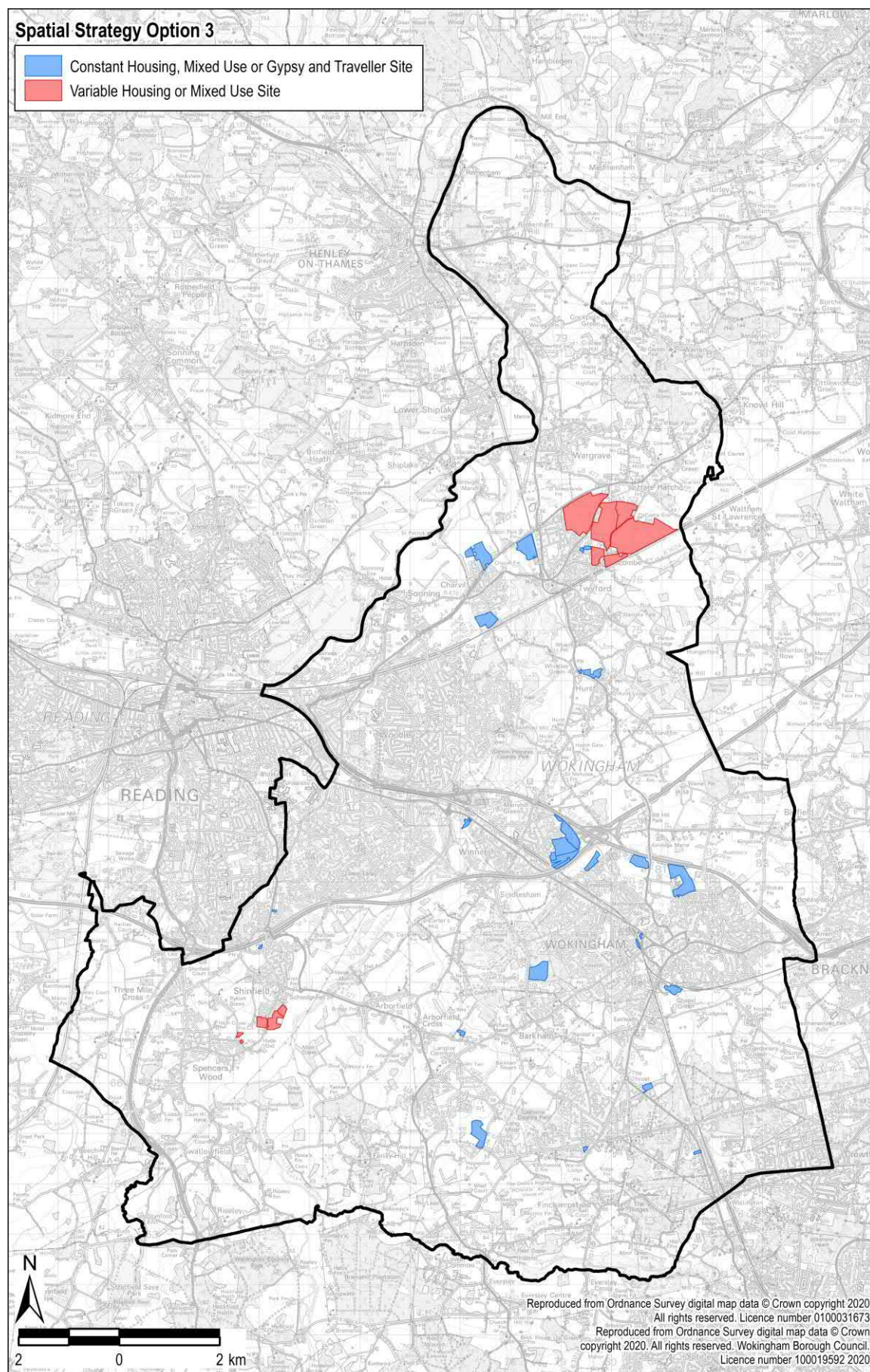




*Spatial strategy option 2: East of Twyford/Ruscombe*

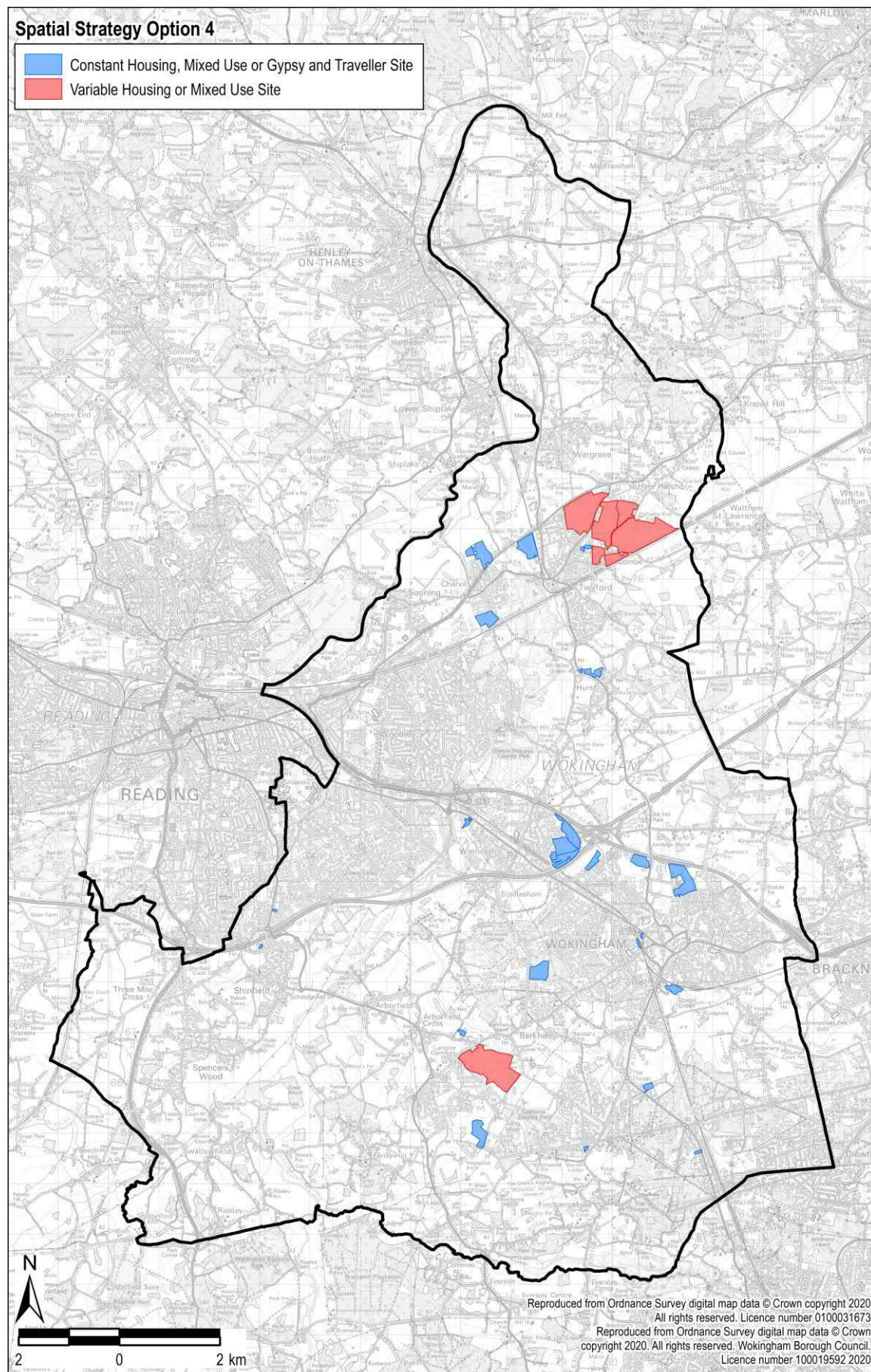


*Spatial strategy option 3: East of Twyford/Ruscombe plus HELAA potentially suitable sites in Shinfield Parish*



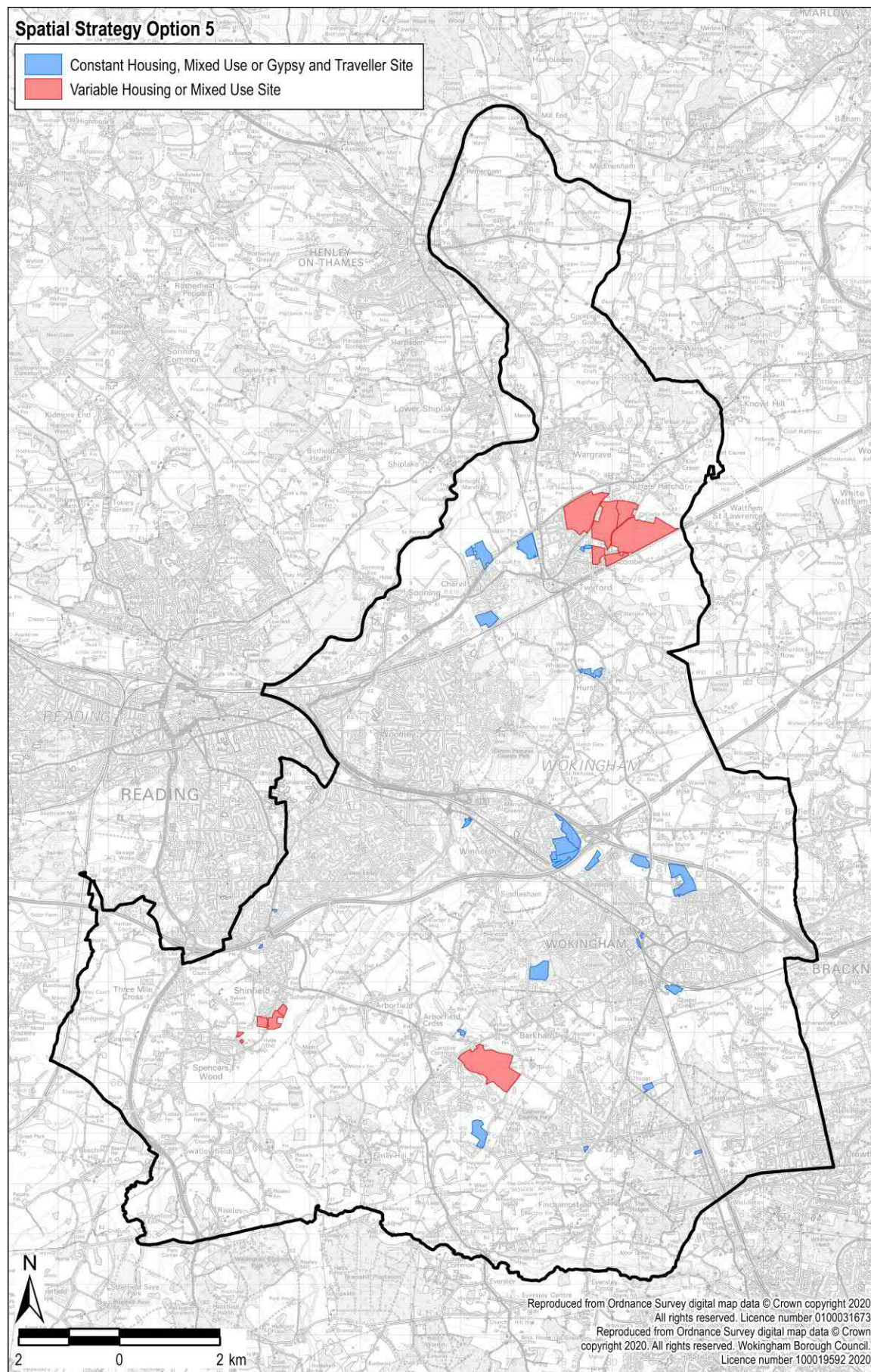


*Spatial strategy option 4: East of Twyford/Ruscombe plus Barkham Square*



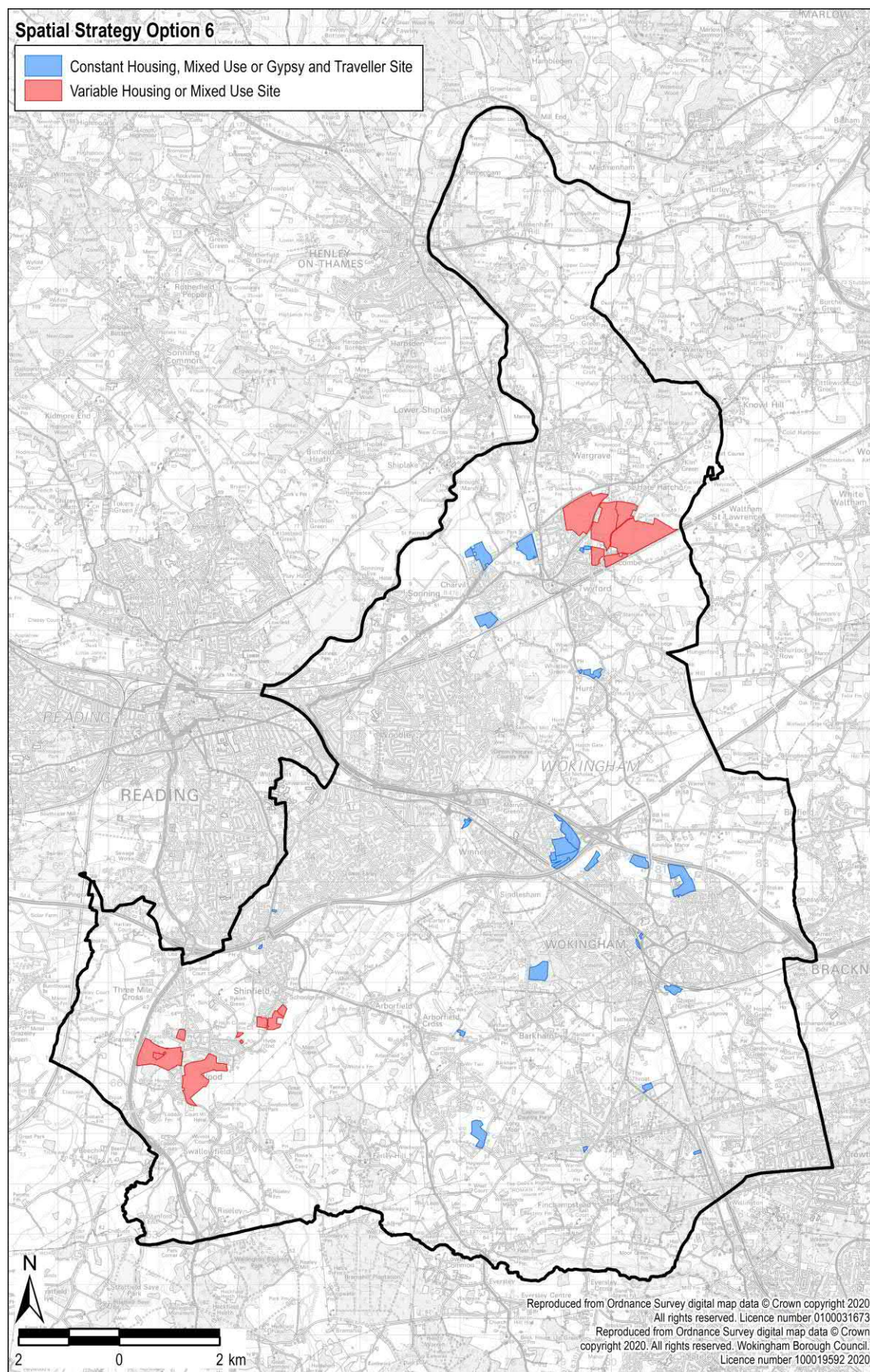


*Spatial strategy option 5: East of Twyford/Ruscombe plus HELAA sites in Shinfield Parish plus Barkham Square*



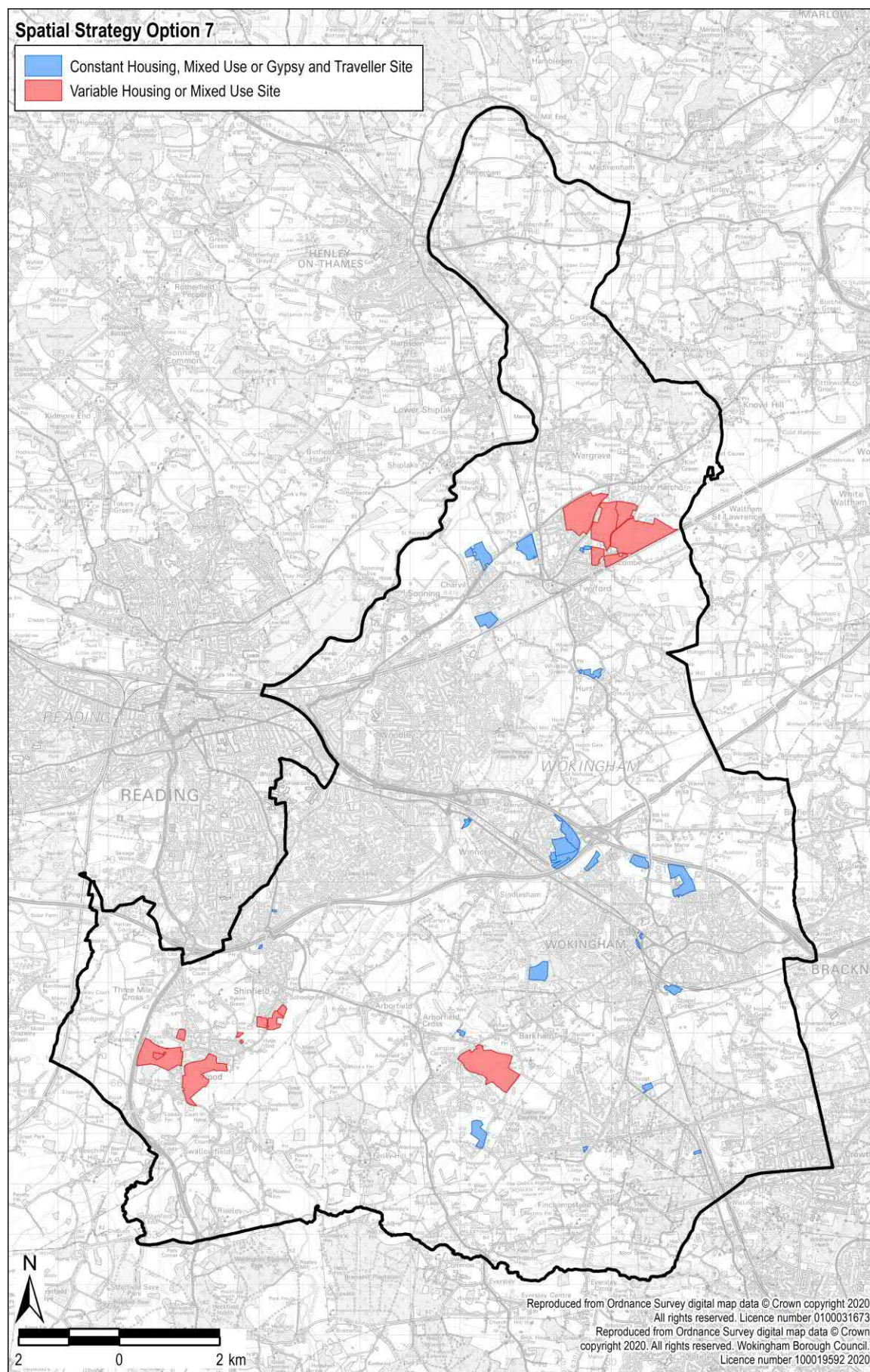


*Spatial strategy option 6: East of Twyford/Ruscombe plus Shinfield Parish SDL expansion*



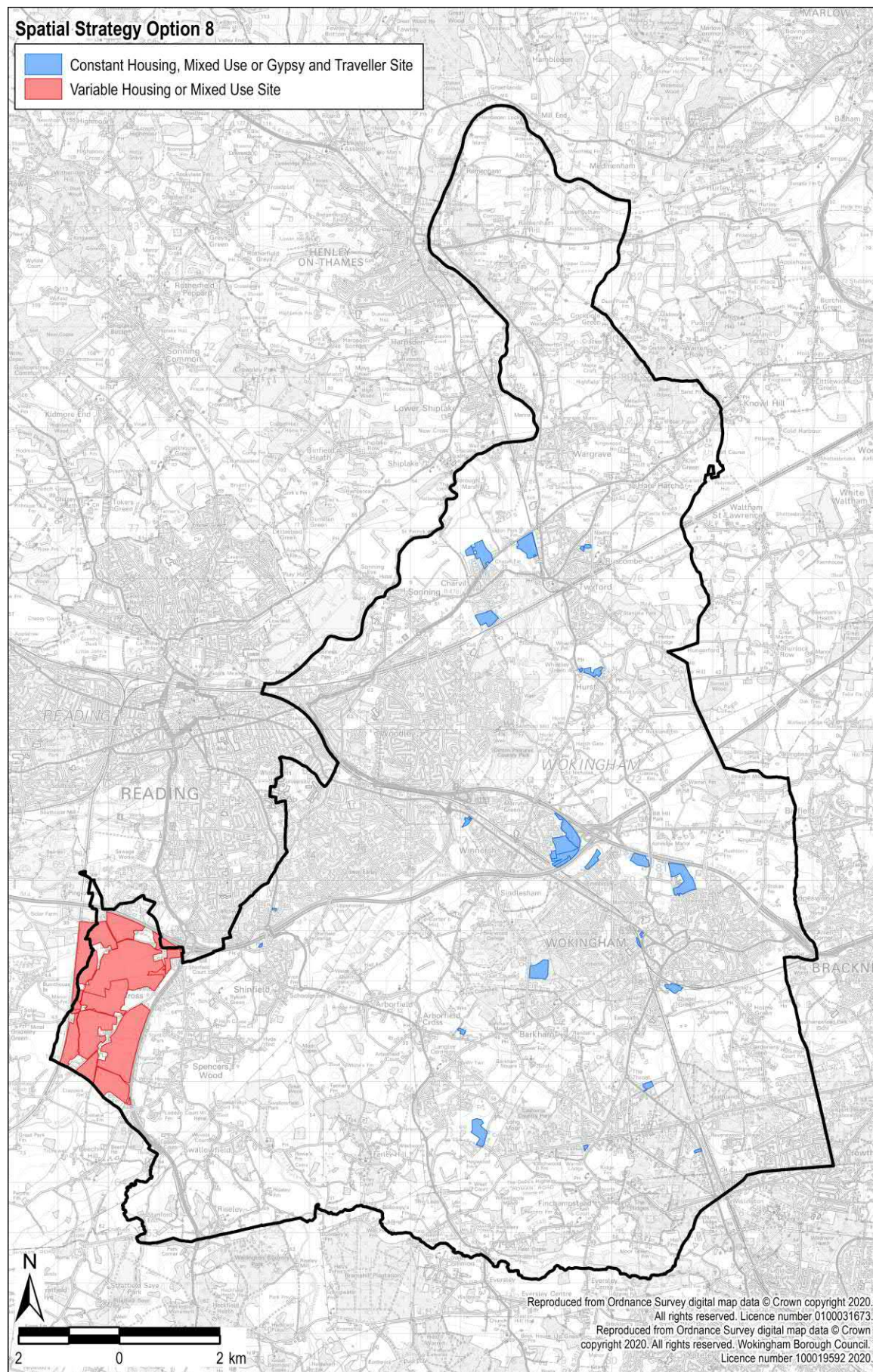


*Spatial strategy option 7: East of Twyford/Ruscombe plus Shinfield Parish SDL expansion plus Barkham Square*



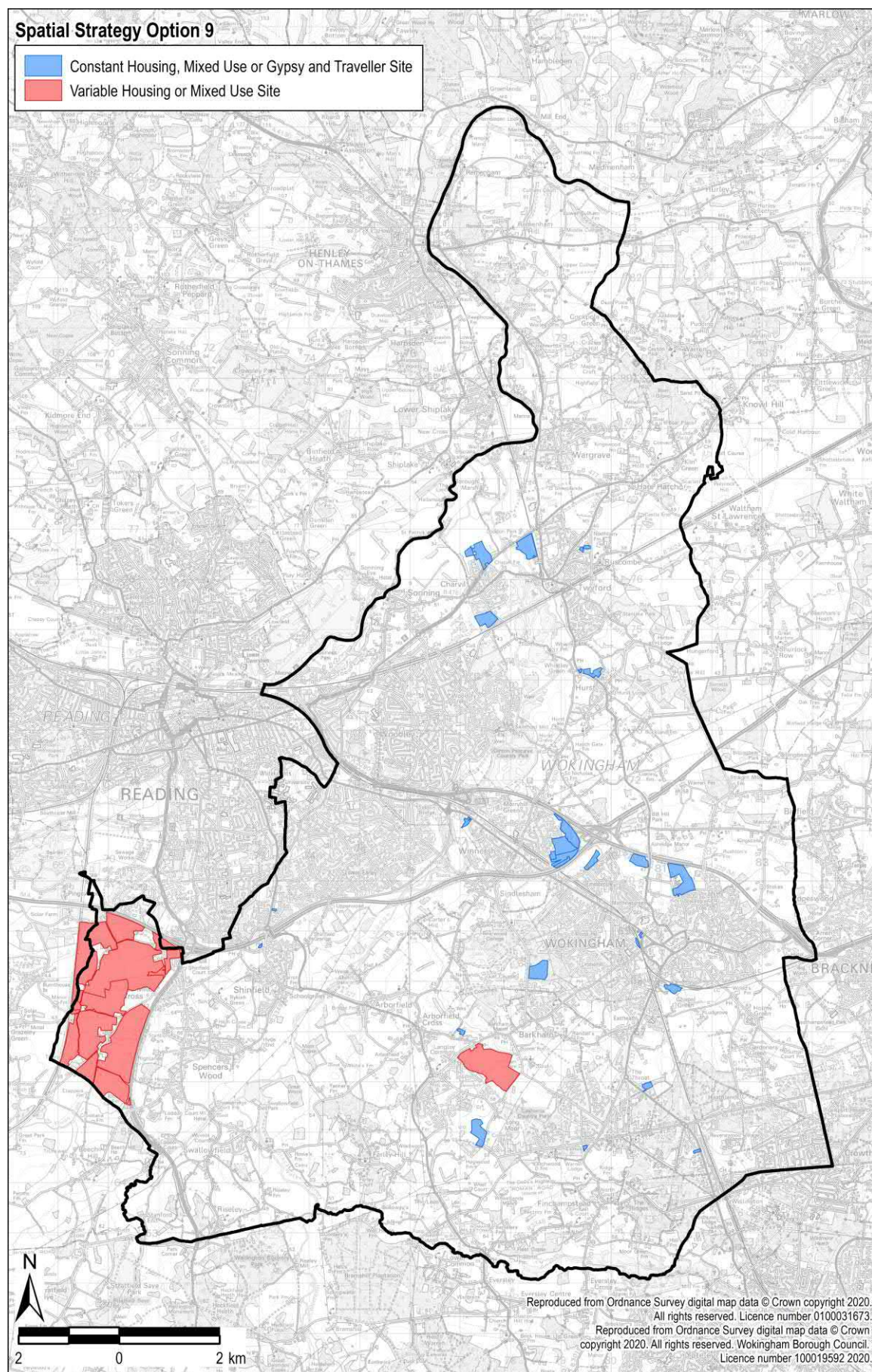


## Spatial strategy option 8: Grazeley





## Spatial strategy option 9: Grazeley plus Barkham Square



## Appraising the reasonable alternatives

Summary alternatives appraisal findings are presented within the table below. Within each row (i.e. for each of the topics that comprise the SA framework) the columns to the right hand side seek to both categorise the performance of each option in terms of 'significant effects' (using red / green) and also rank the alternatives in order of performance. Also, '=' is used to denote where it not possible to differentiate the alternatives with any confidence.

### Summary of spatial strategy alternative findings

	Categorisation of significant effects and rank of preference								
	Option 1 M4 SDL L Barkham	Option 2 A4	Option 3 A4 M4 SDL L	Option 4 A4 Barkham	Option 5 A4 M4 SDL L Barkham	Option 6 A4 M4 SDL H	Option 7 A4 M4 SDL H Barkham	Option 8 Grazley	Option 9 Grazley Barkham
Accessibility	6	2	5	5	5	3	4	1	3
Air and wider env quality	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
Biodiversity	2	2	3	2	3	4	4	1	1
Climate change adaptation	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	3	3
Climate change mitigation	4	2	3	3	3	3	3	1	2
Communities	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	2
Economy	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2
Historic environment	2	3	3	4	4	3	4	1	2
Housing	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	2	1
Land, soils and natural resources	1	2	3	2	3	4	4	1	1
Landscape	=	=	=	=	=	=	=	=	=
Transportation	4	1	2	3	3	2	3	1	4
Water	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?



## Summary discussion

A headline conclusion is that Option 8 stands out as performing well in terms of a number of topics, both in relative and in absolute terms. However, it does not necessarily follow that Option 8 is best or 'most sustainable' overall, noting that it performs less well in terms of certain objectives, most notably flood risk, and noting that the topics are not assigned any particular weight / degree of importance.

Having made this initial point, the following bullet points present summary conclusions for each of the sustainability topics in turn:

- **Accessibility** – Option 2 and (in particular) Option 8 perform well as there would be a focus of growth at large-scale strategic sites, namely East of Twyford/Ruscombe and Grazeley respectively, hence there would be excellent potential to deliver community infrastructure alongside new housing. Option 1 performs poorly as this would essentially represent a dispersal strategy, although there would be a focus on SDL expansion which could potentially be supportive of community infrastructure delivery / ensuring good access.
- **Air and wider environmental quality** – Options involving strategic expansion to the east of Twyford/Ruscombe (Options 2 to 7) perform well as the assumption is that any such scheme would deliver a new relief road (or, at least, partial relief road) to the benefit of the town centre air quality management area (AQMA). However, it is not possible to conclude the likelihood of significant positive effects as spatial strategy options would also involve a relatively high growth strategy at Charvil, which could lead to increased car movements through the Twyford AQMA.
- **Biodiversity** – Options involving expansion of the South of the M4 (Shinfield Parish) SDL are judged to perform relatively poorly; however, there is considerable uncertainty, and this conclusion may be somewhat marginal. There may be the potential to achieve an overall biodiversity net gain at the Wokingham scale (or, more importantly, at functional landscape scales); however, there is no certainty at this stage ahead of detailed site specific proposals (which should ideally reflect established strategic priorities). There may be a particular opportunity to deliver targeted strategic green infrastructure at larger sites, e.g. Grazeley.
- **Climate change adaptation** – there are a number of sites - both sites that are a constant across the spatial strategy alternatives and those that are a variable - that intersect or abut a fluvial flood risk zone and/or are affected by extensive surface water flood risk, hence it is appropriate to 'flag' a risk of significant negative effects under all alternatives. However, it is recognised that there will be good potential to avoid and mitigate risk through masterplanning and design measures, including delivery of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS). Options 8 and 9 give rise to a particular concern as Grazeley is associated with the valley of the Foudry Brook.
- **Climate change mitigation** – the appraisal under this topic heading focuses on the matter of minimising per capita greenhouse gas emissions from the built environment, on the basis that emissions from transport are more appropriately considered separately under the 'transport' heading. The appraisal findings reflect an assumption that a focus of growth through large scale strategic schemes can enable delivery of low carbon infrastructure and/or achievement of standards of sustainable design and construction that exceed building regulations and, in turn, help to minimise per capita greenhouse gas emissions from the built environment.
- **Communities** – noting that the matter of accessibility to community infrastructure has already been discussed above, the discussion under this topic heading focuses on: safety considerations relating to AWE Burghfield; the need to minimise the negative impacts of housing growth on existing communities; and the need to support Gypsy and Traveller communities within the Borough. The appraisal serves to highlight spatial strategy options involving a focus of growth at Grazeley as performing relatively well, as there would be the potential to deliver a thriving new community and also avoid impacts to existing communities to a large extent. At the other end of the spectrum, there are concerns regarding impacts to existing communities associated with expansion to the east of Twyford/Ruscombe (in particular given impacts to Ruscombe) and expansion of the Shinfield Parish SDL (where committed growth needs time to 'bed in', including from an infrastructure capacity perspective).
- **Economy** - spatial strategy options involving a focus of growth at Grazeley stand-out as performing well, as the scheme would deliver targeted new employment floorspace as part of a mixed use new community; however, it is possible to conclude only a modest significant positive effect as there is understood to be limited need for new employment land locally. Other spatial strategy options would not facilitate delivery of significant new employment land, although all options would concentrate housing in locations close to existing and committed employment growth locations, e.g. Thames Valley Science Park at Shinfield.

- **Historic environment** - spatial strategy options involving strategic expansion to the east of Twyford/Ruscombe perform relatively poorly, as there would inevitably be impacts to the landscape setting of the Ruscombe Conservation Area, and there is also a degree of concern associated with Barkham Square due to the proximity of Arborfield Cross Conservation Area. There are also a range of other, potentially less significant, concerns associated with other growth locations, both those that are a variable across the alternatives and those that are a constant, hence it is appropriate to flag the risk of significant negative effects under all of the alternatives.
- **Housing** - whilst there are spatial distribution and site specific considerations, an overriding consideration is the need to allocate sites with a total yield that suitably exceeds ('buffers') the established (or, at least, agreed) LHN figure. As such, the reasonable spatial strategy alternatives are placed in an order of preference according to total housing quantum, with one exception. Specifically, Option 7 is judged to perform equally as well as Option 8, despite involving the allocation of sites with a lower total yield, as there would be a good mix of sites and, in turn, reduced risk of unanticipated delays to delivery.

With regards to effect significance, it is possible to conclude that Options 1 to 3 would lead to significant negative effects, on the assumption that LHN would be used as the basis for setting the Local Plan housing target and that the requirement would be for this target to be achieved via a steady trajectory over the plan period. This is on the basis that the total quantum of homes provided for through committed/allocated sites would *at best* exceed LHN by 7%, which is a small buffer to account for the risk of delays to delivery. Options 4 to 6, would also give rise to a risk that housing supply would fall below the required trajectory at some point. Options 7 and 8 are associated with a good degree of confidence regarding the potential to meet the required housing supply trajectory, although there remains a degree of risk. Finally, Option 9 performs very well, and it could potentially even be the case that there is capacity for Wokingham Borough to provide for unmet needs arising from elsewhere.

- **Land, soils and natural resources** – whilst there is uncertainty in the absence of consistent data on agricultural land quality, it is appropriate to highlight spatial strategy options involving expansion east of Twyford/Ruscombe as performing relatively poorly (the national low resolution/accuracy dataset shows the Borough's highest quality agricultural land to be concentrated in this area), and also to flag a degree of concern associated with spatial strategy options involving a focus of growth at Grazeley and Shinfield Parish SDL. These are the 'variable' sites that are known to be associated with best and most versatile agricultural land, although there are also a number of 'constant' sites that are also subject to this constraint, hence significant negative effects are predicted for all of the spatial strategy alternatives.
- **Landscape** - there is some reason to suggest that a strategic expansion to the east of Twyford/Ruscombe stands out as giving rise to particular concerns, particularly given the Green Belt constraint; however, there is no certainty given the available evidence / ahead of further detailed work to consider the possibility of establishing a robust Green Belt boundary (and also offset impacts through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land, as per NPPF requirements).
- **Transportation** - spatial strategy options involving a focus of growth at either Grazeley or East of Twyford/Ruscombe perform relatively well. There is much uncertainty ahead of further detailed work; however, a focus of growth at either location would represent a significant opportunity to deliver growth in such a way that minimises need to travel and car dependency, and hence ultimately minimises per capita greenhouse gas emissions from transport and also traffic congestion. It is also appropriate to flag a concern associated with Option 9 as a high growth option, given traffic congestion issues ahead of detailed transport modelling.
- **Water** - the Water Cycle Study (WCS, 2019) serves to generate confidence in the ability to deliver any reasonable spatial strategy option without risking significant negative effects to the water environment, but does not enable confident differentiation between the sites that are a variable across the spatial strategy alternatives. Growth loading pressure on Wargrave WwTW and (in particular) Arborfield WwTW potentially leads to a degree of concern, and it is also noted that the Twyford Brook stands-out as the only watercourse in the Borough that is assigned 'poor' status under the Water Framework Directive; however, there will be good potential to deliver upgrades to WwTWs and also high quality SuDS.

## Establishing the preferred option

The following is the response of the Borough Council's officers to the appraisal / reasons for supporting the preferred option (Option 8) -

The Council's current planning policies are contained in the Core Strategy (adopted 2010) and Managing Development Delivery (MDD) (adopted 2014) local plans. The strategy established by our existing local plans focus the majority of development in the four Strategic Development Locations (SDL) (North and South Wokingham, Arborfield Garrison and Shinfield/Spencers Wood/Three Mile Cross), with a lesser level of development supported within towns and villages subject to consideration of accessibility and impacts. This approach has enabled significant new infrastructure to be delivered alongside new homes so helping to mitigate impacts and allowing us opportunity to retain the character of our towns and villages through actions such as the retention of gardens. It is important for the Council to continue to support the delivery of these commitments.

The four SDLs will continue to make a significant contribution to meeting housing and other development needs going forward, however further land is required to help meet the longer term needs and to address a new government requirement that a proportion of new housing is delivered on small sites.

The Council's preferred approach to meeting further development needs is the creation of a garden town at Grazeley (Option 8). This is the most sustainable and suitable option to meet the majority of additional housing needs in the plan period to 2036 and beyond into the 2050s. It offers the opportunity to create new community, well supported by infrastructure so limiting the need to travel by car for everyday journeys, and with rail link to both Reading and Basingstoke, and dedicated public transport routes into Reading, providing a viable alternative to the car.

The creation of the garden town has been investigated jointly with West Berkshire District Council and Reading Borough Council. To achieve the upfront delivery of key infrastructure, a joint bid to the government's Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) has been made for £252m. A successful outcome will enable a wide package of infrastructure including measures designed to mitigate traffic effects.

The delivery of a garden town at Grazeley supplements the location of existing SDLs. It also provides economic benefits with the scale providing opportunity to plan employment as part of the new community.

The Council considers that the potential weakness of flood risk at Grazeley can be managed to avoid impacts to the proposed development and the land beyond. This will be addressed in detail through detailed masterplanning.

Whilst the creation of a garden town at Grazeley means that fewer new opportunities for new building are required elsewhere in the borough, the Council recognises that the four SDL provide significant existing opportunity for buying or renting housing across the majority of the borough. Notwithstanding, the Council preferred approach supports limited development across a range of settlements, including those in the northern parishes where there is no existing SDL.

In summary, taking both the positive and negative effects into account, the Council considers Option 8 to be, at present, the most sustainable basis for its spatial strategy for the emerging LPU. The other reasonable alternatives have various merits, however all are assessed as having less positive and more negative effects.

# Appraisal findings at this stage

Part 2 of the Interim SA Report presents an appraisal of the Draft LPU, as a whole as a series of narratives under the 13 'SA framework' topic headings. The conclusions of each narrative are repeated below.

## Accessibility

The proposed concentration of growth at Grazeley enables a conclusion to be reached that the proposed spatial strategy would lead to **significant positive effects**, and the proposed development management policies are supportive of this conclusion, albeit there remains the potential to further strengthen the requirements that will apply to Grazeley and other proposed sites, taking account of development viability. Aside from Grazeley, the proposed package of smaller allocations is broadly supported, although a recommendation is made in respect of ensuring that the strategy for Charvil, which can be described as relatively high growth, is in-line with objectives relating to accessibility to community infrastructure.

## Air and wider environmental quality

The appraisal raises certain concerns regarding the proposal to allocate seven sites for a total of 345 homes in proximity to the Twyford town centre AQMA, and also the proposal to allocate four sites in proximity to a motorway grade road or a railway line; however, on balance it is not clear that there is the potential to conclude the likelihood of 'significant' negative effects, taking account of proposed development management policy. There will be a need for further detailed work ahead of plan finalisation. **Significant effects are not predicted** at the current time, either positive or negative.

## Biodiversity

The proposed spatial strategy seeks to direct the majority of growth to areas with limited sensitivity, from a biodiversity perspective, although the appraisal identifies a degree of concern in respect of the proposed strategy at Charvil/Twyford and in the Arborfield/Nine Mile Ride area. A focus of growth at Grazeley is tentatively supported; however, that is not to suggest that the site is without its sensitivities, recognising that a defining feature of the site is the floodplain of the Foudry Brook and also noting a large area of priority habitat. There will be a need for detailed work to confirm that the spatial strategy is conducive to achieving a suitable gain in biodiversity at the Wokingham scale or (ideally) all affected functional landscape scales. **Significant effects are not predicted** at the current time, either positive or negative.

## Climate change adaptation

Grazeley is strongly associated with the valley of the Foudry Brook, and hence there is a degree of concern ahead of detailed work to confirm the potential to deliver a successful new town whilst avoiding flood risk from all sources; however, initial work has been undertaken, and the findings are reflected in the proposed site specific policy, which serves to reduce concerns. Nevertheless, there is a need to flag the risk of an **uncertain significant negative effect** associated with the Local Plan as a whole, given that a significant proportion of the package of smaller allocations intersect a flood risk zone. There will be good potential to avoid and mitigate risk through development management, and policies are proposed through the plan to ensure that this is the case; however, an element of residual risk remains at the current time.



## Climate change mitigation

In conclusion, the proposal to focus growth at Grazeley is strongly supported, as the economies of scale associated with a scheme of this scale should lead to an excellent opportunity to deliver decentralised heat and/or power generation from renewable or low carbon sources and deliver development to high standards of 'sustainable design and construction'; however, there is a need for further details regarding the particular constraints/opportunities associated with the site. With regards to effect significance, there is inherently no potential to conclude highly significant effects as climate change mitigation is a global issue, such that local actions can have only a very limited effect; however, on the other hand, a national climate emergency has been declared, which serves to highlight the urgency of departing from the status quo. Having made these points, it is fair to conclude **moderate/uncertain significant positive effects**.

## Communities

The proposal to focus growth at Grazeley is broadly supported, as there would be the potential to deliver a thriving new community and also minimise impacts on existing communities (although it is important to recall that the site is constrained by proximity to AWE Burghfield). The proposed package of smaller site allocations is also broadly supported, in particular noting that these sites were identified as suitable for allocation following engagement with town and parish councils. It is fair to conclude **uncertain significant positive effects** overall, recognising that detailed site-specific proposals are emerging at this stage. Ahead of consultation there also remains a degree of uncertainty regarding the suitability of the proposed strategy for meeting Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs.

## Economy

The proposal to focus growth at Grazeley performs well as the scheme would deliver targeted new employment floorspace, and there is also support for expansion of Thames Valley Science Park. These proposals are in line with the economic evidence-base, which suggests limited need for new employment space in the Borough, given the pipeline of committed supply. The proposed suite of development management policies is also strongly supported, with these policies having an important role to play in a number of respects, e.g. ensuring protection of existing employment land and supporting thriving town centres. Taking the plan as a whole, i.e. spatial strategy and development management policy, it is possible to conclude the likelihood of **significant positive effects**.

## Historic Environment

In conclusion, whilst the proposed focus of growth at Grazeley is broadly supported (subject to policy being formulated in respect of appropriately integrating historic environment considerations), other elements of the proposed strategy give rise to a degree of concern, perhaps most notably the proposed allocation of Ashridge Farm within the North Wokingham SDL. A robust framework of development management policies is proposed, but a degree of residual concern remains, hence it is appropriate to flag **uncertain/moderate significant negative effects** at this stage.

## Housing

An overriding consideration is the need to allocate sites with a total yield that suitably exceeds ('buffers') the established (or, at least, agreed) LHN figure, and to allocate a good mix of sites conducive to ensuring a steady trajectory of housing supply across the plan period. In this respect the proposed spatial strategy is broadly supported, although there is inherently a degree of risk associated with a focus of growth at a new settlement, namely Grazeley. The proposed framework of development management policies is also broadly supported, including Policy H5 which relates to the crucial matter of requiring provision of affordable housing alongside market housing. With regards to effect significance, it is appropriate to predict **uncertain significant positive effects** at this relatively early stage in the plan-making process, recognising that further evidence regarding housing delivery timescales and plan viability may come to light through consultation.

## Land, soils and natural resources

A primary consideration relates to the performance of the proposed spatial strategy in respect of avoiding the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land. In this respect, there is a degree of concern associated with the focus of growth at Grazeley and also at Charvil/Twyford. It seems likely that there will be a significant loss of best and most versatile agricultural land, hence there is a need to predict **significant negative effects**.

## Landscape

The proposed spatial strategy seeks to direct the great majority of growth to areas with limited sensitivity, from a landscape perspective, noting that sites have been selected following engagement with town and parish councils, although the appraisal identifies a degree of concern in respect of the proposed expansion to the north of Charvil (85 homes). A focus of growth at Grazeley is tentatively supported; however, that is not to suggest that the site is without its sensitivities, given the description of a “highly rural landscape” presented within the Landscape Character Assessment. On balance, at this relatively early stage in the plan-making process, **uncertain significant negative effects** are predicted given the potential to avoid and mitigate impacts through masterplanning and design.

## Transportation

A focus of growth at Grazeley is supported as a major new settlement in this location, representing a significant opportunity to deliver growth in such a way that minimises need to travel and car dependency, and hence ultimately minimises per capita greenhouse gas emissions from transport and also traffic congestion; however, there is much uncertainty ahead of further detailed work. **Significant effects are not predicted** at the current time, either positive or negative.

## Water

The Water Cycle Study does not serve to highlight any major constraints to growth; however, there remains considerable uncertainty, in respect of risks to the water environment, ahead of further work, perhaps most notably in respect of waste water treatment capacity to serve Grazeley garden town. Having said this, concerns are reduced by the proposal to (paraphrasing) “champion climate resilience and adaptation through design and construction methods and deliver high standards of water efficiency with the aim of being water neutral in areas of serious water stress.” **Significant effects are not predicted** at the current time, either positive or negative, recognising good potential to address water environment issues/impacts at the development management stage; however, there is some uncertainty.

## Overall conclusions on the Draft LPU

The final section of Part 2, within the main report presents an overall conclusion. In summary, the conclusion of the appraisal is:

- Significant positive effects are predicted in respect of **Accessibility** and the **Economy**
- Uncertain or moderate significant positive effects are predicted in respect of **Climate change mitigation**, **Communities** and **Housing**.
- A broadly neutral conclusion is reached in respect of **Air quality**, **Biodiversity**, **Transport** and **Water**.
- Uncertain or moderate significant negative effects are predicted in respect of **Climate change adaptation**, **Historic environment** and **Landscape**.
- Significant negative effects are predicted in respect of **Land, soils and natural resources**.

The conclusion also discusses key ‘larger than local’ considerations relating to Grazeley, transport infrastructure, employment land, the Thames Basin Heaths SPA and ‘landscape-scale net gain’ considerations, and also discussed ten specific recommendations to be considered by the Council.

# Next Steps

## Publication of the Proposed Submission LPU

Subsequent to the current consultation it is the intention to prepare the proposed submission version of the LPU for publication in-line with Regulation 19 of the Local Planning Regulations 2012. The Proposed Submission LPU will be that which the Council believes is 'sound' and intends to submit for Examination. Preparation of the Proposed Submission LPU will be informed by the findings of this Interim SA Report, responses to the current consultation and additional evidence / appraisal work.

The SA Report will be published alongside the Proposed Submission LPU. It will provide all the information required by the SEA Regulations 2004.

## Submission, examination and adoption

Once the period for representations on the Proposed Submission LPU / SA Report has finished the main issues raised will be identified and summarised by the Council, who will then consider whether the LPU can still be deemed 'sound'. If this is the case, the LPU will be submitted for Examination, alongside a statement setting out the main issues raised during the consultation. The Council will also submit the SA Report.

At Examination the Inspector will consider representations (alongside the SA Report) before then either reporting back on soundness or identifying the need for modifications. If the Inspector identifies the need for modifications to the LPU these will be prepared (alongside SA if necessary) and then subjected to consultation (with an SA Report Addendum published alongside if necessary).

Once found to be 'sound' the LPU will be formally adopted by the Council. At the time of adoption a 'Statement' must be published that sets out (amongst other things) 'the measures decided concerning monitoring'.

## Monitoring

The SA Report must present 'measures envisaged concerning monitoring'.

At the current time, in-light of the appraisal findings presented in Part 2 (i.e. predicted effects and uncertainties), it is suggested that monitoring efforts might focus on:

- Air quality – the Council might review how air quality monitoring efforts are targeted in light of the Local Plan, including with a view to both understanding how air quality is changing over time within AQMAs and identifying problem areas outside of the existing designated AQMAs.
- Biodiversity – the Council might look into updating the Biodiversity Monitoring Report, which has not been updated since 2016. There will also be a need to develop a framework for ensuring that individual developments deliver a biodiversity net gain in combination at landscape / functional scales.
- Climate change adaptation – the Council might monitor housing in close proximity to a fluvial flood zone and also homes intersecting the 1 in 30 year surface water flood zone.
- Climate change mitigation – there will be a need to monitor the proportion of new homes that come forward at sites linked to a district heating network, or which benefit from decentralised heat or power generation in some way, and also the proportion of homes delivered to standards of sustainable design and construction that exceed building regulations.
- Housing – the Council already monitors numerous housing delivery related matters through the Annual Monitoring Report, and the list of indicators should be kept under review.
- Transport – at Grazeley garden town there will be merit to monitoring the travel behaviours of residents in detail, in order to test the hypothesis that per capita emissions from transport can be minimised through a focus of growth at major growth locations.