

Neighbourhood Area Letter

Dear Sir/Madam

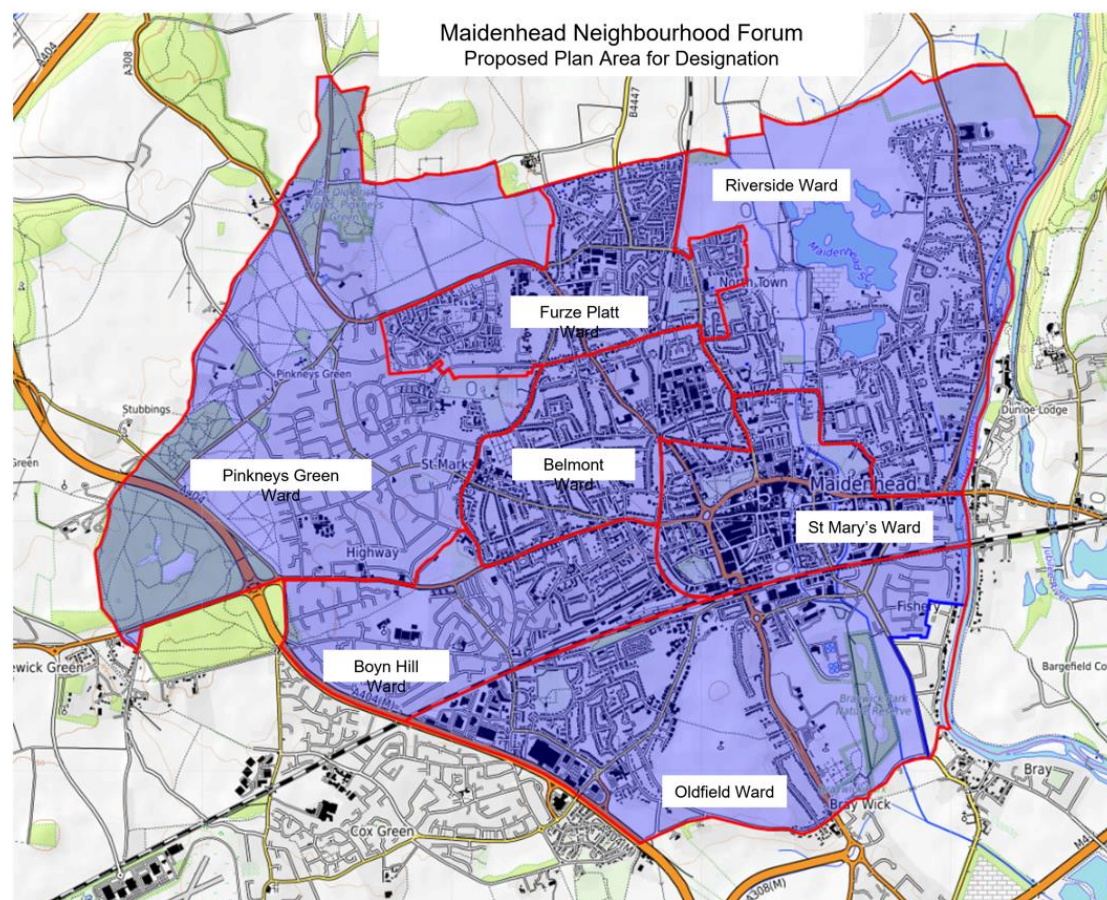
Town and Country Planning Act 1990 The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 Designation of Maidenhead Neighbourhood Area

I am writing to request the designation of a neighbourhood area under Section 61 of the above Act.

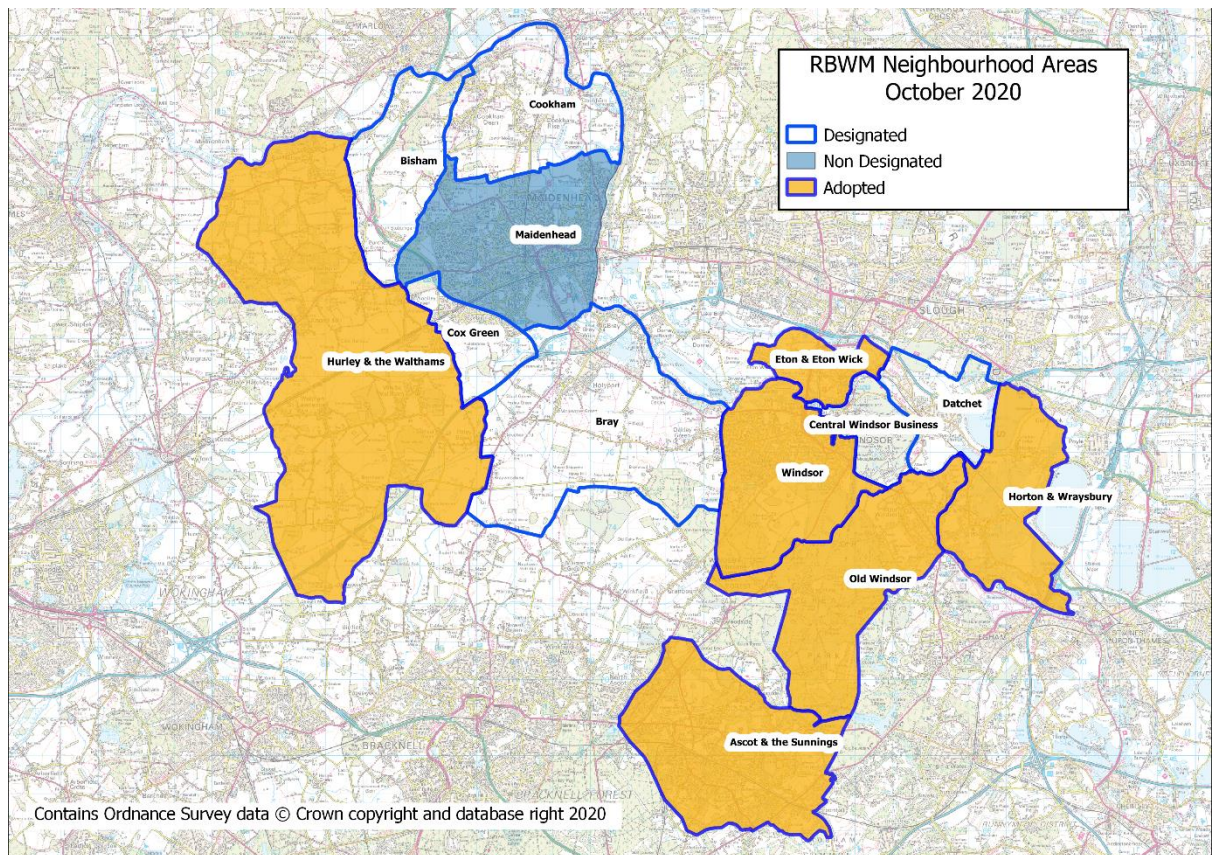
Background and local context

The application is made by the prospective Maidenhead Neighbourhood Forum, which is capable of being a qualifying body within the terms of Section 61. The prospective neighbourhood forum comprises 21 or more people living, working or acting as elected members in the area, and we are working to draw membership from different places in the area and different sections of the community. There is a written constitution which includes the express purpose of promoting or improving the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the neighbourhood area concerned. Enclosed is a list of people currently making up the prospective forum and a copy of the constitution.

Having considered options for the neighbourhood area, the prospective neighbourhood forum would like the area indicated on the plan to be designated. The rationale for the neighbourhood area is given below.



Within the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, there are made Neighbourhood Plans or designated Neighbourhood Plan areas covering all parts of the Borough except for the town of Maidenhead itself. In the Borough Local Plan Maidenhead is the town targeted for the highest growth in housing provision.



History and geography

Maidenhead grew up where the London to Bristol Road crossed the Thames, on the Western side of the river beyond immediate threat of flood. It also sits at the crossroads with the Windsor to Marlow Road, and a glance at the map today shows a well-defined town clustered around its historic centre. Later transport links such as the Great Western railway and the M4 motorway have reinforced its position.

Maidenhead largely follows a common market town pattern, with retail and commercial activity concentrated in the town centre, surrounded by residential suburbs and industrial estates, with main transport corridors connecting the suburbs to the town centre. Recent development is seeing an increase in town centre residential development, and some decrease in retail activity.

Area boundary considerations

While there is clearly a “Maidenhead shaped hole” in the Royal Borough’s designation map, a previous application for the area and Forum together was refused [1]. Recent discussion concluded that it would be useful to consider the area and the Forum separately, and as the individuals eligible to participate in a Forum depends on the geographic area, this request is for designation of the area as a first step.

Guidance from Locality [2] gives a bullet point list of considerations when deciding a neighbourhood area boundary. They are listed here, together with a summary of how each one has been handled.

- **Village or settlement boundaries, which could reflect areas of planned expansion**
 - The most clearly defined settlement boundary is the town of Maidenhead, set to expand over the plan period according to the site allocations in the Borough Local Plan (BLP) [3]. On most edges of the settlement there is Green Belt land, with the majority expected to remain so after BLP sites have been built out. Excluding these from the designated area could be an option, but may restrict policy scope on for example green corridors.
- **The catchment area for walking to local services such as shops, primary schools, doctors' surgery, parks or other facilities**
 - Within the as-yet-undesignated area, there are 14 primary schools, 7 doctors' surgeries and 10 parks. The catchments would not necessarily align, and basing neighbourhood areas on these could lead to quite a large number of Neighbourhood plans and groups. This would be impractical to resource and co-ordinate. In the suburbs shops are thinly scattered, while those in the town centre serve most of the town.
- **The area where formal or informal networks of community based groups operate**
 - A number of community groups operate over the town of Maidenhead, for example Maidenhead United Football Club, Maidenhead Civic Society, and the local paper covering the whole of the town is the Maidenhead Advertiser. Many special interest groups and religious entities exist, some over smaller areas. It would be challenging to define smaller areas based on community groups without creating bias, or to risk excluding sub-areas without an existing group.
- **The physical appearance or characteristics of the neighbourhood, for example buildings may be of a consistent scale or style**
 - Many different scales and styles of buildings exist in the as-yet-undesignated area. Areas could be defined on this basis, but the grain would need to be quite fine, leading to a large number of Neighbourhood plans and groups. This would be impractical to resource and co-ordinate. Within a larger designated area, area-specific policies can be defined, so for example a desire to keep certain sub-area characteristics can be within scope.
- **Coherent estate, either for businesses or residents**
 - Coherent residential and business estates exist in the as-yet-undesignated area. Again, areas could be defined on this basis, but the grain would need to be quite fine, leading to a large number of Neighbourhood plans and groups. Area-specific policies can be defined provided the estate is covered by a designated Neighbourhood plan area.
- **Whether the area is wholly or predominantly a business area**
 - This criterion could be useful, but would most likely be only applicable to employment areas or industrial estates. For the town centre, the direction of travel set by the BLP [3] is for more high-density residential development, thus excluding it from the "predominantly a business area" criterion. It seems unlikely that employment areas or industrial estates would be motivated to form a Neighbourhood plan group, and few such applications have appeared (one may be Windsor, with a strong tourism business).

- **Where infrastructure or physical features define a natural boundary, for example a major road or railway line or waterway**
 - All of these (the A4/A308 roads, the Great Western railway/Marlow branch, and the river Thames) feature in the as-yet-undesignated area. Of these, the river Thames is a clear boundary, with the Eastern side being a different County and separate planning authority. Maidenhead Town centre is sandwiched between the railway embankment to the South and the (modern) A4 road to the North, but the suburbs on the far sides of these transport routes have a clear and direct relationship to the town.
 - Splitting designated areas using these as boundaries could be an option, but would make policy on green transport links through/across the railway and the A4 unnecessarily difficult.
- **The natural setting or features in an area**
 - The as-yet-undesignated area has a clear natural setting on the West bank of the Thames valley. This setting applies to the whole area, with the land rising more or less steeply in different parts of the town, or being flood plain. While Flood risk is clearly an important factor in planning terms, this is covered by the BLP [3] and National policy, and does not provide any useful input on selection of Neighbourhood Plan areas to designate.
- **Size of the population (living and working in the area)**
 - With a population of around 51,000 and likely to rise by around 10,000 over the period of the BLP, the as-yet-undesignated area would be at the large end of Neighbourhood Plan area populations, but not outside the range of plans that have passed referendum and Inspector's examination. For example, nearby Bracknell had a population of 55,000 at the time of plan-making in 2016, and currently rising. The Inspector's report [4] noted the size, without making any adverse comment. We note that no upper limit is set by the legislation.

In addition to the Guidance from Locality [2] there are practical benefits for planning policy:

- **Maidenhead town and its environs is a logical area to focus on**
 - Post-Covid, there will be changes in town centre uses and live/work/travel patterns. These, together with office to residential conversions, are likely to blur previous distinctions and Neighbourhood planning policies would benefit from considering the whole town.
 - The success of the town is linked to what happens in the surrounding area, and the relationship between town and catchment population is critical
 - Consideration of climate change, sustainability and town centre recovery require the town to be considered within its wider context, rather than a narrow focus on sub-areas
 - Community facilities, essential when considering sustainability, health, education and climate change, are spread over the whole area of the town
 - Employment is spread over the wider area of the town
 - The whole of the modern town of Maidenhead still looks to its old core as the hub for most transport links to and from the town

Of the considerations above, none point to a clear subdivision of the prospective area that would have an identifiable benefit in planning policy terms. The town functions as a whole in that the town centre, surrounding residential suburbs, industrial estates, schools, health and leisure facilities mutually support and balance each other. The local transport routes are coherent with this pattern.

It is acknowledged that Maidenhead Town Centre is a strategic location and covered by several policies in the BLP and related supplementary planning documents. A Maidenhead Neighbourhood Plan would aim to complement and fit it with these.

For these reasons, we propose that the 7 unparished wards of Maidenhead (Belmont, Boyn Hill, Furze Platt, Pinkney's Green, Riverside, St Mary's and Oldfield excluding part of the Fisheries area located in Bray Parish) form a Neighbourhood Plan area.

The Plan area shown in purple coincides exactly with the unparished part of Maidenhead. The boundaries are defined by the boundaries of five parishes (Cookham CP, Bisham CP, White Waltham CP, Cox Green CP and Bray CP) and the eastern boundary of the Royal Borough at the river Thames. This also forms the boundary between the counties of Berkshire and Buckinghamshire.

It should be noted that designation was awarded in 2013 by RBWM to a predecessor forum for this entire area and Cox Green civil parish combined.

Yours faithfully,

Andrew Ingram and Ian Rose, prospective Maidenhead Neighbourhood Forum co-Chairs

References

[1] RBWM letter from James Carpenter, Re: Application for Neighbourhood Forum Designation and a Neighbourhood Area Designation, Feb 2020

[2] Guidance notes on Designation, Locality

[3] RBWM Borough Local Plan Submission Version incorporating Proposed Main Modifications, RBWM, Jul 2021

[4] Report to Bracknell Forest Council on the Examination of the Bracknell Town Neighbourhood Plan, John Slater Planning Ltd, Apr 2020