An assessment of the availability and role of Innovation Spaces in Berkshire

Report to Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership

June 2019
Contents

1. Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 1
2. Demand for Innovation Spaces ................................................................................................. 3
3. Review of the supply of Innovation Spaces ............................................................................. 8
4. Conclusions............................................................................................................................... 16

Annex A: Audit of Innovation Spaces in Berkshire ................................................................. A-1
Annex B: Networking groups ....................................................................................................... B-1
Annex C: Profiles of individual Innovation Spaces ............................................................... C-1
1. Introduction

The purpose of the study

1.1 Thames Valley Berkshire LEP commissioned SQW to examine the availability and role of Innovation Spaces in Berkshire. The study took place as the Berkshire Local Industrial Strategy was being developed and in the context of a wider consideration of future investment in Berkshire’s innovation ecosystem. Key issues framing the study were the role of Innovation Spaces within the wider innovation ecosystem; the role of town centres vis-à-vis “out-of-town” locations in terms of overall provision; the supply/demand balance (and spatial variations within this); and key market failures (including the possible role of the public sector in addressing these).

Defining Innovation Spaces

1.2 Innovation Spaces are not always easy to distinguish from other forms of provision. At the outset, the study adopted the following definition of Innovation Spaces:

‘Spaces which provide entrepreneurs and businesses with accommodation on flexible terms and access to supporting administrative, business and innovation support services and networks.’

1.3 In theory, this definition included: accelerator programmes (linked to innovation space); incubators; co-working spaces; hack/maker spaces; lab space; creative spaces; and science parks. It excluded managed workspace, offices, business and industrial parks run simply as property schemes as well as cafes or coffee shops whose primary purpose is not to provide business space or innovation support. It also excluded innovation support of an entirely peripatetic nature (although this can be important locally and often complements Innovation Spaces).

Methodology

1.4 This short study was undertaken from March to May 2019. It included four main strands of work:

- A desk-based review of secondary evidence and data regarding the supply of and demand for Innovation Spaces in Berkshire.
- Consultations with 16 key stakeholders including Economic Development Officers from Berkshire’s unitary authorities, representatives from networking groups and managers of Innovation Spaces.
- A website trawl to enable a “mapping” of the Innovation Spaces.
- A workshop with TVB LEP and Oxford Innovation to synthesise findings.
Report structure

1.5 The chapters that follow discuss the demand for (Chapter 2) and supply of (Chapter 3) Innovation Spaces in Berkshire before presenting overall findings and setting out a series of recommendations (Chapter 4). There are three supporting annexes:

- Annex A – Audit of Innovation Spaces in Berkshire
- Annex B – Networking Groups
- Annex C – Profiles of individual Innovation Spaces.
2. Demand for Innovation Spaces

High-level indicators

2.1 Berkshire is well connected – to London and internationally – and on most metrics relating to the economy, it performs well (i.e. GVA, GVA per job, etc.). However, in relation specifically to enterprise and innovation, the high-level indicators paint a picture which is above average, but not remarkably so.

Enterprise

2.2 In every year between 2012 and 2017, Berkshire had a higher number of business births than business deaths, resulting in an overall growth in business stock. The scale of the difference between these two metrics has varied year-on-year and – as the graphic below shows – the difference was smallest in 2017 (as the number of births declined and the number of deaths increased). A declining birth rate in the very recent past is a national phenomenon as Figure 2-2 confirms – although it is noteworthy that in 2016 and 2017, the local rate was lower than the national one, reversing the pattern of preceding years.

Figure 2-1: Business births and deaths in Berkshire, 2012-17

2.3 In 2012, Thames Valley Berkshire’s business survival rates were one percentage point higher than the national average, with 44% of firms ‘born’ in Berkshire in 2012 surviving for at least five years.\(^1\) There was some level of variation in business survival rates within Berkshire, with Wokingham performing 2.9 pp above UK averages and Bracknell Forest performing 4 pp lower than UK averages. But overall, the conclusion must be that Berkshire is similar to the national picture.

**Figure 2-3: 5-year business survival rates (for businesses born in 2012)**

\(^{11}\) Business in Berkshire, 2018
Berkshire has a relatively high number of small businesses: in 2018, approximately 90% of businesses employed less than 10 people. Between 2010 and 2018, the number of businesses employing 0-4 people increased by 34%, three percentage points more than in the UK.

There is also evidence of business survival and expansion. Over the period 2014-2017, some 685 firms in Berkshire were classified as ‘scale ups’, meaning they had significantly grown in terms of turnover and/or employment over the previous three years. Scale-ups in Berkshire were less likely than the UK average to grow their turnover from <500k to >£1m within three years, but more likely than the UK average to scale from £1-2m to over £3m turnover.

Innovation

Data also indicate a relatively healthy – though not exceptional – track record in relation to innovation in Berkshire. Between 2012 and 2014, 22% of firms in Thames Valley Berkshire engaged in product and service innovation, higher than in Buckinghamshire Thames Valley and London but lower than Enterprise M3 and Oxfordshire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEP</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thames Valley Berkshire</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckinghamshire Thames Valley</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise M3</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Enterprise Research Centre, 2014.

According to an Enterprise Research Centre analysis of the 2015 UK Innovation Survey, between 2012 and 2014, 17% of firms engaged in process innovation in TVB; this was higher than in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Enterprise M3 and London.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEP</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thames Valley Berkshire</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckinghamshire Thames Valley</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise M3</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Enterprise Research Centre, 2017.

---

4 See https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/changestobusiness/businessbirthsdeathsandsurvivalrates/adhocs/009665highbirthsbyemploymentturnoverandbothbyladistrict2017
5 Business in Berkshire, 2018
In addition, between 2012 and 2014, 27% of firms in Thames Valley Berkshire undertook some form of collaboration for innovation, ranking 14th out of all Local Enterprise Partnerships in the UK. This was lower than in Buckinghamshire, Enterprise M3 and Oxfordshire. During this period, 23% of firms in Thames Valley Berkshire also undertook some form of R&D, ranking 9th out of all Local Enterprise Partnerships in the UK.⑥

Between 2010 and 2014, Innovate UK invested £47.78 in innovation in Thames Valley Berkshire per person employed. This was more than in Buckinghamshire Thames Valley but less than in Enterprise M3, London and Oxfordshire.⑧

**Perspectives from consultees**

The overall finding from the data – that Berkshire’s performance appears “good but not exceptional” with regard to enterprise and innovation – was largely endorsed through the consultation evidence.

Generally, the view was expressed that Berkshire has a prosperous and vibrant local economy, but that its success is more of a corporate nature than an overtly entrepreneurial one, certainly as compared to near neighbours. The consequence is that demand for innovation space is perhaps more latent than might be expected – and that the nature of provision is important in seeking to realise it.

Within this context, key feedback regarding demand for (and provision of) Innovation Spaces in Berkshire is summarised below:

- Several consultees noted that demand in Berkshire is for innovation space that is both affordable and flexible. This type of demand was generally considered to be unmet by current Innovation Spaces provision.

⑧ Benchmarking local innovation – the innovation geography of England: 2017. ERC, 2017
Demand for space was considered to be strongest from small but established businesses (2-10 person) that are seeking affordable office space, rather than from very small (one-person) start-ups. Hence the demand is for space that can be occupied by genuine micro-businesses, not simply free-lancers needing to “work from somewhere” (for whom there are many different options, including home and coffee shops as well as designated provision).

Consultees thought that, while there may be enough commercially-led managed office and co-working in Berkshire, these facilities could provide a more integrated offer of business support. This might be achieved by greater connections between existing co-working space and the Growth Hub, or a “mobile” business support individual/facility that is visible in all existing spaces. This in turn requires an individual or organisation to “drive connections” and within the wider ecosystem.

Consultees thought that innovation space is important for delivering vibrant town centres. Innovation Spaces diversify town centres by increasing the mix of work, retail and leisure offers. It is thought that this may result in increased footfall during the week when town centres are typically much quieter. It could in turn potentially help to address the decline of many High Streets.

2.13 Five Economic Development Officers were consulted as part of this study. The key messages from these conversations are summarised in Box 2-1 below.

**Box 2-1: Perspectives from Economic Development Officers on Innovation Spaces in Berkshire**

- Several EDOs were concerned that there is an outflow of innovators and entrepreneurs from Berkshire into London because of the lack of affordable office space and suitable grow on space in Berkshire.

- EDOs acknowledged that there is a lack of hard evidence of demand for Innovation Spaces. However, a number had anecdotal evidence from working closely with businesses to help them find suitable premises in Berkshire.

- All EDOs consulted would like to provide more flexible and affordable Innovation Spaces in their respective areas. However, a lack of funding and resources for the unitary authorities is seen as a barrier.

- Innovation space that is both affordable and provides integrated business support struggles to be viable without subsidy. As a result, it is difficult for local authorities to demonstrate that the benefits outweigh the costs. Furthermore, the private sector is unlikely to provide these types of spaces without some level of public sector intervention. It was thought that joint ventures between the private and public sector were the best response moving forward.

- The price of property in Berkshire was also seen as a barrier to providing innovation space by EDOs. However, several Officers highlighted the national trend of declining retail space within town centres. They believed that repurposing empty retail space into other uses (e.g. co-working/networking/event space) would be a more viable option than providing a new facility.
3. Review of the supply of Innovation Spaces

An overview of supply

3.1 Across Thames Valley Berkshire, there is a range of Innovation Spaces provision (Figure 3-1). Whilst recognising that the differences are not absolute, the Innovation Spaces identified through this study can be grouped into three broad categories – specialist space, community/local authority led space and commercial co-working space. As illustrated below, these are all spaces which act as a permanent base for businesses and which interact – to a varying degree – with broader networks of innovation support (such as business support and networking groups). Whilst the narrative that follows focuses on the supply of Innovation Spaces, it also touches upon the broader ecosystem in which they are embedded, including corporate/sectoral innovation 'labs' and innovation support networks.

Figure 3-1: Spectrum of Innovation Spaces provision

Source: SQW

3.2 Some 32 Innovation Spaces were identified in Thames Valley Berkshire (see Annex A, Table A-1). Of these, five were categorised as specialist spaces; five as community/local-authority led space; and 22 as commercial co-working space.

3.3 Two thirds of provision (by number of schemes) is located in town centres; and most of this is commercial co-working space. Community/local-authority led space is relatively evenly divided between town centre and out-of-town locations, whilst the specialist provision is mainly on edge/out-of-town sites (because of the influence of the University of Reading). Overall, half of the Innovation Spaces provision is in Reading town centre or Reading edge/out-of-town.

Table 3-1: Summary table of Innovation Spaces by category and location (town centre vs edge/out-of-town)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Specialist Innovation Spaces</th>
<th>Community/local authority led</th>
<th>Commercial co-working</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Town Centre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edge/out-of-town</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td><strong>32</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SQW analysis
An assessment of the availability and role of Innovation Spaces in Berkshire
Report to Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership

Table 3-2: Summary table of Innovation Spaces by category: the importance of provision in Reading compared to elsewhere

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Specialist Innovation Spaces</th>
<th>Community/local authority led</th>
<th>Commercial co-working</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsewhere in TVB</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td><strong>32</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SQW

3.4 Thames Valley Berkshire has experienced a marked increase in Innovation Spaces provision over recent years (Figure 3-3). Just under a third of Innovation Spaces opened between 2017 and 2018. The majority of new provision has been commercial co-working space.

Figure 3-3: Illustrative timeline of recent Innovation Spaces openings in Thames Valley Berkshire (not fully comprehensive)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. rLab – Reading</td>
<td>1. GROW@Green Park</td>
<td>1. Spaces – Reading</td>
<td>1. Spaces – Reading</td>
<td>1. Thames Valley Science Park</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henley Start-up Business Incubator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Fora Reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reading Business Centre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Regus - The Porter Building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Central Working Slough</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7. The Workstation- Markham House</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SQW research
Specialist Innovation Spaces

3.5 Across the facilities identified, five might be regarded as “specialist provision” insofar as innovation is the primary rationale/objective. Of the five, four are linked to Thames Valley Science Park (and its affiliated spaces) and the fifth is Bracknell Enterprise and Innovation Hub. This means that specialist Innovation Spaces are restricted to two locations in Berkshire – Reading edge/out-of-town and Bracknell town centre. Most of the specialised provision does not have a distinct sectoral focus, although the Innovation Catalyst in Thames Valley Science Park caters specifically for technology start-ups.

3.6 The paragraphs below provide a synopsis of these two main (groups of) amenities. They are based on a review of published material (including websites), and discussions with both managers and wider stakeholders.

Thames Valley Science Park

3.7 Thames Valley Science Park (TVSP) provides laboratories, flexible office space and R&D facilities to start-ups, SMEs and larger companies. It also offers various forms of business support, incubator facilities and networking opportunities. It promotes close links to the University of Reading facilities and research, and to Thames Valley Berkshire Business Growth Hub.

3.8 TVSP is split across two sites on the edge of Reading. The Gateway Building and Rutherford Cancer Centre are out-of-town in Shinfield (along the M4) whilst the Science and Technology Centre and Enterprise Centre are on the University of Reading Whiteknights campus to the south-east of Reading. The Shinfield site opened in 2018 and is still expanding, with 800,000 sq. ft allocated so far to the development.\(^\text{10}\)

3.9 Within TVSP, there are four principal Innovation Spaces, each performing a different role:\(^\text{11}\)

- **The Gateway (Shinfield)**
  - The Gateway building on the new TVSP campus is a multi-occupancy facility offering 70,000 sq. ft of lab and office space aimed at growth-orientated companies. It forms an initial phase of a 50-acre site which has a 15-year development plan for bespoke office and lab facilities with modern on-site amenities such as cafés, conference suites and a fitness centre. TVB LEP has invested £5m into The Gateway through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) which in turn has been enabled by the LEP’s ESIF Strategy.

- **The Enterprise Centre (Whiteknights)**
  - The Enterprise Centre provides offices to high-growth start-ups (primarily in the technology sector). There are currently 40 SMEs occupying the facility.

- **Innovation Catalyst (Shinfield)**
  - The Innovation Catalyst is a 65-seat co-working space for small technology firms located within The Gateway building. It is a collaboration with Bardays

---

\(^\text{10}\) https://www.businessmag.co.uk/thames-valley-innovation-opportunities-flagged-science-park-opening/

\(^\text{11}\) https://www.tvsp.co.uk/whats-at-thames-valley-science-park/
Eagle Labs, VitalSix, Henley Business School and the University of Reading, forming part of a wider network of 20 Eagle Labs across England. Occupants are offered business support, an accelerator programme and networking opportunities.

- **Henley Start-up Business Incubator (Whiteknights and Shinfield)**
  - Henley Start-up Business Incubator is a single co-working space for University of Reading students or graduates with a start-up business, who are admitted on a competitive basis by the Henley Centre of Entrepreneurship (HCofE). Occupants are offered business support from the HCofE, financial support, networking opportunities and access to the Barclays Eagle Flight Accelerator programme.

3.10 According to consultation feedback, the success to date of Thames Valley Science Park has been mixed. It has experienced low levels of demand for some Innovation Spaces: in 2019, its co-working space had a 20% occupancy rate. This stands in contrast to the high demand for its office and laboratory space, which in 2019 had occupancy rates of over 90%. Several consultees attributed the challenges associated with the more informal provision to TVSP’s relative remoteness from Reading town centre, which deterred start-ups and individuals from using the site. On the other hand, some consultees described TVSP in terms of Innovation Spaces that were successfully forging links between academia and businesses as well as attracting companies that were seeking business support and networking opportunities.

**Bracknell Enterprise and Innovation Hub**

3.11 Bracknell Enterprise and Innovation Hub offers office and co-working space – and some business support – to small and growing companies. It was established in Bracknell town centre in 2013 and is managed by Oxford Innovation. The community of businesses in the Hub is made up of knowledge-based businesses, mostly established but growing and a small number of early stage start-up businesses. The Hub has links to key institutions and organisations which offer networking events and provide access to an extended, external pool of business support. For example, the Thames Valley Berkshire Growth Hub, co-located in the centre, regularly hosts seminars of business growth topics, with recent events on Funding for Growth, IP Clinics, Marketing, Accounting and HR for Growing Businesses. Links between occupants and external networks/companies are facilitated by Innovation Directors onsite.

3.12 The Hub has grown incrementally since opening in 2013. It currently has 30 offices (which, with one exception, are occupied by firms with 2-10 staff) and a shared co-working space for up to 6 people, which have a 98% occupancy rate. In 2013, the Hub had reached 34% occupancy in a net lettable area of almost 4,000 sq. ft. In November 2013, this increased to 7,511 sq. ft and this was fully occupied by September 2014. In March 2015, the Hub took on another floor of the building, increasing the net lettable area to 12,604 sq. ft. A further floor was added in July 2017, taking the net lettable area to 18,191 sq ft. In April 2018, the Hub opened a 5th floor to customers. Total net lettable is now 20,334 sq ft. The graph below plots occupancy against the centre's net lettable area. Average occupancy since opening has been 85%.
Within Bracknell Enterprise and Innovation Hub, the co-working space is a single room with six desks that offers occupancy at a subsidised price to start-ups/individuals with growth aspirations who require support. Overall, there is limited demand for the co-working space – other than on an ad hoc basis (i.e. most footfall is from individuals coming in to access the business support or networking groups).

A key success factor for Bracknell Enterprise and Innovation Hub is its location. Customers are attracted to Bracknell town centre due to its good facilities and transportation links (direct train into central London in one hour, Reading is 20 minutes away and the M4 is a 5-minute drive away).

Community/local-authority led space

Thames Valley Berkshire has a diverse though relatively ad hoc supply of community/local authority led space. Five sites were identified. These are spread throughout Berkshire – in Reading, Maidenhead and Thatcham town centres as well as on the edges of Reading and Slough. Provision includes social enterprises and hack/maker spaces.

Three of the Innovation Spaces are social enterprises and/or not-for-profit organisations. Of these, two (GROW @ Green Park and Slough Aspire) offer co-working space, structured business support and networking events whilst one (The Workary Maidenhead) offers co-working space and networking events to companies in the technology sector. There are also two hack/maker spaces in Berkshire, located in Reading and Thatcham town centres.
Commercial co-working space comprises two-thirds of the identified “Innovation Spaces” in Berkshire. The majority are located in town centres and just under half are in Reading. There is a big range in the prices (and structure of prices) for co-working space.

From a review of the co-working space, it is evident that much of it is best understood as a Berkshire “branch” of a London/international chain. This includes well-established Regus facilities (over half of the commercial supply, 14 spaces, are Regus or Regus affiliated sites) and also includes newer provision. There has been a marked increase in commercial co-working provision over the last few years, primarily due to London chains (such as Central Working and Fora) opening up new sites in Berkshire. Our research suggested that in 2019, occupancy rates ranged from 45% to 80%. It is possible that this is simply because the provision is new – but it could also be indicative of over-supply and inflated prices (which was certainly the view of some of our consultees).

This type of innovation space sits at the weaker end of the spectrum in terms of its links to innovation (Figure 3-1) – in the sense that it is not, in general, actively facilitating or animating an innovation process. Commercial co-working spaces tend to offer some form of networking opportunities, through structured events or more informal collaboration, but are often limited in terms of business support and advice provision. For example, Regus facilities offer monthly networking events that are open to the public, but do not offer any structured business support.

Consultation feedback echoed these findings. There was some concern that the rapid expansion of commercial sites may have resulted in an oversupply of commercial co-working space in Berkshire’s urban centres (and especially in Reading). This means that, whilst Berkshire has a sufficient supply of desks, this may be masking a lack of genuine innovation space. Commercial co-working space was described as not providing sufficient business support and failing to spark collaboration between firms. Moreover, some consultees felt that the commercial co-working space, particularly the newer sites, were unaffordable for small start-ups and young firms.
‘Soft’ innovation support

3.21 The “Innovation Spaces” explored above are integrated within a wider innovation network that includes (but is not limited to) networking groups and corporate / sectoral innovation ‘labs’. These do not provide permanent space for businesses but are nevertheless crucial facets of the innovation ecosystem in Berkshire.

Innovation networks

3.22 Networking groups facilitate collaboration and partnership between individuals and companies. As shown in Table B-1 (Annex B), ten innovation networks were identified in Berkshire, which were mostly technology orientated and a mix of local and external groups. Most of the networks were based in Reading. Moreover, Thames Valley Berkshire Growth Hub is a single point of contact for all business support services that engages with both the Innovation Spaces and networks. According to some consultees, these ‘soft’ forms of innovation support are more successful at promoting innovation than the spaces themselves.

3.23 Our research suggested that some of the Innovation Spaces have a very strong relationship to innovation networks. Thames Valley Science Park has links to numerous innovation networks, from the Berkshire Growth Hub to the Google Developers Group and ConnectTVT. Similarly, Bracknell Enterprise and Innovation Hub is co-located with the Berkshire Growth Hub. Moreover, several of the Innovation Spaces, including Central Working Reading, Spaces Reading and GROW @ Green Park, host networking group events. However, these links between spaces and networks are neither universal nor comprehensive, and many of the Innovation Spaces have no known links to an innovation network. This was reiterated by some consultees who thought Innovation Spaces and networks in Berkshire were somewhat disparate and disconnected.

Corporate / Sectoral innovation ‘labs’

3.24 Corporate / sectoral innovation ‘labs’ are spaces provided by larger firms that can be used as drop-in workspaces by entrepreneurs and start-ups looking to benefit from a larger firm’s resources. These resources are usually technology-based but can also include other forms of business support and knowledge exchange. Whilst their lack of permanent business accommodation means they are outside this study’s definition of Innovation Spaces, they still represent an important part of Berkshire’s innovation ecosystem. There are a number of such ‘labs’ in Berkshire. Based on consultations and a review of written material, two schemes are described below as illustrative case-studies.

Reading Buses Tech Lab

3.25 Reading Buses Tech Lab is a co-working space for external partners of Reading Buses to develop new apps, technology and ideas related to the improvement of Reading transport systems. It was launched in 2018 and is located in Reading Buses HQ, above Broad Street Mall in Reading town centre. The lab is a single co-working space with a total floorspace of 215 sq. ft and six workspaces. Occupancy is free but restricted to start-ups or entrepreneurs partnered with Reading Buses.
3.26 Occupants gain access to Reading Buses’ open data server (with live transport information), workshop and wider business network. The lab also offers mentoring and facilitates further investment and market routes for successful ventures. Recent successful projects facilitated by the Lab include a tree branch detector for buses, a Twitter bot, seat sensor work and big data future service planning.

**NB Internet of Things Vodafone Lab**

3.27 The NB Internet of Things Vodafone Lab is a space that allows small businesses and individuals to develop and test products and applications related to Narrowband Internet of Things (NB-IoT) technology. The lab forms part of the GSMA’s international network of NB-IoT innovation labs, which includes collaborations with companies including Cisco, Nokia, Huawei and AT+T. It opened in 2016 and is located in Vodafone’s headquarters in Newbury.

3.28 The space consists of a testing lab, a showcase area and a meeting room. There is no charge for using the facilities. Whilst the site can accommodate five businesses at any one time, it usually receives drop-in visits from approximately two companies each day. As it is Vodafone’s only UK innovation lab, the site draws companies from around the UK. The space hosts regular events such as hackathons which are attended by 15-20 people.

---

12 https://www.reading-buses.co.uk/tech-lab-and-open-data-launch
13 https://www.reading-buses.co.uk/tech-lab-and-open-data-launch
15 https://www.gsma.com/iot/deployment-map/#labs
4. Conclusions

Overall findings

4.1 Thames Valley Berkshire has a reasonable pedigree in relation to enterprise and innovation. From our review of secondary evidence and some consultations with stakeholders, there does appear to be some demand for innovation space – albeit the demand that exists (which is to accommodate 2-10-person businesses) may be out-of-kilter with much of the new provision that has come on-stream recently.

4.2 Regarding the provision of Innovation Spaces in Berkshire, at least by number, there is a heavy skew towards commercial co-working facilities over specialist and community/local authority led space. The quantity of commercial co-working space in Berkshire has risen over the last few years due to the arrival of London/international-based chains. There is some evidence that several of these chains are struggling to attract demand and there are doubts over the extent to which these spaces facilitate innovation.

4.3 High levels of commercial provision are masking a limited supply of affordable, flexible and arguably ‘genuine’ innovation space. Specialist Innovation Spaces provision in Berkshire, where innovation is the principal rationale/objective, is focused on Thames Valley Science Park (including the Innovation Catalyst, Enterprise Centre and Henley Start-up Business Incubator) and the Bracknell Enterprise and Innovation Hub. These amenities facilitate innovation through incubators, accelerator programmes, business support and networking/collaboration opportunities. They are having mixed levels of success, with high demand for office/lab space but somewhat lower demand for the co-working spaces. The specialist Innovation Spaces are complimented by a diverse offering of community/local authority led sites, which are primarily comprised of social enterprises and hack/maker spaces. These spaces have a more ‘social’ focus and facilitate innovation through their provision of flexible and affordable desk space, business support and networking opportunities.

4.4 Overall, it can be concluded that there is not currently a lack of provision of Innovation Spaces in Berkshire per se, but that there may be a mismatch of supply and demand, and an over-supply of the wrong type of space. This is resulting in a certain level of unmet demand for innovation space in the region. The recommendations below address this market failure.

Recommendations

4.5 Taking into account the evolving nature of Berkshire’s economy and the changing ways in which innovation space (of all forms) is being used, this study recommends various responses. For the most part, these are concerned with effecting a better match between supply and demand in different parts of Berkshire.
An assessment of the availability and role of Innovation Spaces in Berkshire  
Report to Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership

**Recommendation 1: Make better use of existing Innovation Spaces**

4.6 This study has found no evidence of an absolute shortage of provision, but it has unearthed evidence to suggest that supply does not wholly reflect the nature of demand. Some level of re-purposing would therefore make sense. In this context, it might be appropriate to:

- **Encourage commercial co-working spaces to work with the public sector to facilitate more innovation and provide subsidised space.** This represents an emerging opportunity given apparent over-supply. There may be scope for the public sector to work with private sector providers to try and match up supply and demand, creating (for example) more explicitly ‘innovation-led’ co-working spaces. Given the fragility of employment provision within town centres more generally, the opportunity – and perhaps the imperative – is clear. There are clear market failures linked to the softer forms of networking that tend to define genuine Innovation Spaces, and in this context, the scope for the public sector to play a role – which also links to place-shaping more broadly – is clear.

- **Improve links between existing Innovation Spaces and the Growth Hub.** We found that existing links were often very limited and yet there ought to be an obvious synergy. Links of this nature can be difficult to establish for all sorts of practical reasons, but this is an area in which the LEP itself might have a brokering role to play.

- **Take steps to ensure that business support/growth advisers are visible in all co-working spaces.** More generally, it may be appropriate to encourage the providers of co-working space to make links to commercial growth advisers. In part, this opportunity/need is a consequence of the differences between the co-working market in London and that in TVB – and the need to ensure that co-working models are sustainable outside of the capital.

**Recommendation 2: Create more small ‘affordable’ Innovation Spaces**

4.7 If there is a “gap” in the market, it is for “affordable” (i.e. cheaper) provision. It is important to recognise that most small and/or new enterprises are not are not particularly profitable and property costs can be significant. Yet it is only once they have a reasonable “working space” that growth is likely to be sustained. In this context, there is a key role for the public sector. Possible actions in this context include:

- **Put in place affordable “Innovation Spaces” within the main town centres.** In this context, there are lessons to be learned from the success of the Bracknell Enterprise and Innovation Hub (which has been developed in phases and is enjoying very high occupancy levels). It benefits from its town centre location and is making use of an existing building.

- **Repurpose surplus retail space and other surplus public-sector space into Innovation Spaces (e.g. co-working/networking/event space).** There is a particular opportunity to use Innovation Spaces as at least part of the response to the challenge of declining High Streets. Innovation spaces can play a crucial role in diversifying town centres and regenerating High Streets which are facing structural issues (including by supporting innovation in retail and hospitality).
• **Further develop and replicate corporate/sectoral innovation ‘lab’ schemes.** We have found some interesting examples of schemes of this nature within Berkshire. It may be that these could be replicated within the public sector, e.g. local authorities, health, education, emergency services.

**Recommendation 3: Develop new delivery models**

4.8 The provision of genuine Innovation Spaces usually requires some level of public subsidy: there is a real market failure which separates small firms’ ability to pay from developers’ willingness to invest (particularly given differential land values). Yet public sector resources are under pressure. In this context, there is a need to explore the development of new delivery models. Potential actions in this context are summarised below:

- **Facilitate more joint ventures between the private and public sector, recognising that local authorities have a key role to play in tailoring products to meet local needs:** There are examples of local authorities being increasingly “hands on” as they recognise the need to retain and encourage innovation and enterprise locally. This could potentially be galvanised and used within Berkshire.

- **Alleviate risk in creating new Innovation Spaces through loans/grants from local authorities.** There are examples of public sector organisations providing funding packages that enable the development of new Innovation Spaces. Well-planned, professionally managed Innovation Spaces can provide a good return on investment, both in financial and economic development terms.

- **Unlock local authority and other public sector owned space for the provision of Innovation Spaces.** There is precedent elsewhere for using publicly-owned space for Innovation Spaces provision and sharing the profits between private companies and the local authority.

**Recommendation 4: Pursue longer term, ecosystem-wide, ventures to galvanise emerging Innovation Spaces**

4.9 A fourth area where action may well be appropriate relates to the functioning of the wider ecosystem – in other words, the links between different Innovation Spaces (and other forms of innovation support) across Berkshire as a whole. In this context, it may be appropriate to:

- **Develop the role and range of Anchor Institutions.** The University of Reading is playing an increasing role within the innovation ecosystem – albeit, this is a relatively new development (compared to universities elsewhere). However, there are other organisations with the potential to play a parallel role in respect of innovation. Hence there is an opportunity to work with organisations like Syngenta, AWE and Vodafone – alongside University of Reading – to enhance the provision of genuine Innovation Spaces.

- **Consider the possibilities for enhanced provision alongside major new developments and promote policies supportive of innovation and enterprise in Local Plan and strategic allocation policies.** Over the next few years, TVB will see housing and population growth. It will be important that provision for enterprise and innovation is “designed in” alongside this. Developers can be asked to contribute
through s106 agreements, but even if this is inappropriate, provision for Innovation Spaces ought to feature within site-level masterplanning processes at an early stage.

- **Consider the development of sectorally-specific Innovation Spaces.** From our study, it was striking how little provision has been designed to reflect the specific needs of particular sectors. In many cases, needs are generic and office-based. But this is not always the case. The life sciences sector may, for example, have requirements for wet lab space, while workshop provision could be appropriate for high value manufacturing businesses. A sectoral narrative on an approach to innovation provision could be developed in parallel to the Berkshire Local Industrial Strategy.

- **Ensure that decisions in relation to enhanced provision are fully informed by developments outside TVB as well as within, and have regard to opportunities from strategic infrastructure projects, e.g. Heathrow Airport and the Elizabeth Line.** This final observation is made in light of the fact that there are many external drivers to enterprise and innovation from which Berkshire can benefit. In planning future provision, these ought to be factored in fully.
Annex A: Audit of Innovation Spaces in Berkshire

Table A-1: Innovation Spaces by category and location

| Category                                      | Reading Town Centre | Thames Valley Science Park Enterprise centre (TVSP) | Henley Start-up Business Incubator (TVSP) | Innovation Catalyst | Grow @ GreenPark | Regus Winnersh Triangle | Regus Thames Valley Park | Regus Green Park | Theale Town Centre | Regus Theale | Slough Town Centre | Regus Slough Town Centre | Regus Slough Bath Road | Regus The Porter Building | Slough edge/out-of-town | The Workary Maidenhead | Regus Maidenhead Station | My Work Spot | Regus Broadway | Regus Thames Street | Bracknell Town Centre | Bracknell Enterprise and Innovation Hub | Regus Bracknell Arlington Square | Newbury Town Centre | Regus Newbury Oxford House | Netqubate Business Centre | Thatcham Town Centre | Newbury and District Hackspace | The Workstation, Markham House | Wokingham Town Centre | The Workstation, Markham House |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|

Source: SQW research.
Annex B: Networking groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Networking group</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Member size*</th>
<th>Meeting locations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>External groups</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>StartupGrind</td>
<td>Global startup community in 200 cities with free monthly events - partnership with Google</td>
<td>859</td>
<td>Reading (Thames Tower)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet of Things TV</td>
<td>Global group for members interested in 'Internet of Things'. Regular free events and meetups.</td>
<td>1,671</td>
<td>Reading (Green Park conference centre)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders in Tech</td>
<td>Global group (Reading, Berlin, USA) for technology leaders to discuss tech trends.</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>Reading (Thames Tower)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Developer Group - Reading and Thames Valley</td>
<td>Global community and meetup group for those interested in Google technologies. Free monthly meet ups.</td>
<td>2,214</td>
<td>Reading (in Spaces/Central Working)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Locally grown</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Tester Gathering</td>
<td>Monthly event for those interested in Testing. Grew out of interest from Berkshire community and modelled on London Tester Gathering.</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading start-ups, freelances and creatives co-working hub</td>
<td>Grow@greenpark – led networking socials</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>Reading (Grow@GreenPark)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td>Meetup for those interested in DevOps, Automation, Development and Quality located in the M4 Corridor.</td>
<td>305 (meetups 40-80)</td>
<td>Maidenhead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConnectTVT</td>
<td>Involves membership with networking, advice and support services and events. Part of British Chamber of Commerce network.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Across Thames Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Tech Group</td>
<td>Monthly networking group for people/business interested in technology and new media</td>
<td>1,176 (meetup attendance 4-10)</td>
<td>Reading (inc. Central Working)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SQW research.

* Member size is based upon group membership of meetup.com
Annex C: Profiles of individual Innovation Spaces

C.1 This Annex contains summary profiles for each of the Innovation Spaces that have been identified in Berkshire. It is based on a review of websites and other published material, together with some conversations. The research was conducted in March 2019 (and all the website references refer to that date).

Figure C-1: Map of Innovation Spaces in Berkshire by category

A: Specialist Innovation Spaces

**Bracknell Enterprise and Innovation Hub**

C.2 Bracknell Enterprise and Innovation Hub offers high-quality office space to small and growing companies. It is located in Ocean House above Princess Shopping Centre in Bracknell town centre, with strong transport links and a professional on-site centre management team. Oxford Innovation manages Bracknell Enterprise and Innovation Hub under a management agreement, with KPIs linked to occupancy and return to the landlord.

C.3 The Hub has grown incrementally since opening in 2013. It is currently 20,334 ft², with 30 offices, business lounge and a shared co-working space for up to 6 people. Some 266 people in total can work from the centre in the dedicated workspaces, with more using the business lounge. Average occupancy since opening has been 85%.
The community of businesses in the Hub is made up of knowledge-based businesses, mostly established but growing and a small number of early stage start-up businesses. Its community of entrepreneurs forms a support network for SMEs, with regular networking events and access to an extended, external pool of support, such as the Thames Valley Berkshire Growth Hub which is co-located in the centre. The Growth Hub regularly hosts seminars of business growth topics, with recent events on Funding for Growth, IP Clinics, Marketing, Accounting and HR for Growing Businesses.

**Thames Valley Science Park**

C.5 Thames Valley Science Park (TVSP) provides laboratories, flexible office space and R&D facilities to start-ups, SMEs and larger companies.\(^16\) It is closely affiliated with the University of Reading.

C.6 Included within TVSP are:\(^17\)

- The Gateway Building – with lab and office space for science companies; the Innovation Catalyst and Henley Start-up Business Incubator
- The Rutherford Cancer Centre
- The Science & Technology Centre
- The Enterprise Centre – which holds office space for technology SMEs.

C.7 TVSP is split across two sites which are two miles apart: the Gateway Building and Rutherford Cancer Centre are out-of-town in Shinfield along the M4 whilst the Science and Technology Centre and Enterprise Centre are on the University of Reading Whiteknights campus to the south-east of Reading. The Shinfield site opened in 2018 and is still expanding, with 800,000 sq ft allocated so far to the development.\(^18\)

C.8 TVSP provides various forms of business support, incubator facilities and networking opportunities. Its website explains that these include:\(^19\)

- partnership with the University of Reading which facilitates research collaboration, access to numerous specialist technical services and for recruitment of students or graduates
- business support services in areas such as access to finance, exporting, training and sales.
- a close relationship with Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership-supported initiatives such as:
  - Thames Valley Berkshire Business Growth Hub
  - Innovate and Growth Accelerator

---

\(^{16}\) https://www.tvsp.co.uk/whats-at-thames-valley-science-park/
\(^{17}\) https://www.tvsp.co.uk/whats-at-thames-valley-science-park/
\(^{18}\) https://www.businessmag.co.uk/thames-valley-innovation-opportunities-flagged-science-park-opening/
\(^{19}\) https://www.tvsp.co.uk/approach/
• Thames Valley Funding Escalator which provides funding support to start up and to growth orientated tech companies

• a close relationship with ‘Grow’ incubator run by ConnectTVT

• regular networking events.

The Enterprise Centre

C.9 The Enterprise Centre provides offices to high-growth start-ups, primarily in the software, IT, digital and data analytics fields. It opened in 2011 and is located on the University of Reading Whiteknights campus.\(^\text{20}\)

C.10 Its total floorspace is 55,000 sq ft and is comprised of flexible office suites that range in size from 150 to 4,000 sq ft. There are currently 40 SMEs occupying the site.\(^\text{21}\)

C.11 The Enterprise Centre provides its occupants with access to all business support, funding and networking facilitated by TVSP.

Henley Start-up Business Incubator

C.12 Henley Start-up Business Incubator is a collaborative workspace for University of Reading students or graduates with a start-up business. The incubator was launched in 2013 and relocated in 2018 from the Whiteknights University of Reading campus to the Gateway Building on the TVSP Shinfield site.\(^\text{22}\) Occupancy of the site is competitive and managed by the Henley Centre of Entrepreneurship according to viability of an applicant’s businesses.

C.13 The incubator consists of a single co-working space, although occupants have access to the Gateway Building’s facilities such as meeting rooms and a café.\(^\text{23}\) The incubator provides its occupants with access to all business support, funding and networking facilitated by TVSP, as well as some additional services. Firstly, the Henley Centre of Entrepreneurship provides incubator occupants with business support, including mentorship, professional services, skills building workshops and SME targeted events.\(^\text{24}\) Moreover, occupants can apply for AWS hosting credits, financial support of up to $15,000 and a place on the Barclays Eagle Flight Accelerator programme. Finally, occupants gain membership of various networking groups such as the Innovation Catalyst community, IET, BCS, Google Developers Group and Reading Enterprise Network.\(^\text{25}\)

Innovation Catalyst

C.14 Innovation Catalyst is a 3,648 sq ft\(^\text{26}\) incubation and managed workspace facility in Thames Valley Science Park that opened in 2018\(^\text{27}\). It forms part of a wider network of 20 Eagle Labs

\(^{20}\) https://alumni.reading.ac.uk/sslpage.aspx?pid=824

\(^{21}\) https://www.tvsp.co.uk/whats-at-thames-valley-science-park/


\(^{23}\) https://www.henley.ac.uk/research/research-centres/henley-centre-for-entrepreneurship/henley-centre-for-entrepreneurship-student-business-incubator

\(^{24}\) ibid

\(^{25}\) ibid

\(^{26}\) Valuation Office Agency (2018)

\(^{27}\) Reading (2017) Barclays to support new business innovation space at Thames Valley Science Park
An assessment of the availability and role of Innovation Spaces in Berkshire
Report to Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership

-across England²⁸; these were set up by Barclays to help businesses create, innovate and grow²⁹. Innovation Catalyst is located out-of-town within a nine-minute bus drive of the University of Reading and 24 minutes bus drive to Reading station and the town centre. The centre was developed in collaboration with Barclays Eagle Labs, VitalSix, Henley Business School and the University of Reading, for the purpose of "boosting Reading's tech ecosystem"³⁰.

The centre is focused on the Internet of Things innovation³¹, and there are various forms of business support provided at the centre to small tech firms. According to the website, the centre runs a 16-week accelerator programme for up to 12 individuals delivered by VitalSix which offers tech high growth small businesses support focused on creative thinking, participation and cross collaborative working³². Firms are also provided with access to mentoring, introductions to major firms as well as a structured programme of events which may allow for networking³³. The centre provides co-working space, meeting rooms and an event space³⁴. The quoted costs of occupancy for the 65-seat co-working³⁵ space is from £75 per month to £225 per month for Hot desks and £325 per month for permanent desks³⁶.

Community/local authority-led Innovation Spaces

**GROW @ Green Park**

Grow is a a not for profit³⁷ managed work space facility that opened in 2014³⁸. It is located at Green Park. According to the website, the centre was developed to connect passionate, like-minded people, who want to make a difference through their business³⁹. Grow is currently home to a diverse community of tech & digital businesses and creatives⁴⁰. As of 2017, the centre was said to have more than 300 members⁴¹. Although there is no direct business support provided, Grow runs structured networking events that are focused on promoting business growth. The centre has a good interior décor and provides co-working spaces, and meeting rooms and meeting pods. Quoted occupancy costs are from £130 per month for hot desks, £200 per month for a fixed desk⁴², £25 per hour for a meeting room and £5 per hour for a meeting pod⁴³.

---

²⁸ Eagle Labs (2019) Locations
²⁹ Vital Six (2018) Innovation Catalyst launches at Reading’s new tech incubator helping the Thames Valley strengthen its leadership in the field
³⁰ Vital Six (2018) Innovation Catalyst launches at Reading’s new tech incubator helping the Thames Valley strengthen its leadership in the field
³¹ Eagle Labs (2019)
³² Vital Six (2018) Innovation Catalyst launches at Reading’s new tech incubator helping the Thames Valley strengthen its leadership in the field
³³ Vital Six (2018) Innovation Catalyst launches at Reading’s new tech incubator helping the Thames Valley strengthen its leadership in the field
³⁴ Eagle Labs (2019) Innovation Catalyst
³⁵ Vital Six (2018) Innovation Catalyst launches at Reading’s new tech incubator helping the Thames Valley strengthen its leadership in the field
³⁶ Eagle Labs (2019) Innovation Catalyst
³⁷ Grow Green Park (2019) Grow
³⁸ Get Reading (2016) Grow@GreenPark Helping Reading Businesses to flourish
³⁹ Grow Greenpark (2019) Desk
⁴⁰ Grow Green Park (2019) Blog
⁴¹ Tech City (2017) Tech Nation 2017
⁴² Grow Green Park (2019) Meeting Rooms
⁴³ Grow Green Park (2019) Meeting Rooms
Newbury and District Hackspace

C.17 Newbury and District Hackspace is a peer run community workshop that provides hackspace/makerspace to its members. It is geared towards small businesses in manufacturing or technology sectors.\(^4\) The hackspace is sponsored by Thatcham Town Council, the Greenham Trust and Andrews and Arnold Ltd. The space is located in Thatcham town centre. The facility provides its members with access to specialist equipment such as woodwork tools, a laser cutter and a 3D printer. Membership requires a monthly fee that ranges from £5 to £25.\(^5\)

C.18 The space holds regular networking events including a weekly ‘open evening’, where the general public is invited to view recent projects. Occupants also benefit from specialist skills and equipment training that members of the Newbury and District Hackspace provide for each other. The community Google Forum, which facilitates networking and training, has 80 members.\(^6\)

rLab Reading

C.19 rLab Reading is a peer-run community workshop that provides hackspace/makerspace to its members. It opened in 2013 and is geared towards small businesses in manufacturing or technology sectors.\(^7\) The space is located in Reading town centre, near Reading railway station. The facility provides its members with access to specialist equipment such as woodwork tools, a laser cutter and a 3D printer.

C.20 Its website suggests that rLab holds regular networking events, including a weekly ‘Open Hack night’, in which occupants and the public meet to discuss project ideas, and a monthly ‘Repair café’, in which occupants provide technical support to the public.\(^8\) Occupants also have access to specialist skills and equipment training that members of the rLab provide for each other. The rLab community Google Forum, which facilitates networking and training, has over 800 members.\(^9\)

Slough Aspire

C.21 Slough Aspire centre is a 3,000 sq ft\(^5\) incubation and managed workspace facility that opened in 2013\(^5\). It is located out-of-town within 32 minutes bus journey of Slough Station and the town centre. It is a social enterprise created to be the first port of call for training and development needs for businesses and the local community\(^5\). The centre has a sectoral focus on Knowledge-based businesses\(^5\). Over the past five years, it has helped to create 40 new start-up companies. It has supported 2,483 local business professionals through workforce development, networking and recruitment services\(^5\).

\(^4\) https://www.nadhack.org.uk/
\(^5\) https://wiki.nadhack.org.uk/index.php/Membership_Levels
\(^6\) https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/newbury-hackspace
\(^7\) https://www.createeducation.com/community-partner/rlab-reading-hackspace/
\(^8\) http://rva.org.uk/organisation/rlab/
\(^9\) https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/reading-hackspace
\(^50\) Windsor Forest (2012) Slough Aspire to Cater for Business Needs
\(^51\) Segro (2018) Slough Aspire
\(^52\) Windsor Forest (2013) New Aspire Centre opens on the Slough Trading Estate
\(^53\) Slough Aspire (2019) About Us
\(^54\) Slough Aspire (2019) Slough Aspire celebrates five years of making a difference
According to the website, the centre contains a conference room, co-working spaces and training rooms that can seat up to 26 people which may also be used for meetings\textsuperscript{55}. Slough Aspire also provides training and development advice for small businesses aimed at improving productivity, as well as structured networking events which facilitate links to local training organisations and apprenticeships providers\textsuperscript{56}. An IT pack is an additional provision for occupants which includes up to eight laptops and six tablets that costs up to £10 per hour\textsuperscript{57}. Quoted occupancy costs include £5 per day (afternoon) for co-working space, £50 per hour for the main space, and £25 per hour for the training rooms\textsuperscript{58}.

**The Workary Maidenhead**

The Workary Maidenhead is a co-working space for start-ups and small businesses in the technology sector. It is located on the third floor of a building on Maidenhead High Street, above a shop. The Workary is a small co-working space with one meeting room.\textsuperscript{59}

**Rental costs for this facility are relatively low:**\textsuperscript{60}

- Fixed desk: from £95 + VAT / month
- Hot desk: £65 + VAT / month

The Workary is part of Wimbletech CIC, a chain of co-working spaces that partners with local councils to transform under-utilised library and public space into affordable workspaces.\textsuperscript{61} In addition to its Maidenhead facility, it has seven spaces in London and one in Rickmansworth. As a ‘community interest company’, it has reinvested profits back into local councils and libraries. Its centres are described as ‘a home for start-ups & co-workers, a garage for hackathons and an innovation hub for your local community’.\textsuperscript{62} The Workary Maidenhead is Wimbletech’s first space that is not publicly owned.

Occupants of the Workary Maidenhead gain access to regular networking events hosted by Wimbletech facilities such as a Code Club.

**Commercial co-working space profiles**

**Central Working**

Central Working is a chain of commercial workspaces based primarily in London, with seven London facilities and four outside London (Slough, Reading, Manchester and Cambridge).\textsuperscript{63} It offers flexible working space and access to a members’ network, which includes structured training and social events. Business support is available in the form of training events in which invited speakers can give general business advice or specific skills training.\textsuperscript{64}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{55} Slough Aspire (2019) Hire Aspire
  \item \textsuperscript{56} Slough Aspire (2019) Services
  \item \textsuperscript{57} Slough Aspire (2019) Hire Aspire
  \item \textsuperscript{58} Slough Aspire (2019) Hire Aspire
  \item \textsuperscript{59} https://wimbletech.com/co-working-hub/theworkary-maidenhead/
  \item \textsuperscript{60} https://wimbletech.com/co-working-hub/theworkary-maidenhead/
  \item \textsuperscript{61} https://wimbletech.com/
  \item \textsuperscript{62} https://wimbletech.com/
  \item \textsuperscript{63} https://centralworking.com/locations
  \item \textsuperscript{64} https://centralworking.com/events
\end{itemize}
Networking occurs through structured social events as well as the pairing of businesses to foster collaboration, with one guaranteed pairing within the first 30 days of membership.\textsuperscript{65} It is important to note that most Central Working networking events seem to be based in its London spaces. Moreover, Central Working’s peer-to-peer Founders’ Programme encourages business founders to collaborate and support each other’s business development.\textsuperscript{66}

**Central Working Slough**

C.28 Central Working Slough is a commercial workspace that offers offices, co-working space and meeting rooms. It opened in June 2018 in The Future Works, a state-of-the-art workspace in Slough town centre, directly opposite Slough train station. \textsuperscript{67} It offers modern facilities including high-speed internet, a communal roof terrace and changing rooms.\textsuperscript{68}

C.29 It is relatively large facility. The space contains a 35-person auditorium and 40 offices that seat between 2 and 25 occupants.

C.30 Rental costs are cheaper than Central Working Reading.

**Central Working Reading**

C.31 Central Working Reading is a commercial workspace that offers offices, co-working space and meeting rooms. It opened in June 2018 in RPlus, a state-of-the-art workspace in Reading town centre, directly opposite the train station.

C.32 Rental costs are higher than the Slough branch:\textsuperscript{69}

- Co-working desk: £299 per month
- Private office desk: £499 per month

**Fora Reading**

C.33 Fora Reading is a commercial co-working space that offers flexible workspace, event space, meeting rooms and communal space to businesses.\textsuperscript{70} It is part of Fora, an expanding chain of contemporary flexible workspaces that has four completed sites and seven future sites across London (due to be built in 2019/2020).\textsuperscript{71} The Reading site opened in September 2018 and was Fora’s fourth completed space and first outside London.\textsuperscript{72}

C.34 Fora Reading is located in Thames Tower, a redeveloped 1970s office block in Reading town centre, directly opposite the railway station. It has a total 7,695 sq ft of floorspace spread over three floors.\textsuperscript{73} The space is modern, with high-tech facilities including high-speed internet, an

\textsuperscript{65} https://centralworking.com/community  
\textsuperscript{66} https://startups.co.uk/central-working/  
\textsuperscript{68} https://centralworking.com/locations/slough  
\textsuperscript{69} https://centralworking.com/locations/reading  
\textsuperscript{70} https://www.foraspace.com/location/fora-reading/  
\textsuperscript{71} https://www.foraspace.com  
\textsuperscript{72} https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/buildings/piercy-and-company-completes-co-working-space-in-reading/10038825.article  
\textsuperscript{73} https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/buildings/piercy-and-company-completes-co-working-space-in-reading/10038825.article
app to organise meetings and iPads in meeting rooms. The workspaces are flexible, with opportunity for add-on space if required.

C.35 From its website, the costs of space are:\(^74\)

- Open desk: from £300 per month (£425 p/month to access Fora network)
- Owned desk: from £400 per month
- Owned office from £475 per desk/month.

C.36 From photographs on the website, it appears to be in a good condition and according to the website, it provides co-working space, meeting rooms and an event space\(^82\). The centre also provides grow-on space with offices available for teams between 2-16 people. Structured networking events are provided. However there does not appear to be targeted business support. The quoted occupancy costs are £59 per month\(^80\) for co-working space and £25 - £35 p/hr\(^81\) for meeting rooms.

**MyWorkSpot Maidenhead**

C.37 MyWorkSpot, Maidenhead is a 6,000 sq ft\(^76\) managed office space in Maidenhead that opened in 2017\(^77\). It is centrally located in Maidenhead town-centre, near the station (4 minutes) and other local amenities. The website explains that My Work Spot was built in response to the changing work cultures and for independent workers, entrepreneurs, growing businesses and corporate commuters\(^78\).

C.38 From its website, the costs of space are:\(^74\)

- Open desk: from £300 per month (£425 p/month to access Fora network)
- Owned desk: from £400 per month
- Owned office from £475 per desk/month.

C.36 Fora Reading facilitates structured networking opportunities through ‘a calendar of talks, workshops and networking events’.\(^75\) Occupants also get access to the entire Fora Resident network, which includes events in all Fora buildings.

**Netqubate Business Centre**

C.39 Netqubate Business Centre provides office space and business support to start-ups and SMEs. It is located in a renovated Grade II listed building in Newbury town centre, next to Newbury railway station.

C.40 Netqubate is a small facility with 9 offices, each seating between 2 and 5 occupants; a meeting room; and hot desks. The hot desks are marketed towards ‘home workers, newly formed start-ups or commuters’ who would use the facility on an ‘ad-hoc’ basis’.\(^82\) There is no communal area and the space seems minimally furnished. No information is provided on the website in relation to costs. The business support services include accountancy, IT support, website design, marketing, sales and recruitment advice.\(^83\)

\(^74\) https://www.foraspace.com/location/fora-reading/
\(^75\) https://www.foraspace.com
\(^76\) My Work Spot (2019) Offices and Desks
\(^77\) My Work Spot (2017) My Work Spot Launch Countdown – This is not a drill
\(^78\) My Work Spot (2017) My Work Spot Launch Countdown – This is not a drill
\(^79\) My Work Spot (2019)
\(^80\) My Work Spot (2019) Membership
\(^81\) My Work Spot (2019) Meeting Rooms
\(^82\) http://netqubate.com/hotdesk-newbury.html
\(^83\) http://netqubate.com/serviced-offices-newbury.html
Reading Business Centre

C.41 Reading Business Centre is a serviced office centre that was opened in 2013. It is centrally located in Reading town centre, within ten minutes walking distance of both The Oracle shopping centre and Reading Railway Station. Reading business centre is in a good condition. It occupies upper floors of Fountain House and contains 40 office suites spread across 17,000 square feet with 200 desk spaces. According to the website, the centre provides private offices designed for 2 to 50 desks, co-working space, as well as secretarial support. The quoted costs range from for private office space starts from £350 pcm. Cost for meeting rooms: 12 persons ‘boardroom’ – £250/day £125 / half day 20 persons ‘classroom’ – £350/day.

Regus

C.42 Regus is an international chain of commercial workspaces which has operated since 1989. It has 17 sites across Berkshire. There are similarities and differences between them, and not all of the Regus facilities are Innovation Spaces (two in Berkshire are only serviced offices and not included in this report). Nevertheless, each Regus facility offers a monthly networking event open to both occupants and the general public.

Regus Slough Town Centre

C.43 Regus Slough Town Centre is a commercial co-working space that offers offices, co-working space and meeting rooms to businesses. The property is a large, modern building located in Slough town centre, near Slough train station and the University of West Berkshire.

C.44 Quoted rental costs are low relative to other Regus sites in Berkshire:

- Co-working desk: £5.40 per day
- Office desk: £6.30 per day
- Virtual office: £2.20 per day

Regus – Slough Bath Road

C.45 Regus Slough Bath Road is a commercial co-working space that offers offices, co-working space and meeting rooms to businesses. It is in a modern building on Slough Trading Estate, located approximately two miles to the north-west of Slough. The building is described as ‘one of the largest fully-serviced business centres in Europe’. More broadly, Slough Trading Estate is home to SMEs, blue chip companies and international company HQs such as Mars and O2.
C.46 It is a relatively large Regus facility that is spread over three floors.

C.47 Quoted rental costs are higher than for other Regus sites in Berkshire:\(^94\)

- Office - £7.60 per day
- Co-working - £6.60 per day
- Virtual - £2.20 per day

**Regus – Maidenhead Station**

C.48 Regus Maidenhead Station is a commercial co-working space that offers offices, co-working space and meeting rooms to businesses. It is located in a modern building in Maidenhead town centre, directly next to Maidenhead train station.

C.49 Quoted rental costs are higher than other Regus sites in Berkshire:\(^95\)

- Office - £7.40 per day
- Co-working - £6.60 per day
- Virtual - £2.20 per day

**Regus – Thames Street**

C.50 Regus Thames Street is a commercial co-working space that offers offices, co-working space, a business lounge and meeting rooms to businesses. It is located in a recently renovated Georgian building on the outskirts of Windsor, next to Windsor and Eton Riverside train station and Windsor Castle.\(^96\)

C.51 There are approximately 60 workspaces and 15 office and meeting rooms spread over 2 floors, that range in size from 100 to 13,600 sq ft.\(^97\)

C.52 Quoted rental costs are high relative to other Regus sites in Berkshire:\(^98\)

- Office - £8.60 per day
- Co-working £7.60 per day
- Virtual - £2.20 per day

**Regus - Winnersh Triangle**

C.53 Regus Winnersh Triangle is a commercial co-working space that offers offices, co-working space and meeting rooms to businesses. It is in a three-storey modern building on Winnersh Triangle Industrial Estate, located along the A329(M) between Reading and Wokingham.

---

\(^94\) [https://www.regus.co.uk/locations/united-kingdom/slough/slough-bath-road](https://www.regus.co.uk/locations/united-kingdom/slough/slough-bath-road)

\(^95\) [https://www.regus.co.uk/locations/united-kingdom/maidenhead/maidenhead-station](https://www.regus.co.uk/locations/united-kingdom/maidenhead/maidenhead-station)

\(^96\) [https://www.regus.co.uk/locations/united-kingdom/windsor/windsor-thames-street](https://www.regus.co.uk/locations/united-kingdom/windsor/windsor-thames-street)

\(^97\) [http://www.waltergiles.co.uk/datafiles/waltergiles3.pdf](http://www.waltergiles.co.uk/datafiles/waltergiles3.pdf)

\(^98\) [https://www.regus.co.uk/locations/united-kingdom/windsor/windsor-thames-street](https://www.regus.co.uk/locations/united-kingdom/windsor/windsor-thames-street)
C.54 **Regus – Newbury Oxford House**

Regus Newbury Oxford House is a commercial co-working space that offers offices, co-working space and meeting rooms to businesses. It is located in a four-story modern building in Newbury town centre, 0.7 miles from Newbury train station.

C.55 Quoted rental costs are low relative to other Regus sites in Berkshire:

- Office - £6.80 per day
- Co-working - £4.40 per day

### Regus – Theale

C.56 Regus Theale is a serviced office centre within Arlington Business Park. It is centrally located, within walking distance of both Theale Railway Station (11 minutes) and the town centre (8 minutes). The centre has a modern interior with energy efficient features incorporated in its design. According to the website, Reading Theale provides office space, virtual office, private offices, meeting room and co-working spaces. Quoted occupancy costs are £6.20 per day for Offices, £5.40 per day for Co-working space, and £2.20 per day for Virtual Offices.

### Regus – The Porter Building

C.57 Regus The Porter Building, is a 30,000 sq ft serviced office that opened in Slough in summer, 2018. It is within one minute’s walk from Slough Station, six minutes’ walk from Observatory Shopping Centre, 20 minutes’ drive from Heathrow and 35-minute train from London. The centre has a modern décor and energy efficient features incorporated in its design and a roof-top terrace used as a break area. It contains five floors of open-plan reception areas, office space, meeting rooms and conference suites. According to the website, the facility provides office space, virtual office service, six meeting rooms accommodating two to 30 people and co-working space. Quoted cost of occupancy are £9.30 per day for offices, £8.20 per day for co-working spaces and £1.90 per day for virtual offices.

### Regus – Broadway, Maidenhead

C.58 Regus Broadway, is a serviced office facility centrally located in Maidenhead’s town centre, within five minutes’ walk from Maidenhead station. It is in good condition and has a standard décor. The centre provides office space, virtual office, six meeting rooms accommodating from two to 30 people and co-working space. Quoted costs are: £6.80 per day for office, £6.00 per day for co-working spaces, £2.20 per day for virtual offices.

---

99 https://www.regus.com/locations/united-kingdom/newbury/newbury-oxford-house
100 Regus (2019) Reading Theale
101 Regus (2019) Reading Theale
102 Regus (2019) Reading Theale
103 Lambert Smith Hampton (2018) Thames Valley Office Market Pulse Q2 2018
104 The Business Magazine (2019) Slough: Spaces opens first centre in fast-growing tech hub
105 Regus (2019) Slough The Porter Building
106 Regus (2019) Slough The Porter Building
107 Regus (2019) Slough The Porter Building
108 Regus (2019) Maidenhead Town Centre
109 Regus (2019) Maidenhead Town Centre
Regus – Bracknell Arlington Square

C.59 Regus Arlington Square is a serviced office centre located within nine minutes walking distance from both Bracknell Station and the town centre. According to the website, Regus Arlington Square provides office space, virtual office, six meeting rooms accommodating from two to 30 people, business lounge and co-working space. There are also shower facilities within the centre. Quoted costs range from £5.20 per day for office, £4.40 per day for co-working spaces, £2.20 per day for virtual offices.

Regus – Thames Valley Park

C.60 Regus Thames Valley Park is a serviced office located out-of-town in Thames Valley Park, it is 20 minutes away from Reading station and the town centre by bus. There is also a free shuttle bus service to Reading Station and the town centre. The centre provides office space, virtual office, meeting room, business lounge and co-working space. Quoted occupancy costs are £5.50 per day for office, £4.70 per day for co-working spaces, £2.20 per day for virtual offices.

Regus, Green Park, Reading

C.61 Regus Green Park is a serviced office centre located out-of-town, it is in close proximity to Madejski Stadium and within 20 minutes bus drive from Reading Station. The business park is energy efficient due to its generation of clean energy using Ecotricity turbine. The centre provides Office space, virtual office, six meeting rooms accommodating two to three people, business lounge and co-working space. Quoted cost are £6.20 per day for office, £5.40 per day for co-working spaces, £2.80 per day for virtual offices.

Regus - Davidson House, Reading

C.62 Regus Davidson House is a serviced office centre that is located in Reading’s town centre, in Forbury Square, within (four minutes) walking distance of Reading Station and (five minutes from) The Oracle shopping centre. The office benefits from views across Forbury Gardens and other local amenities such as riverside walks as well as restaurants on the ground floor of the building, which may be used to facilitate informal networking. The centre has a good quality interior; it has an internal floor area of 55,383 sq ft that is spread across three floors (the ground, second and third) of Davidson House. Regus Davidson House provides office space, virtual office, meeting rooms, a business lounge and co-working space. Quoted costs range from £6.80 per day for offices, £6 per day for co-working space to £3.50 per day for virtual offices.

110 Regus (2019) Bracknell Arlington Square
111 Regus (2019) Bracknell Arlington Square
112 Regus (2019) Bracknell Arlington Square
113 Regus (2019) Reading Thames Valley Park
114 Regus (2019) Reading Thames Valley Park
115 Regus (2019) Reading Thames Valley Park
116 Regus (2019) Reading Green Park
117 Regus (2019) Reading Green Park
118 Gerald Eve (2017) Davidson
119 Regus (2019) Reading Forbury Square
120 Regus (2019) Reading Forbury Square
Spaces Reading

Spaces, Reading is a 39,620 sq ft managed serviced office facility in central Reading. It is part of a global network of offices five of which are in Scotland and 31 across England (north, south and the midlands). It is in proximity to local amenities and within a four-minute distance from Reading Station. The centre opened in Reading in 2017 and has a very modern interior which incorporates energy efficient features, it also has a decked roof terrace. Spaces’ serviced offices are intended to provide a creative environment focused on community. Its website states that the centre provides private offices, co-working space, private calling areas and meeting rooms. The facility is said to be designed to facilitate collaboration and informal networking. Structured networking events are also held for its members.

Work. Life Reading

Work. Life Reading is a managed office facility within walking distance of Reading Railway Station (8 minutes) and The Oracle shopping centre (5 minutes). Work.Life Reading is part of a wider network of nine Work.Life centres; seven of these are in London, and one is in Manchester.

The centre has a modern interior and a roof terrace. It provides office, co-working space and meeting rooms. It also has larger units, so can accommodate businesses of different sizes. Its website explains that occupants are provided with access to mentoring and structured networking events with major corporations such as Yahoo and AOL.

On the website, the café area is identified as facilitating collaboration and informal networking. The centre provides grow-on space to accommodate businesses of varying sizes. Work life has links to Verizon, a telecommunications conglomerate which provides occupants with access to mentorships, events and its pool of clients. However, the centre has no obvious sectorial focus. Work Life Reading also has an events space, private phone booths, bike storage and showers. The centre provides additional services which are aimed at well-being – e.g. yoga and monthly massages.

Quoted cost of co-working / Hot desking ranges from £4 per hour for the pay as you go package to £250 per month for the local package which offers unlimited hot desking. The quoted cost of private office space starts from £320 per month.

---

121 Campbell Gordon (2017) McKay Leases 40,000 sq ft Reading HQ to Co-Working Group Spaces
122 Spaces (2019) Locations
123 Commercial News Media (2017) Workspace pioneer Spaces opens Reading hub
124 Spaces Works (2019)
125 Spaces Works (2019)
126 Spaces Works (2019)
127 Spaces Works (2019)
The Workstation, Markham House

The Workstation, Markham House, is a managed office facility that is part of a wider network of ten Workstation centres located across southern England. It is located on the edge of Wokingham town centre within walking distance of Wokingham Railway Station (nine minutes) and other local amenities. The centre was opened in the summer of 2018 and is situated within a grade II four storey building which appears to be repurposed and of a standard quality. According to the website, The Workstation, Markham House, has co-working spaces, virtual office services and private office suites available across all four storeys. Offices spaces are designed to cater for single occupants with up to 12 people. The centre also provides IT support, high speed internet and parking space.

^133 The Workstation (2019)
^134 The Workstation (2019)