

AGENDA ITEM: 5

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

1. John Mullaney to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport:
Bus Only Route

The Labour administration plans to build a new road that will run alongside the Thames river from Napier road, across a new road-bridge to be built at Kennetmouth, and continue beside the Thames until it reaches the Wokingham Waterside centre. The Lead Councillor for Transport and Planning has said publically that this road will be built only for buses to use and protected for only buses to use.

Given that planning conditions can't be set requiring compliance with other regulatory requirements and that bus lanes are determined by Traffic Regulation Orders that can be set, or easily removed, by a traffic management sub-committee, what protection was the Lead Councillor referring to that will ensure the road is forever kept as bus use only?

RESPONSE by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport):

I thank Mr Mullaney for his question which again enables me to put on record my regret that the campaign against this major public transport enhancement has been subject to so much deliberate misinformation.

The proposed new bridge over Kennetmouth is intended for public transport, cyclist and pedestrian use only. The actual section of the bridge over Kennetmouth will be narrowed to a single lane which will facilitate shuttle working over the bridge and will ensure that it cannot be converted into a conventional road bridge without effectively completely rebuilding the bridge.

This single lane design will obviously result in a narrower bridge impacting less on the local environment and ensuring the listed Horseshoe bridge is retained, besides reinforcing our commitment to public transport links.

The new bridge will require a planning application to be submitted in the near future. As a part of the planning permission (if approved) there will be a planning condition stating the route will only be used by buses, cycles and pedestrians. There will also be a Traffic Regulation Order restricting use of the new route to buses, cyclists and pedestrians.

I therefore contend that the design of the bridge, along with the planning and TRO safeguards, will ensure its continued and exclusive use for public transport, cyclists and pedestrians.

I hope that this information again helps firmly nail the lie that the MRT scheme is a precursor to a full-blown resurrected Cross Town Route. The CTR planned by the then Berkshire County Council included a four lane, dual-carriageway bridge for all modes of traffic and involved the loss of a large part of the King's Meadow parkland.

I will also take this opportunity to repeat what I said to Cllr White at the Policy Committee on 18 July 2016. This mass rapid transit proposal and the nearby park & ride scheme form part of our wider transport strategy to help manage and accommodate the very substantial growth planned over the next 20 years in the Wokingham area by encouraging the use of public transport, cycling and walking.

The MRT scheme is a vital first element of developing a public transport corridor between Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell and would link to the preferred location for the Third Thames Crossing. It is our intention that any Third Thames Bridge will include dedicated public transport provision so as to link to park & ride sites north and south of the river.

This proposed bus-only link from Thames Valley Park along Napier Road will save buses up to 15 minutes by bypassing the often congested and slow-moving London Road/Cemetery Junction/Forbury Road route.

Once this new and faster route has become established, it is quite conceivable to expect many thousands of car commuter journeys to switch to public transport from a much wider area.

2. Tom Lake to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services:

Arthur Hill Pool

With regard to the revenue cost of running Arthur Hill pool what is the share of Reading Leisure membership fees apportioned to Arthur Hill and what is the direct revenue?

Is the figure cited net of these receipts?

RESPONSE by Councillor Gittings (Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services):

Thank you for your question Mr Lake. Firstly with regard to the apportionment of membership income, when a customer signs up for a membership within RSL they will identify a home site (usually the one they use most frequently). This information is used to allocate the income to the appropriate RSL site.

This broadly reflects actual usage patterns and so is a good method of allocating income to each facility.

Based on the above methodology, on past trends approximately 11.5% of the total Reading Sport and Leisure Membership income is apportioned to Arthur Hill, although this can of course vary. This equates to approximately £55K of the £133k income target for Arthur Hill Pool in 2016/17, the remainder coming from hires, casual use etc. This compares to overall budgeted running costs of approximately £260k giving a net cost, taking into account all budgeted income including memberships, of just over £125k.

This does not take into account any planned or non-routine maintenance which is budgeted for corporately or any of the leisure management overheads or central re-charges for corporate support services.

3. Tom Lake to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services:

Arthur Hill Pool

What evaluation has been made of the health consequences of closing first Arthur Hill and then the Central Pool?

What is the estimate of the health impact?

RESPONSE by Councillor Gittings (Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services):

Thank you for your question Mr Lake. Reading's recent review of leisure facilities has indeed taken into account the health benefits of swimming and the need to modernise our facilities to improve access for our residents.

The Council proposes to build both a new competition standard pool with diving provision to replace Central and a new 25m 6 lane pool and teaching pool at Palmer Park which will improve swimming facilities in the East Reading area. These facilities will greatly enhance the offer to local people, drive up participation and the health benefits that flow from this. It is notable that the Council has the strong support of both Sport England and the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) for these proposals to develop new facilities to replace those at the end of their useful life.

The Council is also taking forward plans for a demountable pool at Rivermead to ensure that there is some additional provision to meet demand over and above the existing pools at Meadway and Academy Sport for an interim period pending the delivery of permanent new facilities. Some Reading residents may also find it convenient to access public swimming sessions at the Bulmershe and Loddon Valley leisure sites to the south and east of the Borough.

With the range of alternatives available, any health impact of a short term reduction in facilities in East Reading should be minimal.

4. Carol Froud to ask the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods:
Charges for Emptying Green Recycling Bins

This new charge will result in adding significantly to the amount that Reading will put into land-fill sites. The residents who actually purchased Green Recycling Bins are the very people who're recycling wherever they possibly can! Surely we need to be *encouraging* recycling - imposing a charge will only achieve the opposite! Already those without Green Bins conceal garden refuse in the bottom of their other bins - or worse still 'fly-tip', but this proposed charge can only *discourage* people from recycling.

Above all of this is, of course the '*TRUST*' which the people of Reading held for their Councillors, but this will be destroyed if our Council renege on this agreement and, as we know, without trust there can be no justice! Residents purchased these Green recycling bins on a *written* promise from our Councillors that there would be no charge for emptying them! The *very* people who ARE recycling are being penalised! Surely Council ought to be *fining* those who *won't* recycle, not those who do!

If we're to be charged separately for having our wheelie bins emptied, will a charge be introduced subsequently for those that use other services rather than the existing system of an 'across the board' council tax charge?

Residents are concerned that this is the beginning of a series of charges for services being introduced, and will ultimately be extended - with individual charges for those residents who use Education, Libraries, Theatre and the Police.

So does this mean that, as I don't use, for example, education I won't have to pay this part of the Council Tax?

RESPONSE by Councillor Terry (Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods):

The collection of garden waste was introduced in 2006 as an additional service when separated weekly collections of black and red bins were introduced. The doorstep collection of garden waste is a discretionary service the Council provides, currently taken up by 16,228 properties across the borough. There is no legal duty on local authorities to collect garden waste but we believe the service is valued by many households in Reading.

The Council's garden waste collection service has been provided to Reading households for free since it was introduced 10 years ago. Unfortunately the unprecedented financial pressures the Council is now under mean the Council is proposing to follow the lead of many other local authorities in introducing an annual charge for the doorstep collection of garden waste. The service costs the Council around £300,000 a year to operate. The proposal to charge for garden waste is one of a number of difficult budget decisions the Council is having to consider as a result of significant cuts to the Council's budget and increasing demands on services.

Benchmarking with other local authorities show the £50 charge is comparable to charges already in operation in neighbouring authorities. For example, Wokingham Borough Council already charges £60 a year for garden waste collections, Bracknell Forest Council £40 a year and Oxford City Council £46 per year.

Now the proposed garden waste charges have been approved at a meeting of the Council's Policy Committee on Monday September 26th, the Council will be contacting all householders to give them early notice of the proposed charges, which would become effective from April 2017, and with details of how they can pay the charge.

The garden waste collection service is an 'opt in' service, meaning households can choose whether they wish to continue with it or not. Whilst we appreciate this would be a new charge, we hope that Reading households who currently take advantage of the doorstep collection service will still consider it a reasonable price to pay for the convenient fortnightly doorstep collection of garden waste.

With regard to the inter action of charges for services and the Council Tax, in the 2015 Spending Review the Government essentially assumed that all (upper tier) Councils like Reading would implement a tax increase of 4% per annum, and took this into account in deciding grant cuts (so RBCs RSG is being cut by £22.3m between 2015 & 2020 (part of £57.5m grant losses the Council has faced over the decade).

In the context of such significant losses the Council has been forced to consider what services it charges for; some services have to be provided freely to residents who need them (for example the collection of domestic waste), other services (such as the theatre) can be and are funded by charges. The Police are funded separately and their charge is a separate element (precept) on the Council Tax bill.

All residents are obliged to pay the Council Tax, regardless of how many services they use (although there is a support scheme for those on low incomes, and pensioners on very low incomes pay nothing).

The rationale for any future charges (or changes to charges) the Council decides to introduce will be set out at the time, but there are no plans, nor would it be lawful to replace Council Tax by a series of charges that only those who use services would pay.

5. Roger Lightfoot to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services:
Arthur Hill Pool - Site Value

To ask the Lead Councillor what is Reading Borough Council's current estimate of the value of the Arthur Hill swimming pool site?

RESPONSE by Councillor Gittings (Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services):

Thank you Mr Lightfoot. As you will note from the report to tonight's meeting, whilst there are recommendations that the Council declares the Arthur Hill Pool site surplus to requirements and be disposed of and that a sum equivalent to the capital receipt arising from

any such disposal is invested in new replacement facilities at Palmer Park, the report does not attribute any specific value to the site. The Council does not have an estimate of the value at this stage and this would be determined as part of any disposal process. As you will also note from the report, the key drivers for the proposed closure of Arthur Hill relate to the Council's financial position and the need to make savings. The primary considerations in this regard are the very high repair costs associated with the pool's poor condition and the ongoing revenue cost of running the pool. The potential value of the site is therefore not a major consideration, although it is acknowledged that any such capital receipt would be welcome as it could usefully be reinvested in a new pool at Palmer Park.

6. Philip Vaughan to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services: Arthur Hill Pool

As a long-time regular user of the Arthur Hill swimming pool, I wish to understand the financial basis for the Council's proposal to close the pool.

Please will you provide, for the last financial year, a breakdown of costs incurred in running the pool and associated facilities [gym], and the income derived therefrom?

RESPONSE by Councillor Gittings (Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services):

Thank you for your question Mr Vaughan.

The breakdown of last year's income and expenditure was:

<u>Expenditure</u>	
Employee Costs	£202,500
Premises Costs	£62,300
Supplies and Services	£11,400
<u>Income</u>	£167,200
Net Operational Cost	£109,000

These figures exclude expenditure funded from other budgets such as management costs, maintenance and corporate overheads (e.g. insurance).

The saving identified within the report to Council being considered later this evening of £120,000 is calculated using this year's budget.