

AGENDA ITEM 5

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

1. Tony Warrell to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:
Invest Bus Lane Penalties

It seems that RBC has a 'penalty dependency' and claims a gross disproportionate amount of road space for buses creating even more bus lanes, compared with all other road users trying to enter the town and crossing it. There is no allowance in the road system when the vital M4 is continually closed and the A4 conduit fills to over capacity. Pedestrians in Reading will always want to 'cross roads' safely.

Using elevated pedestrian walk ways will stop any risk of collisions. The continuous movement of all traffic will cut the toxic quality of the air at these road junctions introducing a major improvement for drivers and pedestrians.

Why therefore are none of the bus penalties you gain from your bus company; invested in updating pedestrian road crossings at the Forbury (bridges) - Kings Rd; Forbury Rd; junction, - Cemetery Junction & the Royal Berkshire hospital as examples ? The money could have been better spent at Cemetery Junction when the upgrade took place. Now pedestrians, drivers and residents have to breathe in the menacing toxic fumes while the traffic remains stationary continuously for long intervals ?

Pedestrians passing over roads and not on the roads - helping keep the whole town moving - need reviewing ?

Returning to Minster St; & Gun St; penalties, revenues that continue to increase yearly helped by the inappropriate signage in Kings Road, depicting instructions in a small font, covering over eighty characters. No thought for the drivers following the bus, you've passed it before you can read the first two lines...Therefore, no entry - red lights and 'give way to buses' I suggest could be the order of the day but can the Council afford to lose all the £8,927 money ?

I take with a pinch of salt your quote on Readings' bus service stat's which are very opaque, try a little harder and give me the return on investment including the public penalties as a starter ?

Being a Liberal Democrat candidate and then invited by Martin Salter to join Labour was embarrassing - it wasn't a difficult decision for me.

As a Labour PPC you lost to a Conservative - remember - may be your time will come again ?

REPLY by Councillor Page Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

I will attempt to respond to what I think are the few serious points in what can best be described as an unstructured rant.

Any motorway diversion from the M4 will place impossible demands on Reading's roads, as the local road network is self-evidently not designed to replace the capacity of a 3-lane motorway. This is the case across the whole country and is not unique to Reading.

Pedestrians are naturally drawn to the shortest route and this is the reality particularly within the urban environment. Bridges require steps and usually long ramps to ensure they cater for all needs. Most pedestrians dislike such facilities and prefer at-grade crossings that you will find everywhere across the UK. Conventional traffic management measures, pedestrian crossings on desire lines and good speed management provide the safest and lowest risk facilities for people to use - this is particularly the case in Reading and other urban centres.

With regard to air quality issues I would refer Mr Warrell to the detailed reports submitted to the Council's SEPT Committee on 19th March.

Let me repeat, yet again, that all our bus lanes in Reading are signed to national regulations laid down by the government. We do provide advanced signing and provide as much information to drivers as possible within the national rules.

National regulations stipulate that all monies, net of enforcement costs, collected from our bus lane and parking enforcement must be spent on transport and environmental schemes.

The Council uses nationally collated statistics published by the DfT, which provide the comparator figures I was quoting. If you have any serious evidence-based challenge to these statistics you should raise your concerns with the DfT.

The puerile comments at the end of your mainly incoherent collation of prejudices will be ignored.

2. Ellie Emberson to ask the Leader of the Council:
Voter Registration and Engagement

What does Reading Borough Council do to maximise voter registration and engagement ?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock Leader of the Council

Can I thank Ellie Emberson for her question.

The Council has carried out a thorough canvass of all properties in the Borough again in September 2017, following on from the initial Household Enquiries Form and a follow up letter between July and September.

Following the Canvass just over 91% of households are now registered and in all wards except Thames and Mapledurham the number of households now registered has increased again.

Since Individual Registration has been introduced it is more difficult to tell if everyone in a household has supplied the necessary personal information needed and whether all who are eligible have been registered, but the information given both initially and as part of the canvass encourages people to ensure they do register.

Effort has also gone into contacting students directly. The University used to be able to register them collectively in a hall of residence, but now students must register individually. Of course some may prefer to register in their home constituency.

Posters and leaflets are being distributed currently to remind residents of the local elections on May 3rd.

For many years the Council's Electoral Registration Officer has submitted a detailed report each year to a Council Committee analysing results of the annual canvass and the resultant

electoral register published on 1 December. The report analysing the 2017/18 annual canvass, and the 2018 electoral register published on 1 December 2017, was presented to and discussed at the Policy Committee on 19 February 2019. I have asked the Committee Officer to provide you with a copy, which gives a lot more detail.

It is great to see young people engaging in politics in our town and I look forward to Ellie Emberson being elected as one of our youngest ever councillors in May and I know she will make a huge contribution towards the work of this council and, in particular, the encouragement of young people to participate in the political process. She already has a proven track record as a member of the youth cabinet and parliament which will be invaluable. How many candidates can say they have made a speech from the green benches in the House of Commons!

3. Oscar Ward to ask the Leader of the Council:

Voting Age

Does Reading Borough Council believe that lowering the voting age to 16 will help in the campaign of engaging society to vote?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock Leader of the Council:

Can I thank Oscar Ward for his question. The short answer is yes.

Back in 2014 my colleagues Cllr. John Ennis and Cllr. Jan Gavin moved the following motion at a council meeting:

ITEM NO 13 - VOTES AT 16

That this Council:

1. Reaffirms its commitment to encouraging all residents of Reading to participate in all elections.
2. Recognises that if people can be got into the habit of voting at the earliest opportunity they are likely to continue doing so throughout their lives
3. Is pleased to note that more and more young people are taking part in the Reading Youth Cabinet elections, with this year 4712 voting, 800 more than in 2013
4. Believes that, with sixteen now established as the age at which young people take responsibility for life decisions including where to live, what career path to take, and about their personal relationships, the time has come to widen the franchise for local, national and European elections so as to allow all sixteen-year-olds to vote
5. Instructs the Managing Director to forward this resolution to the Electoral Commission, the Local Government Association and the town's two MPs, requesting their support for this move.

The motion was carried and remains the policy of this Council, although the Conservative Group did not support it and neither did then Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron. Since then we have had the Scottish referendum which did allow 16 year olds to vote, two general elections and the EU referendum in which only the over 18s were allowed to vote. I cannot help wondering what the results would have been in those latter three votes had 16 year olds been included, especially given the surge in support for the Labour Party from young voters in 2017.

We should renew our efforts to persuade the government to reconsider this - they need only look at the young people in the USA who are making the arguments for gun control that are so obviously right that the political establishment there should hang its head in shame.

I would be very happy to work with the youth cabinet to refresh the campaign to lower the voting age to 16.

4. Tom Steele to ask the Lead Councillor for Education:
General Data Protection Regulation

On the 25th May the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) will come into force. This is the biggest shake up in privacy legislation in a generation across the public and private sector.

The requirements are strict and the penalties for non-compliance are severe. Organisations must be able to guarantee that the data they collect about individuals will be used only for the explicit purpose that is agreed prior to the data being collected and this applies retrospectively for already held information. Additionally, data must be stored for no longer than is necessary and must be protected from theft at all times.

Preparation for GDPR is therefore a significant challenge for organisations.

Currently schools across Reading hold significant amounts of data in the form of historical records about their pupils, their absences, academic achievements and records of injuries etc.

Could the Lead Councillor advise me whether or not RBC is responsible for ensuring compliance with the new GDPR legislation on behalf of the Council run schools, nurseries and other educational settings and if so what steps have been taken to achieve compliance by 25th May this year.

REPLY by Councillor Jones Lead Councillor for Education.

RBC is not responsible for ensuring compliance with the new GDPR legislation on behalf of the Council run schools, nurseries and other educational settings.

5. Tony Warrell to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services:
Council's Poor Tree Maintenance

The previous questions I have put to Council concerning inadequate maintenance shown in the few green areas existing in RG1 have fallen on deaf ears. I have repeatedly asked for the Eldon Square Garden to be given more attention and the smaller area at the Kings Road & Queens Road junction. Both places have trees that are seeking attention but the Council's promises have come to nothing for years.

The arranged meeting between Councillor Hacker, Council officers and me at the Eldon Sq. Garden in September 2017 I felt was a turning point. I gave the Councillor a list of improvements which were considered reasonable and agreed on. The tree situation was thought to be a priority; given that the Council provided me with the last Tree Survey Report (April 2016). It contained over forty tree reference's of which we counted fourteen; diagnosed containing deadwood and those that needed removing and crowns that need reshaping.

Moving on to the 5th February 2018 officers notified me that a schedule was about to be put in place which includes a 'parking suspension order' to enable the 'lime trees' to be maintained accordingly.

Are officers able to use their prerogative and enable the work to be carried out quickly and efficiently before the cuckoo arrives ?

REPLY by Councillor Hacker Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services

The Council takes its duty of care in respect of its tree stock very seriously. It carries out regular surveying of the trees on its estate, and prioritises the maintenance work that is identified by these inspections. The Council undertakes tree work principally to maintain the health and safety of the trees and on land that it owns. We prune trees for Health and Safety reasons, to remove actionable nuisances, in order to clear the public highway, or where trees are causing foreseeable damage to property. The Arboricultural Unit has both statutory and income generation responsibilities and routine maintenance such as the work in Eldon Square is scheduled to fit in with these priorities.

In September, the Tree Officer met Mr. Warrell at King George V Gardens, Eldon Square, and gave him a copy of the survey of the trees in Eldon Square. There are 16 trees in the garden requiring some form of maintenance. Most of the work identified is dead-wooding; none of it is urgent. Deadwood is present in most mature trees, and is rarely removed from private trees. The Council notes the presence of deadwood, and seeks to remove this while carrying out other work. It is rare that the removal of deadwood precipitates a works order in the first place. The Tree Officer conveyed this to Mr. Warrell at the meeting in September. He did undertake to carry out maintenance works to the trees in the King George V Gardens, and, preparatory to this, arranged for Eldon Square to be included in the list of streets for Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders during 2018, so that parking restrictions could be put in place to carry out the work. He conveyed this in an email to Mr. Warrell on 5 February, so that Mr. Warrell would be aware that the maintenance work to the trees in the Gardens had not been forgotten, since it was over four months since they had met.

The trees remain on the list for works during 2018. There are two reasons why the work has not yet been done: (i) the work is not urgent, and (ii) limes are a species of tree that tolerate tree surgery when they are in leaf, so work to other species that must be dormant when pruned is carried out over the winter. The Arboricultural Unit has carried out work to several hundred street trees over the course of the winter as well as emergency works due to high winds and snow. The team will schedule the work to the trees in Eldon Square as soon as they are able.