

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

15 JANUARY 2018

COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

Local Neighbourhood Money

In April 2017, the Chair of the Planning Applications Committee replied to a resident's question on CIL money - that further details on how CIL would be spent would be coming to Policy Committee in the summer, and a consultation held in the Autumn of 2017 on the 15% local spend that is determined by the public. Could the Lead Councillor for spending the public's money update us on what actually happened? Could they also let us know the total CIL amount collected to date, and therefore the 15% that is local neighbourhood money? Could they now let us know what they plan to do with the public's money?

REPLY by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport):

I thank Cllr White for his question.

The total amount of CIL collected up until March 2017 is £2,172,820 of which 15% is £325,923. The total from April 2017 to date is £2,329,623 of which 15% is £347,125.

Last June Policy Committee agreed to use £908k of CIL funding to support the financing of the Capital programme. This allocation does not affect the 15% local contribution which is being held.

The Council has a significant budget gap from 2018/19 and subsequent years and some difficult decisions have to be made in order to deliver a balanced budget. The Council's capital programme, which is funded by a number of sources including developer contributions, is currently being revisited and will be presented to the February Policy Committee as an important element of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Given the need to align the proposed capital programme alongside the Council's revenue budget a decision on CIL and how best to use the entire contribution must wait until then.

As previously stated, a public consultation will be undertaken when proposals are brought forward for schemes that would benefit from the 15% CIL funds allocation.

COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 2

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

Public Drinking Water Fountains to Cut Plastic Waste

35 million new plastic bottles are used in the UK every single day. And as if that's not bad enough, it's estimated that 16 million - nearly half of those - don't get recycled. Instead they end up as part of the tide of toxic plastic waste that's choking our rivers and oceans, and making its way back through our food chain. In Reading we have the excellent Refill Reading campaign, to cut down on single use coffee cups, but we need to do more to deal with the threat to the oceans, our single greatest natural asset. We have to make sure that we use fewer plastic bottles, recycle them better and, most crucially, stop them from ending up on our beaches and riverbanks, in our seas and rivers, causing terrible damage to wildlife as well as blighting the landscape.

There is a growing call for action, from lobby groups such as the WWF and Greenpeace and not least the Daily Mail, which is leading a campaign against plastic waste. Many of us try to make a difference by carrying a refillable bottle with us. But all too often our good intentions are frustrated by the lack of public drinking water fountains where we can refill it. We are forced to buy yet another bottle from retailers, and the vending machines that are readily available.

Many cities across the world provide free drinking water fountains in public spaces, and we know that this sort of action can work. We need to have the same in the UK and install an extensive network of accessible, free tap water fountains, either new or recommissioned, to reduce the pressure on our planet.

What support is the Council able to offer to this movement?

REPLY by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport):

I thank Cllr White for his question.

The Council supports the reduction of waste plastics in a number of ways. Plastic drinks bottles are recycled as part of the local recycling service offered to residents.

The Council and Reading Climate Change Partnership have supported Transition Town Reading to launch the scheme mentioned in the question, namely the Refill Reading scheme. This scheme introduces refillable coffee cups to independent coffee shops. The cups are made from sustainably sourced bamboo.

The Council notes with interest the recent report produced by the Environmental Audit Committee "Plastic Bottles: Turning Back the Plastic Tide" which has brought

the issue national press attention. The report sets out a number of recommendations to the Government namely:

- Introduce a Deposit Return Scheme for plastic drinks bottles
- Introduce a requirement for all public premises that serve food and drink to provide free drinking water
- Increase the number of public water fountains
- Make producers financially responsible for the plastic packaging they produce and to phase in a mandated 50% recycled plastic content in plastic bottles, to be achieved by 2023 at the latest.

The Council supports the recommendations of that report, but believes that it does not go far enough. We propose that the Government should go further than giving water companies the power to supply water fountains, but that there should be an obligation on them to install water fountains in public places in areas of certain population density. The Council intends to write to Thames Water proposing that a number of water fountains be installed in Reading with possible sites in Town Hall Square, the town centre and our well-used parks.

At the current time a number of Council facilities offer drinking water to patrons including the Town Hall and theatre-goers at the Hexagon. Members of the public can refill their water bottles at reception in any of the Council's leisure centres at the Meadway, Rivermead, Academy Sport and Palmer Park. In addition licensed bars run by the Council also provide drinking water to patrons (in common with other premises licensed to sell food and drink).

The Council will also write to members of the Business Improvement District to encourage them to offer drinking water refills to members of the public.

Last Friday's Environment White Paper was a great disappointment offering plenty of consultations as a poor substitute for action. The only immediate policy announced was the welcome extension of the 5p plastic bag charge to smaller shops in England - as already happens in Scotland and Wales.