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Labour Councillor, Abbey Ward

**Deputy Leader & Lead Councillor for
Strategic Environment, Planning and
Transport**

Your Ref:

My Ref: tp/tw

Date: 23 June 2014

ESTATE AND LETTING AGENTS BOARDS

You will recollect that I invited all Reading based estate and letting agents to a meeting at the Civic Offices on Thursday 20 March to discuss the issue of advertising board proliferation and options open to the Borough Council and the local industry.

The consensus of those agents who attended the meeting on 20 March was that they would support a voluntary “ban” on boards advertising house and flat “lets”.

I am keen, therefore, to take forward a voluntary agreement to the effect that agents will not display boards in connection with the letting of properties (i.e. TO LET/LET BY) within a defined area for a trial period of six months. To be meaningful, the trial should take place during the six months from October 2014 to March 2015. My proposal is that we conduct a trial in the area bounded by, and including, the south side of London Road between Alexandra Road and Cemetery Junction, the south side of Wokingham Road from Cemetery Junction to Eastern Avenue, the west side of Eastern Avenue, the north side of Upper Redlands Road from Eastern Avenue to Alexandra Road, and the west side of Alexandra Road, as shown on the attached map.

The purpose in proposing this area is that it is easily defined and encompasses most of the roads where we have been experiencing real problems. Furthermore, we have evidence that more than thirty different agents have displayed at least one board in the area during a survey period running from January 2012 to April 2013, so there is no question that it is not a representative area.

Can I make it clear that, at this stage, there is no proposal to restrict the use of FOR-SALE or SOLD boards as these represent a very small proportion of the proliferation problem.

I am therefore writing to invite your agreement to participate in not using TO LET or LET BY boards in the above area for the period of 1 October 2014 to 31 March 2015.

The meeting on 20 March rightly discussed what would happen if one or two letting agencies declined to participate in this voluntary agreement. The short answer is that it would increase pressure on the Council to invoke its statutory powers and make it more likely, subject to approval by the appropriate committee, that the Council will make an application to the Secretary of State for more power to control estate agents boards. Evidence of the failure of a voluntary approach would mean that such an application is much more likely to succeed.

You will be aware that the Council remains under considerable pressure to invoke more draconian powers available under the Planning Laws to ban the use of all estate agents and letting boards, but I am hopeful that a successful trial in respect of removing "TO LET and LET BY" boards will mean that we can avoid the use of legal sanctions whilst delivering a marked improvement in the local environment.

Could I please invite you to fill in your company details and sign the attached form and return this as soon as possible to me at the Borough Council.

In the meantime, if there are any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Tony Page

Deputy Leader & Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport

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