

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE
15 JULY 2015

Present: Councillors David Absolom (Chair), Ayub, Chrisp, Dennis, Duveen, Hopper, Lawrence, Maskell, McDonald, Page, Rodda, Whitham and R Williams.

Apologies: Councillor Stevens

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of 26 March 2015 and 27 May 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. MINUTES OF TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the meeting of the Traffic Management Sub-Committee of 17 June 2015 were received.

4. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Joint Waste Disposal Board of 26 March 2015 and the Minutes of the meeting of the AWE Local Liaison Committee of 22 April 2015 were submitted.

Resolved: That the Minutes be noted.

That, pursuant to the provisions set out in Standing Order 10(3)(b), which permitted questions to be taken after the deadline for receipt where there was a genuine reason for urgency and it had been received in writing by 12 noon on the day before the meeting, the Chair allowed a question for the following reason:

- On the grounds that this was a matter of concern to local rail commuters and could not reasonably wait until the next meeting of the Committee to be held in November 2015.

5. QUESTIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER NO 36

Questioner	Subject
Councillor Chrisp	Network Rail and First Great Western - Task and Finish Group

(The full text of the question and reply were made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

That, pursuant to Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the Chair agreed that the following item of business be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency for the following reason:

- On the grounds that the issue arose with insufficient time to prepare a report in time for the publication of the agenda on 7 July 2015 and that the matter

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needed to be determined before the next scheduled meeting of the Committee due to be held on 24 November 2015.

6. PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A TASK-AND-FINISH GROUP

The Head of Legal & Democratic Services submitted a report to update the Committee on the proposal to establish a Task-and-Finish Group to undertake an overview and scrutiny exercise to look into on-going signalling problems between Reading and London Paddington on the Great Western Mainline and air conditioning on First Great Western trains.

The report stated that the Head of Legal & Democratic Services had received a question from Councillor Chrisp under Standing Order 36 in the following terms:

“A number of commuters have contacted me about the on-going signalling problems between Reading and London Paddington on the Great Western Mainline, where it seems barely a day goes by without signals failing somewhere along the route.

Additionally, there have been many complaints on social media about the constant problems with air-conditioning systems failing on First Great Western trains, despite assurances made by the company that the issue was being addressed with its supplier.

As a daily commuter into London I too have experienced these issues regularly. Commuters were of the understanding that the recent signalling upgrades earlier this year would improve the stability of the signals on the route but this does not seem to be the case.

Would it be possible for the SEPT Committee to establish a one-off scrutiny sub-committee to investigate the issues, and ask Network Rail and First Great Western to respond?”

The question had been received after the deadline of 6pm on 8 July 2015 for this meeting, however, the Chair was minded to allow the question in accordance with emergency provisions set out in Standing order 10(3)(b), which permitted questions to be taken where there was a genuine reason for urgency and it had been received in writing by 12 noon on the day before the meeting.

The report recommended terms of reference for the Task-and-Finish Group and, as the proportionality requirements were not applied to such groups, recommended that the Group be set up on the basis of a 4:2:1 or 3:1:1 split (Labour: Conservative: Liberal Democrat or Green).

Resolved:

- (1) That a Task-and-Finish Group be established, in accordance with the process described in the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, with the following terms of reference:**

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- To review complaints being made by commuters about on-going signalling problems between Reading and London Paddington on the Great Western Mainline and the problems being experienced with the failure of air-conditioning systems on First Great Western train services;
 - To seek an explanation from Network Rail of the current situation and why the recent signalling upgrades had not resolved the on-going problems being experienced and seek assurances that the issues would be resolved;
 - To consider, in the light of information from Network Rail, the likely impact on the performance and reliability of local rail services that would occur once the Reading Station upgrade reached completion;
 - To seek an explanation from First Great Western of the reasons why the air-conditioning on their trains had experienced on-going problems and seek assurances that measures were being addressed with its supplier to resolve this persistent problem;
- (2) That the membership of the Task-and-Finish Group be on the basis of 4:2:1 and the Group Leaders be asked to notify the Head of Legal and Democratic Services of the appointment(s) for their groups.

(Councillor Duveen declared an interest in the above item. Nature of Interest: Councillor Duveen's son was employed by Network Rail.)

7. SMALL HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION (HMO) AND THE ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION - REVIEW

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report updating the Committee on the review of HMO policy, on proposals to update the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and on new or extended Article 4 Directions in relation to a number of Conservation Areas in the Borough.

The report stated that an Article 4 Direction had been made on 16 May 2012, and come into force from 16 May 2013, to remove the permitted development right to convert a dwellinghouse (C3 use class) to a small house in multiple occupation, with between 3 and 6 unrelated inhabitants (C4 use class) and was applied to an area covering much of Katesgrove, Park and Redlands wards.

The report explained that the Residential Conversions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) outlined the criteria to be taken into account to assess applications in the Article 4 area, including that there should not be more than 25% of the properties within a 50m radius of the application site that were in HMO use. However, there were difficulties in identifying and calculating the numbers of HMOs in an area, which made it difficult to assess the effectiveness of this policy.

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Further to the report on the Enhancement of Conservation Areas that had been submitted to the Committee in March 2015 (Minute 31 refers) and the petition presented to the Committee in March 2015 (Minute 24 refers) requesting an Article 4 Direction to cover Jesse Terrace, a meeting had been held in June 2015 with a number of invited representatives of community groups who had previously raised issues about the need for the enhancement of conservation areas in their localities. It was agreed that further work would be undertaken and another meeting held in September 2015 to which Historic England would also be invited.

The report also stated that in light of the review of conservation areas it would be appropriate to update the Residential Conversions SPD, with the revised document being consulted on and adopted in 2016.

The report outlined the arguments with regard to extending the existing Article 4 area or issuing new Article 4 Directions to cover conversions from C3 dwellinghouses to C4 HMOs in other parts of the Borough, as there were substantial implications in terms of Council resources in extending the Article 4 Direction area beyond the area where evidence showed that it was necessary. In terms of Jesse Terrace, there was no data to indicate that there was a high percentage of HMOs, but it was considered that it was important to retain the character of the street which had interesting architectural detail of a type that was important to Reading's heritage.

At the invitation of the Chair, Mr Anthony Ihringer, a member of the Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association, addressed the Committee.

Resolved:

- (1) That the review of changes of use from C3 dwelling houses to C4 small houses in multiple occupation within the Article 4 Direction area be noted;**
- (2) That the Residential Conversions Supplementary Planning Document be reviewed and a report be presented to a future meeting of the Committee;**
- (3) That proposals for an extension of the Article 4 Direction covering Jesse Terrace, to prevent changes of use from a C3 dwelling house to a C4 small house in multiple occupation, be implemented.**

8. CARBON PLAN - 2015-2020

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report to update the Committee on the proposed new Carbon Plan 2015-16, which set out the Council's policy, targets and action plan for energy, water and carbon management for 2015 to 2020. A copy of the Carbon Plan 2015-20 was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

This strategy built on the successes of the previous six years of carbon reduction which had seen the corporate carbon emissions reduced by 31% from the 2008 baseline, which was 10% ahead of the annual target and avoided costs of £1.1million for 2013/14. Investments that had contributed towards this reduction included

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Reading Transport's electric hybrid vehicles and a fleet of renewably sourced Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) fuelled buses. There had also been a major investment in 26 solar panels on schools, council and community buildings and 1,300 LED streetlights.

The report stated that the Council was committed to reduce its carbon emissions by 50% by 2020, against a 2008 baseline year. As such a further 20% reduction on carbon emissions, or 3,700 tCO₂, was needed to meet this target. Work in progress was cautiously predicted to further reduce the carbon emissions of the council by around 2,400 tCO₂, which would bring the council's carbon footprint to 10% above the target emissions. In 2014/15 the Council invested £1.1million on energy efficiency and renewable energy measures in the new Civic Offices, including 572 solar panels, which was predicted to reduce the energy use of the Council Offices by 75%.

The report explained that the Carbon Plan set out actions to ensure that the authority continued to be compliant with relevant legislation and national reporting requirements, to bridge the carbon emissions savings gap by reducing the footprint by 50% by 2020 (against a 2008 baseline) and to increase the use of low carbon and renewable technologies, generating at least 15% of total energy use off grid by 2020. The priority for the period of this strategy was to reduce the Council's carbon emissions by managing the energy and water use. This work directly supported the Council's aspiration to narrow the gaps in Reading to ensure that everyone could benefit from its success.

The plan, which would be monitored by the Energy and Natural Resources Group, focused on four key issues for the council:

1. Cost of resources;
2. Environmental impact;
3. Energy decarbonisation;
4. Integration of energy management approaches throughout the organisation.

Resolved: That the Carbon Plan for 2015-20 be approved.

9. CYCLING STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2015-16

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report to update the Committee on the Cycling Strategy 2014, which formed part of the overall transport strategy for Reading. The Cycling Strategy programme for 2015/16 was attached to the report at Appendix A and the progress made in delivering the Cycling Strategy during 2014/15 was attached to the report at Appendix B.

The report stated that the Cycling Strategy programme for 2015/16 had been developed by assessing the level of available funding alongside an assessment methodology to prioritise projects which met strategic objectives and would deliver value for money. In addition to the core funding from the Local Transport Fund (LTF), the programme included projects funded through the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF), private sector funding (secured through Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions) and other local revenue funding sources.

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The report explained that the key delivery objectives within the programme for 2015/16 included:

- The opening of the new pedestrian cycle bridge over the River Thames, linking Caversham to Reading Station and the town centre;
- Completion of the A33 Pinch Point Scheme, which included a new raised section of cycle route R1 between Rose Kiln Lane and Bennet Road to ensure that it remained usable during times of flooding;
- The opening of the Napier Road underpass to provide an additional north-south link under the Great Western railway line between Napier Road and Kenavon Drive;
- Continuing the substantial programme of cycle training courses and events including Bikeability, Bike It and the CTC cycling development programme.

A range of schemes and measures had been implemented over the previous year, contributing towards achieving the overall objectives of the Cycling Strategy. Delivery highlights in 2014/15 included:

- The launch of ReadyBike in June 2014, which consisted of 200 bikes at 29 locations;
- A range of cycle infrastructure enhancements including the shared path scheme on London Road, advisory cycle lanes on Berkeley Avenue and cycle parking facilities at Reading Station, Moorlands Primary School in Tilehurst and Grace Church in Emmer Green.

It was reported that the annual cordon count in May each year had registered a steady increase in people cycling as 5176 cyclists had been counted in 2013, 6168 in 2014 and 7258 in 2015.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Cycling Strategy programme for 2015/16 as set out in Appendix A be approved;
- (2) That the progress made in delivering the Cycling Strategy during 2014/15, as outlined in Appendix B, be noted.

10. AIR QUALITY ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report to update the Committee on the revised Air Quality Action Plan.

The report stated that the Air Quality Action Plan had been in place since 2009 and required review as some of the actions had either been completed or superseded.

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The report explained that the revised Plan contained measures to improve air quality across Reading, specifically targeting action on the key pollutants and setting out a series of interventions and ways to provide education and promotion of the issues.

The Air Quality Action Plan was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

Resolved:

- (1) That the work that was being undertaken to improve air quality be noted;
- (2) That the Action Plan, as attached to the report at Appendix 1, be endorsed.

11. LOCAL PLANNING ENFORCEMENT PLAN

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report updating the Committee on the proposal to adopt a local Planning Enforcement Plan, a copy of which was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report stated that the Planning Enforcement Plan had been drafted based on National Policy and Guidance and would replace the Council's existing Enforcement Policy, which had been adopted in 2007.

The report explained that the Local Enforcement Plan was a factual document that provided the legal and national policy context to planning enforcement and background to the Council's Enforcement Service. It set out the Council's priorities for investigation and action, explained what would be investigated and what would not be investigated and outlined the Council's general discretionary powers with regard to planning enforcement.

The new Enforcement Plan had provided the opportunity to update the existing Policy in light of changes to legislation and Government policy and also to review the service priorities and timescales in regard to the nature of current complaints and the lower levels of enforcement and planning officer and other resources currently available. Priorities were now based on a judgement of the level of harm being caused rather than on the type of breach.

The report also stated that there was no requirement to consult on the Plan but it would be reviewed in response to any constructive comments raised and, should this occur, the Plan would be brought back to Committee for further approval.

Resolved: That the Planning Enforcement Plan, as attached to the report at Appendix 1, be approved.

12. LETTINGS BOARDS PILOT SCHEME

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report containing the results of the pilot ban on lettings boards in a part of Redlands Ward.

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The report explained that the Planning Enforcement Team had surveyed and monitored the number and concentration of lettings boards, mainly in parts of Redlands Ward, in response to concerns raised by the Redlands and University Neighbourhood action Group (NAG) and had subsequently set up an agreed voluntary ban in co-operation with most lettings agents.

Attached to the report were the following appendices:

Appendix 1 - A map of the original survey area that had been identified as suffering high concentrations of lettings boards;

Appendix 2 - A map of the area covered by the voluntary ban;

Appendix 3 - The survey results for the pilot area from January 2012 to April 2013;

Appendix 4 - The survey results for the pilot area from September 2014 to April 2015;

Appendix 5 - The draft Charter on the Display of Lettings Boards.

The report stated that the trial had run from October 2014 to March 2015 and most agents had refrained from advertising in accordance with the agreement and so the numbers of boards displayed had been significantly reduced. As a result of the success of this pilot it was proposed to extend the voluntary ban in the same area of Redlands Ward for a further three years and to extend the voluntary arrangement to areas adjacent to the pilot area which were also affected by high numbers of student lettings and to other areas of the Borough, such as the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area, where the character and appearance of such areas was seen to be adversely affected by the proliferation of lettings boards.

The report also stated that the Council would consult on the draft charter and work with community groups and neighbourhood officers to define an appropriate basis for monitoring and encouraging the voluntary ban in their areas as the Council's Planning Enforcement Team did not have the resources to monitor bans on a permanent basis.

It was also noted that the ban was only voluntary as the lettings boards did have deemed consent under the advertising regulations. However, if the voluntary arrangements did not work and there was evidence that the detrimental impact of lettings boards were damaging an area, the Council could consider making an application to the Secretary of State for a Regulation 7 Direction.

Resolved:

- (1) That the results of the voluntary pilot ban on lettings boards that operated in a part of Redlands Ward between October 2014 and March 2015 be noted;
- (2) That agreement be sought with local lettings agents that the pilot ban be extended on a permanent basis;
- (3) That agreement be sought with local lettings agents and local community groups that the pilot ban be extended to adjoining areas in Redlands and Park Wards, with areas to be defined as part of the

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consultation and on the basis that local community groups could effectively monitor and encourage the operation of the voluntary ban;

- (4) That agreement be sought with local lettings agents and local community groups that a voluntary ban on the display of lettings boards be agreed and introduced to cover the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area in Abbey Ward, to be defined as part of the consultation and on the basis that local community groups could monitor effectively and encourage the operation of the voluntary ban.

13. READYBIKE CYCLE HIRE SCHEME - FIRST YEAR UPDATE

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report to update the Committee on the first full year of operation of the ReadyBike cycle hire scheme, future proposals to relocate a small number of underused docking stations and progress with identifying a sponsor for the scheme. A map showing the location of ReadyBike Docking Stations was attached to the report at Appendix A.

The report explained that the ReadyBike cycle scheme had been launched in June 2014 as a core component of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) programme funded by the Department for Transport and that there had initially been 200 bikes at 27 docking stations, with two additional docking stations opened during the year.

The report stated that usage statistics for the first full year of operation showed that there had been over 26,000 individual bike rentals from 220 annual subscribers and 7,000 casual subscriptions and that users of the scheme had cycled an estimated 135,000 miles, with the average rental time being 38 minutes.

The review of usage had also identified the most used and underused docking stations and so it was proposed to relocate a small number of docking stations to areas of potentially higher demand and to expand the scheme into West Reading.

The report also stated that officers were investigating the possibility of appointing a sponsor for the scheme, which had the potential to further raise the profile of ReadyBike and to provide an income stream to help ensure the longer-term sustainability of the scheme.

Resolved:

- (1) That the success of the scheme to date and progress with identifying a sponsor be noted;
- (2) That the proposals for relocating a small number of underused docking stations be noted;
- (3) That the Head of Transportation and Streetcare be granted delegated authority, in conjunction with the Lead Member for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport to approve any relocation of docking stations.

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14. WHITEKNIGHTS RESERVOIR

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report updating the Committee on the position with regard to Whiteknights Reservoir.

The report explained that Whiteknights Reservoir was located within the University of Reading (UoR) grounds and bordered Whiteknights Road and the Borough boundary, and that there were three 'Statutory Undertakers' that owned land forming part of the reservoir - UoR, B&M Care and the Council. An inspection, that had been commissioned by the UoR in 2011, had resulted in five mandatory recommendations, one of which related to the Council protecting the allotment side embankment to withstand the Probably Maximum Flood discharge without damage.

The report stated that since August 2014 the UoR and the Council had sought to collaborate in an attempt to deal with the outstanding mandatory recommendations and had also sought Counsel's advice on the respective duties and responsibilities of the statutory undertakers and owners and this had confirmed that the UoR, B&M Care and the Council were jointly responsible.

In February 2015 the UoR and the Council had commissioned a Flood Study which recommended two options, both of which were outlined in the report.

The report also stated that work had been commissioned to ascertain the most appropriate engineering solution, to carry out topographical and habitat surveys and to model the Flood Study options. Once completed, the procurement tender process would commence in late summer with the site works programmed to be completed within the current financial year.

Resolved:

- (1) That the progress to date and the programme for completing the necessary risk of failure reduction measures be noted;
- (2) That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods, in consultation with the Lead Member for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport, be authorised to approve capital expenditure for the preferred option as set out in the report;
- (3) That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods, in consultation with the Lead Member for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport, be authorised to award the contract to the best value tender.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and closed at 8.40pm).