

**STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE  
24 NOVEMBER 2015**

**Present:** Councillors David Absolom (Chair), Ayub, Chrisp, Dennis, Duveen, Hopper, Lawrence (for items 19 to 27), Maskell, Page, Rodda, Whitham and R Williams.

**Apologies:** Councillor McDonald

**15. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of 15 July 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**16. MINUTES OF TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Traffic Management Sub-Committee of 16 September 2015 were received and the Minutes of the meeting of the Traffic Management Sub-Committee of 3 November 2015 that were tabled at the meeting were also received.

**17. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Joint Waste Disposal Board of 7 July 2015, the Minutes of the meeting of the AWE Local Liaison Committee of 10 June 2015 and the Minutes of the Reading Climate Change Partnership of 12 October 2015 were submitted.

**Resolved:** That the Minutes be noted.

**18. QUESTIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER NO 36**

<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Subject</b>
Councillor Hopper	Highway works at Reading Station and the Pedestrian/Cycle bridge over the River Thames
Councillor Hopper	Local Sustainable Transport Funding
Councillor Steele	Bus Stop Improvements
Councillor Ballsdon	Funding for Bus Stop Improvements
Councillor Ballsdon	S106 Developer Monies
Councillor Ballsdon	Capital Improvements Programme
Councillor Whitham	M4 Scheme

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

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**19. PRESENTATION - HISTORIC ENGLAND**

Martin Small, Principal Advisor, Historic Environment Planning, National Planning and Conservation Department at Historic England, gave a presentation on the work of Historic England.

**Resolved:** That the presentation be noted.

**20. CONSERVATION AREAS ENHANCEMENT PILOT PROJECT - UPDATE**

Further to Minute 31 of the meeting on 26 March 2015, the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report updating the Committee on the progress of the working group of officers who were working with the Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association (BSANA) and other groups to examine priorities for environmental action and improvement and ways that priority matters could be dealt with in such areas within available budgets and resources. A copy of the presentation outlining issues and options for the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area was attached to the report at Appendix 1, a copy of the presentation with an appraisal of issues for the St Peter's Conservation Area was attached to the report at Appendix 2 and a copy of the presentation outlining issues and problems in the Redlands Conservation Area was attached to the report at Appendix 3. A copy of the report produced by the working group community group members was attached to the report at Appendix 4.

The report stated that the first meeting of the working group had highlighted a number of issues, including the need to review some conservation area appraisals, waste collection and streetcare issues and the expanding use of single dwelling houses for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) uses. The meeting agreed that officers should invite representatives of Historic England to attend a future meeting of the group to provide advice on the enhancement of conservation areas and that the groups would prepare assessments of priorities for action in their areas.

The report explained that there were 15 Conservation Areas in the Borough and that these were designated as areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which should be conserved or where appropriate enhanced. Unlike listed buildings, they were designated at a local level, by the local authority, and specific controls were exercised in these areas relating particularly to demolition and minor development, as well as protection of trees. Local authorities had a duty to consider the designation of conservation areas and good practice recommended that conservation area appraisals should be produced for all such areas which could include management plans with recommendations for action. These appraisals had been completed for all 15 Conservation Areas in the Borough.

The report also stated that Historic England had attended the second meeting of the working group and that each of the groups representing the three pilot areas had provided a presentation on issues in their areas, with the following common themes raised:

- Issues with car parking;
- The change of use of single dwelling houses to HMO uses;

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- The loss and alteration of front walls and railings to provide for off street parking or waste bin storage areas and the continuing risk of such loss;
- Poorly maintained pavement surfaces;
- Inappropriate traffic signs and street furniture;
- Poor quality new development within and adjoining conservation areas.

There was also a view that all conservation areas should be recognisable as such and that the special green coloured street name signs should be used to denote all conservation areas.

The report stated that all three groups had also jointly produced a single paper on Priorities for Action for protecting and enhancing Reading's Conservation Areas which set out the following priorities:

- Raising awareness of Conservation Areas and developing community involvement through better information and communication with stakeholders and residents;
- Developing policies to protect and enhance such areas in relation to a range of matters and actions;
- Policy and action to deal with the increase in HMOs and other small units of accommodation;
- Protect character through action to protect and enhance garden walls/railings/front gardens/bins/streetscape;
- Protect character through action to protect and enhance buildings/architectural features and details;
- Improved, more responsive, enforcement action possibly using the community to report incidences.

The paper also raised the possibility of forming a Conservation Area Advisory Committee involving representatives from each of the subject conservation areas.

The report outlined the advice provided by Historic England, who had suggested that the Council undertook a review of Conservation Area Appraisals to consider if any would be eligible for the grant funding that was available if any of the areas were designated a Conservation Area at Risk. It was noted that these grants required match funding from the Council and that there was no budget available at present.

The report explained that officers would undertake a review of the Castle Hill/Russell Street Conservation Area Appraisal as a pilot project, which would assist in developing a methodology for undertaking such reviews and help in assessing the resource implications of undertaking such reviews. It would also provide an up to date assessment of the Conservation Area heritage asset and point to priorities for future action to maintain and enhance the heritage of the area. The preparation of such a review would involve local representatives and stakeholders (including landowner and estate/letting agent representatives) to help identify issues and opportunities for enhancement. It would consider appropriate management tools and actions, but it was noted that there were currently no resources or budget for any work of this nature.

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The report stated that Reading Borough Council Streetcare had been represented at the meetings of the working group and had undertaken environmental visual audits of the Area with BSANA and cleared a number of areas of waste dumping. They also proposed to carry out street furniture audits with the Neighbourhood Officers (NOs) to produce a programme of work that could be implemented when budget allowed. It had also been agreed that street name plates would be changed over time as those in conservation areas should have a green background and have the name of the conservation area printed on them. In addition, an on-street communal bin trial had been introduced in Anstey Road to address issues of bins blocking footways and would be reviewed at the end of November 2015.

Environmental Health and Community Safety and Neighbourhood Initiatives were also in close contact with BSANA in relation to issues around HMO licencing, environmental protection/nuisance, anti-social behaviour and other neighbourhood action matters.

The report explained there had been a request for the Council to set up conservation area advisory committees (CAAC). The advice from Historic England was that local planning authorities could set up CAACs which should consist mostly of non-local authority people who represented the interests of residents and businesses and who were able to bring expertise or understanding of the area's history and amenity. There was no statutory duty for the Council to operate or facilitate CAACs, nor was there national guidance on how these should be organised, operated or on the composition of their membership. CAACs were independent of the Council and anyone could stand for election to be members. It was proposed that local groups set up their own committee and invited appropriate persons to be members. The local planning authority would agree to notify and consult a CAAC on planning applications affecting their conservation area and any comments made would be taken into account.

The report cautioned that available budgets and resources were restricted and there was very little spare capacity to undertake the tasks and work outlined in relation to other existing priorities. There was already a commitment to make an Article 4 Direction for Jesse Terrace (Minute 21 refers) which was having resource implications and there was now a commitment to produce a review of the Castle Hill/Russell Street Conservation Area Appraisal. As a result, further options related to this project were not considered appropriate given the current limited resources.

At the invitation of the Chair Karen Rowlands addressed the Committee on this item.

A written statement was submitted by Helen Lambert, Trustee of Reading Neighbourhood Network and Chair of the Caversham and District Residents Association.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That the progress to date in setting up a working group to develop a conservation areas enhancement pilot project; the submissions of the representatives of each of the pilot conservation areas on the issues affecting their conservation areas; and the Priorities for Action

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for protecting and enhancing Reading's Conservation Areas produced jointly by the representatives of each of the pilot conservation areas be noted;

- (2) That the various actions by Streetcare, Environmental Health, Community Safety and Neighbourhood Initiatives that were already taking place in conjunction with the community, in particular in relation to the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area be noted;
- (3) That further work on the proposed actions for the pilot conservation areas outlined in the report relating to: the undertaking of a review of the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area Appraisal; consideration of whether the Council should declare a Conservation Area at Risk for the Castle Hill/Russell Street Conservation Area; consideration of enhancement and improvement works and future applications for grant assistance; consideration of the use and development of the various tools outlined in paragraph 4.9 be endorsed;
- (4) That, recognising the current severe pressure on resources, the actions and works outlined above could only be undertaken where there was local community organisation and voluntary assistance, and would depend on the involvement of Historic England;
- (5) That Historic England provide a training day on 24 February 2016 in using the Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit (OCAT) and other techniques to prepare a conservation area appraisal and realistic management plan, along with a follow-up masterclass on 6 April 2016 to help review the draft appraisals prepared, to which Council Officers and four representatives from Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association, Caversham and District Residents' Association, Redlands and University Neighbourhood Action Group and Reading Civic Society would be invited.

**21. JESSE TERRACE - PROPOSED ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION IN RELATION TO SMALL HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION (HMO)**

Further to Minute 7 of the meeting on 15 July 2015, the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report to update the Committee on the proposed Article 4 Direction covering Jesse Terrace to prevent changes of use from a C3 dwellinghouse to a C4 small house in multiple occupation. It was considered that its location within the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area, the unspoilt character of the street, and its importance as an example of a very fine, attractive street with interesting architectural detail of a type that was important to Reading's heritage, was justification for restricting further changes of use to HMO use in Jesse Terrace. A copy of the Article 4 Notice, and map defining the area of Jesse Terrace to which the Direction would apply, was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report stated that Census information had shown that the general area of the Castle Hill/Russell Street Conservation area had relatively high proportions of dwellings that were a flat, maisonette or apartment as part of a converted or shared

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house compared to other parts of Reading, although it did not have particularly high concentrations of HMO's compared to other parts of Reading. However, the total recorded proportion in Jesse Terrace was around 17%, which was higher than the 10% average for Reading.

The report explained that in moving forward with an Article 4 Direction, the original petition that had been presented to the meeting on 26 March 2015 (Minute 24 refers) had requested that the existing Direction covering Jesse Terrace be extended to cover further changes of use to HMO use. However, any Article 4 Direction prepared now would have to be under the new 2015 General Permitted Development Order (GPDO).

The report also explained that there were two forms of Direction, an Immediate and a Non-Immediate Direction. The Council's clear legal advice was that an Immediate Article 4 Direction should be limited to situations where there was an urgent need to protect the proper planning or local amenity of the area because there was evidence that the development to which the Direction related had occurred and was and would be prejudicial to the proper planning of the area or constitute a threat to the amenities of their area. Legal advice was that if the Council sought to make an Immediate Direction it would be open to challenge either through representations to the Secretary of State or through judicial review proceedings in the courts and also carried the threat of claims for compensation.

The report recommended that the Council made a Non-Immediate Article 4 Direction to remove permitted development rights to convert from a C3 dwellinghouse to a C4 HMO for Jesse Terrace, Reading. Once served, there would be an opportunity for parties to make representations and the Council could consider amendments to the Direction. The notice would make clear that the Direction would not take effect until after 12 months from the date of the notice. After this, planning permission would be required to change use from a C3 dwellinghouse to a C4 small HMO. Such applications would be considered in the light of relevant policies (currently policies CS18 and DM8) and the advice in the Council's Supplementary Planning Document on Residential Conversions.

The report stressed that exemptions from paying council tax existed where houses were occupied by students. Such exemptions were recorded on Council Tax records which, along with other information (mainly licencing information), provided a good indication of HMO use in those areas which had high concentrations of students. In areas not used by students, there were no such records of HMO use and it was therefore very difficult to establish through verifiable evidence those properties that were in HMO use at any one time. Obtaining such evidence was often very difficult and very resource intensive. It also had to be noted that applications made solely because permitted development rights had been removed by an Article 4 Direction were free of any planning application fees and dealing with such applications, including any evidence gathering that was needed, would be expensive in terms of staff resources.

At the invitation of the Chair Anthony Inringer, Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association, addressed the Committee on this item.

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- (1) That the report be noted;
- (2) That the making of a non-immediate Article 4 Direction to remove permitted development rights to convert from a C3 dwellinghouse to a C4 House in Multiple Occupation for Jesse Terrace as shown on the map in the Notice (attached to the report at Appendix 1) be approved.

## **22. LOCAL PLAN ISSUES AND OPTIONS**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report to update the Committee on the task of replacing the Council's existing development plans (the Core Strategy, Reading Central Area Action Plan and Sites and Detailed Policies Document) with a new single local plan to set out how Reading would develop up to 2036 and to seek approval to undertake community involvement on the Issues and Options for the Local Plan, a copy of which was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

Various changes had established the need to review the Local Plan. In particular, the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2012 had meant significant changes, in particular the need for local planning authorities to identify their 'objectively assessed development needs' and provide for them.

The report stated that the first stage of preparing a new local plan was to consult broadly on what the plan should address and how it should address it. This stage was typically known as Issues and Options, and was a discussion paper with a number of consultation questions and alternative options on how to proceed and did not state the Council's preferred approach at this stage. The responses received to the consultation, which would take place in November and December 2015, would then be used in drawing up the draft plan.

The report explained that one of the main issues that the Issues and Options tackled was the number of new homes to be provided over the plan period. One of the key inputs to the plan was the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), which had been produced in conjunction with the other five Berkshire unitary authorities, and had identified a level of need for 699 dwellings per annum in Reading. For comparison, the existing Core Strategy contained an annual requirement for up to 572 dwellings per annum.

The identified need was the starting point for how many dwellings Reading should seek to provide, but it did not take account of physical and policy constraints. The expectation in the NPPF was that each authority should seek to accommodate its objectively assessed needs within its boundaries insofar as was compatible with other policies in the NPPF. The Local Plan would therefore need to explore to what extent this level of housing could be accommodated within Reading and what the annual target for new housing should be.

The report also explained that the main body of the Issues and Options document was structured into four parts:

- What are we aiming to achieve, and by when?

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- How much development?
- How and where should development take place?
- Which other issues should be dealt with?

The Issues and Options was supported by a Sustainability Appraisal, which was a requirement of all stages of plan production, and assessed each option against a range of environmental, social and economic objectives to identify any significant sustainability issues. This document also needed to be open to consultation, and would be available on the Council's website.

The report stated that community involvement was intended to start early in 2016 and would last for a period of at least six weeks. Responses from the community involvement exercise would feed into a full draft Local Plan, potentially by November 2016 followed by consultation early in 2017.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That the Issues and Options for the Local Plan (as attached to the report at Appendix 1) be approved;
- (2) That community involvement on the Issues and Options for the Local Plan and associated supporting documents be authorised;
- (3) That the Head of Planning, Development and Regulatory Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport, be authorised to make any minor amendments necessary to the Issues and Options for the Local Plan prior to community involvement.

**23. GREAT WESTERN ELECTRIFICATION AND READING GREEN PARK STATION**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report to update the Committee on the latest position regarding Network Rail's electrification of the Great Western Mainline and implications for the proposed station at Green Park.

The report stated that the electrification of the Great Western Mainline from London to South Wales was a committed project within Network Rail's Control Period 5 as agreed with Government, to be delivered during the period 2014-19. Electrification of the Great Western Mainline would provide better connections between Reading and London, Newbury, Oxford, Bristol and Cardiff. In conjunction with the Intercity Express Programme a new fleet of faster, longer electric trains would provide shorter journey times and more frequent intercity services.

The report also stated that electrification of the railway line between Southcote Junction and Basingstoke had been included in the final phase of Great Western electrification works, to be completed by the end of 2018. This section of electrification was vital to enable the opening of Green Park Station as the higher performance of the electric trains would allow trains to call at the new station within the current timetable for the line, which would not be possible with the diesel trains currently operating on the line without the need for an additional train.

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The report explained that the Department for Transport and Network Rail had announced in June 2015 that a review of the previously committed programme of major enhancement projects for Control Period 5 (2014-19) would be undertaken by the newly appointed Chairman of Network Rail, Sir Peter Hendy. This review was required due to higher costs and longer delivery timescales associated with the programme of works than had previously been anticipated.

The report also explained that Reading Green Park Station was a proposed new railway station on the Reading to Basingstoke line. Planning permission for the station had been granted and capital funding to deliver the station had been secured through the Thames Valley Berkshire LEP Growth Deal and S106 private sector funding contributions. Delivery of a new station at Green Park was a critical element of Reading's transport strategy to facilitate the proposed level of residential, commercial and leisure development on the A33 corridor (within both Reading and south of the M4 in Wokingham) by helping to alleviate significantly increased levels of congestion on the road network.

Delivery of Green Park Station was anticipated to be completed by December 2018, to coincide with the previously committed timescales for Network Rail's electrification of the line from Southcote Junction to Basingstoke. Officers would continue to work with colleagues at Network Rail, Great Western Railway and Thames Valley Berkshire LEP to progress plans for Green Park Station to ensure the Council was in a position to take advantage of electrification of the line when timescales had been confirmed by Government.

**Resolved:** That the report and position be noted.

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

**24. READING'S CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY 2013-2020; PERFORMANCE REPORT TO MARCH 2015**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report updating the Committee on the Climate Change Strategy 2013-2020, the progress against targets and the first annual review of the action plan. A copy of the performance reports and the revised action plans for 2015/16 was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report stated that the Reading's Climate Change Strategy 2013-2020 (Reading Means Business on Climate Change) had been launched in September 2013, setting out a vision for Reading for 2020, a set of strategic priorities organised according to eight themes, and detailed action plans on how the strategic priorities would be delivered by partners.

The Climate Change Strategy sought to develop activities that would lead to reductions in the carbon footprint of Reading Borough of 34% from 2005 levels by 2020. The latest local area carbon footprint data (2013) showed Reading Borough had reduced its carbon emissions by 27% reduction per capita since 2005, which made it the best performing Local Authority in Berkshire and amongst the best for carbon emission reductions of the 413 Local Authorities in the UK.

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The eight themes of the strategy were:

- Energy Supply;
- Low Carbon Development;
- Natural Environment;
- Water Supply and Flooding;
- Transport;
- Purchasing, Supply and Consumption;
- Education, Communication and Influencing Behaviour;
- Community.

Although the action plans detailed delivery by a range of organisations, a significant number of actions were being delivered by the Council and these were embodied in existing Council policies such as the Carbon Plan, Local Transport Plan and Biodiversity Action Plan.

The report explained that there had been a number of key successes in the delivery of the Climate Change action plan during the first 18 months of delivery of the strategy, including a large solar panel project on Reading's Council housing and securing of funding for LED streetlights across the Borough. There had been significant progress with sustainable transport schemes such as ReadyBike and the new pedestrian and cycle bridge across the River Thames. Other successes included the completion of the Re-Start Local business project and local community projects such as Reading Bike Kitchen and Food4Families.

The report also stated that across all partners, 80.2% of actions were green and amber (on-track, complete or progressing but with minor delays/issues), with the remaining being red or purple (not progressing or yet to be resourced or developed). For the delivery of actions for which Reading Borough Council was the lead, 82.5% of actions were green or amber. Overall there had been significant progress, but there were some areas where timescales had slipped, local delivery partners had not been able to commit, largely due to resource constraints, or where national policy changes had impacted delivery.

**Resolved:** That the progress that had been made in the delivery of the Reading Climate Change Strategy 'Reading Means Business on Climate Change', for the period April 2014 - March 2015, be noted.

## **25. SOLAR COMMUNITY SCHEME**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that outlined the changes that the government had proposed to reduce the subsidies for photovoltaic (electricity generating) solar panels by up to 87% from their existing rates from 1 January 2016.

The report explained that at the current market rate for solar panels, the changes had the impact of making projects initiated from January 2016 unviable without additional income from other sources such as energy sales to other sites or on site use. However, there was an exemption for community groups, who were able to fix

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the Feed in Tariff for one year if an application for a pre-registration had been made by the 30 September 2015 and the application accepted by Ofgem.

The report stated that only community organisations were eligible to pre-register buildings for the Feed in Tariff (FiT) payments and that they would then receive the existing tariff rates for the 20 year life of the scheme, which had to be used for the benefit of the community. Officers had contacted a number of local and national community organisations who would be able to own the systems and gain the benefit of the current higher FiT payments. A list of buildings that had been submitted to Ofgem for pre-registration was attached to the report at Appendix A.

The report stated that an organisation called Energy4All had pre-registered the solar panels on the Council's buildings using a local Community Benefit Society (BenCom) and it was proposed that the Sustainability Team continued to work with Energy4All to develop a community share option to be hosted on these buildings.

The report also stated that under the Energy4All arrangement, the host buildings would benefit from fixed low cost energy (likely to be 6 to 8 pence per kWh) for the lifetime of the scheme (20 years). The local BenCom would receive proceeds after returns to local shareholders and the scheme administration costs had been taken out. The BenCom would be designed to support local activity relating to fuel poverty, low carbon development and climate change activity.

The report explained that Energy4All had appointed an interim board which would include members from Reading Climate Change Partnership (RCCP), the Council (one officer and two Councillors) and local organisations such as Reading Sustainability Centre and/or the Berkshire Energy Pioneers and Energy4All. Members of the board would decide what proportion of the profit went to shareholders and what went to towards local community/charity organisations.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That the work with the community organisation Energy4All to establish a community share model for hosting solar panels on buildings in Reading which had been pre-registered be agreed;
- (2) That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods, in consultation with the Head of Legal & Democratic Services, the Head of Finance and the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport, be delegated authority to enter into an agreement between the Community Benefit organisation administered by Energy4All and the Council to host solar panel systems on the Council's buildings subject to being satisfied that the legal and procurement requirements were met.

**26. WITHDRAWAL OF THE CODE FOR SUSTAINABLE HOMES**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report to update the Committee on the withdrawal of the Code for Sustainable Homes, which was an assessment method for the environmental performance of new housing. The implications of the withdrawal meant that the Council's existing planning policies on

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the Code for Sustainable Homes could no longer be applied, although an energy performance equivalent to the Council's policy requirements could still be required under transitional arrangements.

The report explained that the Code for Sustainable Homes had previously been consulted on as part of a rationalisation of the various standards that were to be applied to new housing development, with the consultation also covering matters such as security, accessibility and internal space. In terms of sustainability, the Government's intention was to replace the Code for Sustainable Homes with measures in the Building Regulations. However, these measures would relate to only two aspects - water efficiency and energy and other aspects of the Code, such as materials or pollution, would no longer be covered. It had been made clear that local planning authorities could not set any housing standards other than those offered at national level.

The report stated that for water efficiency, a new voluntary standard of 110 litres per person per day had been introduced in the Building Regulations from 1 October 2015. These standards would be applied in those authorities that had 'opted in' through a policy in their Local Plan. If an authority had not included such a policy, which was currently the case in Reading, water use would be in accordance with the existing minimum Building Regulations standard (125 litres per person per day). Transitional arrangements had been in place to allow the Council to continue to seek water efficiency standards equivalent to the Council's Code for Sustainable Homes policies, but these ended on 1 October 2015.

The report also explained that at the time the Code was withdrawn, the Government had intended to introduce zero carbon homes through the Building Regulations in 2016. The transitional arrangements were therefore that local planning authorities could continue to apply energy requirements equivalent to their Code policies until zero carbon homes were introduced. For energy, Code Level 3 was now equivalent to the Building Regulations (as amended in 2013) in any case, meaning that only the 50% of major developments that were subject to Code Level 4 would be affected. The equivalent to Code Level 4 was a 19% increase over part L of the Building Regulations 2013. However, the 'Fixing the Foundations' paper published in July 2015 had removed any commitment to zero carbon homes.

There had been no guidance on how this proposed change affected the transitional arrangements outlined above and it was the view of Officers that the Council should continue to apply the equivalent energy levels to the Code Level 4 for 50% of major housing schemes as set out above, until such time as those transitional arrangements were formally removed. Applicants would be required to demonstrate how this had been met by following the energy hierarchy in an Energy Statement in line with existing planning application requirements.

The above changes applied to new applications, meaning that the Code for Sustainable Homes could continue to be applied where it was a requirement of a planning condition pre-dating the March 2015 statement. However, in practice, applicants were making applications to vary these conditions, and these needed to be treated as new applications, subject to the above.

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The report also stated that the sustainable design and construction policy requirements for non-residential buildings, under the BREEAM system, were not affected by any of these changes. Nor were some of the more general sustainability requirements for all types of development including residential, such as the need to consider incorporation of decentralised energy or to include sustainable drainage systems. A Sustainability Statement was still required alongside major applications that demonstrated compliance with these policies.

The report recommended that the Council sought to apply the voluntary water efficiency standard in the Building Regulations of 110 litres per person per day, by inclusion of a policy in the new Local Plan and also to ask the Secretary of State to clarify the status of the transitional arrangements and to reconsider preventing local planning authorities from setting their own sustainability standards for new homes, now that the Government's aim of introducing zero carbon homes had been abandoned.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That the Council write to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to express concern about the removal of the Code for Sustainable Homes and the abandoning of the commitment to zero carbon homes;
- (2) That the Council further ask the Secretary of State to clarify whether the transitional arrangements for energy efficiency for new homes set out in the ministerial statement of 25 March 2015 now continue until specifically withdrawn;
- (3) That the Council further ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to consider whether, in the absence of any lead on the sustainability of new homes from Government, local planning authorities should be able to once again set their own sustainable design and construction standards for new dwellings in their local policies.

**27. AIR QUALITY**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report updating the Committee on the consultation response submitted to the Department of Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) on draft plans to improve air quality, a revision to the Air Quality Action Plan 2009 which was currently out for consultation, an update on a recent bid for Defra grant funding and an update on air quality monitoring within the Borough.

The report explained that the Council were under a statutory duty to regularly 'review and assess' air quality in their areas, and to determine whether or not air quality objectives were likely to be achieved. Where exceedances were considered likely, the Council must then declare an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and prepare an Air Quality Action Plan setting out the measures it intended to put in place in pursuit of the objectives. In September 2006, the Council had declared six Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) but in September 2009 monitoring had

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indicated additional areas where nitrogen dioxide levels were being exceeded. As a result the six AQMAs were revoked and replaced by a single management area which covered perceived and actual exceedances. The existing Air Quality Action Plan, which had been in place since 2009, had been reviewed as some of the actions had either been completed or superseded and the revised Plan contained measures to improve air quality across Reading, specifically targeting action on the key pollutants of concern, which were Nitrogen Dioxide and Particulate Matter.

The report stated that the government had published its consultation document, 'Draft plans to improve air quality in the UK - Tackling nitrogen dioxide in our towns and cities' in September 2015. The draft plan set out individual, local and national measures. Local authority measures were identified as having a central role in achieving improvements in air quality, due to local knowledge and interaction with communities.

The report also stated that the consultation paper indicated that a national programme of support, electrification of the vehicle fleet, retrofitting buses to the latest standard, combined with local assessment and targeted local action would deliver the government's projection of compliance (in all but seven cities) being achieved by 2020. The paper did not identify the additional measures that were likely to be required in the remaining non-compliant areas and also proposed a national framework for new Clean Air Zones, which would support local decision making to implement access restrictions for certain types of vehicles.

The report stated that the draft plan appeared to place too much emphasis on local authorities to implement schemes to address the problem. The national role was stated to be one of support for local authorities, however little detail was provided. It was agreed that local authorities were well placed to understand local conditions and what measures could be implemented to improve air quality but, due to continued budget cuts, there must be increased support in order to be able to deliver further changes.

The report also explained that the national plan appeared to be heavily reliant on the vehicle emissions performance standards (EURO6) being effective and if these were not as effective as predicted the projections would be inaccurate, which would also affect other measures that were linked to emissions standards such as clean air zones. Source apportionment work carried out in Reading in 2013 showed that light diesel vehicles were the highest single emitters of Nitrogen dioxide (~45%) and so in order to be truly successful, clean air zones must tackle this source of Nitrogen dioxide, but penalising these vehicles would be unpopular with their drivers and might have an economic impact if this discouraged people from the town centre.

#### Update to the Air Quality Action Plan 2009

The Air Quality Action Plan had been updated to reflect the current position and the plan was currently out for consultation with statutory consultees.

#### Bid for Air Quality Grant Funding

**STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE**  
**24 NOVEMBER 2015**

A bid had been submitted for grant funding in October 2015 to reduce the impact of Council vehicles on pollution in and around Reading's Air Quality Management Area by enabling the early adoption of electric vehicles for use on the Council fleet.

This project planned to use this grant funding opportunity to install four electric vehicle charging points on public sector estate within Reading for use with Council fleet vehicles. The provision of this infrastructure would support the local authority to integrate electric vehicles into its fleet as appropriate opportunities and economies arose and enabled the transition to electric vehicle adoption in accordance with the Council's vehicle replacement programme.

Changes to Air Quality Monitoring within the Borough

Defra had identified the need for additional Nitrogen Oxide and particulate matter (PM10) monitors in the Reading area and had requested that one of the existing sites be moved to London Road to become affiliated with their network. Defra would fund the relocation process and would also carry out the data management for the site, benefitting the Council by reducing the annual cost of running the site.

**Resolved:** That the response to the Government's consultation and the work being undertaken to improve air quality in the Borough be noted.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and closed at 9.00pm).