

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE - 22 NOVEMBER 2017

QUESTION NO. 1 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Councillor McGonigle to ask the Chair of Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:

Charging Points for Electric Powered Vehicles

We are, at last, witnessing the beginning of the end for the internal combustion engine.

Gains in battery technology are seeing a rapid switch to electric powered vehicles.

The benefits to the environment are manifold, if you will pardon the pun, especially as more and more energy comes from renewable sources.

Can we know if this authority has plans to meet and encourage this demand by providing more charging points in existing locations and new-builds around the town, and will the council and/or a private company be providing these points?

REPLY by the Chair of the Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee (Councillor David Absolom):

I invite Councillor Page, the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport to make the response on my behalf.

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

I thank Cllr McGonigle for her question.

The Council recognises that encouraging the use of electric vehicles is an important element of tackling climate change and improving air quality in Reading. Electric vehicles emit no tailpipe emissions and therefore offer a significant improvement to air quality compared to the combustion engine.

However, the carbon footprint derived from electric vehicles comes from the carbon emissions associated with the generation of electricity. The carbon intensity of electricity varies and where renewable energy is used to charge vehicles, this will offer significantly lower carbon transport. It is usual practice at the current time to use the average carbon intensity of grid. Using current averages, electric vehicles still offer an improvement over even the most economic of internal combustion engines. Additionally the carbon intensity of national grid electricity is reducing as more offshore wind and other renewable energy generation comes on line.

This authority has and will continue to play a leading role in encouraging the uptake and usage of electric vehicles, through initiatives such as the recently installed publicly available charge points outside the Civic Offices in Simmonds Street, and the purchase of our first electric vehicle - with more to follow.

Where possible the electric vehicle charging infrastructure at Council sites will be co-located with renewable energy generation to reduce the carbon emissions of Council operations.

A network of publicly available charge points already exists in Reading, provided by a combination of the public and private sector. This includes facilities in town centre car parks, hotels, retail outlets, car dealerships, business parks, the University, Royal Berkshire Hospital, and the park & ride facilities at Mere oak and Winnersh Triangle.

The Council will seek additional charging points through the planning process. The Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan, which will be discussed in a few minutes time at this meeting, introduces requirements for new developments to provide charging points in policy TR5. All new houses with dedicated off-street parking should provide a charging point, and within communal car parks for both residential and non-residential development that have at least 10 spaces, at least ten percent of spaces should provide an active charging point. Reading's proposed policy is among the more ambitious of the limited number of authorities that operate such policies. It will be considered at examination by a Government-appointed inspector, but we consider that the air quality issues faced in Reading present a strong case to support it.

It is important to emphasise that encouraging the use of electric vehicles is one element of the Council's wider strategies to tackle climate change and improve air quality within the Borough which involve an ambitious programme of initiatives including:

- (1) investment in solar panels and low-energy LED street lighting;
- (2) a campaign to reduce vehicle idling emissions;
- (3) one of the cleanest bus fleets in the country through the Council owned Reading Buses;
- (4) encouraging the use of public transport, walking and cycling through our significant programme of infrastructure investments in the local cycle network, rail facilities including Green Park Station, and a comprehensive network of park & ride sites and Mass Rapid Transit routes.

It is regrettable that a number of these initiatives which will bring substantial environmental benefits in years to come, such as park and ride schemes and mass rapid public transport routes, have been opposed by Green Party councillors.