

# HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 11 MARCH 2020

**Present:** Councillor Davies (Chair);  
Councillors Carnell, Ennis, Gittings, Grashoff, Hacker, James, Leng, Manghnani, McGonigle, O'Connell, Rowland, R Singh and R Williams

**Apologies:** Councillors Lovelock and Hoskin

## 18. MINUTES OF THE HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS & LEISURE COMMITTEE HELD ON 6 NOVEMBER 2019

The Minutes of the meeting of 6 November 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

## 19. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the following meetings were submitted:

Community Safety Partnership - 9 September 2019 and 6 February 2020.

**Resolved - That the Minutes be received.**

## 20. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

Questions on the following matters were submitted:

<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
Jo Ramsay	Glass Recycling	Cllr James

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

## 21. READING FESTIVAL 2019

Further to Minute 23 of the meeting held on 13 March 2019, James Crosbie, Acting Head of Planning and Regulatory Services, introduced Noel Painting, Festival Republic who gave a presentation on the 2019 Reading Festival. The presentation particularly focused on the issues of safeguarding and welfare and sustainability.

Noel explained that the changes that had been made for the 2019 festival had been successful. They had included working with more agencies to promote safeguarding and

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wellbeing, new main stage barriers and line up gates for the pit, additional clean-up volunteers and greater use of car sharing. Noel added that sustainability measures had also been successful with the following improvements on the previous year:

- 14% reduction in carbon footprint;
- 19% reduction in waste;
- 20% reduction in single-use plastic;
- 52% reduction in tents left on site;
- Increased use of biofuels.

Noel also gave an overview of Festival Republic's proposals for the 2020 Festival, which included improving the plans and entertainment provision for those attendees who arrived on the Thursday evening whilst keeping noise levels low. Other improvements would include improved arena flow, safety improvements to the bridge and improved water provision across the site. There would also be increased safeguarding measures including new partner agencies and help maps throughout the site to advise people on where to go for help. The Festival would also run a sustainable audience campaign which included:

- Zero-waste festival goer;
- Take your tent home;
- Recycling Champions;
- No single-use plastic in the arena or from bar and food outlets throughout the site.

**Resolved -**

**That Noel Painting be thanked for his interesting and informative presentation.**

### **22. DRAFT HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS STRATEGIES**

Sarah Tapliss, Strategic Housing Finance and Development Manager, gave an update presentation on the Housing and Homelessness Strategies that would be submitted to the Committee in July 2020. The presentation covered:

- The National Picture;
- Local Policies and Priorities;
- Strengths and Challenges;
- Consultation;
- Housing Strategy Vision and Themes;
- Homelessness Strategy 2020-2025;

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- Next Steps.

Sarah requested that Committee members feed any questions and comments to Housing Officers for inclusion in the final Strategies.

**Resolved -**

**That Sarah Tapliss be thanked for her interesting and informative presentation.**

### **23. READING, PLACE OF CULTURE, YEAR TWO EVALUATION**

Further to Minute 24 of the meeting held on 13 March 2019, the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing an updated on the activity and outcomes delivered in year two of 'Reading, Place of Culture', which ran from December 2018 to December 2019. The report also outlined plans for the final year of the programme, December 2019 - December 2020, the current partnership working arrangements and indicative plans for the future.

The report detailed the projects that had been delivered and commissioned in Year 2, including:

- The culmination of the first three commissioned programmes (June 2018-June 2019);
- The commissioning of three more programmes, funded for a total of £75,000 - including £30,000 'partner' funding from Berkshire Community Foundation and Brighter Futures for Children - to be delivered July 2019 - July 2020;
- The commissioning of three final programmes, for a total of £70,000, with match funding from Berkshire Community Foundation and Brighter Futures for Children once again.
- Two Ageing Well Pilot programmes which explored the barriers faced by older people when accessing Arts Culture and Heritage.
- A Young People's Mental Health Pilot to explore how the sector could meet the needs of young people with mental health issues.
- Rosetta Life were delivering a dance, music and spoken word project for long term conditions such as living with the effects of stroke, dementia or Parkinson's to widen the approach for living well with neurological disability;
- Reading Rep, Jelly and other partners were delivering theatre for young people with SEND to develop confidence and independence, develop skills and decrease social isolation;
- Sport In Mind and Junction Dance were working with Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, schools and community settings to use dance in the treatment, management and prevention of mental illness.
- Mustard Tree, Real Time and Cranbury College were delivering a creative employment project based around film for young people with SEND to build confidence and key skills;

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- Alana House, Rahab and Reading Rep were delivering theatre for women at risk to enhance communication and conflict resolution skills;
- Age UK Berkshire and Museum of English Rural Life were delivering a storytelling and reminiscence project for older people at risk of loneliness and social isolation to improve wellbeing.

The report also set out the Year three commissions which focused on creating a sustainable legacy of the scheme with the following plans:

- Deliver year two and three cultural commissions and their associated action research, data collection, social impact measurement and case studies;
- Further training to upskill the sector; e.g. RBC had commissioned MB Associates to deliver evaluation and social impact measurement training for the cultural commissions; RBC were bringing CC Skills to Reading for creative employment training for cultural organisations working with children and young people;
- Deliver a conference aimed at local cross-sector organisations and commissioners to take place in November 2020 to disseminate learning from the research and commissioning strands;
- Following research carried out by the Whitley Researchers and feedback from grassroots BAME arts culture and heritage organisations, the University would coordinate a BAME grassroots cultural organisation exchange to provide more opportunities for networking, peer support and exchange;
- Complete Ageing Well pilot programmes and support Cultural Champions to advocate for older people's engagement;
- Continue to advocate the role of arts, culture and heritage with commissioners from other sectors, creating and publicising research and case studies to illustrate impact;
- Set up a Business Ambassadors programme to link more local businesses to the arts culture and heritage sector;
- Use the Reading Thames Festival as a transition to prepare for a larger celebratory year in 2021. This would support Reading's existing festivals and provide them with an infrastructure, which was sustainable beyond this grant funding;
- Expand the Young Researchers programme to three new schools in Reading;
- Build on the existing partnerships that had been developed organically, to create a strategic cultural development partnership for Reading that focused on supporting the development and growth of the arts, culture and heritage sector in Reading.

Lara Stavrinou, Culture Development Officer, gave a presentation that provided further details on the delivery of the second full year of the programme and the proposals and plans for year three.

**Resolved -**

- (1) That the progress made in delivering 'Reading, Place of Culture' in its second year, be noted;

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- (2) That the proposals to further develop the programme of work in the third and final year of delivery as set out in section 5 of the report be noted.

### 24. PRIVATE SECTOR RENEWAL & DISABLED ADAPTATIONS POLICY

Further to Minute 15 of the meeting held on 6 November 2019, the Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which sought approval of the updated Private Sector Renewal & Disabled Adaptations Policy.

The report stated that there had been 40 responses to the public consultation which had taken place during January and February 2020, that these were from a mix of residents, family and friends of service users, and professionals, and set out the feedback that had been received together with the Council's responses.

While the responses raised detailed issues and provided challenge to the proposed policy, the overall policy direction remained as presented to the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee on 6 November 2019. However, an annual review was proposed as part of the policy and if changes to the grants offered were required then appropriate amendments would be made.

#### Resolved:

- (1) That the Private Sector Renewal & Disabled Adaptations Policy, effective from 1 April 2020, be approved;
- (2) That the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Assistant Director of Finance and the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services where appropriate, be given delegated authority to amend the Private Sector Renewal & Disabled Adaptations Policy where it did not affect the broad direction of the policy.

### 25. EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY 2020-2026

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which sought approval of the updated Empty Homes Strategy 2020-2026. The report explained how the service helped and persuaded owners to bring their empty homes back into use. This was the third version of the strategy and took stock of activity since 2008.

The report explained that bringing privately-owned empty homes back into the market boosted housing supply, smartened streetscapes, helped prevent and tackled crime and anti-social behaviour. Re-use of existing buildings had a smaller ecological footprint than new build housing because it required fewer building resources and did not require undeveloped land. A copy of the Empty Homes Strategy 2020-2026 was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

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The Empty Homes Strategy set out the following aims for the period 2020-2026:

- Identify empty homes and their owners, understand the reasons why their homes remained empty and help owners to bring their spare homes back into use.
- Use enforcement powers to force owners to reduce the impact of their unoccupied buildings on their locale.
- Encourage owners to make their spare homes available to local people needing a home.
- Contribute towards sustainable development through re-use of existing, finite resources.
- Maximise Council income through New Homes Bonus rewards.

The Strategy also set a goal for increasing the number of high priority long-term empty homes back in to use from 20 to 30 annually.

### Resolved:

- (1) That the activity and results of the Empty Homes Strategy be noted;
- (2) That the Empty Homes Strategy 2020/26 and its new goal for bringing 30 high-priority long term empty homes back into use be approved;
- (3) That the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Assistant Director of Finance and the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services where appropriate, be delegated to amend the Strategy where it did not affect the broad direction of the policy.

## 26. BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on the Council's draft Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), which would be considered by Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on 16 March 2020, for endorsement. The report set out a draft Biodiversity Action Plan which provided a framework for actions that the Council would be taking to conserve biodiversity across the range of its functions. Reading's existing BAP covered the period from 2005-2015 and had expired, therefore a new version was needed to set out the actions needed as part of the response to the climate emergency. The following documents were appended to the report:

- Appendix 1 - Equality Impact Assessment Scoping
- Appendix 2 - Draft Biodiversity Action Plan

The report recommended that the draft BAP, which was a more succinct and user-friendly document than the 2005-2015 version, be approved for public consultation. The new document was intended to be easier to use, but also easier to keep under review over the coming years.

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The report explained that the BAP was organised around the following themes, each of which contained a set of actions. In some cases, these actions would require more detailed work to be undertaken, such as a more detailed action plan.

- Legislation - to ensure the Council's plans and actions complied with most up-to-date legislation.
- Designated sites - actions around management, monitoring and selection of important wildlife sites.
- Planning and building control - ensuring that there was no net loss and where achievable a net gain of biodiversity on development sites, which was likely to mean identifying priorities for a Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document.
- Woodlands, trees and hedgerows - management actions for woodlands, consideration of actions for identification of new woodlands and reviewing whether all ancient woodlands had been identified.
- Grasslands and road verges - actions around management of these features, including opportunities for wildflowers and pollinating species.
- The two rivers, their floodplains and other watercourses - ensuring that the wildlife significance of the watercourses and surrounds was maintained and enhanced, including opportunities for habitat creation.
- Management of Council projects and the sale of land - actions could ensure that biodiversity was considered as a fundamental part of Council projects and taken into account when disposing of land.
- Education, access to nature, public engagement and volunteering - a variety of actions around education at all ages, working with schools and the University, as well as volunteering and Council communications to the public about biodiversity.
- Ecological records - actions to continue and improve the maintenance of ecological records.
- Connectivity - actions to improve the connection of habitats in Reading to allow for movement of biodiversity.
- Coordinated approach across council departments and within policy documents - noting the need to co-ordinate efforts with a range of Council and partner strategies.
- Global biodiversity - actions the Council and partners could make to avoid contributing to global biodiversity loss, for instance in terms of procurement.
- Ongoing review - an action for an annual review.

The report added that the actions were accompanied by proposals for how and when they would be achieved, and it would be important to keep these actions under review on a regular basis over the life of the BAP. To achieve this, in some places the BAP avoided significant levels of detail and focused on the strategic objectives, which meant it would be easier to review and update in a streamlined manner.

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### Resolved:

- (1) That the draft Strategy be endorsed for approval by Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on 16 March 2020;
- (2) That the Deputy Director of Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services be authorised to make any changes necessary as a result of consultation and approve the final Biodiversity Action Plan, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

### 27. TREE STRATEGY

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which set out a draft Tree Strategy 2020, which would be considered by Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on 16 March 2020, for endorsement. The following documents were appended to the report:

Appendix 1 - Equality Impact Assessment Scoping;  
Appendix 2 - Draft Tree Strategy 2020.

The report explained that the new Tree Strategy was needed to replace the 2010 version as an important part of the Council's response to the Climate Emergency. The Strategy included ambitious aims and objectives for tree planting to 2030 and 2050, and included details of how the existing tree stock would be protected and maintained. Key stakeholders and environmental groups had been given the opportunity to express their views which had been incorporated into the document, and public consultation would take place during March and April 2020.

The report stated that the Tree Strategy was built around a number of objectives, with actions against each objective. The Strategy looked at tree management and planting on the Council's own land, as well as measures dealing with trees on private land. The objectives of the Strategy are set out below:

1. RBC Tree Stock - protect, retain, manage and plant trees to ensure an increased canopy cover of healthy trees resistant to pest & diseases and climate change and to reduce air pollution.
2. Climate adaptation - increase the diversity of the tree stock (family, genus and species) to provide resistance to climate change; plant large canopy species wherever feasible; maintain and keep trees healthy in order that they could achieve their full potential thus ensuring that Reading's Urban Forest was resilient to the impacts of climate change and provided the maximum role in mitigating its effects.
3. Tree planting - plant at least 3,000 'standard' trees by 2030 on Council land.
4. Canopy cover - increase overall canopy cover to 25% by 2050; ensure that all wards had at least 12% canopy cover by 2050; and target priority areas for tree planting based on canopy cover, air pollution, treed corridors, green links,



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areas of high landscape value and ensure RBC and planting on development sites considers these.

5. Protection of private trees - the Local Planning Authority would continue to use its powers under the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 to make Tree Preservation Orders and to retain & protect trees on development sites in line with good arboricultural practice.
6. RBC would engage with partners, public and landowners and work with key partner volunteer groups to raise awareness of the Tree Strategy aims and good arboricultural management practices.
7. Improve biodiversity across the Borough by: selecting trees that were either native or of wildlife value, particularly in semi-natural areas; by ensuring that tree planting did not compromise or adversely affect other habitats; and by protecting ancient woodlands and ancient/veteran trees.
8. Identify all areas suitable for street tree and other planting on Council land - initial study to be completed by 2021, with continued updates.
9. Funding - continue to secure funding for tree planting and maintenance through government and other funding streams and partners.
10. Biosecurity - continually review RBC purchasing and working practices to ensure RBC were working to good arboricultural practice to minimise the chance of introducing and/or spreading pests, diseases or invasive species within the Borough.
11. Trees & Development - tree retention, protection and planting within development sites in would be in accordance with the aims of the Tree Strategy and Local Plan policies.
12. Monitor progress - record and report net tree gain on an annual basis and reassess canopy cover in 2030.

In terms of quantitative targets, the strategy included shorter-term targets for tree planting by 2030 and longer-term targets for canopy cover by 2050. The proposed tree planting on Council land would represent a 50% increase over current rates. However, as trees took some time to mature, it would be a number of years before increased tree planting in line with this strategy was reflected in increased canopy cover, and this was why no canopy cover target by 2030 was proposed. There were four wards which fell below the ward-specific canopy cover target (Abbey, Battle, Katesgrove and Whitley), and these, along with the treed corridors, would need to see much of the tree planting.

Councillor Rowland recommended amendments to the Strategy, which were accepted by the Committee and are set out in the resolution below.

### Resolved:

- (1) That the draft Strategy be endorsed for approval by Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on 16 March 2020 as amended below:
  - (a) Objective 4 of the Tree Strategy be amended to state:

*“Canopy cover - increase overall canopy cover to 25% by 2030; ensure that all wards have at least 12% canopy cover by 2030;*

*and target priority areas for tree planting based on canopy cover, air pollution, treed corridors, green links, areas of high landscape value and ensure RBC and planting on development sites considers these.”*

- (b) the references to Objective 4 in the Executive Summary and the Action Plan in Appendix 1 be changed from 2050 to 2030.
- (c) That paragraphs 3.65-3.69 the Strategy be amended as follows:

*3.65 “It is important for this Strategy to aim to increase canopy cover in light of the global climate crisis. This aim must balance ambition with what can realistically be achieved, taking account of the borough’s geography.*

*3.66 Reading is a highly urban Borough, with the fourth highest population density in the South East at the 2011 Census. That translates directly to a densely built environment with almost half of Reading’s area covered by the footprint of buildings, road carriageways and railway lines. The Council owns or has direction over approximately a quarter of all the land within the Borough and much of that land is made up of other areas where opportunities for tree planting are very limited, such as sports pitches, surface car parks, service yards, open water, or priority habitats that are not characterised by tree cover. Within that context, it remains notable that Reading’s tree cover is already higher than the average for towns and cities of 16% (Forest Research, 2018). There is thus limited additional land available for planting, and even less land over which the Council is able to exercise control.*

*3.67 This Strategy aims to increase canopy coverage within the Borough to 25% by 2030. This is a genuinely ambitious target which responds to the immediate Climate Emergency we face, whilst reflecting the amount of land that is likely to be suitable and potentially achievable for extended cover. It would represent a substantial 39% increase in canopy cover over existing levels.*

*3.68 To achieve this target, it is evident that the Council recognises that it cannot undertake achieving these results alone. Most essentially, it will need private landowners across the Borough to respond similarly and immediately through their own planting. The Council reiterates that the number of trees planted must significantly exceed those felled on Council land and this follows true for each and every private land owner within the borough to achieve 25% tree cover by 2030.*

*3.69 In addition, whilst recognising that each ward has a distinct geography, the aim is to ensure that all wards exceed 12% canopy cover by 2030, and this will require immediate improvement in four wards in particular - Abbey, Battle, Katesgrove and Whitley. Again, the Council will do its part through Council planting (subject to funding), ensuring net increases in tree numbers on development sites and the retention of trees through TPOs. However, the contribution of private landowners will again be vital.*

These two paragraphs remain as is:

**“3.70 Ward boundaries in Reading are under review, and are expected to change shortly. There will therefore be a need for an early review of this Strategy to take account of the new wards and amend objectives accordingly. This review may also cover other matters.**

**3.71 In order to contribute to the aim of increasing canopy cover, the Council will aim to plant at least three trees for every non-woodland one felled on its own land. Over the last 10 years, the Council’s target of planting two trees for every one felled has been surpassed, and it is an opportunity to increase our ambitions to meet the climate change challenge. However, achieving this will require an increase in funding for tree planting and maintenance.”**

*And to add:*

*3.72 The Council will work with key stakeholders to ensure that a robust and active engagement and encouragement programme is established and motivated as set out in sections N1, N5, N7, N17 and N21 in the Nature Theme Action Plan of the Draft Climate Change Strategy document. It is evident that without the public’s involvement, this ambitious target will fail and it is their active and willing participation alongside the Council that is paramount to achieving this aggressive target.*

- (2) That the Deputy Director of Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services be authorised to make any changes necessary as a result of consultation and approve the final Tree Strategy, in consultation with the Lead Councillors for Culture, Heritage & Recreation and Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport.

(The meeting closed at 9.45 pm)