

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

Direct: ☎ 0118 937 2368
e-mail:
julie.quarmby@reading.gov.uk

3 March 2020

Your contact is: **Julie Quarmby - Committee Services**

NOTICE OF MEETING - HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE 11 MARCH 2020

A meeting of the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee will be held on Wednesday, 11 March 2020 at 6.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading. The Agenda for the meeting is set out below.

	<u>WARDS AFFECTED</u>	<u>Page No</u>
1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST		
Councillors to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests they may have in relation to the items for consideration.		
2. MINUTES OF THE HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS & LEISURE COMMITTEE HELD ON 6 NOVEMBER 2019		5 - 8
3. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES		9 - 18
Community Safety Partnership - 19 September 2019 and 6 February 2020.		
4. PETITIONS		
Petitions submitted pursuant to Standing Order 36 in relation to matters falling within the Committee's Powers & Duties which have been received by Head of Legal & Democratic Services no later than four clear working days before the meeting.		

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5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

Questions submitted pursuant to Standing Order 36 in relation to matters falling within the Committee's Powers & Duties which have been submitted in writing and received by the Head of Legal & Democratic Services no later than four clear working days before the meeting.

6. DECISION BOOK REFERENCES

To consider any requests received by the Monitoring Officer pursuant to Standing Order 42, for consideration of matters falling within the Committee's Powers & Duties which have been subject of Decision Book reports.

7. READING FESTIVAL 2019

**BOROUGH
WIDE**

To receive a presentation on the 2019 Reading Festival.

8. DRAFT HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS STRATEGIES

**BOROUGH
WIDE**

To receive a presentation on the draft Housing and Homelessness Strategies.

9. READING, PLACE OF CULTURE, YEAR TWO EVALUATION

**BOROUGH
WIDE** 19 - 28

This report updates the Committee on the activity and outcomes delivered in year two of Reading, Place of Culture and outlines plans for the final year of the programme, the current partnership working arrangements and indicative plans for the future.

10. PRIVATE SECTOR RENEWAL & DISABLED ADAPTATIONS POLICY

**BOROUGH
WIDE** 29 - 62

This report seeks approval of the final Private Sector Renewal & Disabled Adaptations Policy, following public consultation.

11. EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY 2020-2026

**BOROUGH
WIDE** 63 - 92

This report seeks approval of the updated Empty Homes Strategy 2020-2026.

12. BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

**BOROUGH
WIDE** 93 - 172

This report recommends that a draft Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) be published for public consultation.

13. TREE STRATEGY

**BOROUGH
WIDE** 173 -
244

This report concerns a draft Tree Strategy 2020, which is proposed for public consultation to take place in March and April 2020.

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HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE 6 NOVEMBER 2019

Present: Councillor Davies (Chair);
Councillors Carnell, Ennis, Grashoff, Hacker, Hoskin, James, Leng,
Lovelock, Manghnani, McGonigle, Rowland, R Singh, and R Williams.

Apologies: Councillor Gittings.

13. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of 3 July 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

14. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

Questions on the following matters were submitted:

<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
Cllr McGonigle	Tree Planting Programme	Cllr James
Cllr R Singh	Norcot Youth & Community Centre	Cllr James
Cllr R Singh	Moped Misuse	Cllr James

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

15. PRIVATE SECTOR RENEWAL & DISABLED ADAPTATIONS POLICY

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which sought approval of the draft updated Private Sector Renewal & Disabled Adaptations Policy for consultation. The Council's Monitoring Officer had advised that, due to the General Election being called for 12 December 2019, the start of the consultation should be delayed until January 2020, with the final report being submitted to the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee on 11 March 2020, rather than Policy Committee on 17 February 2020 as originally stated in the report. A copy of the Policy was attached to the report at Appendix A.

The report explained that the Private Sector Renewal & Disabled Adaptations Policy related to the Private Sector only, and that there was a separate Council Housing Adaptations Policy. The updates to the Policy would enable the Council to deliver Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptations in the private sector in a person-centred and outcome-focused way. The updated Policy met the objectives of the Better Care Fund, to increase the uptake of Disabled Facilities Grants and work collaboratively with health and social care colleagues. It was anticipated that the Policy would enable a more proportionate and responsive service, delaying hospital admissions, falls or moves to residential or nursing homes. The measures would further support care and support services to actively promote wellbeing and independence, and would enable early intervention, thereby avoiding crisis intervention.

The following discretionary grants would be offered as part of the updated Policy:

**HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE
6 NOVEMBER 2019**

- Health & Wellbeing at Home Grant;
- Discretionary Professional Fees Grant;
- Discretionary Accommodation Fees Grant;
- Amended Relocation Grant;
- Disabled Facilities Grant Top up.

Resolved: That the draft Private Sector Renewal and Disabled Adaptations Policy be approved for consultation, with the final Policy being presented to Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee on 11 March 2020.

16. FIRE SAFETY IN TALL BUILDINGS

Further to Minute 12 of the meeting held on 14 November 2018, the Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted an update report which provided an update on the Council's response following the Grenfell Tower fire in Kensington on 14 June 2017. This included action taken in relation to the Authority's own housing stock, other corporate buildings and schools, as well as wider work in partnership with the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) in respect of privately owned high rise residential blocks within the Borough boundaries.

The Council had taken the following action post the Grenfell Tower incident:

- Instructed Fireskills, an independent fire safety specialist to audit tall buildings within the Housing Revenue Account. An action plan had been drawn up and the Council had also responded to the Government's latest guidance on issues such as fire doors.
- Signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between RBFRS and the six Berkshire Unitary Authorities, to enable a partnership approach to inspections and enforcement.
- Implemented a building safety programme and started joint work, involving joint fire safety inspections of 32 of the most high risk residential buildings over 18 metres and work to meet fire safety standards had been required where necessary.
- Identified four high rise residential buildings with Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) cladding which failed the required fire safety standards. These buildings have had interim measures installed and were being monitored in accordance with the current Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) guidance. The council and RBFRS were working with stakeholders of the buildings to support plans to remove, and in some cases replace, the cladding.
- Begun work in response to a requirement from MHCLG in July 2019 to complete a data collection exercise to identify external wall materials and insulation on all high-rise residential buildings 18 metres and over within their area. There were approximately 106 such high-rise residential buildings in Reading and legislation under the Housing Act 2004 was being used to require this information from freeholders.

The report also set out the current position with regard to the work being undertaken to meet the requirements set out in the action plan in the Council's Housing stock,

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6 NOVEMBER 2019**

corporate buildings and schools and interim measures that had been put into place for the four cross-tenure high rise buildings.

The report detailed the actions that Council and its partners were planning to undertake going forward:

- Communications with stakeholders on the high rise residential buildings with ACM to continue. The priority would be to secure remediation of the cladding where required as quickly as possible.
- The council would undertake steps to obtain external wall details of all applicable buildings in response to the request from MHCLG in order to submit the required data by 31 March 2020.
- The council would keep up to date with the latest Government guidance and take action where appropriate. This included any new changes derived from recommendations in the final Hackitt review.
- RBFRS were planning to release information to the media detailing the joint work that had been undertaken on the building safety programme to date.
- Regular communication and sharing of information between the council and RBFRS, plus joint meetings with relevant stakeholders where required.

Resolved: That the action taken and planned in respect of fire safety in tall buildings, as detailed in the report, be noted.

17. DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2019-22

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which summarised the draft Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading, 2019-22 and the report on the recently completed consultation, and recommended that the draft strategy be adopted as the live Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading 2019-22. The following documents were appended to the report:

- Appendix 1 - Draft Domestic Abuse Strategy;
- Appendix 2 - Consultation Summary;
- Appendix 3 - Equality Impact Assessment.

The report explained that the existing Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading ended in 2018 and a new refreshed strategy was required. A consultation exercise on the draft Domestic Abuse Strategy 2019-22 had been carried out between 19 August 2019 and 13 September 2019. The priorities within the draft strategy had been developed via a series of workshops with members of the Domestic Abuse Strategy Group (DASG), a sub-group of the CSP. They reflected the Group's aspirations to move the practices and approach of partners in Reading forward in specific areas, and it was assumed that the progress made during the previous strategy would be embedded by agencies as part of their 'business as usual' and therefore continued. Data would continue to be monitored by the DASG and any changes in performance or outcomes would be challenged regularly. The respondents to the consultation strongly agreed with the priorities so they remained as follows:

Priority 1 -Raising awareness about domestic abuse with a focus on:

HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE
6 NOVEMBER 2019

- **Workforce Development** - Continue to ensure a knowledgeable and well trained workforce.
- **Healthy Relationship Education** - increasing the resilience of Young People to negative relationships and behaviour.
- **Engagement with marginalised communities** - Encouraging those experiencing abuse to seek help at an earlier stage

Priority 2: Developing a multi-agency approach to working with perpetrators - Working with strategic partners to create a perpetrator approach to reduce and prevent repeat Domestic Abuse.

Priority 3 - Improving our partnership response to Coercive Control -Training professionals to understand and identify coercive control, so as to increase and better manage disclosures.

Resolved: That the draft Strategy be approved as the adopted Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading 2019- 2022.

(The meeting opened at 6.30pm and closed at 7.35pm).

Present:

Bhupinder Rai (Chair)	Thames Valley Police
Cllr Jason Brock	Leader, RBC
Cllr Raj Singh	Councillor, Kentwood Ward, RBC (Observer)
Sally Anderson	Commissioner, Drugs and Alcohol, RBC
Nicola Bell	Manager, Willow Project
Anthony Brain	Community Safety Manager, RBC
Gina Carpenter	Service Manager, Early Help, Brighter Futures for Children
Geoff Davis	Head of Operations, Thames Valley CRC
Carol Kelly	Chair, Berkshire Bench
Sarah Gregory	Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service
Darran Hill	Thames Valley Police
Sam Mortimore	Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service
David Munday	Consultant in Public Health, RBC
Zelda Wolfe	Assistant Director of Housing & Communities, RBC
Julie Quarmby	Committee Services, RBC

Apologies:

Cllr Sophia James	Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods & Communities, RBC
Cllr Tony Page	Deputy Leader, RBC
Cllr Liz Terry	Lead Councillor for Children, RBC
Teresa Gravett-Smith	Adult Safeguarding, RBC
Catherine Marriott	OPCC
Jo Middlemass	Anti-Social Behaviour Team Manager, RBC
Vicky Rhodes	Strategic Lead for Early Help, RBC
Kathryn Warner	PACT

1. INTRODUCTION OF NEW CHAIR

Bhupinder Rai, Thames Valley Police, was introduced as the new Chair of the Community Safety Partnership Executive Group.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

3. MATTERS ARISING

Community Safety Plan 2019-22 - Mission Statement

Further to Minute 3 of the meeting held on 25 April 2019, Anthony Brain presented the amended Mission Statement for the Community Safety Plan 2019-2022 for consideration by the Group:

“We will continue to make Reading a safer place for those who live, work and visit here through a reduction in crime and disorder.

We will do this by:

- Focusing on early intervention within those communities most at risk;
- Protecting those most vulnerable to crime or risk of exploitation;
- Focusing on tackling the greatest harm.”

COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP EXECUTIVE GROUP - 19 SEPTEMBER 2019

AGREED: That the Community Safety Plan 2019-22 Mission Statement be agreed.

4. YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN

Further to Minute 4 of the meeting held on 25 April 2019, Gina Carpenter submitted the final Youth Justice Plan 2019/2020 which had now been amended as discussed by the partner agencies and signed off by the Management Board on 31 August 2019.

AGREED: That the final Youth Justice Plan 2019/2020 be noted.

5. PRIORITY SUB-GROUP ACTION PLANS

(a) Violent Crime

Chief Inspector Darran Hill, Thames Valley Police, submitted the Reading CSP Serious Violence Strategy 2019, which covered the following four areas:

Prevent: including diversion activities, engagement with schools, multi-agency problem solving, better use of data and better messaging.

Pursue: which covered bringing offenders to justice, identifying children committing criminal offences and diverting/safeguarding, early identification of locations, better intelligence gathering and better use of Closure Orders.

Protect: by creating a hostile environment for gangs, Multi-Systemic Therapy, better use of the National Referral System and better use of Child Protection Proceedings.

Prepare: Training and learning opportunities, surveys, minimising risk when children are missing and targeted mentoring.

(b) Class A Drugs

David Munday, Consultant in Public Health, RBC, submitted the Class A Drugs Strategy which set out what was already being done by the Council's Wellbeing team, and proposed that a Sub-Group of the CSP be set up to focus on actions within Priorities 1 and 3 of the plan which addressed Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare themes. The strategy also set out suggestions for how this could work and measures of success.

(c) Adult Exploitation and Modern Slavery

Nicola Bell, Willow Project, submitted the draft Reading Modern Slavery and Exploitation Plan 2019 for consideration. The Plan sought to set up a multi-agency group to provide a co-ordinated approach to address the issue of modern slavery and exploitation in the area, by raising awareness as they related to Reading amongst partners and the wider community and providing strategic direction for operational activity amongst partners.

The plan set out the following four priorities for the multi-agency group:

- Victim identification and care;
- Law enforcement and criminal justice;
- Partnerships;
- Private sector engagement.

The Executive Group discussed the Strategies and Plan, and the following points were raised:

COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP EXECUTIVE GROUP - 19 SEPTEMBER 2019

- Whilst the Strategies and Plan covered separate areas, they were closely inter-linked;
- Partnership working was key to delivery of the Strategies and Plan. It was important to ensure that each of the partner organisation's representation on the Sub-Groups was at the appropriate level and that data could be shared easily;
- Partners need to communicate clearly with the public to ensure that information flowed well in both directions;

AGREED: That the Violent Crime Strategy, Class A Drugs Strategy and Adult Exploitation & Modern Slavery Action Plan be noted.

6. OTHER CRIME PERFORMANCE

(a) BCS Comparator

Anthony Brain submitted the crime performance report as at the end of July 2019. For all British Crime Survey crimes there had been a 2% year-on-year decrease.

(b) Burglary

For burglary there had been a 25% year-on-year decrease which had led to an improvement in the position within the Most Similar Group of CSPs (MSG).

(c) Violent Crime

There had been a 25% year-on-year increase in violent crime, and Reading's performance remained average amongst the MSG.

AGREED: That the position be noted.

7. FUTURE ITEMS

AGREED: That the following item be considered at the next meeting of the Community Safety Partnership Executive Board:

- Out of Court Disclosures.

8. DATES OF FUTURE MEETING

Future meetings for 2019/20 would take place on:

Thursday 14 November 2019;

Thursday 6 February 2020;

Thursday 23 April 2020.

All meetings start at 9.30am in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices.

(The meeting commenced at 9.30 am and closed at 11.40 am)

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COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP EXECUTIVE GROUP - 6 FEBRUARY 2020

Present:

Bhupinder Rai (Chair)	Reading LPA Commander, Thames Valley Police
Cllr Jason Brock	Leader, RBC
Ash Smith	Thames Valley Police
Jason Kew	Thames Valley Police
Kate Stockdale	Commissioner, Drugs and Alcohol, RBC
Nicola Bell	Manager, Willow Project
Anthony Brain	Community Safety Manager, RBC
Jo Middlemass	Anti-Social Behaviour Team Manager, RBC
Vicky Rhodes	Strategic Lead for Early Help, Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC)
Andy Boyd	VRU
Vickie Pitchbrook	Change Grow Live
Hannah Powell	Thames Valley CRC
Carol Kelly	Chair, Berkshire Bench
Christine Rolls	TTG Aspire
Tracy Harrison	TTG Aspire
David Munday	Consultant in Public Health, RBC
Zelda Wolfle	Assistant Director of Housing & Communities, RBC
Julie Quarmby	Committee Services, RBC

Apologies:

Cllr Tony Page	Deputy Leader, RBC
Cllr Liz Terry	Lead Councillor for Children, RBC
Kathryn Warner	PACT
Natausha VanVliet	PACT
Catherine Marriott	OPCC
Geoff Davis	Reading CRC
Deborah Glassbrook	Director of Children's Services, BFfC
Donna Gray	Safeguarding Children, BFfC

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

2. VIOLENCE REDUCTION UNIT/SURGE FUNDING

Andy Boyd, Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit, gave a presentation on the work that was being undertaken with young people to reduce violent crime. The presentation covered the reasons why young people might become involved in violent crime, and the Government's Serious Crime Strategy which set out four themes for tackling these causes: Tackling County Lines and Drugs; Early Intervention and Prevention; Supporting Communities and Partnerships and Effective Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Response. Andy reported that Thames Valley Police had received additional funding, which had been used for early intervention and diversion as well as additional police presence. He added that work with partner agencies was aimed at reducing adverse childhood experiences and producing positive outcomes for young people rather than specifically targeting violent crime and explained that the Thames Valley Strategic Unit was asking the Partnership how the partner agencies wanted to configure themselves to achieve this.

The Group discussed the presentation and the following points were raised:

- There was significant evidence to link mental health to potential involvement in violent crime;
- The three Partnership Sub-Groups covered most of the four Government themes;
- It would be necessary to agree the geographical areas to be covered by any smaller units, giving special regard to the different demographic in West Berkshire and Wokingham, which didn't have the same night-time economy and level of violent crime, whilst acknowledging the overlap in areas at the edges of Reading;
- Partner agencies would need to agree a suitable alignment with Health, who tended to work on a West of Berkshire level;
- It would be helpful to have a main point of contact in Brighter Futures for Children;
- The Serious Violence Policing Bill would be likely to place statutory duties on Community Safety Partnerships.

AGREED:

- (1) That Andy be thanked for his interesting and informative presentation;
- (2) That Ash Smith, in consultation with Andy Boyd, explore the current arrangements under the Community Safety Partnership, including Health, as a basis for the Violence Reduction Unit;
- (3) That Ash Smith circulate the latest violent crime data to the Group.

3. THE NEW DRUG SERVICE: CHANGE, GROW, LIVE

Vickie Pitchbrook gave a presentation on Change Grow Live, Reading's new drug service, which covered:

- The Change Grow Live Vision, Mission Statement and Values;
- Details of Change grow Live's offer in Reading;
- Details of the services provided by the Clinical Services Team, Treatment and Care Co-ordination and the Abstinence and Recovery Element;
- Positive news, quotes and feedback;
- Contact Information.

Vickie also reported that the service would be holding an Open Day on 25 March 2020.

AGREED:

- (1) That Vickie be thanked for her interesting and informative presentation;
- (2) That Vickie circulate success rates and monthly/quarterly data to the Group as appropriate;
- (3) That Vickie send invitations to the Open Day to members of the Community Safety Partnership.

4. ASPIRE - NEW EMPLOYMENT SERVICE FOR OFFENDERS

Christine Rolls and Tracy Harrison, Aspire, gave the Group an introduction to the work that was being carried out by Aspire, and in particular their Through the Prison Gate Service. This service had originally been set up in Oxford to assist offenders to return to work and had now been expanded to cover Slough and Reading, as well as other areas. Tracy explained that the service worked closely with Probation, to support offenders to find training and employment,

and with practical matters such as housing, ID, banking etc to enable them to cope following their release, starting before they were due to leave prison. The service also worked with employers and Christine explained that more employers were becoming open to employing ex-offenders, including Greene King, Taylor Wimpey and Pret a Manger. Tracy added that Aspire worked with both male and female offenders, and had close links with Alana House in Reading.

The Group discussed the work carried out by Aspire and the following points were noted:

- Aspire hoped to gain greater links with Reading via the Community Safety Partnership;
- Stan Gilmour, TVP, was investigating the best way to co-ordinate and use the various diversionary interventions that were available in the Reading area to ensure that there were no overlaps or gaps;
- The scheme covered all offenders, not just violent criminals, and offered a full service, even providing haircuts and suitable clothing for interviews;
- It would be helpful to have data for Aspire's work in Oxford.

AGREED:

- (1) That Christine and Tracy be thanked for their introduction to the services provided by Aspire;
- (2) That the Oxford data be submitted to a future meeting of the Group;
- (3) That Christine Rolls, Tracy Harrison, Ash Smith and Penny Jones (TVP) meet to discuss the role of Aspire in Reading.

5. PRIORITY SUB-GROUP ACTION PLANS

(A) Class A Drugs

David Munday, Consultant in Public Health, RBC, submitted a draft report on Class A Drug Harm Reduction Proposals for onward submission to the Health & Wellbeing Board in March 2020. The report explained that Public Health in Reading had an opportunity to obtain regional police funding and work with partners to deliver a work stream to support drug harm and death reduction in the following areas:

- Develop drug diversion schemes whereby anyone found in possession of controlled drugs would be diverted to a drug service for assessment and education rather than arrest.
- Extend the roll out of Naxolone to treat drug overdose. TVP were engaging clinical governance to enable officers to train and carry intra-nasal Naxolone, which could be used to treat users who had overdosed on heroin. Provision could potentially be widened further, to include Council services and community and business groups.
- Heroin Assisted Treatment which involved the prescription of diamorphine to a carefully selected group of hardened heroin users who were not currently engaged in any other Opiate Substitution Treatment Programmes. Jason Kew reported that currently the top 10% of heroin users consumed 50-60% of illicit heroin, and this programme would help to reduce the criminal market significantly. Previous trials had also shown that in the trial areas acquisitive crime had also significantly reduced. The set-up costs for prescribing diamorphine were similar to methadone, but trials had shown it to be more successful.
- Introduction of a Supervised Injection Room. This was a legally sanctioned facility where people could inject their pre-obtained drugs under medical supervision and access medical care, counselling services and referral to health and social care

services. Similar facilities elsewhere had been successful and had visibly reduced drugs harm on the street. This facility could be provided via Change Grow Live and would be an opportunity for Reading to lead the way in the UK. The Group noted that any such provision would need to be carefully located, and the local community would need to be carefully approached and consulted.

(B) Violent Crime

Ash Smith, Thames Valley Police, gave a presentation on work that TVP had carried out across Reading to address knife crime, which covered the following areas:

- The areas of Reading that had been identified as having higher levels of knife crime;
- Dedicated operations using Surge funding;
- Resources that had been used during these operations;
- Partnership working;
- Results of the Operations;
- Operations and Actions for the Future;
- Successes.

(C) Adult Exploitation and Modern Slavery

Nicola Bell, Willow Project, submitted the draft Reading Modern Slavery and Exploitation Plan 2019 for consideration. She reported that a new restorative justice partnership would be in place from 1 April 2020, which would provide a one-stop-shop for victims of exploitation. There would be continuity of service going forward. Nicola added that she would be responsible for managing the new service and would report further once the partnership had been set up.

Nicola also reported that she was working with housing providers, including private landlords, with regard to emergency accommodation.

AGREED:

- (1) That the Class A Drug Harm Reduction Proposals be submitted to the Health & Wellbeing Board in March 2020, and that Bhupinder Rai be invited to attend;
- (2) That the work to address Violent Crime and the changes to the Adult Exploitation & Modern Slavery support service be noted;
- (3) That Anthony Brain set up a meeting with the three leads to ensure that the three Priority Sub-Groups continued to work together strategically.

6. CRIME PERFORMANCE

Anthony Brain submitted the crime performance report as at the end of October 2019. For all British Crime Survey crimes there had been a 1% increase in the current year to date, with Reading's performance remaining average for the Most Similar Group of CSPs (MSG).

For burglary there had been a 25% year-on-year decrease which was a more rapid decrease than the MSG.

There had been a 10% increase in violent crime for the year to date, and Reading's performance remained average amongst the MSG.

AGREED: That the position be noted.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

David Munday raised concerns that certain ethnic groups might experience hate crime in relation to the current Coronavirus outbreak, and asked that if and when the Police received details of any incidents, they report them to the Group. Anthony Brain noted that it was possible that these communities might be reluctant to engage with the police if they were victims of hate crime.

AGREED: That the position be noted.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETING

Future meetings for 2019/20 would take place on:
Thursday 23 April 2020.

All meetings start at 9.30am in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices.

(The meeting commenced at 9.35 am and closed at 12.04 pm)

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READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	11 MARCH 2020		
TITLE:	READING, PLACE OF CULTURE, YEAR TWO EVALUATION		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR ROWLAND	PORTFOLIO:	CULTURE HERITAGE RECREATION
SERVICE:	CULTURE	WARDS:	ALL
LEAD OFFICER:	DONNA PENTELOW LARA STAVRINO	TEL:	01189 373 422
JOB TITLE:	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR CULTURE CULTURE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER	E-MAIL:	Donna.pentelow@reading.gov.uk lara.stavrinou@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report updates on the activity and outcomes delivered in year two of 'Reading, Place of Culture', which ran from December 2018 to December 2019. The report outlines plans for the final year of the programme, December 2019- 2020, the current partnership working arrangements and indicative plans for the future.
- 1.2 Reading, Place of Culture, was one of 16 Great Places Schemes funded by Arts Council England, Historic England and the Heritage Lottery. It is jointly led and delivered by Reading Borough Council, Reading UK CIC and Reading University. The scheme runs from 2018-2020. A grant of £558,400 was awarded to deliver four core strands of work over three years.
- 1.3 Reading, Place of Culture aims to make Reading a better place to live, work and visit, fostering a culture of collaboration across sectors, and where caring for and engaging people is achieved in partnership between the public, private and voluntary sectors. The scheme supports Reading to enhance its cultural offer, drive economic growth, and improve the quality of life for people in Reading.
- 1.4 There are four core strands of delivery:
 - **The Cultural Commissioning Programme** empowers local organisations to develop cross-sector partnerships to engage marginalised or hard-to-reach communities in arts, culture and/or heritage programmes. Year two saw the culmination of three commissions and the funding of three new ones. Other activity included a pilot around ageing and young people and a new Ageing Well Partnership.
 - **The Research Programme** is co-produced by the University of Reading and the Whitley Researchers, an active research partnership between Whitley Community Development Association and local residents. It aims to develop best practice for borough-wide engagement, geared towards the needs of Reading's diverse communities.

- **Reading Thames Festival** is an annual festival which celebrates Reading’s unique identity, showcases new work and reveals Reading as a place of ‘parks and rivers’ and ‘culture and diversity’.
 - **Culture and Business Engagement** aims to further develop the relationships between the business community and cultural organisations in order to support key economic development objectives for ‘good growth’ and delivery of the long-term 2050 Vision for the town.
- 1.5 The final year of the programme will focus on delivery and research completion, dissemination of information, training, networking, and building a sustainable legacy.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Committee notes the progress made in delivering ‘Reading, Place of Culture’ in its second year, as set out in section 4.
- 2.2 That Committee notes the proposals to further develop the programme of work in the third and final year of delivery as set out in section 5.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Council’s Corporate Plan 2018 - 2021 sets out the key priorities for the Council. Reading, Place of Culture supports:
- Securing the economic success of Reading
 - Promoting health, education, culture & wellbeing
- 3.2 A stronger arts, culture and heritage sector enhances quality of life and brings economic value to the town. It can impact on place making and inward investment, and therefore, the future of Reading as a whole.
- 3.3 Reading’s Culture and Heritage Strategy runs from 2015 - 2030 and was produced by Reading’s Cultural Partnership. The strategy is due for review in 2020, which will also include reviewing the terms of reference of the Cultural Partnership, to continue to meet the needs of the cultural sector in Reading.
- 3.4 The Reading 2050 Vision, developed by Barton Willmore, Reading UK and the University of Reading, aims to excite and engage with people from across Reading to support Reading’s economic growth and evolution as a smart and sustainable city. It has two core themes that Reading, Place of Culture supports: A city of culture and diversity, and a city of rivers and parks.
- 3.5 Reading, Place of Culture reports quarterly to its three national funders via progress report updates and presentations in person; they have approved the current plans.

4 THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Over the last year, Reading, Place of Culture has:
- Increased overall engagement by reaching new audiences and better understanding barriers for harder to reach audiences.
 - Established strong new strategic partnerships.
 - Developed new models for including community voice in cultural activity
 - Changed people’s perceptions of Reading by increasing belonging, sense of community and pride in Reading.
 - Enhanced belonging and connectivity among Reading’s communities.
 - Strengthened the Arts, Culture and Heritage sector by increasing their skills, confidence and knowledge and developed new networks and partnerships.
 - Created evidence, tools and models to demonstrate the added value of culture.

4.2 It has done this through its four core delivery strands:

The Cultural Commissioning Programme, led by Reading Borough Council

4.3 The purpose of the commissioning programme is to empower local organisations to develop cross-sector partnerships to engage marginalised or hard-to-reach communities in arts, culture and/or heritage programmes. It aimed to mainstream the commissioning of cultural activities for social outcomes in two ways:

- Increase awareness of public service commissioners of the potential for arts, culture and heritage organisations to deliver effective interventions around their priority outcomes.
- Enabling the arts, culture, heritage and voluntary sectors to better engage with public sector commissioning.

4.4 Year two has delivered:

- 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 explore the barriers faced by older people when accessing Arts Culture and Heritage.
- A Young People's Mental Health Pilot to explore how the sector can meet the needs of young people with mental health issues.

4.5 Year one commissions included:

- Alana House and Photovoice delivered a photography project for female offenders and women at risk of offending leading to a reduction in anxiety and an increase in self-esteem.
- Museum Partnership Reading worked with Royal Berkshire Hospital and in their museum settings to deliver reminiscence, dance and other creative activities for older people to improve their health and wellbeing.
- Reading Rep created drama projects for young people unable to participate in mainstream education to encourage group working and build confidence.
- Reading Rep also delivered reminiscence and theatre projects for adults in Prospect Park Hospital living with dementia and acute mental health illnesses.

4.6 Year two commissions include:

- Rosetta Life are 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 are delivering theatre for young people with SEND to develop confidence and independence, develop skills and decrease social isolation.
- Sport In Mind and Junction Dance are working with Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, schools and community settings to use dance in the treatment, management and prevention of mental illness.

4.7 Year three commissions include:

- Mustard Tree, Real Time and Cranbury College are delivering a creative employment project based around film for young people with SEND to build confidence and key skills.
- Alana House, Rahab and Reading Rep are delivering theatre for women at risk to enhance communication and conflict resolution skills.

- Age UK Berkshire and Museum of English Rural Life are delivering a storytelling and reminiscence project for older people at risk of loneliness and social isolation to improve wellbeing.
- 4.8 Further detail on each year of the Cultural Commissioning Programme are in section 13, Appendix 1. Full case studies are available from year 1 via the link below: <http://readingplaceofculture.org/greatplaces/culturalcommissioningprogramme/>
- 4.9 **The Research Programme, led by University of Reading**
The Whitley Researchers are a participatory action research partnership between the Whitley Community Development Association, local residents and the University of Reading. The aim is to engage and involve communities in conducting their own research. The team are piloting innovative ways of exploring local residents' lived experiences of culture and heritage, as well as understanding their views on health and wellbeing. This then informs the cultural commissioning, festival programmes and evaluation frameworks.
- 4.10 This year, through research interviews/surveys/focus groups, 450 participants and representatives of organisations have been engaged with directly.
- 4.11 A 'Young Researchers' team has also been developed at John Madejski Academy and other local schools. They create visual methods and interactive community events to explore young people's ideas around art, heritage and place. The Young Researchers have engaged with a further 50 people.
- 4.12 A growing body has been developed of shared learning and findings illustrating what local communities think about art, culture, heritage and civic pride with a focus on ageing well and diversity. This includes knowledge on community engagement with art, culture, heritage, barriers to partnership working between groups in the sector and service providers, and an assessment of the diverse social needs of Reading's older residents and BAME communities. They also supported with the data analysis and evaluation of the 2019 Reading on Thames festival.
- 4.13 **Reading Thames Festival, led by Reading UK**
The Festival took place 26-29 September 2019 and built on the work in 2018 by supporting, producing and presenting creative projects that foster social engagement and new artistic experiences in Reading. The Festival continued to celebrate Reading's unique identity and present new works of performing arts, design, literature, moving image, visual arts and popular culture. It developed engaging, participatory, multi-sensory events for all ages that utilised a range of venues and outdoor sites, culminating in the Cirque de Bijou performance in the Abbey Ruins, which was unfortunately affected by bad weather. Other examples of activity include 'Acid Brass', the brainchild of Turner Prize winning artist Jeremy Deller, which took place in the Town Hall and fused Acid House anthems with the sound of a traditional British Brass Band, and 'Art After Dark', where over 20 Reading artists and organisations were brought together for a free one-night event which presented art and performances in public spaces across Reading.
- 4.14 Audience feedback was collected via 127 questionnaires:
- 60% strongly agreed they had a good time, with another 27% agreeing. Enjoyment was felt across demographic groups.
 - 88% of attenders were new to the festival in 2019, with 66% of these having been unaware of it - showing that it is still reaching new audiences in its third year.
 - Among attendees, the Reading Thames Festival led to a sense of togetherness and pride. 78% strongly agreed or agreed that it increased their pride in Reading, and 82% strongly agreed or agreed that it brought communities together.
- 4.15 For 2020, the festival has been reviewed and reshaped in order to successfully deliver further impact and to create a lasting legacy beyond the Great Places scheme.

Through evaluation, we learned that targeted work is needed to realise a shift in perceptions of Reading from potential visitors and local audiences. As such, a clear set of audience targets and outcomes are being developed to inform the marketing strategy and planning. Additional learning from audience feedback identified improvements in venue facilities, and information flow by providing: (1) better publicity; (2) accurate and detailed information on the web; (3) on-site signage. Reading UK, Reading Borough Council and representatives from the directors of Reading's Festivals are working in partnership to transition the 2020 festival to create a sustainable legacy.

4.16 The Culture and Business Engagement Strand, led by Reading UK

This strand aims to further develop the relationships between the business community and cultural organisations in order to support key economic development objectives for 'inclusive growth' and delivery of the long-term 2050 Vision for the town.

4.17 Reading UK commissioned a piece of research to build on survey feedback to date and explore in a more qualitative and evaluative way the links between Reading businesses and cultural organisations. The work is intended to better understand Reading's profile as a cultural hub and emergent potential as a centre of excellence; why businesses get involved; and how this engagement might be nurtured and promoted into the future. Appendix 2 provides further findings from the research and initial plans for 2020.

4.18 A cultural project manager and consultant have been employed by Reading UK to implement the recommendations from the year two evaluation report.

5 Options Proposed

5.1 December 2019 - 2020 is the third and final year of Reading, Place of Culture. The focus is 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 have commissioned MBAssociates to deliver evaluation and social impact measurement training for the cultural commissions; RBC are 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 will 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 will support Reading's existing festivals and provide them with an infrastructure, which is sustainable beyond this grant funding.
- Expand the Young Researchers programme to three new schools in Reading.
- Build on the existing partnerships that have developed organically, to create a strategic cultural development partnership for Reading that focuses on supporting the development and growth of the arts, culture and heritage sector in Reading.

6 CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 6.1 The Reading, Place of Culture programme will contribute to the following Corporate Plan priorities:
- Securing the economic success of Reading and provision of job opportunities.
 - Ensuring that there are good education, leisure and cultural opportunities for people in Reading.
 - Ensuring every vulnerable person can achieve their potential and aspirations.
- 6.2 The broad and varied programme also contributes to the Council's strategic aims of:
- To establish Reading as a learning City and a stimulating and rewarding place to live and visit.

7 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 The cultural commissioning and research strands have community engagement and information at their core. They both undertake research to ascertain what different community barriers to engagement are and how partnerships can be built in order to use creativity to overcome key issues for a given community.

8 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 There is no requirement for an Equality Impact Assessment; however, Reading Place of Culture prioritises and positively benefits a number of groups with protected status as well as vulnerable populations of Reading.

9 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no direct environmental implications for the council as a result of this report or the activity being delivered.

10 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Council will continue to comply with the Great Place Scheme 'Standard Terms of Grant'. These mirror those of the Heritage Lottery Fund with which the Council is familiar through its management of other HLF funded projects. There are no additional conditions in respect of the project beyond these standard terms.

11 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 A grant of £558,400 was awarded by Arts Council England, Historic England and the Heritage Lottery Fund to deliver four core strands of work over the three years. We claimed and received so far £222,882. We are in a process of submitting another claim for the period covering July to December 2019.
- 11.2 The Great Place Scheme bidding guidelines stipulated that a minimum of 10% of direct project costs should be provided by cash contributions from delivery partners. The Council and Reading UK have each committed to provide £30,000 over the life of the programme to meet this requirement. The council's contribution is contained within existing budget allocations for the Culture Service.
- 11.3 £56,000 worth of matched funding has been generated for the Cultural Commissioning Programme from Brighter Futures for Children, Berkshire Community Foundation and the University of Reading.

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- GREAT PLACE SCHEME: Reading-on-Thames - HLF grant award letter 13th April 2017.
- GREAT PLACE SCHEME: 'READING-ON-THAMES' - Report to Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee 5th July 2017.
- 'READING, PLACE OF CULTURE' (GREAT PLACE SCHEME) - Report to Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee 14th November 2018.

13 Appendix 1: Cultural Commissioning Programme - further detail

13.1 Year 1 Commissions, June 2018-June 2019:

13.2 **Alana House with Photovoice, £15k:** Enabled female offenders and women at risk of offending to represent their experiences and perspectives through photography and digital storytelling. 14 women took part resulting in a reduction in anxiety around meeting new people and an increase in self-esteem. The project developed a strong group dynamic and embedded wrap around support for the participants. It explored what a creative model of rehabilitation could look like.

13.3 **Museum Partnership Reading, £15k:** The Museum of English Rural Life (The MERL) and Reading Museum trialled and evaluated different forms of cultural projects to improve the health and wellbeing of older people. They sought to assess their impact, including how they contributed to a reduction in loneliness and social isolation. The project delivered 44 activities using reminiscence, gardening, dance and knitting, involving 173 participants aged between 52-94. It gave the museums a stronger understanding of how they can evaluate and communicate the successes of their work and developed strong links with new Health and Voluntary sector staff. Partners in these sectors, such as the Royal Berkshire Hospital, acknowledged the benefits of museum collections in supporting wellbeing and their partnerships continue.



Reminiscence and Dance at MERL

13.4 **Reading Rep Theatre, £15k:** Reading Rep worked with young people unable to participate in mainstream education and with adults in Prospect Park Hospital living with dementia and acute mental health illnesses. They used drama to encourage group working and confidence building. Equitable partnerships developed enabling hospital staff to understand and advocate for the benefits of cultural activity for their patients.

13.5 The partnerships developed in year 1 have enabled the funded organisations to continue growing their cultural offer for vulnerable populations. For example:

- Alana House participants were consulted on what other cultural activities they would like to participate in. Feedback showed they were interested in drama, leading to a partnership with Reading Rep, who have successfully secured funding as part of the third round of Cultural Commissioning. They plan to use this to continue to demonstrate the value of cultural work to other commissioners.
- As a result of their commission, MERL partnered more closely with AGE UK Berkshire and Younger People with Dementia and continue to deliver across artforms due to trialling other activities as part of their cultural commission.
- Reading Rep were inspired by the rigorous social impact measurement, which the Commissioning Programme trained them in and have implemented this across their entire programme of work.

12.6 Year two commissions, July 2019 - July 2020

13.6 Elderly Care, £15k: Rosetta Life are delivering dance, spoken word and performance with older people living with the effects of stroke and developing a Stroke Ambassadors programme. In addition, it delivers a participatory action research programme considering how to widen the approach for living well with a neurological disability, such as dementia. They will be taking performances to care homes, hospitals, GP surgeries and other locations. The service is developing a strategy for wider work and ambassadors across Reading.



Rosetta Life dance workshop

13.7 Cultural Short Breaks, £30K: Reading Rep Theatre are working with Jelly, Reading College and five further organisations to engage children and young people with moderate and severe Special Educational Needs. They are working with arts and non-arts partners to deliver workshops and activities, which develop confidence and independence, develop skills and decrease social isolation.

13.8 Mental Health and Wellbeing, £30K: Sport in Mind working with Junction Dance and Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust to use dance in the treatment, management and prevention of mental illness. Using dance as a unique form of therapy, strengthening emotions, cognitive skills, physical abilities and social connections, and a proven effective remedy for depression and anxiety.

13.9 Year 3 Commissions, December 2019 - December 2020:

13.10 Creative Employment, £30k: Mustard Tree with Real Time and Cranbury College are delivering a series of creative workshops and work placements to build young people's confidence and key skills and empower them to create their own film production company. Working with young people aged 15-24 who are (or who are at risk of becoming) not in education, employment or training (NEET), in particular those with significant additional needs, to see the 'art of the possible' through the world of film production.

13.11 Women at Risk, £20k: Alana House with Rahab and Reading Rep are working with vulnerable, at-risk women with complex needs to explore their feelings and improve their self-confidence. The women will be able to enhance their communication and conflict resolution skills by expressing their feelings through performance.

13.12 Older People at Risk of Loneliness and Social Isolation, £20k: Age UK Berkshire, in partnership with Younger People with Dementia Berkshire and The Museum of English Rural Life are engaging older people at risk of loneliness and social isolation to reminisce about their lives and bring common interests together through storytelling. The activities will be designed to benefit the wellbeing of the participants.

13.13 The commissioning programme has fostered new connections between public, private and voluntary sector organisations; supported existing organisations to increase their capacity; delivered new services and fostered new relationships with funders, partners and other organisations. Highly valuable research has been gathered from local people about their thoughts and feelings, engagement and participation in arts, culture and heritage in their town. Research on connectivity, belonging and pride of place has been used to shape the specifications for each year of commissioning, the smaller pilot funds and the delivery of the Reading Thames Festival. Feedback on barriers for older people directly led to the University of Reading Ageing Well research pilot. Similarly, young people stating that they do not feel they have enough

access to arts culture or heritage has led to a large-scale funding bid to add delivery in this field of work.

14 Appendix 2 - Further findings from Business Engagement Research

- 14.1 Reading UK commissioned a piece of local qualitative research by freelance researcher Grant Thornton in 2019. It analysed the 2019 business surveys undertaken by Reading UK, sought the views of new businesses in Reading about their perceptions of the town and its cultural scene, analysed the 2018 Christmas festival visitor survey and surveyed a sample of local businesses and cultural organisations on their perception and experience of engaging with culture/businesses and the nature of these relationships. A range of potential mechanisms for further enhancing business engagement with cultural organisations emerged, such as a need for helping organisations to overcome time constraints, improving mutual understanding, raising awareness, opportunities for meaningful dialogue and developing good practice.
- 14.2 The research found that there is a strong recognition among local businesses of the value of a strong cultural offer in recruitment and retention of high-quality staff. People place culture relatively high in terms of what Reading has to offer new businesses, with many people seeing a positive trajectory in terms of their perceptions of the sector over the last few years. The businesses involved in the study felt they could and should do more to support culture in Reading.
- 14.3 Based on report recommendations, Reading UK will set up a Business Ambassadors programme to link more local businesses to the arts culture and heritage sector.



Cultural Commissioning Programmes:

Photography with Alana House, Reminiscence with Museums Partnership Reading, Drama with Reading Rep

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READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	Labour Group/Housing Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee		
DATE:	24 th February/11 th March 2020		
TITLE:	Private Sector Renewal & Disabled Adaptations Policy		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	Cllr John Ennis	PORTFOLIO:	Housing
SERVICE:	Regulatory Services	WARDS:	All
LEAD OFFICER:	Yasmin Ahmad	TEL:	0118 9372466
JOB TITLE:	Private Sector Housing Team Manager	E-MAIL:	yasmin.ahmad@reading.gov.uk

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The draft Private Sector Renewal & Disabled Adaptations Policy was presented to the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee at its meeting on 6th November 2019 with the recommendation that following the public consultation the report would be presented back to the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee meeting on 11th March 2020 for adoption.
- 1.2 The public consultation was delayed due to the announcement of the General Election. The consultation began on 8th January 2020 with a closing date of 7th February 2020 and relates to the discretionary grants being proposed in relation to disabled adaptations.
- 1.3 Appendix A - Private Sector Renewal & Disabled Adaptations Policy
- 1.4 Appendix B - Consultation questionnaire

2.0 RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee approve the Private Sector Renewal & Disabled Adaptations Policy to be effective from 1st April 2020.
- 2.3 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 given delegation to amend the Private Sector Renewal & Disabled Adaptations Policy where it does not affect the broad direction of the policy.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Foundations (appointed by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government to oversee a national network of nearly 200 home improvement agencies (HIAs) and handyperson providers across England) said in their DFG Review in 2018:

“Home is central to everyone’s lives, but is particularly important for disabled and older people, as it is where they spend most of their time. Increasing numbers are living alone, especially in later life. Ability to get in and out of the home, move around inside, access the bathroom, receive friends, cook and go to bed has a significant effect on people’s dignity, autonomy and wellbeing. The majority of disabled people are living in ordinary housing but only 7% of homes in England have basic accessibility features such as downstairs toilets and level access. Three quarters of deaths relating to falls happen in the home, and falls represent 10-25% of ambulance call-outs to older adults. Once admitted in an emergency, older people use more bed days than other people (65%) and falls often precipitate a move into residential care.

90% of adaptations provided are level access showers, stair lifts or ramps. The average cost is around £9,000 but most work is under £5,000. The challenge is to join up the process and shift the thinking from ‘welfare’ to ‘investment’ so that decisions are taken, not at crisis point, but in a more preventative way that is based on the long-term health and wellbeing of disabled people and their families”.
(Foundations)

- 3.2 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) remain mandatory and are available from local authorities in England under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. They are only available to private sector residents including Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and the applicant and their partner is subject to a means test. There is no means test for children’s DFGs. The DFG provides a mechanism for essential adaptations to be carried out such as stairlifts, ramps, improved lighting, bathroom adaptations to enable disabled people to give access to essential facilities within the home and access to and from their homes.
- 3.3 In 2015 the government introduced the Better Care Fund (BCF) in an attempt to bring health and social care together in an integrated way. The fund is a combination of government funding from the Department of Health and the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government and includes the grant allocation for DFGs.
- 3.4 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (the “Order”) came into effect in July 2003 and led to a major change in the way local authorities can provide financial assistance to people to repair and improve private sector homes. The Order set aside the previously prescribed grants (other than the Disabled Facilities Grant, which remains a mandatory grant) and allowed local authorities to adopt a flexible approach to providing financial assistance to reflect local circumstances, needs and resources. In 2008-09 the Government extended the scope of the Regulatory Reform Order to include the use of DFG funding. This allows Local Authorities to use specific DFG funding for wider purposes. This includes help with the cost of moving

and adapting or improving another property where it is deemed to be a more cost-effective option.

- 3.5 If a local authority wishes to use the powers under the Order it must adopt a policy setting out how it will use these powers. The purpose of the policy is to detail the type of assistance available to households living in the private sector, the eligibility criteria and the procedures for accessing assistance.
- 3.6 Following the introduction of the Order a policy was developed in 2003 and this was updated in 2007 and a separate Housing Adaptations policy was produced in 2012.
- 3.7 The updated draft policy presented to Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee on 6th November 2019 will enable the council to deliver Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptations in a person centred and outcome focused way. The updated policy meets the objectives of the Better Care Fund, to increase the uptake of DFGs and work collaboratively with health and social care colleagues. It is anticipated that this policy will enable a more proportionate and responsive service, delaying hospital admissions, falls or moves to residential or nursing homes. The measures in this policy will further support care and support services to actively promote wellbeing and independence, and enables early intervention avoiding crisis intervention.
- 3.8 Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee agreed the public consultation which went live on 8th January 2020 with the closing date of 7th February 2020. The focus of the consultation was the discretionary grants being proposed in relation to disabled adaptations.
- 3.9 The consultation was made available on line and hosted on the Council website. At the start of the consultation a press release was issued, and regular reminders of the consultation were placed on the Council Twitter and Facebook pages.
- 3.10 In addition to this information flyers were sent to wide variety of organisation across the Borough such as Reading Voluntary Action, Carers Hub, CommuniCare, Royal Berkshire Hospital, Age UK, Adult Care Forums, customers who had been awarded Disabled Facilities Grants were also contacted. Flyers were also placed in the Civic Offices reception area and Posters and flyers were placed in all the libraries across the Borough and flyers also went out with the book delivery services operated via Central Library. Information on the consultation was also brought to the attention of Council Officers.
- 3.11 The consultation focussed on the new discretionary disabled adaptation grants being proposed and the questions looked at three main areas:
 - The purpose of the grant
 - The maximum grant being offered
 - The criteria of the grant

4. CONSULTATION RESULTS.

- 4.1 40 responses were received, these were a mix of residents, family and friends of service users, and professionals. The feedback in summary is as follows:

- 4.2 Purpose of grant - 39 respondents agreed with the purpose of all the grants being consulted on. 1 respondent disagreed with the whole policy, citing that taxpayers should not be funding the cost of adapting inappropriate housing and that affordable housing should not be artificially restricted by keeping older people in large properties.
- 4.3 The Council acknowledges the comments made by the respondent who disagrees with the policy. However, it is the Council's view that the benefits of adapting the home to serve the occupiers needs are recognised as an effective way to improve the health and wellbeing of older people disabled adults and children. A more accessible home environment can improve independence, reduce risk and reduce reliance on assistance. As the body of evidence demonstrating the benefits of home adaptations grows, so does the recognition that the sooner they are installed, the greater will be the preventative benefits. A common theme in legislation and policy across the UK is the need for a more preventative approach to interventions. As part of this policy review in 2018 the Council Lead Occupational Therapist and the Head Occupational Therapist and the Royal Berkshire Hospital carried out a survey. The survey examined the cost impact on the number of bed days lost with 6 patients in Royal Berkshire Hospital who were "bed blocking" due to inadequate Housing. These patients all owned their own properties and due to a number of health reasons were no longer able to maintain their homes and with no support from friends or family required input from the hospital OT and adult social care. All 6 patients were assessed as being able to return home with care packages but could not be discharged due to the unsafe environments they were living in. The cost to RBH was £96,250 in delayed discharges.
- 4.4 The updated policy will enable the council to deliver Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptations in a person centred and outcome focused way. The updated policy meets the objectives of the Better Care Fund, to increase the uptake of Disabled Facilities Grants and work collaboratively with health and social care colleagues. It is anticipated that this policy will enable a more proportionate and responsive service, delaying hospital admissions, falls or moves to residential or nursing homes. The measures in this policy will further support care and support services to actively promote wellbeing and independence and enables early intervention rather than crisis intervention.
- 4.5 Maximum grants being offered - across the 5 new discretionary grants being consulted on 37 respondents agreed with the maximum grants being offered. 1 person disagreed with the whole policy and 2 respondents were concerned whether there would be sufficient funding. It is the Council's view based on experience that the funding allowed should be enough however, an annual review will be carried out to ensure this is the case and changes made if necessary.
- 4.6 Grant criteria - other than in the case of the Professional fees and Top Up funding grants, 39 of the respondents agreed with the grant criteria.

4.7 In the case of the Professional Fees, 2 respondents felt grant applicants should not have to pay back professional fees if they choose not to proceed with the grant; 1 person did not agree with the policy overall and 1 person did not answer the question. In terms of not paying back professional fees it is the Council's view that unless there are exceptional circumstances for example the disabled applicant has passed away or their health has deteriorated whereby the adaptations are no longer appropriate professional fees should be repaid if the grant applicant simply chooses to withdraw from grant. By claiming the fees back in these circumstances allows for the funds to be recycled to assist others.

4.8 Top Up Funding - 33 respondents agreed with the criteria of the grant; 1 person did not agree with the overall policy and 6 respondents had reservations about means testing for the additional funding over the £30k mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant and placing a charge against the property. It is the Council's view that means testing would be the appropriate mechanism to ensure fair distribution of the additional discretionary funding required and by placing a charge against the property means funds can be recycled in due course to assist other people.

5.0 POLICY CHANGE

5.1 While the responses raised detailed issues and provided challenge to the proposed policy which have been considered in paragraphs 4.2 - 4.8 above, the overall policy direction remains as presented to the November Committee. However, an annual review is proposed as part of the policy and if changes to the grants offered is required then appropriate amendments will be made.

6.0 CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

6.1 in relation to the Council's Corporate Plan the following themes are appropriate:

- Providing homes for those most in need - this policy will improve housing conditions and enable residents to remain living in their own homes.
- Protecting and enhancing the lives of vulnerable adults and children.

7.0 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 The policy has been consulted on and this report has presented the results.

8.0 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

8.2 No group will be adversely affected by the introduction of these schemes.

9.0 ENVIRONMENTAL & CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Adaptations and repairs will be carried out to meet the Building Regulations Standards for sustainable design and construction and where applicable will look to comply with the higher building standards set out in the Council's adopted Local Plan.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 **The Care Act 2014** - is applicable to adults - Section 1 of the Care Act states that local authorities have a general duty to promote the wellbeing and independence of the disabled person. This includes the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. Therefore, home adaptations are highly relevant to the individual's wellbeing and regard should be given to their own views, wishes and feelings.

10.2 Section 2 places duties on the local authorities to identify, provide and arrange services that help people prevent developing needs for care and support or delay people deteriorating such that they would need on-going care and support.

10.3 However, eligibility criteria from the Care Act or any other legislation should not be applied to adaptations, but the principles of wellbeing should be considered.

10.4 **The Chronically Sick and Disabled Person Act (1970 Section 2)** - Continues to apply to children, it gives local authorities a duty to assess and assist chronically sick or disabled children that may be necessary and appropriate with assistance in arranging adaptations or the provision of additional facilities to promote safety, comfort and convenience.

10.5 **Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996** - Disabled Facilities Grants are governed by this legislation and DFGs remain a mandatory duty for Local Authorities

10.6 **The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002** -

Came into effect in July 2003 and led to a major change in the way local authorities can provide financial assistance to people to repair and improve private sector homes. The Order set aside the previously prescribed grants (other than the Disabled Facilities Grant, which remains a mandatory grant) and allowed local authorities to adopt a flexible approach to providing financial assistance to reflect local circumstances, needs and resources.

10.7 In 2008-09 the Government extended the scope of the Regulatory Reform Order to include the use of Disabled Facilities Grants money. This allows Local Authorities to use specific DFG funding for wider purposes. This includes help with the cost of moving and adapting or improving another property where it is deemed to be a more cost-effective option.

10.8 If a local authority wishes to use the powers under the RRO it must adopt a policy setting out how it will use these powers. This policy details the type of assistance available to households living in the private sector, the eligibility criteria and the procedures for accessing assistance.

11.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The funding for DFGs sits within the Better Care Fund and for 2019/20 it is £1,055million.

11.2 The funding for Housing Assistance Grants is £320k and this is funded from RBC capital funds.

11.3 The Private Sector Housing Team charge a 10% fee for managing each DFG for applicants and this is re-invested back into the service running costs. An average of £40k is achieved

11.4 There is funding available for the OT assistant post within existing budgets

11.5 The financial implications arising from the proposals set out in this report are set out below: -

Revenue Implications

See note below	2020/21 £000	2021/22 £000	2022/23 £000
Employee costs	£234k	£234k	£234k
Other running costs	£5k	£5k	£5k
DFGs and Private Sector Renewal Grants	£1,136,000	£1,136,000	£1,136,000
Expenditure	£1,375,000	£1,375,000	£1,375,000
Income from:			
Fees and charges			
Grant funding - Better Care Fund DFG	£1,055	£1,055	£1,055
Capital Funding	£320k	£320k	£320k
Total Income:	£1,375,000	£1,375,000	£1,375,000

Note - this team is funded by DFG funding and capital recharge relating to Private Sector Renewals

11.6 Risk Assessment

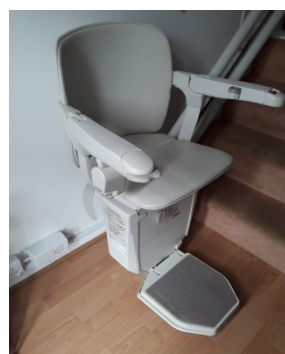
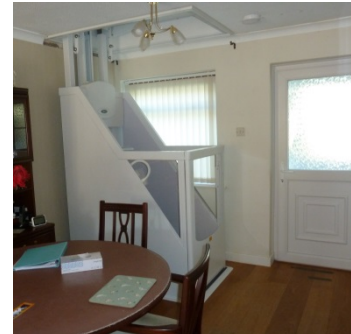
11.7 The key risk might be the demand outstrips funds available however in this case mandatory DFGs will be given priority

12.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 Report to Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee - 6th November 2019

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Reading Borough Council's Private Sector Renewal & Disabled Adaptations Policy



The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002

April 2020

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (the “Order”) came into effect in July 2003 and led to a major change in the way local authorities can provide financial assistance to people to repair and improve private sector homes. The Order set aside the previously prescribed grants (other than the Disabled Facilities Grant, which remains a mandatory grant) and allowed local authorities to adopt a flexible approach to providing financial assistance to reflect local circumstances, needs and resources. In 2008-09 the Government extended the scope of the Regulatory Reform Order to include the use of Disabled Facilities Grants funding. This allows Local Authorities to use specific DFG funding for wider purposes. This includes help with the cost of moving and adapting or improving another property where it is deemed to be a more cost effective option.
- 1.2 It is therefore the policy of the Council to examine all the options available to the individual before immediately embarking on plans to adapt the current property where major adaptations are required.
- 1.3 If a local authority wishes to use the powers under the Order it must adopt a policy setting out how it will use these powers. This policy details the type of assistance available to households living in the private sector, the eligibility criteria and the procedures for accessing assistance.
- 1.4 Disabled Facilities Grant funding is not permitted to be used for Local Authority owned properties. This means that this policy is not applicable to Reading Borough Council tenants. There is a separate Housing Adaptations policy for Council Housing tenants.
- 1.5 This policy will enable the Council to deliver Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptations in a person centred and outcome focused way. This updated policy meets the objectives of the Better Care Fund, to increase the uptake of DFGs and work collaboratively with health and social care colleagues. It is anticipated that this policy will enable a more proportionate and responsive service, delaying hospital admissions, falls or moves to residential or nursing homes. The measures in this policy will further support care and support services to actively promote wellbeing and independence, and enables early intervention avoiding crisis intervention.
- 1.6 **Policy Implementation & Review**
- 1.7 This policy shall come into force on 1st April 2020 and remain until such time as the Council approves any successor policy.

- 1.8 The policy will be reviewed on an annual basis and any changes will be implemented as soon as practically possible
- 1.9 Situations that might result in an earlier review will be where there is a change in funding available, legislative changes or significant change in the Councils strategies.
- 1.10 **Funding**
- 1.11 Should the situation arise where the demand for grants outstrips the funding available Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants will be given priority
- 1.12 **Appeals & Complaints**
- 1.13 The Council has an established corporate complaints procedure for dealing with appeals and complaints. All Council officers have copies of the leaflet explaining how to make a complaint.
- 1.14 A complaint should be linked to the Council's systems and procedures and may be about delay, lack of response, discourtesy or any item that leaves cause for dissatisfaction with the Council' conduct.
- 1.15 Where service users remain unhappy with the outcome of the formal complaint, they may wish to contact the Local Government Ombudsman.
- 2.0 **BACKGROUND**
- 2.1 **Housing & Health**
- 2.2 Housing is a key determinant of Health and by promoting good quality housing this policy contributes to improving housing conditions
- 2.3 The benefits of adapting the home are recognised as an effective way to improve the health and wellbeing of older people, and disabled adults and children. A more accessible home environment can improve independence, reduce risk and reduce reliance on assistance. As the body of evidence demonstrating the benefits of home adaptations grows, so does the recognition that the sooner they are installed, the greater will be the preventative benefits. A common theme in legislation and policy across the UK is the need for a more preventative approach to interventions, including adaptations, for older people, disabled children and adults, to maximize health and wellbeing.
- 2.4 Research has shown that there is a direct impact on the health and wellbeing of residents resulting from the homes in which they live; therefore, poor housing can contribute to poor health. Each year hazards in the home result in unnecessary injuries, episodes of ill-health, and harm to mental

health and in many cases the occupiers do not link the poor condition of their homes with a potential negative impact on their health.

The poorest housing stock can be found in the private sector, and in some cases residents who own their own home are not able to maintain them and as a result hazards can develop.

2.5 Home adaptations can prevent falls, reduce hospital admissions, reduce reliance on care, avoid the need to move into residential care and significantly improve quality of life and wellbeing for individuals, their families and carers.

2.6 **Better Care Fund (BCF)**

2.7 In 2015 the government introduced the BCF in an attempt to bring health and social care together in an integrated way. The fund is a combination of government funding from the Department of Health and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and includes the grant allocation for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG). The 2017-19 Integration and BCF policy framework document lists the conditions that the BCF must be used to address. Funding must be used to contribute to the maintenance of adult social care services in each local authority, which also has a health benefit.

2.8 BCF long term plan outcomes includes properly joined-up care, actions to cut delayed hospital discharges which will help free up pressure on hospital beds. The plan seeks to join-up health and care services, so that people can manage their own health and wellbeing, and live independently in their communities for as long as possible.

2.9 The BCF has been created to improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in our society, placing them at the centre of their care and support, and providing them integrated health and social care services, resulting in an improved experience and better quality of life.

3.0 **Better Care Fund objectives in Reading**

3.1 In Reading the Better Care Fund objectives are:

- Reduced admissions to residential and nursing care homes
- Reduce avoidable emergency admissions
- Assist disabled adults and children to remain in their own homes
- Prevent admissions to care and to assist with delayed transfers where possible.
- Falls prevention
- Cost avoidance of care
- Support for carers and families

3.2 The assistance detailed in this policy has been designed to reflect these objectives

4.0 **MINOR ADAPTATIONS**

The Council's policy is to provide simple adaptations i.e. those that cost under £1000 such as grab rails and bathing equipment, direct to the resident without the need to apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant.

The adaptation belongs to the individual and therefore they will need to maintain it.

All minor adaptations will be installed by Council's Property Services Team following a recommendation by an Occupational Therapist.

5.0 **MAJOR ADAPTATIONS**

5.1 **Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants**

5.2 Mandatory DFGs are available from local authorities in England under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. The applicant or home owner is subject to a means test, for essential adaptations to give disabled people access to essential facilities within the home. There is no means test in the case of adaptations that are for the benefit of a child

5.3 The types of work that a mandatory DFG can cover include:

- making it easier to get into and out of the dwelling e.g. widening doors and installing ramps;
- ensuring the safety of the disabled person and other occupants e.g. improved lighting to ensure better visibility or, place of safety for a child with behavioural challenges;
- making access easier to the living areas;
- providing or improving access to the bedroom, kitchen, toilet, and bathroom e.g. wet floor shower;
- installing a stair lift or providing a downstairs bathroom;
- improving or providing a heating system in the home which is suitable to the needs of the disabled person;
- adapting heating or lighting controls to make them easier to use;
- enabling the disabled person to carry out parenting or carer roles or
- facilitating access to and from the garden by a disabled occupant.

5.4 In order to qualify for a DFG the required adaptations need to be 'necessary and appropriate' (as determined by Adult Social Services and Brighter Futures Occupational Therapists to meet the needs of the disabled person. It must also be 'reasonable and practicable' (determined by the Private Sector Housing Team) for the relevant works to be carried out.

- 5.5 Hoists in the homes of Adults and Children are fitted without going through the DFG application process in order to speed up service delivery
- 5.6 **Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant**
- 5.7 In addition to the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant, the council is not obliged but may consider Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants, depending on funding constraints and legislation.
- 5.8 The Regulatory Reform Order (Housing Assistance) 2002 gives the Council the power to offer discretionary DFG's to residents in the private sector.
- 5.9 If the demand for Disabled Facilities Grants outstrips the funding available Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants will be given priority.
- 5.10 **Housing Assistance Grants and Loans**
- 5.11 These grants and loans are discretionary and are subject to funding being available. This funding can be withdrawn without prior notice to include funding not being made available to grants waiting approval.

6.0 FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

6.1 The types of assistance provided through the Disabled Facilities Grant funding is detailed in the table below

Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant

Type of Assistance	Eligibility Criteria	Eligible Works	Non-Eligible Works	Conditions
<p>Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants</p> <p>Max £30,000 plus up to £10,000 discretionary assistance to pay for architects, agents and other ancillary costs where the cost of the actual adaptation work is up to the grant maximum</p>	<p>Means tested for over 18 years old. Not means tested for those under 18 years</p> <p>Must have been assessed under Section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 (Children).</p> <p>Must be eligible for services under the Care Act 2014 (Adults)</p> <p>Can be an owner, tenant (with at least 5 years of the tenancy left to run) or a landlord applying on behalf of a disabled tenant</p> <p>A relative who fits these criteria may apply on behalf of someone who lives in their home or as part of their household</p>	<p>Works recommended by an Occupational Therapist (OT)</p> <p>Works required because of the disabled person's condition, for facilitating access, making the building or dwelling safe, facilitating adequate bedroom, bathroom and/or kitchen facilities. Providing suitable heating installations, provision of a hard standing in certain circumstances</p> <p>Facilitating and enabling a disabled person to care for dependent residents</p> <p>Where the adaptation is only a stairlift no means test.</p>	<p>Works not supported by an OT or Technical Officer (Private Sector Housing Team)</p> <p>Works that do not relate to the disabled person's medical and/or independence needs.</p> <p>Major Adaptations (extensions) where the existing property can be adapted to meet identified needs.</p> <p>Works that have already been started or completed</p> <p>Scooter storage</p>	<p>Works must be agreed and signed off as 'necessary and appropriate' by the OT and 'reasonable and practicable' by a Technical Officer (Private Sector Housing Team) and agreed by the Disabled Facilities Advisory Group (DFAG)</p> <p>Works must be carried out within 12 months of the date of the grant approval letter.</p> <p>For grants over £5,000 awarded to owner occupiers a charge of up to £10,000 is secured on the property, to be repaid if the property is sold within 10 years</p> <p>Grant will be managed and administered by RBC Private Sector Housing Team and contractors will be paid directly</p> <p>We work with Housing Associations (RSLs) to secure funding towards the costs of works in their properties.</p>

Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant

Type of Assistance	Eligibility Criteria	Eligible Works	Non-Eligible Works	Conditions
<p>Health & Wellbeing at Home Grant</p> <p>Grant Maximum £5,000</p> <p>Enable an applicant to manage their health and wellbeing in their own home</p> <p>Make a property suitable to facilitate safe hospital discharge</p> <p>Prevent hospital admissions or readmissions</p> <p>Reduce admission to long term care</p> <p>Page 45</p>	<p>Not means tested</p> <p>Must have been assessed under Section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 (Children).</p> <p>Must be eligible for services under the 2014 Care Act. (Adults)</p> <p>For private sector residents only including RSL tenants</p> <p>A relative who fits these criteria may apply on behalf of someone who lives in their home or as part of their household</p> <p>Can be an owner or tenant</p>	<p>Make the property safe and accessible for discharge and admission avoidance.</p> <p>This may include deep clean, declutter of essential rooms, repair/replacement of boiler, or small adaptations such as ramps, ceiling track hoists</p>	<p>Works not supported by an OT and Technical Officer (Private Sector Housing Team)</p> <p>Non-essential works for health & wellbeing</p> <p>Where alternative adaptations to the existing home could be provided more cost effectively to meet the identified needs</p> <p>Works costing over £5,000</p> <p>Works that are not able to be completed within 6 weeks</p> <p>Works or adaptation that have already been paid for prior to submission of the grant application</p> <p>Works that have already been started or completed</p>	<p>Referral can be from Adult Social Care hospital discharge team, hospital OTs, community OTs, staff from Willows, Oakwood or Winter Watch</p> <p>Works must be completed within 6 weeks from point of referral.</p> <p>To be agreed by Disabled Facilities Advisory Group</p> <p>Grant will be managed and administered by RBC Private Sector Housing Team and contractors will be paid directly</p> <p>The grant does not cover modifications or adaptations in common parts of rented accommodation such as communal staircase.</p> <p>No further grant for 5 years</p>
<p>Professional Fees</p> <p>Architect, structural engineer or other relevant fees which allow a DFG application to proceed</p> <p>Grant maximum £5,000</p>	<p>Eligible where it has been agreed a DFG application can be made</p>	<p>The cost of architect, structural engineer or other relevant fees to enable the DFG application to progress</p>	<p>DFG application has not been submitted or where it has not been agreed that a DFG application can be made</p>	<p>Fees approved by Private Sector Housing Team Manager</p> <p>DFG does not proceed, unless the proposed DFG is no longer viable because the disabled person has been moved into residential care or has passed away, the fees will be reclaimed or registered as a local land charge on property.</p>

Type of Assistance	Eligibility Criteria	Eligible Works	Non-Eligible Works	Conditions
<p>Accommodation Fees</p> <p>Alternative accommodation costs where it is not feasible to remain living in the property while works are carried out</p> <p>Grant maximum £5,000</p>	<p>Where a DFG application has been approved</p> <p>Technical Officer identifies that it is not feasible to remain living in the property while works are carried out</p>	<p>The cost of alternative accommodation to enable the DFG building works to progress</p>	<p>Where all alternative options (e.g. staying with relatives) and/or equipment (e.g. commode) have been explored by the OT</p> <p>DFG application has not been approved</p>	<p>Fees are paid directly to Architect, Structural Engineer</p> <p>Fees approved by Enablement, Risk and Review Group</p> <p>OT costed and recommended resource</p> <p>Fees will be paid directly to the accommodation provider</p>
<p>Relocation grant</p> <p>Owner Occupiers</p> <p>£10,000 maximum for fees for moving to more suitable property and minimal adaptations if required to the new home</p> <p>Private Rented Tenants</p> <p>£5,000 maximum for fees for moving to more suitable property and minimal adaptation if required in the new rented property</p>	<p>Means tested for over 18 years old. Not means tested for those under 18 years</p> <p>Must have been assessed under Section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 (Children).</p> <p>Must be eligible for services under the 2014 Care Act (Adults)</p> <p>Private sector residents only, not including RSL tenants</p> <p>A relative who fits these criteria may apply on behalf of someone who lives in their home or as part of their household</p>	<p>Fees (estate agents, solicitors, removals and surveys) to move to more suitable property and minimal adaptations if required to the new home</p> <p>In exceptional circumstances, grants of a maximum of £20,000 would be considered if the works contribute to a significant reduction in commissioned care</p> <p>In the case of private rented tenant's expenses such as rent deposit, professional or removal costs. Permission will need to be sought and provided in writing by the landlord prior to moving in</p>	<p>Move and works not supported by an OT or Technical Officer in the Private Sector Housing Team</p> <p>Move where alternative adaptations to the existing home could be provided more cost effectively to meet the identified needs</p> <p>Moving costs or expenses that have already been paid prior to submission of the grant application.</p>	<p>Move and works must be agreed and signed off by an OT and Technical Officer</p> <p>Works must be carried out within 12 months of approval</p> <p>A charge will be secured on the property for a period of 10 years to be repaid if the property is sold within this time</p> <p>Grant will be managed and administered by RBC Private Sector Housing Team. Contractors can be paid directly or the applicant can be paid directly on presentation of appropriate receipts</p>

Type of Assistance	Eligibility Criteria	Eligible Works	Non-Eligible Works	Conditions
<p>Top up funding for a DFG</p> <p>Maximum of £30,000 funding to top up a mandatory DFG where the cost of work has exceeded the grant maximum of £30,000</p> <p>Only available when customer unable to raise funding elsewhere</p>	<p>Means Test for all including parents of children that require the home adapted</p> <p>Owner Occupiers only, not including RSL tenants or private tenants.</p> <p>In exceptional circumstances where a customer is unable to afford their means tested contribution</p>	<p>Top up funding to a mandatory DFG where the cost of work has exceeded the grant maximum of £30k.</p> <p>This will have occurred when the adaptations, in order to meet the assessed needs, exceed the DFG or where there are unforeseen necessary work and no other source of funding is available.</p> <p>Will require Adult Social Care test of resources to establish eligibility in the case of means tested contributions</p>	<p>Works do not meet mandatory DFG criteria</p> <p>Works that have already been started or completed</p>	<p>To be agreed by Head of Service.</p> <p>Works must be carried out within 12 months of approval</p> <p>With the top up funding of up to £30k a charge will be registered against the property with Land Registry and reclaimed whenever the property is sold</p> <p>As with the mandatory DFG the contractor will be paid directly.</p>

7.0 The following types of assistance are discretionary and are subject to funding being available. This funding can be withdrawn without prior notice to include funding not being made available to grants waiting approval

Discretionary Grants

Form Of Assistance	Description, Eligible Works and Client Group	Non-eligible Works	Summary of Conditions
<p>5. Housing Health & Safety Repairs Grant</p> <p>This grant is intended for homeowners or private tenants (tenants must have a repairing obligation) to remove category one and two hazards and bring properties up to the Decent Homes Standard.</p> <p>The grant limit is £20,000.</p>	<p>Applicants are means tested to calculate how much they should contribute to the cost of the work in the same way as the statutory means test for disabled facilities grants.</p> <p>The Housing, Health & Safety Rating System will be used to carry out an assessment of the property and those applicants whose properties fall into the category one or two hazard bands will be invited to make an application for a Decent Homes Grant</p> <p>Works must as a minimum ensure that the property no longer has category 1 or high category 2 hazards on completion of work</p>	<p>In order to maximise funding we will not be modernising internal facilities such as kitchen and bathrooms as a matter of course</p> <p>Works covered by insurance</p> <p>Decorating</p> <p>Replacing or Upgrading non defective installations</p> <p>Repairs to rectify poor DIY</p> <p>Servicing of boilers and other installations and equipment</p> <p>Energy Efficiency work that can be funded by an 'Energy Efficiency Scheme'</p>	<p>Not available for landlords or RSLs</p> <p>Property must be over 10 years old and Owner occupiers will need to have owned and lived in the property for at least 3 years prior to the date of the application</p> <p>Tenants must have been in occupation for 3 years, have a repairing obligation and the tenancy must have no less than 5 years to run.</p> <p>Note: where someone is living in a property owned by a family member they are not a tenant, the owner/s needs to make the application</p> <p>Work must be carried out within 12 months of grant approval.</p> <p>A local land charge will be registered for a period of 10 years. If the grant conditions are breached then the full grant is repayable</p>

Form Of Assistance	Description, Eligible Works and Client Group	Non-eligible Works	Summary of Conditions
<p>LANDLORD GRANT</p> <p>50% of the cost of work will be funded by grant aid with the minimum grant being £1,000 and the maximum grant being £10,000</p>	<p>Grant assistance is open to private landlords for the purposes of remedying items of disrepair that have a direct detrimental effect on the health, safety, security or welfare of the occupants.</p> <p>The HHSRs will be used to assess the hazards and those landlords who are issued with an enforcement, prohibition or emergency remedial notice because their properties have failed due to category one hazards will be invited to make an application for a landlord grant to bring the property up to the Decent Homes Standard.</p> <p>On completion of work the property should:</p> <p>Be free from category 1 hazards as defined by the HHSR System</p> <p>Be in a reasonable state of repair e.g. remedying dampness, have a reasonable degree of thermal comfort. Central heating with timing and temperature controls, Effective insulation (both cavity and loft insulation).</p> <p>Have reasonable modern facilities.</p> <p>Have adequate means of escape and detection system that provides early warning system to occupants in the event of a fire</p> <p>Works to improve the security of the property</p> <p>Have sufficient facilities to comply with the Housing Act 2004 'Amenity Standards'</p>	<p>Work that has not been specified by an Environmental Health Officer</p> <p>Any non-structural works required under S372 of the Housing Act 1985, Management Regulations for e.g. cleaning communal areas, rubbish removal, decoration, servicing of gas or electrical installations</p>	<p>The landlord must be the freeholder of the property or have a lease with at least five years unexpired term at the time of application</p> <p>A local land charge will be registered for a period of 10 years</p> <p>The grant is repayable should the property be sold or no longer continue to be let within five years of the completion of work.</p>

Form Of Assistance	Description, Eligible Works and Client Group	Non-eligible Works	Summary of Conditions
<p>7. Empty Homes Grant</p> <p>Grant limit is £10,000 and can be combined with an Empty Homes Loan (FHIL)</p>	<p>Intended to assist with bringing properties that have been empty for more than six months back into circulation</p> <p>Grant aid is available to assist with the renovations, repairs and/or energy efficiency measures e.g. heating, boilers, insulation and double glazing required to make the property habitable and bring it up to the Decent Homes Standard</p> <p>HMO work: including fire precautions, means of escape and the provision of adequate facilities and amenities for the number of people and households</p>	<p>Works covered by insurance</p> <p>Decorating</p> <p>Replacing or Upgrading non defective installations</p> <p>Repairs to rectify poor DIY</p> <p>Servicing of boilers and other installations and equipment</p> <p>HMO: any non-structural works required under S372 of the Housing Act 1985, Management Regulations for e.g. cleaning communal areas, rubbish removal, decoration, servicing of gas or electrical installations</p>	<p>Not open to RSLs</p> <p>Property must have been empty for more than six months</p> <p>Not eligible for grant assistance where any form of statutory notice has been served.</p> <p>On completion of work a 5 year charge will with registered against the property and breach of grant conditions will mean full repayment of the grant</p> <p>Must provide nomination rights for 5 years to the Council</p>
<p>Flexible Home Improvement Loan (Empty Homes)</p> <p>5 year fixed term loan available to empty property owners to bring the property back into use</p> <p>The loan must not exceed the lesser of the cost of the works or two-thirds of the value of the property</p> <p>Further advances or stage payments maybe possible if the value of the property increases as the work progresses</p>	<p>Must have sufficient equity in the property to support the loan</p> <p>Can be used to supplement an Empty Homes Grant</p> <p>The loan is available to assist with the renovations, repairs and/or energy efficiency measures e.g. heating, boilers, insulation and double glazing required to make the property habitable.</p> <p>HMO work: including fire precautions, means of escape and the provision of adequate facilities and amenities.</p>	<p>Works covered by insurance</p> <p>Decorating</p> <p>Replacing or Upgrading non defective installations</p> <p>Repairs to rectify poor DIY</p> <p>Servicing of boilers and other installations and equipment</p> <p>HMO: any non-structural works required under S372 of the Housing Act 1985, Management Regulations for e.g. cleaning communal areas,</p> <p>Rubbish removal, decoration, servicing of gas or electrical installations</p>	<p>The cost of the loan is secured as a charge on the property</p> <p>The loan must be paid in full by the end of the 5 year term.</p> <p>The loan must be repaid if the property is sold</p>

Form Of Assistance	Description, Eligible Works and Client Group	Non-eligible Works	Summary of Conditions
<p>Flexible Home Improvement Loan (over 60)</p> <p>The loan must not exceed the lesser of the cost of the works or two-thirds of the value of the property</p>	<p>Owner Occupiers over the age of 60. If joint owners one can be 55 years of age.</p> <p>Must have sufficient equity in the property to support the loan</p> <p>Works relating to for example, heating, plumbing, electrics, roofing, drainage, damp proofing, gutter and disabled adaptations.</p> <p>To fund disabled adaptations in excess of DFG limit.</p>	<p>Works covered by insurance</p> <p>Decorating</p> <p>Replacing or Upgrading non defective installations</p> <p>Repairs to rectify poor DIY</p> <p>Servicing of boilers and other installations and equipment</p>	<p>The cost of the loan is secured as a charge on the property</p> <p>The loan must be repaid in any of the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Regular repayments ▫ Occasional repayments ▫ Loan is repaid in full when the property is sold or the owners cease to occupy it.
<p>Flexible Improvement Loan for rented accommodation.</p> <p>The maximum loan is the lesser of the cost of repairs/improvements, or 75% of the value of the property.</p>	<p>Loans will be made for the purpose of improving the quality of the accommodation for the tenants, or prospective tenants.</p> <p>Applicants must be able to demonstrate that the loan can be repaid from the net income from the property. Alternatively the landlord can prove income from other sources sufficient to fund loan repayments.</p>		<p>Loans are secured by a first charge or, in some cases, a second charge on the property.</p> <p>The length of the loan will be agreed at onset, subject to a maximum term of 15 years.</p> <p>Repayments of capital and interest must be made monthly by direct debit.</p> <p>The loan may be repaid (in whole or part) at any time without penalty.</p>

8.0 **Constraints**

- 8.1 **Extensions** - the Council will direct resources so that an adaptation is carried out within the existing structure of the dwelling and will only consider approving a DFG for an extension to a property if all other options have been exhausted.
- 8.2 **Modular adaptations** - the Council, where appropriate, will offer modular adaptations/extensions or the equivalent budget limit. Applicants who choose a more expensive build of extension will have to fund the difference.
- 8.3 **Bulk Purchase** - where the Council or its partners has negotiated a “bulk” contract e.g. stairlifts, applicants will be offered the use of the discount provided by the bulk purchase contractor(s). If they choose to use another, more expensive contractor they will have to fund the difference.
- 8.4 **Recycling** - where available the Council will offer recycled adaptations or equivalent budget limit where the adaptation offered meets the needs of the occupier at the best price available.
- 8.5 **Schedule of rates** - the Council will use a schedule of rates for bathroom adaptations. If applicants choose to use another, more expensive contractor they will have to fund the difference.
- 8.6 **Ongoing maintenance** - The Council will provide extended warranties where possible for example stairlifts but has no responsibility for any future maintenance costs for works or equipment installed to the property.
- 8.7 All adaptations are the responsibility of the applicant.

9.0 **DELIVERING THE SERVICE**

- 9.1 Reading Borough Council’s Private Sector Housing Team will assist applicants with the grant process to include plans, tenders, obtaining the necessary permissions e.g. Planning Permission, Building Regulations, grant application paperwork, monitoring work, sign off and payments. Applicants can if they choose manage the work themselves and detailed guidance will be given as to the requirements
- 9.2 In all cases payments will be made direct to the contractor, Architect, Structural Engineer etc on receipt of a valid invoice and works having been inspected
- 9.3 There is a 10% fee charged for managing the grant process by the Council. This is funded through the grant or loan
- 9.4 An application for assistance shall be in a form prescribed by the Council.

Appendix 1

Private Sector Renewal & Disabled Adaptations Policy

Overview

The Council is proposing to change its Private Sector Renewal & Disabled Adaptations Policy to provide a more flexible and responsive service.

The aim of the changes are to provide discretionary grants that will assist people to remain living independently in their own homes, delay hospital admissions, prevent falls and delay or avoid moves to residential or nursing homes.

We are proposing

Health & Well Being at Home Grant

This grant will be up to a maximum of £5,000 and will not be based on income or savings. The types of adaptations/housing assistance that will be provided include stairlifts, ramps, deep clean, de-cluttering of essential rooms, repair/replacement of boilers.

Discretionary Professional Fees

This grant will be up to a maximum of £5,000 and will be added to the Disabled Facilities Grant once approved. This grant will be available where there is a significant amount of adaptations needed and an Architect is required to draw up plans; or where there is concern about the structure of the existing building and a structural engineer is required.

Discretionary Accommodation Fees

This grant will be up to a maximum spend of £5,000 towards the cost of temporary accommodation where there are significant and disruptive Disabled Facilities Grant works to be carried out at the property which would mean it is not suitable for the resident to remain and where no other options are available for example self-funding alternative accommodation, stay with friends/family

Relocation Grant

This grant has been amended to include tenants in the private rented sector, with an upper limit of £5,000 to enable them to move to more suitable alternative accommodation that would better meet their needs. This grant already exists for owner occupiers with the amendment that in exceptional circumstances a grant of a maximum of £20,000 would be considered if it contributed to the significant reduction in the cost of care being paid for by Reading Borough Council.

Top up funding

The mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) limit is £30,000 which no longer meets the cost of providing extensions such as a wheelchair accessible downstairs bathroom or bedrooms. The current costs can range from £45k to £60k+. This new grant will allow a discretionary maximum grant of an additional £30,000 to top up a mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant, where the cost of work has gone over the grant maximum. The top up grant will be means tested to include the parents of disabled children and will only be offered if there are no other sources of funding available. A charge will be placed against the property and registered with HM Land Registry with repayment whenever the property is sold.

We would welcome your comments on the proposals in the policy. More details can be found in the tables on pages 9-11 of the document.

The closing date for this consultation is 7th February 2020. Please make sure you respond by then.

Consultation questions

Health & Well Being at Home Grant this is a new grant and the purpose of it is to enable:

- An applicant to manage their health and wellbeing in their own home;
- Make a property suitable to facilitate safe hospital discharge;
- Prevent hospital admissions or readmissions and
- Reduce admission to long term care.

This grant will be up to a maximum of £5,000 and will not be based on income or savings. The types of adaptations/housing assistance that will be provided include stairlifts, ramps, deep clean, de-cluttering of essential rooms, repair/replacement of boilers. This grant will help Hospital Occupational Therapists to respond to unsafe housing to ensure safe and more responsive discharges from hospital

Question 1

Do you agree with the purpose of this grant?

Yes
No

If you answered no can you please explain why?

Question 2

Do you agree that this grant should not be means tested (not based on income and savings)?

Yes
No

If you answered no can you please explain why?

Question 3

Do you agree with the maximum grant limit of £5,000?

Yes
No

If no please explain why?

Discretionary Professional Fees - this grant will be up to a maximum of £5,000 and added to the Disabled Facilities Grant when approved. This grant will be available where there is a significant amount of adaptations needed and an Architect is required to draw up plans; or where there is concern about the structure of the existing building and a structural engineer is required. Often the cost of these professionals has to be paid before the Disabled Facilities Grant is approved. This is usually the case with complex adaptations in the homes of children to meet long term needs and generally the family are unable to fund these costs. Offering this grant will enable adaptations to proceed in a more timely fashion.

If the adaptations do not go ahead unless there are exceptional circumstances (e.g. the disabled person having to go into residential care or has passed away) this funding will have to be re-paid or a charge will be registered against the property with HM Land Registry and re-paid whenever the property is sold.

Question 1

Do you agree with the purpose of this grant?

Yes

No

If you answered no can you please explain why?

Question 2

Do you agree with the maximum grant limit of £5,000?

Yes

No

If no please explain why?

Question 3

Do you agree that if the Disabled Facilities Grant does not go ahead then the grant should be repaid, unless there are exceptional circumstances?

Yes

No

If no please explain why?

Discretionary Accommodation Fees - this is a new grant with a maximum spend of £5,000 towards the cost of temporary accommodation where there are significant and disruptive disabled facilities works to be carried out at the property which would render it unsuitable for the resident to remain. An assessment will be made by the Private Sector Housing Technical Officer and Occupational Therapist to

ensure no other options are available for example self-funding alternative accommodation, stay with friends/family before this grant is agreed.

Question 1

Do you agree with the purpose of this grant?

Yes
No

If you answered no can you please explain why?

Question 2

Do you agree with the maximum grant limit of £5,000?

Yes
No

If no please explain why?

Question 3

Do you agree with the criteria for this grant?

Yes
No

If not what should be changed?

Relocation Grant - This grant has been amended to include tenants in the private rented sector where it is not possible to adapt their current home or landlord will not give permission, with an upper limit of £5,000 to enable them to move to more suitable alternative accommodation that would better meet their needs. This grant already exists for owner occupiers with the amendment that in exceptional circumstances a grant of a maximum of £20,000 would be considered if it contributed to the significant reduction in care funded by Reading Borough Council

Question 1

Do you agree with the purpose of this grant?

Yes
No

If you answered no can you please explain why?

Question 2

Do you agree with the maximum grant limit of £5,000 for tenants in the private rented sector?

Yes
No

If no please explain why?

Top up funding- The mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) limit is £30,000 which no longer meets the cost of providing extensions such as a wheelchair accessible downstairs bathroom or bedrooms. The current costs can range from £45k to £60k+. This new grant will enable a discretionary maximum grant of an additional £30,000 to top up a mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant, where the cost of work has exceeded the grant maximum. This will enable extensions and complex adaptations to go ahead, to support families to continue to care for disabled adults and children in their own homes.

The top up grant will be means tested to include the parents of disabled children and will only be offered if there are no other sources of funding available. A charge will be placed against the property and registered with HM Land Registry with repayment whenever the property is sold.

Question 1

Do you agree with the purpose of this grant?

Yes
No

If no please explain why?

Question 2

Do you agree that the top up should be means tested?

Yes
No

If no please explain why?

Question 3

Do you agree that a charge should be registered against the property and the top up re-paid whenever the property is sold?

Yes
No

If no please explain why?

Please indicate whether you are responding to these proposals as:-

- Resident
- Service user
- Family or friend of a Service user
- Voluntary organisation
- Business
- Public Sector
- Employee of Reading Borough Council

Other - please give details below

In order to establish which areas your comments relate to, please provide your home postcode.

*** Your Postcode - (Please enter the postcode in CAPITALS i.e. RG44 23XB)**

About you

These questions are optional but will help us to see if there are differences between the views of different residents. All the information you give will be kept completely confidential and secure.

Webteam - Need to add the correct sex question options here

Are you?

- Male
- Female

Webteam - Need to add Gender Identity question

Which age group do you belong to?

- Under 16
- 18 - 24 years
- 25 - 34 years
- 35 - 44 years
- 45 - 54 years
- 55 - 64 years
- 65 - 74 years
- 75 years plus

Do you have a disability, long-term illness or health problem (12 months or more) which limits your daily activities or the work you can do?

- Yes
- No

To which of these ethnic groups do you consider you belong?

- White - British**
- White - Irish**
- White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller**
- White - Any other White background (Please specify below)**
- Mixed - White and Black Caribbean**
- Mixed - White & Black African**
- Mixed - White & Asian**
- Mixed - Any other Mixed background (Please specify below)**
- Asian or Asian British - Indian**
- Asian or Asian British - Pakistani**
- Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi**
- Asian or Asian British - Chinese**
- Asian or Asian British - Any other Asian background (Please specify below)**
- Black or Black British - African**
- Black or Black British - Caribbean**
- Black or Black British - Any other black background (Please specify below)**
- Other ethnic group - Arab**
- Other ethnic group - Any other ethnic group (Please specify below)**
- Prefer not to say**
- Don't know**

Please give detail of other

What is your religious belief?

- Buddhist
- Christian
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Sikh
- No Religion
- Prefer not to say
- Other

Other - please state

Are you:

- Heterosexual/Straight
- Gay or lesbian
- Bisexual
- Prefer not to say
- Other

Please give details of other

If you do fill in your contact details now, any future participation will be entirely voluntary and there will be no obligation to take part later

*** Do you want to be kept up to date on future budget proposals and consultations and other council news?**

- Yes
- No

Your personal details will be treated as confidential and your survey responses will remain anonymous.

Any future participation will be entirely voluntary and there will be no obligation to take part later on.

Contact Details

Title	<input type="text"/>
First name	<input type="text"/>
Surname	<input type="text"/>
Address	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>
Contact telephone number	<input type="text"/>
Email Address	<input type="text"/>

Data Protection

Under the Data Protection Act, we have a legal duty to protect any information we collect from you. We use leading technologies and encryption software to safeguard your data, and keep strict security standards to prevent any unauthorised access to it. We do not pass on your details to any third party or government department unless you give us permission to do so. The information you have completed on this form will only be used in connection with your feedback. Please check the box below to indicate that you agree to your data being transmitted to and stored by Reading Borough Council for the purpose of processing this form

* Please read the statement above

I Agree

A report on the response to this consultation will be made at the Council's Housing, Neighbourhood and Leisure Committee on 11th March 2020.

Thank you very much for taking part in this consultation Please

click on the submit arrow below to complete the survey

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READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOOD AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	11TH MARCH 2020		
TITLE:	EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY 2020-2026		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	JOHN ENNIS	PORTFOLIO:	HOUSING
SERVICE:	REGULATORY SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGH WIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	YASMIN AHMAD	TEL:	0118 9372466
JOB TITLE:	PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING TEAM MANAGER	E-MAIL:	yasmin.ahmad@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks approval of the updated Empty Homes Strategy 2020-2026. It explains how the service helps and persuades owners to bring their empty homes back into use. This is the third version of the strategy and takes stock of activity since 2008.
- 1.2 Bringing privately-owned empty homes back into the market boosts housing supply, smartens streetscapes, helps prevent and tackles crime and anti-social behaviour. Re-use of existing buildings has a smaller ecological footprint than new build housing because it requires fewer building resources and does not require undeveloped land.
- 1.3 Appendix 1. *Empty Homes Strategy 2020-2026*

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee notes the activity and results of empty homes strategy.
- 2.2 That members approve the Empty Homes Strategy 2020/26 and its new goal for bringing 30 high-priority long term empty homes back into use as detailed in 4.8 of this report. (Appendix 1)
- 2.3 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 does not affect the broad direction of the policy.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 Through this Strategy, the Council helps to optimise use of available housing, disrupts and prevents criminality, improves the appearance of neighbourhoods, identifies and reports suspected fraud, generates revenue through New Homes Bonus and recovers debts such as Council Tax arrears, unpaid fines and aged social care debts.
- 3.2 The Strategy focuses on the reason a home becomes empty rather than the empty home itself. Empty homes arise because owners often cannot act or do not know what to do. The Council also has a range of enforcement powers that can be used in circumstances where owners do not engage or cooperate.
- 3.3 The national drivers to tackle empty homes has been replaced by a cross service approach to deliver local improvements and unlock housing supply. In order, the service's priority empty homes are as follows.
 - 3.3.1 'High-Priority Long Term Empty homes'. 'High priority' is awarded to homes causing problems locally. 'Long Term Empty' is a technical Council Tax term meaning the home has been registered on the Council Tax system as "unoccupied/unfurnished for six months or longer". These are referred to as "registered LTE" or LTE in the Strategy.
 - 3.3.2 Any home that is unoccupied, irrespective of Council Tax classification or duration of emptiness, that causes problems locally.
 - 3.3.3 LTE homes that may have no negative impact on the locality
 - 3.3.4 Any type of empty home, irrespective of Council Tax empty home class, where the owner requests help to return it back into use.
 - 3.3.5 Other empty homes where another Council team asks for help.
 - 3.3.6 The service is not involved in Council-owned LTEs.

4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 **Current Position:**
- 4.2 The Council's empty homes service (the 'service') has been tackling complex empty homes and the more complex back-stories of their owners since 2008.
- 4.3 The table below shows the number of registered LTEs in Reading since 2016. There is always a latent level of empty homes. Trends change according to the health of the housing market and in response to fiscal and legal measures introduced by Governments. Reading's registered LTE figure had a downward trend for a decade from 2008, but numbers rose in 2019 because of national and local factors set out in 4.4 and 4.5 below.

	LTE 2016	LTE 2017	LTE 2018	LTE 2019	LTE CHANGE 2016-19	% CHANGE IN LTE 2016-19	LTE % OF ALL HOMES 2018
Reading BC	515	502	387	571	+56	+11%	0.8
Rest of Berkshire	1,810	2,025	2,327	2,237	+212	+12%	0.7
4 Comparator Councils ¹	1,990	2,002	2,053	2,287	+297	+15%	0.6
SOUTH EAST	23,935	25,378	27,743	29,552	+5,617	+23%	0.8
ENGLAND	200,145	205,293	216,186	225,785	+25,640	+13%	0.9

- 4.4 Several factors have impacted the housing market. Housing transaction rates have slowed while owners wait for the market to lift again. Vendors want certainty and profit from sales, and they currently indicate that their reluctance to sell is related to uncertainty around the impact of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. Agents report that the introduction of Second-Home Stamp Duty Surcharge and phasing-out of Buy-To-Let Mortgage Interest Tax Relief have depressed demand for buy-to-let investments.
- 4.5 Locally, the biggest contributor to the increase in 2019 LTEs were 152 new-build flats in two blocks in Whitely and Abbey wards that had not been sold or let within 6 months of completion. Numbers were further increased by 39 age-restricted or retirement leasehold flats where Executors reported difficulties in selling. In 2019, homes were being registered LTE (i.e. empty for six months) at a faster rate than the existing registered LTEs came back into use.
- 4.6 From 2008 - 2013, 62 High Priority LTE's were returned to use through significant service intervention. Since 2014, 163 High Priority LTE's were returned to use, yielding a total of 208 dwellings.
- 4.7 By year, the figures were 38 in 2014/15, 32 in 2015/16, 40 in 2016/17, 29 in 2017/18 and 24 in 2018/19.
- 4.8 The service is only heavily involved in around 5% of all registered LTE's returning to use each year. Other LTE's come back into use as an indirect result of the services' approach, though it is not possible to quantify these. Some of the Council's approaches are set out below.
- 4.9 **New Homes Bonus (NHB)** - income arising from empty homes work remains a financial incentive for the Council, but the future of NHB is uncertain. NHB rewards Councils that reduce the number of registered LTE homes on the Council Tax system. Council Tax and the service carry out an annual data-cleansing exercise to improve data accuracy for the NHB calculation. The fundamental review of Council Tax services in 2018/19 found our in-house data-cleansing to be highly effective and cost efficient. The exercise leads to important data correction and intelligence that supports new empty home case work. Success hinges on the close working relationship between the service and Council Tax, and project control by the service underpinned by in depth local knowledge.

¹ Comparator Councils = Luton, Southampton, Swindon and Oxford

- 4.10 **Council Tax Recovery** - Synergy between Council Tax and the service cannot be underestimated. The services correct accounts, share intelligence and combine enforcement action. Furthermore, the Council's aim is that no empty homes case is complete until arrears are paid in full. For example, Mr & Mrs Q own three empty homes with combined Council Tax arrears of £10,000. As Council Tax and their enforcement agencies struggled to find and engage with the owners, the case was referred to the service. It took the service under a month to locate and persuade the owners to visit the Council Offices to settle the arrears. Unexpectedly, Mr & Mrs Q then asked for help to scope plans for the three empty homes and one empty business premise.
- 4.11 **Long Term Empty Premium Council Tax Charge (LTEP)**. Increases in the Premium rates were approved by the Council in 2018. The Premium prompts some owners to act, but as a blunt tax instrument, the Premium was identified as causing difficulty to specific customers (see 4.12).
- 4.12 **Long Term Empty Retirement Leasehold Flats and Probate Projects** - Executors are facing difficulties selling retirement leasehold flats. This sub-market's sluggish nature has impacted on the overall LTE figure in 2019. The Council have little influence over this sub-market, but the service is investigating ways to help executors speed up the property sales and ease the burden of the LTE Premium while they try to sell the property. This fits with ongoing work between empty homes and council tax officers to improve information and guidance for surrounding empty homes with a deceased owner (called Class F empties) whether the former owner died intestate (not having made a will) or if their Executors do not know what to do with the empty home.
- 4.13 **Adult Social Care Debt Recovery** - the service helps Adult Social Care Debt with difficult debt recovery cases where an empty home is involved. This work requires sensitivity and empathy as identified as 'high need specialist support' in the Council's Customer Experience Strategy. Debt recovery is important, but the helping families make their own informed decisions so they can overcome difficulties and plan better for the future is paramount.
- 4.14 **Flexible Home Improvement Loan Scheme (FHIL)** - the Council is part of a 16 Council consortium led by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead delivering loans for home improvements. One loan product is the Empty Home Loan. This enables renovations so owners can let, sell or reoccupy the property.
- 4.15 **Enforcement Action** is used when owners prove unwilling or unable to cooperate with our informal requests. For example, Mr. X's home, empty for four years, presents health and safety issues to passers-by, is attractive to squatters and is a local eyesore. Mr. X owes £15,000 in Council Tax arrears. The Council asks him to carry out renovations and bring the house back into use. Mr. X believes that his home, empty or not, is no business of the Council and is belligerent. He does not comply with notices requiring him to carry out works. The service carries out the specified works under warrant and registers our costs as a charge on the property because Mr. X refuses to pay. The Council is now authorised to force the sale of the property to recover the debts (for enforcement action and Council Tax arrears) from the proceeds of sale. Mr. X decides to cooperate, settles the debts, completes all works and

lets the house again. The range of powers the Council can deploy on intransigent owners is set out in the Strategy.

4.16 **Joint Enforcement with the Planning Service.** While Environmental Health enforcement powers tackle hazards and risks, they are not explicitly designed to improve the visual impact of derelict property on a locality. Section 215 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 provides the statutory grounds to take action to improve the look of land or property. It is a highly appropriate power for empty homes work. The use of this power may expand since the National Planning Framework 2019 now places an obligation on Planning Authorities to take into consideration empty homes in their locality.

4.17 **Option Proposed**

4.18 That Members approve the Empty Homes Strategy 2020-2026 attached at Appendix 1 and continues to offer a range of responses matched to the characteristics of each empty homes case arising. We have increased our goal of bringing at least 20 High Priority LTEs back into use to 30 per year and will proactively publicise the work of the service.

4.19 **Other Options Considered**

4.20 **Withdrawing the service.** With no statutory duty to have an empty homes service or strategy, dispensing with the service would be lawful and could generate savings. But without the service, Reading would lose some social, economic and environmental benefits. Generating New Homes Bonus and recovery of complex debts might be compromised. While some impacts of some empty homes could be addressed through normal Environmental Health or Planning enforcement, the absence of a dedicated resource may constrain the Council in improving homes for local people, to tidy up the street-scene and to help improve the lives of some owners.

4.21 **Shared Empty Homes Services.** Numerous examples of service-sharing exist. Some are national (Scottish Empty Homes Partnership), some see the whole service shared across neighbouring Councils (e.g. Cherwell and South Northants) and others see some, but not all empty homes functions shared across borders (e.g. West Oxon, Cotswold, Cheltenham and Forest of Dean). During the last strategy, Reading considered shared service options for all Regulatory Service functions, but the Council opted to retain the service as is.

4.22 **What are other Councils doing?** Local housing market characteristics influence the approaches Councils take to empty homes in their areas. The larger scale schemes remaining are most likely to be found in the former Housing Market Renewal Areas. These Councils often use their own budgets to run schemes, where once national funding was available. Community-led housing or self-help housing projects bloomed during the housing recession of the mid-1990's and are moving up the agenda again in the UK's cities. The following are a few examples of activity elsewhere in England.

4.23 Brighton & Hove CC's 'City Plan - Part 1' commits the Council to seek opportunities for affordable housing in existing unused homes and business spaces along with a network of community-led and self-build housing projects within the Brighton & Hove Community Land Trust. The Council helps the

groups with issues such as business modelling, pre-planning application advice and developing external funding bids. ²

- 4.24 'Abolish Empty Office Buildings', a Bristol community benefit society is using partners' funds, loans, a community share issue and donations to acquire and convert unused business premises into affordable homes.³
- 4.25 North East Derbyshire DC have linked up with energy suppliers E.ON to offer a private sector service to owners of empty homes. E.ON offer free advice, Energy Performance Certificates and property surveys. Their paid-for services include house clearance and project management of repairs.⁴
- 4.26 Barnsley MBC approved a £150,000 budget to carry out works in default of enforcement notices on empty homes⁵. They initially carried out works on six homes that owners had refused to do at a cost of £39,000. Charges were registered against the property and sales were enforced to recover a total of £162,000 in debts, costs and fees. £12,500 of officer time was also recovered. Barnsley are also using part of their section 106 payments to support direct purchase of 30 empty homes to be managed by the charity, Human Kind⁶.
- 4.27 Rushcliffe BC work with UK Property Rescue Ltd, using some of their affordable housing capital budget to use enforcement tools to purchase, repair and let 30 empty homes in 2019/20. Rushcliffe then transfer the homes to Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing to manage, maintain and let at affordable rents.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 In relation to the Council's Corporate Plan the following themes are appropriate
- 5.2 *"Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe"* - working with owners to address property dereliction that attracts crime and anti-social behaviour.
- 5.3 *"Ensuring access to decent housing to meet local needs"* by bringing empty homes back into use increases access to good quality, energy efficient homes.
- 5.4 *"Securing the economic success of Reading and provision of job opportunities"* providing local work for local trades renovating empty homes.
- 5.5 The social, economic and environmental themes in the Council's three strategic aims are supported through the work as set out in 5.1 above.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The service impact on the Climate Change Strategy is minor, though reuse of existing dwellings may reduce land-take needed for some new build schemes. Renovation of run-down homes is carried out in accordance with Approved Document L1B, Building Regulations 2010 thus all empty homes become more

² <https://bhclt.org.uk/bunker-housing-co-op-starts-building/>

³ <https://www.aeobhousepeople.org.uk/>

⁴ <https://www.ne-derbyshire.gov.uk/news-and-media/latest-news/pioneering-empty-property-scheme-extended>

⁵ <https://www.barnsleychronicle.com/article/council-crackdown-on-empty-houses-sees-a-rise-in-market-sales>

⁶ <https://barnsleymbc.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=5176&x=1>

energy efficient, warmer and cheaper to keep warm. In some refurbishments, developers have installed small scale renewable energy solutions. Though the service does not offer grants specifically for energy saving measures, the empty home grant and loan can be spent on such measures.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 Regular feedback and suggestions for improvement from empty home owners, those directly affected by an empty home and agencies active in the agenda is gathered.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 *Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—*

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;*
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;*
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.*

8.2 The service uses enforcement powers, in accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation and the Enforcement Protocol, that have significant impacts on owners' rights and lesser impact of the rights of neighbors. Customers include owners of empty homes and their representatives, neighbors' and the wider community. The 'client group' has no inherent protected characteristic. In each empty home case, we balance the rights of each owner against the interests of the wider community, a process formalised in the 'Statement of Reasons' part of compulsory purchase guidance. We will only interfere with an empty home owners' Article 8, European Convention on Human Rights (respect for private and family life, home and correspondence) if our interference is lawful and appropriate. Neighbors' also have the same rights. If the condition or use of an empty home interferes with the neighbor's rights, we may also act. Using and 'thinking' the 'Statement of Reasons' concept allied with the Council equalities policy insures against discrimination. The Strategy itself discriminates against no group.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 No new legal implications arise from the recommendations to this report. Appropriate application of enforcement powers set out in the Strategy is governed by the provisions of the Council's Corporate Enforcement Policy. The authority to use each enforcement power is delegated to named posts as set out in the Council's Scheme of Officer Delegations 2018.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Continuing the Empty Homes Strategy requires revenue expenditure that will continue to be met from existing budgets. No capital funding has been allocated to the acquisition of empty homes through Compulsory Purchase. Should the situation arise where it is necessary to Compulsory Purchase an empty home a

report will be prepared and presented making the case for the necessary funding

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 None



EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY 2020 - 2026

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

11th March 2020



Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee 11th March 2020

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SUMMARY

This document explains why and how the Council helps to bring unused homes back into use.

There were 571 private homes “registered Long Term Empty homes” or LTEs¹ on the Council Tax system in Reading in 2019². Most have been unoccupied for less than a year with a handful being empty for a decade. LTEs are scattered around the Borough with most found in the more built up parts of the town.

The Council focuses on LTEs that are most damaging to communities and on owners who are struggling to make their spare homes work. The Council try to help owners with advice and funding but will resort to formal powers to persuade the most challenging owners to act. The Council offer Empty Home Grants and Loans in return for the home being let to people that need a home.

Bringing life back to unused homes provides local housing and work for local people. It cleans up derelict eyesores and antisocial behaviour honey-pots as well as improving the lives of owners who are sometimes vulnerable and often at a loss what to do with their spare home.

This is the third version of the strategy since 2008. Since the last Strategy in 2014, the Council has brought back into use 168 of the most troublesome empty homes. Keeping the number of registered LTEs as low as possible also helps the Council earn Government funding called New Homes Bonus.

LEAD COUNCILLOR FOREWORD

Our new Empty Homes Strategy responds to long-standing challenges that still exist in the 21st Century. We want people to have safe, warm and secure homes in peaceful neighbourhoods. We do not want to see vacant derelict homes while there are still some people who have no home at all. We want neighbours to feel confident that that rubbish will not be dumped at the empty home next door, or that the empty home will become a squat and set on fire.

Our strategy tackles the visual impacts of empty homes so they no longer blight communities. We help owners who are struggling to bring their spare homes back into profitable and productive use. We

¹ A registered LTE is a home that has been registered with the Council Tax service as unoccupied/unfurnished for 6 months or longer

² as at 5th October 2019. Data extracted through Council Taxbase Form.

encourage owners to make their once empty homes available to meet local housing needs. We help owners who accept our help but we will take action against owners who are uncooperative or obstructive. It is everyone's interests to see unused homes being renovated and put back into good use.

I have seen how the tenacity and patience of the service has helped owners who had previously been unwilling or unable to turn their spare homes around. I have also seen one-time notorious eyesores renovated and turned into family homes. The work is complex, with one case requiring sensitivity and the next needing legal action to make an owner act. The empty homes service brings together skills within and outside the Council to deliver social, economic and environmental benefits to owners, the community and to the Council.

COUNCILLOR JOHN ENNIS – LEAD COUNCILLOR FOR HOUSING

1. OUR EMPTY HOMES AIMS

- Identify empty homes and their owners, understand the reasons why their homes remain empty and help owners to bring their spare homes back into use.
- Use enforcement powers to force owners to reduce the impact of their unkempt 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.

2. POLICY BACKGROUND

"Plans and decisions should support efforts to identify and bring back into residential use empty homes"
National Planning Policy Framework MHCLG 2019³

"86% of MPs polled agree that Government should place higher priority on tackling empty homes."
ComRes Poll of MPs 2018⁴

GOVERNMENT POLICY SINCE 2014?

Empty homes burst onto the agenda in 2011 when the Government released its first ever National Empty Homes strategy along with innovative policies and funding streams. Empty homes action has now become more of a local than national policy concern.

As a non-statutory function, there was concern in the Empty Homes Network⁵ that services would be lost to austerity. Two factors that have helped reduce loss of services are the income generated through New Homes Bonus (NHB) and the reputation of empty homes services themselves. Though NHB rewards have been cut and the future of NHB is in doubt, the reward still persuades Councils to review empty homes figures annually. A renewed Government interest in empty homes would be welcomed.

³ National Planning Policy Framework 2019, MHCLG.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810507/NPPF_Feb_2019_print_revised.pdf

⁴ "Empty Homes in England 2018", Action on Empty Homes. 2019.

<https://www.actiononemptyhomes.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=68fa9a2d-83f5-4ca4-936b-a8d8248484c0>

⁵ The Empty Homes Network is run by empty homes officers to support each other through good practice.

<https://www.ehnetwork.org.uk/>

LOCAL POLICY

Table 1 below sets out how empty homes work fits with Council objectives. In national media campaigns, the empty homes problem is often coupled with features on homelessness, yet ‘Filling the empties’ alone will not solve homelessness. The policy rationale is to do what can be done to improve housing supply while also addressing other issues caused by empty homes.

Table 1. How the service contributes to the Council’s aims.			
STRATEGY	AIM	WHY EMPTY HOMES ARE RELEVANT Empty Homes are relevant	SOLUTIONS
Reading Local Plan 2019	Maximise use of Reading’s limited land	Re-use reduces land-take for new-build homes	Maximise re-use of existing buildings
Reading 2050 Vision	Smarter, greener buildings ... maximise use of space ... increased density and quality of homes for all.	They are a waste and need investment to bring them up to standard	Guidance on renovation works and empty home loans.
Community Safety Strategy 2019-2021	Identify and prevent empty homes from becoming ASB hotpots	They attract fly-tipping, graffiti, arson and squatting.	Natural surveillance by neighbours. House closures. Community Protection Notices.
Our Corporate Plan 2018-21 updated 2019	Improve access to decent homes to meet local needs. Keep the environment clean ... & safe		
Climate Change Strategy	Home energy savings through ...renovation of existing buildings.	They are energy inefficient	Empty Homes Loans. Signposting to home energy savings schemes.
Neighbourhood Strategy	Foster ...attractive ... neighbourhoods where people want to live & work	Empty homes makes areas feel unsafe	Service and residents identify empty homes in area
Homelessness Strategy	Increase the Use and Accessibility of the Private Rented Sector	Empty homes at a time of high homelessness is a missed opportunity	Persuade owners to let renovated homes at affordable rent.
Housing Strategy 2009-14	Meeting local housing need & ensuring good quality homes & neighbourhoods.	Empty homes have a high impact on streets and are incongruous while there is such a need for homes.	‘Clean them, fix them and fill them up’

NATIONAL AND LOCAL TRENDS

“A national problem on the increase” ... again.

Empty homes numbers in England have increased from 200,000 in 2016 to 226,000 in 2019

English LTE numbers fell from 2008 to 2016, with the greatest drop after the New Homes Bonus scheme began, but have increased each year since 2016. Action on Empty Homes links this rise to housing market stagnation, slow sales of new-build homes, the cessation of Government-funded empty homes schemes and a loss of Council empty homes resources⁶. It is also now harder to replicate success of data cleansing exercises carried out in the early years of NHB.

Between 2008-19, Reading's LTE figure was at its highest in 2010 at 610 and its lowest in 2018 at 387. Fluxes like this are not confined to Reading and are affected by the following major factors

- **Major socio-economic events** such as the 2008 crash or market indecision arising from Brexit. These may be responsible for the slow-down in the volume and speed of housing transactions.
- **Fiscal instruments** such as the Second-Home Stamp Duty Surcharge, phasing-out of Buy-To-Let Mortgage Interest Tax Relief and introduction of the Long Term Empty Premium Council Tax charge on LTEs. Changes to Stamp Duty and Buy-To-Let Mortgages have slowed down appetite for investment in the private rental market. The LTE Premium dissuades owners from sitting on their hands by charging more Council Tax the longer a home remains unoccupied.
- **Accuracy of Council Tax data** from which the registered LTE figure is drawn. NHB reward is eaten into by occupied homes wrongly recorded as empty. Councils drive down LTE numbers when they carry out data cleansing exercises.

Table 2 below compares the Council's standing with other areas since 2016. The Council's LTE number is high in 2019 yet the three-year rate of increase in registered LTEs is lower than England as a whole.

The housing market and wider economy are strong in Reading and it does not have whole neighbourhoods or estates mothballed and awaiting regeneration as in some post-industrial towns. Even the most dilapidated homes are bought, renovated and sold or let swiftly. The borough also does not have the scattered and hard to find empty homes of rural districts.

	LTE 2016	LTE 2017	LTE 2018	LTE 2019	LTE CHANGE 2016-19	% CHANGE IN LTE 2016-19	LTE % OF ALL HOMES 2018
Reading BC	515	502	387	571	+56	+11%	0.8
Rest of Berkshire	1,810	2,025	2,327	2,237	+212	+12%	0.7
Comparator Councils⁷ Total	1,990	2,002	2,053	2,287	+297	+15%	0.6
SOUTH EAST TOTAL	23,935	25,378	27,743	29,552	+5,617	+23%	0.8
ENGLAND TOTAL	200,145	205,293	216,186	225,785	+25,640	+13%	0.9

Data from Action on Empty Homes⁸

⁶Empty Homes in England 2019 <https://www.actiononemptyhomes.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=a5ea72d6-b24a-4f8e-8dc0-451a6da170e6>

⁷ Comparator Councils = Luton, Southampton, Swindon and Oxford

⁸ <https://www.actiononemptyhomes.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=f117e863-ea54-40d3-9bf5-3a23fde72eac>

Reading has a similar prevalence of registered LTEs as four other urban Councils combined, but Reading's rate of increase in numbers is lower than these Councils over the last four years. Half of the six Berkshire Councils saw increases in registered LTE numbers in 2018/19. While Windsor and Maidenhead's LTE figure dropped and Reading's increased by 184 in 2018/19, Reading's 2019 LTE prevalence of LTEs remains half that of Windsor and Maidenhead (0.6% against 1.2%).

Table 3 below compares registered LTE data of the eight South East counties in 2018/19. Once again, trends vary notably. Nearly 90% of the South East's increase in numbers occurred in just four counties. Councils with the higher rates of increase were Reading, Brighton, Wycombe and Ashford. Despite Reading's increase of 47% in 2018/19, the increase for all Berkshire Councils' combined is just 3%.

	LTE 2018	LTE 2019	LTE Change 2018-19	LTE % change 2018-19	LTE (% of all homes) 2019
Berkshire	2,714	2,808	94	+3%	0.7%
Buckinghamshire	2,271	2,467	196	+9%	0.7%
East Sussex	3,198	3,585	387	+12%	0.9%
Hampshire	4,915	5,002	87	+2%	0.6%
Kent	6,172	6,768	596	+10%	0.8%
Oxfordshire	1,748	1,745	-3	-0%	0.6%
Surrey	4,067	4,467	400	+10%	0.9%
West Sussex	2,128	2,220	92	+4%	0.6%
South East TOTAL	27,743	29,552	1,809	+7%	0.7%
England TOTAL	216,186	225,785	9,599	+4%	0.9%

Reading's registered LTE figure rose from 387 to 571 in 2018/19, having fallen 25% in the preceding year. Such swings are inevitable when working with a small number of properties in a depressed housing market. This year's increase has been affected by a glut of unsold/unoccupied new-build flats and by slow rates of sales in the retirement leasehold sector. It should be noted that empty new-builds and hard-to-sell retirement homes appear every year on the LTE count, but in 2019, their numbers were eye-catching. Reasons for high numbers are reflected upon in Table 4 below.

	Reading's Experience 2018-19	CAUSES	Impact on LTE numbers 2018-19
New build homes not sold or let within 6 months of completion	Slow sales of completed new builds observed in two new blocks of flats. On the day of the 2019 LTE count, 37 of 103 flats and 115 of 129 flats (in Abbey and Whitley wards) that had been completed in 2018/19 were empty 6	"New instructions across the UK slip to weakest in 3 years. Buyer enquiries fall as uncertainty deters house purchases. Prices still expected to rise at a national level over the coming 12 months" ¹⁰	+152 LTE

¹⁰ 2019 RICS UK Residential Market Survey <https://www.rics.org/uk/news-insight/research/market-surveys/uk-residential-market-survey/september-2019/>

	months or longer ⁹ .		
Age restricted homes (aka retirement leasehold homes) not sold within 6 months of vacancy	On the day of the 2019 LTE count, 158 LTEs were retirement flats. 119 of these were new build and are included in the line above. 39 were in existing retirement schemes, had been vacated on the death of the former occupier and had Executors seeking Probate. 17 Executors reported delays in the Probate Registry service had stymied their efforts to sell.	“This sector has been experiencing a difficult period for some time” ¹¹ “HMCTS pledge on delay-hit probate system” ¹²	+39 LTE

3. WHY DO WE HAVE AN EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

To some, the Council’s interest in empty homes looks like unwanted meddling by a public body in an owner’s private affairs. The Council respects the spectrum of opinion about empty homes that can range from, *“It’s my property. I do what I like with it. I’m leaving it empty”* to *“It’s unjust that people are being denied a much-needed home by owners who choose to keep their homes empty”*. The strategy aims to balance the rights of the individual owner against the interests of the wider community in striving to meet the three aims below.

- **Improving neighbourhoods.** The Council receives over 100 empty homes complaints a year. Concerns include the unsightliness of derelict homes, fly-tipping, vandalism, damage to neighbouring property, squatters and fire-setting. The Councils tackle the nuisance and public safety aspects of the empty home. An occupied home is better protected than an empty home.
- **Maximising use of existing homes.** In November 2019, there were 4,304 people on the Council’s Housing Register waiting for a home. Of these, 146 were classed as homeless. Tackling homelessness through increased housing supply is national and local policy. The Council try to persuade owners to let their spare homes at affordable rents that meet local housing.
- **Solving problems for owners.** Often owners are doing nothing because they become paralysed by indecision. In most cases, the final decision about the future use of the home rests with and is made by the owner. The Council aims to coach owners to make their own decisions and in doing so, to resolve personal issues that may have dogged them for years.

Bringing homes back into use has many varied benefits to local people.

- Empty homes can help meet housing demand that might only be met by building more new houses on diminishing green-field sites. The ecological footprint of ‘re-used’ homes is far smaller than that of new build homes. Renovated homes have improved energy efficiency.
- Renovating empty homes creates work for local trades and helps the local economy.
- Absence of empty homes boosts the sense of local well-being and local house prices.
- Owners can earn rental income, their home is more secure when in use and their asset does not suffer depreciation through dilapidation.

CASE STUDY A – OF THREE JOINT OWNERS, ONE HAS DIED AND TWO ARE LIVING IN CARE

Empty for 14 months in Whitley ward. Jointly-owned by two brothers and their late Father (who had left no Will). Neither brother had mental capacity to make decisions about property and finance. Property not registered with the Land Registry. Neighbour complaints



receive the net proceeds.

Once occupied, we will count this as a problem empty home back in use yet will receive no NHB reward for our efforts because the home was not 'registered as long term empty'. It was registered as Council Tax exempt because the brothers had moved into care.

4. WHICH EMPTY HOMES DO WE FOCUS ON?

There are normally around 1,500 unoccupied homes in Reading, with more during University holiday time. Each will be reoccupied in time through 'transactions' such as renovation, sale or re-letting. Some will be demolished and rebuilt at a higher housing density. For most, the transaction runs smoothly and the homes are back in use promptly, but plans often become derailed when owners are unwilling or unable to act themselves.

The Council does not work on all 1,500 unoccupied homes, it concentrates on the following types of unoccupied home. These groups overlap.

- Unoccupied for any length of time and in a condition that is harmful to the area or dangerous to people in the neighbourhood.

WHY THESE? Because they are causing or will cause problems locally.

- Unoccupied for six months or longer, though not registered as LTE.

WHY THESE? Because they are causing a problem or because the owner has asked for help.

- All registered LTEs on the Council Tax system In October 2019, there were 571 registered LTEs in Reading.

WHY THESE? The number of registered LTEs on the Council Tax system is the base data used to calculate the amount of NHB income that the Council receives each year.

There are many other classes of empty homes within the Council Tax system. An example is the Class F Exemption, "empty following death of occupant and awaiting Probate". Though NHB encourages Councils to chase registered LTEs, the Council takes on other types of 'exempt' empty homes in certain circumstances. Each 'exempt' empty home type needs a different approach, sometimes needing extra compassion and sometimes more assertiveness. The Exemption/Discount classes are set out in the Appendix B.

The Council can address empty flats over shops, though many of them are ill suited for adaptation. The Council does not offer an 'Empty Business Premises' service because the legislation we use refers explicitly to 'dwellings'. In the last five years, referrals about small empty commercial premises set in residential streets have increased. The Council can attend to nuisance and public safety issues of these buildings, but cannot bring about their conversion to residential use.

5. HOW DOES THE COUNCIL RESPOND TO LONG TERM EMPTY HOMES?

⁹ By February 2020, the numbers of empty flats in these two schemes had reduced to 30 in the Abbey ward block and 87 in the Whitley extra-care scheme.

¹¹ Quote from a Thames Valley Estate Agency specialising in Retirement Leasehold

¹² <https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/news/hmcts-pledge-on-delay-hit-probate-system/5101960.article>

The Council hears of new empty homes from residents and through Council Tax registrations. In 2011, a seemingly 'new' empty home was found to have been standing empty for 21 years.

Empty homes action involves three phases of work; Investigation, Negotiation/Assistance, and Enforcement. Table 5 below outlines the tasks in each phase along with the Council services and external agencies whose talents may be drawn on depending on each case.

Table 5. Three Phases of Empty Homes Work		
Investigation	Negotiation/Assistance	Enforcement
What is the story? What are the barriers to re-use and what are the solutions?	Help owners to bring homes back into use and to make the empty home their priority.	Using our powers to encourage owners to take property ownership seriously.
<p>Identify and inspect the home. Complete the Priority Risk Rating.</p> <p>Trace and contact owners and others with an interest.</p> <p>Use of data sources, tracing agents, neighbours.</p>	<p>Options Appraisal. Advise owner to sell it, let, lease or occupy the home</p> <p>Valuations, builders & costs of works, Legal issues (inc Probate), Council Tax status, VAT relief, Loans & Grants, Auctioneers, Estate/Letting Agents, Housing Associations.</p>	<p>Force owners to care for the home and bring back into use where all other methods have failed.</p> <p>Addresses public health and health & safety problems.</p> <p>Forces an owner to bring the home back into use or to force a change of ownership.</p>
First contact often prompts owners to act quickly.	Offer of help, even if spurned, can spur owners into action.	Formal action adds cost to owner of keeping the home empty.

6. WHAT IS NEW IN THIS STRATEGY?

New Homes Bonus (NHB) Market Testing Exercise 2017-2018. NHB is paid to Councils that bring about a net increase the number of occupied dwellings in their districts each year. As the number of registered LTEs decreases, so the potential NHB reward increase, and vice versa. The NHB reward per extra occupied dwelling was around £8,000 and though now reduced to £1,800, it remains an incentive to keep Council Tax data as accurate as possible. Inaccuracy creeps in because owners do not notify the Council when their homes are reoccupied.

The annual Council Tax Base 'data cleansing' exercise involves checking that all homes registered as LTE are in fact empty. Councils use a range of methods to do this. Throughout August and September, the Council contact over 700 owners to check if the empty home is still actually empty. The Council conducts tracing and follow up visits for those that do not reply and correct records accordingly.

In 2017, the Council outsourced the task to a contractor to compare cost-effectiveness against the in-house method. The in-house approach cost was a third of that of the external contractor. The Council corrected/updated four times as many records than the external contractor. The in-house approach recorded accurately all intelligence gathered to help plan recovery of arrears from serial debtors and in form the basis of the empty home workload for the next year.

Empty Home Loans. The Council joined 16 local Councils in the Flexible Home Improvement Loan (FHIL) scheme in 2013. The flexibility of the scheme and low administration fees can be attractive to owners who might otherwise be averse to borrowing. The Council can lend to owners who may otherwise be unable to increase their mortgage borrowing, and for properties that a high street lender may deem to be un-mortgageable. For more information about the Empty Home Loan product, visit <http://www.fhil.org/five-year-bridging-loans/>

Guidance on Compulsory Purchase Orders and the Crichel Downs Rules. These were revised in 2018 and placed extra tests on the Council to prove that, *"the defects of the property are so serious that it adversely affects other housing accommodation to any material degree"*. Where once 'adverse impact' was a contributory factor to a CPO case, it is now so crucial that failing to provide evidence of negative impacts seriously weakens a CPO case.

Compulsory Purchase and Planning Bill 2019. In Autumn 2019, a Bill to grant Councils increased powers of CPO, and to amend compensation provision was read. The Parliamentary session ended before the bill completed its passage and will make no further progress. Political parties that are most supportive of empty homes work have expressed a wish to reintroduce the Bill.

National Planning Policy Framework 2019. An explicit link between planning policy and empty homes work was set out in the new national framework. Planning teams had formerly only considered CPOs for development and infrastructure reasons only. Planning teams must now help empty homes teams to tackle empty homes thus, *"plans and decisions should support efforts to identify and bring back into residential use empty homes and other buildings, supported by the use of compulsory purchase powers –CPO- where appropriate"*.

Joint Enforcement with the Planning Service. While Environmental Health enforcement powers tackle property hazards and risks, they are not explicitly designed to improve the visual impact of derelict property on an area. Section 215 notices under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 are used force the owner to improve the look of land or property. It is a highly effective tool for some empty homes¹³. It is hoped that the empty homes ambitions stated in the National Planning Framework will lead to effective joint enforcement.

Empty building risk reduction with Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS). The services share details of homes that pose danger to fire crews. Homes under scrutiny can be hoarded, derelict or open to squatters. In 2020, joint-work has extended to alerting each other about high-risk empty commercial premises, especially pubs. We then combine efforts to persuade owners to make their empty premises secure and risk free, then bring them back into use.

¹³ Town and Country Planning Act 1990 Section 215: best practice guidance. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/town-and-country-planning-act-1990-section-215-best-practice-guidance>

The Long Empty Home Premium Council Tax charge was raised again to dissuade owners from doing nothing with their spare homes. Homes that have been empty for two years or longer are charged double Council Tax. From April 2020, homes empty for five years will be charged treble Council Tax. From April 2021, ten-year empties will be charged four times the standard charge.

Homes left empty following the death of the owner, or “Class F” empty homes. We are expanding our project by trying to help executors speed up the sale of properties within Estates. This applies to “Class F” homes where the former owner died intestate or if the Executors do not know what to do with the empty home. As part of this workstream, we are investigating whether the Council has a role in assisting Executors of Estates that comprise a retirement leasehold flat.

The Public Sector Equality Duty. Powers of last resort, such as CPO, have significant human rights considerations. The protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010 duty are now included in the decision-making process that precedes the use of CPO and other enforcement powers.

ServiceMaster Clean. In 2017, the Council let a five-year contract for cleaning void Council-owned homes to ServiceMaster Clean. The contractor also provides services to Environmental Health for empty homes.

Adult Social Care Debt Group. Empty homes input used to be requested by Adult Social Care and the Financial Assessment and Benefits Team on an ad hoc basis. The ASC Debt Group was set up in 2018 to improve recovery of aged care fee charges and to introduce processes that would ensure the total debt carried was kept at an acceptably low level. The empty homes officer attends and takes direct referrals from the group. As an example of the work, in one meeting in 2019, the empty homes officer reported back on the sale of three long term empty homes that he had been given the year before. All resulted in reassessment of finances of social care clients so that they all became self-funders. At the same meeting, the empty homes officer took on another three debt cases involving empty homes. The combined debt from these three cases exceeds £200,000.

RBC Commercial Services. The Council is investigating the services that could be offered by our Commercial Services to owners. The services would be offered directly to owners and may be included in tenders for works being carried out under enforcement notices.

7. EMPTY HOMES WORK PLANNING

“While the number of empty properties throughout the country is on the rise, the misconception persists that local authorities are doing nothing to bring them back into use. But nothing could be further from the truth”.

Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors 2018¹⁴

OVERALL TARGET – The Council exceeded its goal of bringing at least twenty High Priority LTEs back into use per year through significant service involvement. In this strategy the target is now thirty High Priority LTEs back in use per year.

MONITORING. Monitoring is based on the Empty Homes Network’s “Guidelines for Monitoring Empty Homes Interventions”. The Council record eligible homes returned to use as a result of Council action, including advice, financial assistance, enforcement action, help with VAT Relief claims, and leasing arrangements. Where cause and effect are harder to prove, case notes may show efforts that, on balance of probability, helped to return the home to use.

¹⁴ “Empty Homes in the UK, the true picture”. RICS. 2018

<https://www.rics.org/uk/news-insight/future-of-surveying/sustainability/empty-homes-the-true-picture/>

PERFORMANCE REPORTING. Performance is reported in the Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix and the Climate Change Action Plan. Since 2010, empty homes figures have been drawn from the Council Tax Base Form to calculate the value of New Homes Bonus the Council would receive.

Table 6. EMPTY HOMES SCHEDULE 2020/26			
ACTION	WHEN	WHO	IMPACT
30 high priority empty homes returned to use	30 p/a	Empty Homes Officer (EHO)	1/4ly performance reports
Respond to empty home complaints and improve customer service and treat accordingly	Year round	EHO	Customer satisfaction. Council reputation
Take enforcement action to improve homes and share outcomes with stakeholders	Year round	EHO	Property improved. Reinforces joint-working
Cleansing of Council Tax LTE data for annual Council Taxbase & New Homes Bonus.	Autumn annual	EHO, Corporate Investigations, Council Tax	Maximises New Homes Bonus income. Provides next year's workload info
Assist with difficult Council Tax arrears relating to empty homes	Year round	EH & Council Tax Recovery	Helps secure the economic success of the Council
Assist with recovery of Adult Social Care debts	Year round	Social Care (FAB Team & Finance)& EHO	Securing the Council's finances. Solves complex Probate for Executors
Review Delivery & Communications Plan	1/4ly	EHO	Delivery Plan matches Corporate Plan and service priorities.
Deliver Home Improvement Loans and Empty Home Grants	Year round	Private Sector Housing Team	30 empty homes leased to RSLs and let as affordable housing

8. COUNCIL RESOURCES FOR THE EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

There is no statutory duty to have an Empty Homes Strategy or employ an empty homes officer. The Council has recognised since 2008 that local empty homes are problematic enough to warrant employing a part-time empty homes officer. The arrival of the New Homes Bonus regime in 2011 added a financial value to empty homes work.

The work is labour-intensive, and requires consistent and persistent efforts to engage owners and coordinate input from other Council teams. Table 7 below sets out the different Council services, external agencies and local professions that are commonly involved in each phase of work.

INVESTIGATION	NEGOTIATION/ASSI STANCE	ENFORCEMENT
COUNCIL SERVICES INVOLVED		

<p>Local Tax Recovery Fraud Investigation Planning Adult Social Care & CMHT Registrar & Coroner Press Office StreetCare ASB Team Refuse Service Highways Social Care - Finance</p>	<p>Local Tax Recovery Fraud Investigation Planning Joint Legal Adult Social Care & CMHT Registrar & Coroner Press Office StreetCare Anti-Social Behaviour Commercial Services Highways</p>	<p>Local Tax Recovery Legal Services Planning Enforcement Building Control Press Office StreetCare Joint Legal & Legal Services Property Maintenance Valuations Finance-Debt Recovery Approved Financial Investigators</p>
EXTERNAL AGENCIES & PROFESSIONS INVOLVED		
<p>Police; Insolvency Service; Fire Service; Other Local Authorities; Treasury Solicitor; Local Newspapers; Tracing Agents; Local People; Health Services; Prison Service; Land Registry.</p>	<p>Housing Associations; Estate Agents; Auctioneers; Local Architects, Agents & Builders; Solicitors; Independent Financial Advisers; Police; Insolvency Service.</p>	<p>Police; Solicitors; Trustees in Bankruptcy; Law of Property Act Receivers;</p>

9. HOW HAVE WE DONE? WHAT HAS WORKED WELL? WHAT HAVE PEOPLE SAID?

“The service I was offered by the officer was exemplary ... was so much help to me, mentally and practically. By talking through with me and initiating the process to enable the house to be sold, he gave me the confidence to go ahead so that the property can once again become a home” Owner of a Caversham ward property, empty for 6 years.

Only those empty homes that have required a significant input to broker change are counted towards the annual target. There are many other homes that have come back into use through lesser involvement such as mail-outs or giving one-off advice. It is all about helping people achieve what they can already do while coaching them to learn to do something they thought they could not do.

“...very helpful and pointed me in the right direction, arranged an environments agency visit and was proactive keeping me up to date as to the steps”. Neighbour of Minster ward home, empty 3 years

The most common outcome has been for the owner to decide to sell their spare home. From 2008 to 2014, we returned only 77 high priority LTE's back into use and reduced the amenity impact of a further 52. Since 2014, we have brought back into use 168 high priority LTEs. With conversions and redevelopment, these 168 homes provided 205 units of accommodation. By year, the figures were 38 in 2014/15, 32 in 2015/16,

40 in 2016/17, 29 in 2017/18 and 24 in 2018/19. Most owners needed only some advice and guidance to act, while 18 required some form of formal action or enforcement to persuade them to act.

"...efficient and professional ... was always available for a discussion and most importantly, interested in assisting us in returning an empty home back to a liveable proposition". Owner of Mapledurham ward home, empty for 12 years.

The Council now aim to bring back into use at least 30 high priority problem empty homes per year.

"I can't begin to praise enough the sterling work the Empty Homes Officer did in helping me. My home was out of control and like an anvil around my neck that was preventing me from leading a normal life". – Absentee owner/occupier of a Battle ward home, empty 2 years.

It continues to prove difficult to generate homes for affordable rent because of the shortage of funding and willing partners in the social housing sector. The Council encourages owners to consider using the Council's Rent Guarantee Scheme to help meet local housing need.

Empty homes outcomes are most dependent on a good working relationship with Council Tax teams. The Council's good practice was highlighted by Shelter Scotland in 2010 and still stands:

In Reading, the empty homes officer has developed a give-and-take relationship with his finance department. In exchange for interrogations of the council tax data on his behalf, council tax staff receive information from him about homes where council tax liability has changed so that they can update their records. His work to identify the location of the owner for the purposes of bringing the home back into use is then able to be used by council tax staff to pursue debt recovery. "Guide to Data Collection" Shelter Scotland 2010

The relationship with Council Tax has many strings. Council Tax provide access to data as authorised to the empty homes officer, who in turn updates records throughout the year. Council Tax authorised the empty homes officer to gather Council Tax-related information for them.

The in-house approach to the NHB data cleansing exercise is cost-effective and thorough because of sound joint-planning and information-sharing. When tracing uncontactable owners, each service uses different methods. When one service fails to locate and contact an owner, they are the other to try it their way. Some owners of empty homes are serial Council Tax debtors. As part of normal case-work, we aim to bring the empty home back into use and recover all outstanding debts owed to the Council. Empty homes work also unearths and refers suspected fraud and benefits overpayments to the Corporate Investigations Team.

"Colleagues told me that you also actively collected quite a lot of difficult to collect council tax from empty property owners (like more than you earn) ..." Reading BC Head of Finance

"Our bailiffs had struggled to locate an owner of 3 empty homes who owed us £10,000 in Council Tax arrears at three properties. We asked Empty Homes' to find him and use empty homes powers to get the debt paid. It took him just three weeks to trace, contact and persuade the debtor to visit our offices to pay off the arrears in full". RBC Revenues & Benefits Team

Successful debt recovery for and with the Council Tax service also goes on with Adult Social Care. There are a few householders who accrue social care debts that are not secured against the property. If these people move into care and then die, there may sometimes be an empty home left that next of kin struggle to move on. The remaining care fee debt is an estate liability. Empty homes work helps families work through Probate, sell the property and settle the social care charge. As a Unitary Authority, Social Services work closely and successfully with Legal Services and Adult Social Care to use the empty homes approach to unravel complex estates and cases.

“In one case, our empty homes officer helped us to recover £100,000 of aged care fees. We had tried to persuade the client’s Attorney to settle the bill from the proceeds of the sale of the person’s former home, but she refused to work with our team or our lawyers. The empty homes officer opened up good dialogue with the Attorney and helped her through the process of seeking Probate, selling the home and settling Estate liabilities”. RBC Financial Assessment & Benefits Team

The now defunct Homes and Communities Agency set out 11 key facets of a successful empty homes strategy below.

1. detailed assessment of patterns of vacancy to inform the right responses
2. *securing the necessary capital & revenue budgets*
3. negotiating with nervous, confused or hostile owners to encourage them to act
4. *establishing mechanisms to secure homes for people in housing need*
5. identifying, engaging & incentivising partnerships to procure, refurbish & manage homes
6. devising & marketing new grant or loan schemes
7. building internal partnerships to ensure a proper joined-up response
8. monitoring results & keeping the public informed of what is going on
9. providing advice, accurate & extensive information and sign-posting for owners
10. tracing owners & helping resolve ownership issues
11. mastering the demanding legal procedures required for enforcement where other avenues to address nuisance empties have been exhausted

Themes in italics are those where we continue our improvement efforts the most. Performance against these themes has changed since the last strategy, mainly because successive Governments’ interest in and contribution to the agenda have been displaced by other agendas. The Council believes that aiming to achieve against all the themes remains the mark of a sound strategy and service approach.

10. CONTACT DETAILS – WHERE TO GET ADVICE.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL EMPTY HOMES SERVICE

0118 9373091

Reading Borough Council, Civic Centre, Bridge Street, Reading, RG1 2LU

emptyhomes@reading.gov.uk

Other sources of information include

Action on Empty Homes – an independent charity that focuses on this work area <http://www.emptyhomes.com/>

Empty Homes Network – An association of empty property practitioners <http://www.ehnetwork.org.uk/>

Self Help Housing – promoting self-help housing initiatives <http://self-help-housing.org/>



Appendix A. Empty Homes Scoring Matrix

Criteria	Classification & scores
APP EN DIX B. EM PTY HO ME S FIG URE S Property Type	Flat over commercial/Purpose built flat (5); Semi-det (10); Terraced (15); Detached (20)
Location	Prominent site/main road (10); Situated on 'Gateway', regeneration or deprivation area (20); Both (30)
Time Vacant	Less than 6 months (5); 6-12 months (10); 12-24 months (15); 24-36 months (20); 36+ months (25)
Management Standard	Securely Managed (5); Enforcement (20, +5 for each action); Poor management (20); Land Charges (20); More than one of above (50)
Owner Contact	No response (5 for each no response); No reliable address for owner (10); No firm plans for bringing the property back into use (10); No confirmed funding to bring the property back into use (10); More than one of above (35)
Potential extra dwellings	Low (5); Medium (10); High (20)

Council Tax data tells us the total number of homes that are been registered as LTE but not the total number of homes that are unoccupied. Council tax data is only as reliable as the information that the owners give the Council. Many homes are registered as empty when they are not, and many are registered as occupied when they are empty. An empty home becomes a Long Term Empty home (LTE) once it has been empty for six months or longer. The Government definition of an LTE is a “privately owned home registered with Council Tax as empty for six months or longer”. The Government counts the LTE figure of every Council when determining what amount of New Homes Bonus to award.

Table 1 below shows the numbers of registered LTEs by owner type in the last decade.

OWNED BY	Oct 2008	Nov 2012	Oct 2016	Oct 2018	Oct 2019
Individuals	295	305	416	258	292
Companies	147	82	74	114	147
Housing Assoc.	26	25	23	13	131
Public body (not RBC)	0	5	2	2	1
TOTAL	468	417	515	387	571

Tables 1 to 4. Source: RBC COUNCIL TAX

The longer a home stays empty, the more likely it is that the owner will be difficult to engage. Table 2 below shows the length of time that homes were registered as LTE in Reading in 2019. While the number of LTE homes being charged the Premium has increased, their proportion of all LTEs has reduced.

YEARS THAT HOME HAS BEEN	< 1yr	1-2 yrs	2-3 yrs	3-5 yrs	5-10 yrs	>10 yrs
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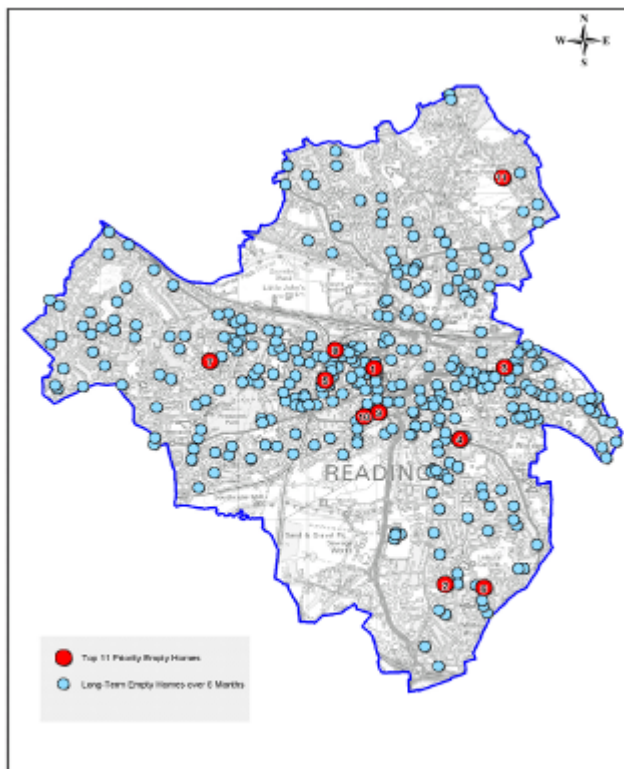
REGISTERED UNOCCUPIED						
% OF & NOS. LTE 2019	257	210	71	40	20	10
% 2019	42%	34%	12%	7%	4%	1%

Registered LTEs are our focus, but other classes of empty homes exist. Table 3 below provides an estimate of numbers of all types of empty homes (including those owned by the Council and other public bodies. Note that the Table does not include the 1,361 Second Homes registered in Reading. It is not known how many Second Homes are occupied or vacant at any one time.

Empty Home Type	Council Tax payable	Homes
Class A - Major works	Full charge	13
Short Term Empty (<6 Months)	Full Charge	772
Long Term Empty - LTE	Full charge for first two years.	466
Long Term Empty Premium - LTEP	X2 Charge if empty 2 years, Treble if empty 5 years.	112
Classes E & I – Person moved to receive care	None	64
Class F – Person has died.	None until 6 months after Probate is granted.	187
Others		95
TOTAL UNOCCUPIED* HOMES		1,711

WHERE ARE READING’S EMPTY HOMES?

The distribution of Reading registered LTEs is demonstrated in the Map and Table 4 below. Empty homes are scattered around the town as shown by Figure 1 below.



WARD	Homes	WARD	Homes
Whitley	151	Tilehurst	15
Abbey	103	Kentwood	12
Katesgrove	39	Thames	8
Minster	37	Mapled’m	6
Battle	35	Norcot	23
Southcote	28	Redlands	22
Park	27	Peppard	21
Caversham	24	Church	20

Title: Distribution of Private Sector Long-Term Empty Homes in Reading
 Dwg No.: Date: 23/06/2016 Scale at A4: 1:47000
 Produced by GIS & Mapping Services Ref: 358179
 © Crown Copyright All rights reserved. Reading Borough Council. Account no 1000/0672. 2008

Though the distribution map is dated 2008, the pattern remains steady. Empty homes are found in all wards and their density increases in areas of highest housing density. Table 4 below shows the numbers of privately-owned Long-Term empty homes by Council ward. The figures can change significantly for various reasons. For example, LTE numbers in Norcot ward increased in 2014 as many Council-owned homes on the Dee Road Estate had been vacated prior to demolition and regeneration. A year later, a large block of NHS housing in Battle ward had the same effect. In 2019, the Council has seen unusually high numbers of LTE in Whitley and Abbey wards because of two large new build blocks of flats that had not been sold before they became LTE.

TABLE 5. REASONS FOR HOMES BECOMING LONG TERM EMPTY

“I am not being neglectful of the site but it just that it seems very difficult to make steps forward with any haste or success.”

“I have a bit of a mental block when it comes to dealing with this property. I don’t even know how to go about finding people to do the work that it needs.”

In general, homes stand empty because owners lack TIME, SKILL, WILL and/or MONEY to move the project on. Every owner has a different story. Some of the reasons for lengthy vacancies found in Reading are listed below,

- **Dilapidation.** Some homes are uninhabitable, and owners lack the money or know-how to get the home renovated. Some are empty despite there being less than £1,000 of works needed to make them habitable.
- **Unclear Ownership.** This can arise when an owner has died without a Will or where the owner (either an individual or a company) is insolvent. Mortgage fraud and money laundering also make ownership unclear.
- **Abandoned because the owner could not or did not wish to live in the home any longer.** Arising from family or relationship breakdown, financial hardship or where a couple moves into in one house but retain the other house as an empty home. Two Reading owners are known to have left bought new homes because their original homes became squalid hoards. They have then left their original homes unoccupied. One local owner kept an empty home for his cats to live in when he bought a new home.
- **Investment properties.** These arise when owners prefer not rent out the home because they wish to protect capital values and may wish to dispose of the asset quickly without having the trouble of moving tenants out. There are more investment empty homes when house prices are depressed. One local owner said he has been waiting for house prices to increase since 1991.
- **Inheritance vacancies.** Some owners did not know they had inherited a home. Others do know but live far away and the empty home remains out of sight and out of mind. One owner has bought a home for their children to use in 15 year’s time, but do not want the trouble of letting it to a tenant in the meantime.
- **Neighbour Disputes.** More than one owner has been found to leave his property empty to upset the neighbours and as a challenge to the Council and Police.
- **Empty in Memoriam.** Some owners have an understandable deep-rooted emotional attachment to the home and cannot bring themselves to do anything with it.
- **Unsold new-build homes.** Slow transaction rates have caused more homes to tip over into long-term empty.
- Homes are also empty for long periods for understandable reasons such as the occupier is in hospital, a care home or in prison. It is rarely appropriate to target these homes.

Most owners do want to get their homes back into use and need a little time, help or money to do so. However, there is always a small hard-core who do not fulfil their responsibilities as property owners and who are happy for their homes to be a menace to local people.

SUMMARY OF POWERS USED IN THE EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY.

The Councils approach is to help the owner take as much responsibility and action as they are capable of while applying a balance of enabling and enforcement that is appropriate to each case. Adult Social Care and Joint Legal services assist and advise in cases where an owner is vulnerable. For the least cooperative owners, the powers in Table 6 below are used according to the Council’s Enforcement Policy and Scheme of Delegation. Many powers allow for the Council to carry out works if an owner refuses to do so, and then to recover costs and register debts as Local Land Charges. Debt recovery powers, whether the debts arise through enforcement work or through Council Tax arrears, are highly persuasive and effective when coordinated with empty homes work.

TABLE 6. SUMMARY OF ENFORCEMENT POWERS USED IN THE EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY
PRIMARY ENFORCEMENT TOOLS. Used to gather information and to address defects, risks and hazards at an empty home.
Local Government Act 2003 - S75 allows local authorities to reduce some council tax discounts. S85 also allows disclosure of Council Tax data for the purposes of bringing long-term empty homes back into use.
Housing Act 2004 - Part 1 concerns the assessment of hazards in the home, and powers including improvement and prohibition notices and emergency actions for urgent works. S237 allows the Council to use Council Tax and Housing Benefit data when exercising functions in Parts 1 and 4 of the Act. See also Secondary Enforcement Powers below for the Empty Dwelling Management Order.
Building Act 1984 – several powers to require property owners to address problems of ruinous, dangerous or dilapidated properties.
Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 - S29 “Boarding Up Notice” gives the Council power to require owners to prevent unauthorised entry to or to prevent a home from becoming a danger to public health.
Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980 – “Public Request to Order Disposal” residents can notify the Secretary of State of unused publicly-owned land or property. Secretary of State can order the sale of the property.
Environmental Protection Act 1990 - relates to abatement of statutory nuisance, including accumulations of rubbish or dampness affecting neighbouring properties.
Town and Country Planning Act 1990 – s215 “Tidy Up Notice” requires owners to deal with unsightly land or the external appearance of a property. Also includes powers relating to compulsory purchase.
Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 – Councils can require urgent works to be carried out to unoccupied buildings to prevent deterioration, and compulsory acquisition of listed buildings in need of repair.
Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949. Requires owners to eradicate and prevent vermin infestations.
Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime & Policing Act 2014. Community Protection Notices. Person’s conduct is unreasonable and is having a persistent and continuing detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality.
Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 Parts I&II – Closure Orders for crack-dens, illegal brothels and premises with persistent disorder or nuisance. Generally used by the Police.
SECONDARY ENFORCEMENT POWERS. Powers of last resort used to change the ownership or management of an empty home where an owner proves to be wholly non-compliant with enforcement Notices and where there is no reasonable chance that the home will be brought back into use through other measures. Each power has prescribed procedures, and each requires a different level of political approval before it can be used.
Law of Property Act 1925 - allows local authorities to recover debts registered as a land charge (for example, some works carried out in default) by enforcing the sale of the property if the debt remains unpaid.
Acquisition of Land Act 1981 - (as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) – Power for Local Authorities to make Compulsory Orders.
Housing Act 2004 - Part 4 concerns Empty Dwelling Management Orders, to allow local authorities to bring empty homes back into use while legal ownership remains with the owner.

SUMMARY OF EMPTY HOMES ASSISTANCE SCHEMES

The Council helps empty home owners in many ways, some of which are forms of financial help. The main thrust of the 'Negotiation' phase is to assist the owner with an Options Appraisal that helps them decide what to do with the empty home. The Council can provide letters of support to owners wishing to claim VAT Relief on renovations works in long term empty homes; help with finding builders, surveyors, solicitors, architects, estate agents and auctioneers.

DISCRETIONARY EMPTY HOMES GRANTS. Maximum grant is £10,000.

Description, Eligible Works and Client Group	Non-eligible Works	Summary of Conditions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home empty 6 months or more • Works - renovation, repair, energy savings e.g. heating, boilers, insulation and double glazing. • Must meet Decent Homes Standard on completion • HMO work: inc. fire precautions, means of escape and the provision of adequate facilities and amenities for the number of people and households. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works covered by insurance. Decorating. Replacing or Upgrading non defective installations. Repairs to rectify poor DIY. Servicing of boilers and other installations and equipment. • HMO: Non-structural works required under S372 of the Housing Act 1985, Management Regulations for e.g. cleaning communal areas, rubbish removal, decoration, servicing of gas or electrical installations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home is empty for more than 6 months • No grant if any form of statutory notice has been served. • A 5-year charge is registered against the property. Breach of grant conditions will mean full repayment of the grant • Must rent the home for 5 years through the Council's Housing Register • Not open to Hg Associations

FLEXIBLE HOME IMPROVEMENT LOAN SCHEME

The loan must not exceed the lesser of the cost of the works or two-thirds of the value of the property. Further advances or stage payments maybe possible if the value of the property increases as the work progresses.

Description, Eligible Works and Client Group	Non-eligible Works	Summary of Conditions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5-yr fixed term loan owners to bring the home back into use. • Interest rate from 5 to 7%. • Property must have enough equity to support the loan. • Can supplement EH Grant. • Eligible works as per Empty Homes Grant. 	<p>Non-eligible works as per Empty Homes Grant</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loan secured as a charge on the property. • Loan is repaid in full at end of loan term by regular or periodic repayments, re-mortgaging or selling the home. Loan must be repaid if the property is sold

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READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	11TH MARCH 2020	AGENDA ITEM:	
TITLE:	BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT
SERVICE:	PLANNING	WARDS:	ALL
LEAD OFFICER:	MARK WORRINGHAM	TEL:	0118 9373337
JOB TITLE:	PLANNING POLICY TEAM LEADER	E-MAIL:	mark.worringham@reading.gov.uk

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report recommends that a draft Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) be published for public consultation. This provided a framework for actions that the Council will take to conserve biodiversity across the range of its functions. Reading's existing BAP covered the period from 2005-2015 and has now expired. A new version is needed to set out the actions needed as part of the response to the climate emergency.

1.2 Appendices

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

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1 That the Biodiversity Action Plan (Appendix 2) be agreed for public consultation.

2.2 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.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 Reading Borough Council declared a Climate Emergency at Council on 26th February 2019, and set out its commitment to work towards becoming carbon neutral by 2030. Biodiversity is a vital consideration within the context of climate change, as changes in the climate can have significant implications on habitats and wildlife. Biodiversity is also part of the response to climate change to ensure that Reading adapts to climate change as it occurs.
- 3.2 The Reading Borough Local Plan was adopted in November 2019, and this includes, as part of objective 6, maintaining and enhancing the natural environment of the Borough. Policy EN12 of the Local Plan identifies the need to protect those areas of greatest importance for biodiversity, but also to connect habitats together to form a green network which allows for movement between habitats. It also seeks a net gain of biodiversity on development sites.
- 3.3 At a national level, the UK Biodiversity Action Plan sets out a programme for conserving the UK's biodiversity and led to the production of action plans for many of the UK's most threatened species and habitats. The UK BAP was superseded by the 'UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework' in July 2012 to reflect the devolution in the UK, and, within this, 'Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife' was published in 2011. It describes what is needed to halt overall biodiversity loss by 2020 and sets ambitious goals across a number of areas.
- 3.4 In 2018 the government published its 25 year Environment Plan. It has 19 policies, with the most relevant being:
1. Embedding an 'environmental net gain' principle for development, including housing and infrastructure
 4. Focusing on woodland to maximise its many benefits
 6. Protecting and recovering nature:
 - i. Publishing a strategy for nature
 - ii. Developing a Nature Recovery Network
 - iii. Providing opportunities for the reintroduction of native species
 - iv. Exploring how to give individuals the chance to deliver lasting conservation
 - v. Improving biosecurity to protect and conserve nature
 9. Helping people improve their health and wellbeing by using green spaces
 10. Encouraging children to be close to nature, in and out of school
 11. Greening our towns and cities
 19. Leaving a lighter footprint on the global environment

4. THE PROPOSAL

(a) Current Position

- 4.1 Reading's most recent Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) was published in March 2006. It covered the period from 2005 to 2015 and has now expired. The Strategy fed into planning policy documents produced within plan period,

such as the Core Strategy and Sites and Detailed Policies Document, but these documents have themselves now been replaced by the Local Plan.

4.2 The BAP 2005-2015 was based around a series of specific action plans for different species and habitats. As it contains a significant amount of species and habitat-specific detail, it is a lengthy document, and is not always in the most user-friendly format.

(b) Option Proposed

4.3 This report recommends that a Draft BAP is approved for public consultation. The Draft BAP is included as Appendix 2. This plan, including any amendments made at this meeting, will also be considered at Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on 16th March.

4.4 The proposed Draft BAP is a more succinct and user-friendly document than was the case with the 2005-2015 version. The document is intended to be easier to use, but also easier to keep under review over the coming years.

4.5 The BAP is organised around the following themes, each of which will contain a set of actions. In some cases, these actions will require more detailed work to be undertaken, such as a more detailed action plan.

- Legislation - to ensure the Council's plans and actions comply 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 is no net loss and where achievable a net gain of biodiversity on development sites, which is 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 have 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 is maintained and enhanced, including opportunities for habitat creation.
- Management of Council projects and the sale of land - actions could ensure that biodiversity is 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 can make to avoid contributing to global biodiversity loss, for instance in terms of procurement.
- Ongoing review - an action for an annual review.

4.6 Actions are accompanied by proposals for how and when they will be achieved, and it will 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 avoids significant levels of detail and focuses on the strategic objectives, which means it is easier to review and update in a streamlined manner.

4.7 The BAP has been drawn up through co-operation with a number of interested stakeholder groups. A steering group comprising the following organisations, alongside the Council, has met a number of times to discuss the emerging document:

- Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust;
- Berkshire Ornithological Club;
- Caversham GLOBE;
- The Conservation Volunteers;
- Econet
- Reading Climate Action Network (nature and green spaces group);
- Reading Friends of the Earth;
- Reading Urban Wildlife Group;
- Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre;
- Tilehurst GLOBE
- University of Reading

4.8 The following organisations were also invited but, due to other commitments, have not attended the meetings to date. They have however agreed to review the document.

- Environment Agency
- Friends of Fobney Island

- 4.9 There is an important relationship between the BAP and the Tree Strategy, which is also to be considered at this meeting. Production of the BAP has been co-ordinated with the Tree Strategy. Council officers who have inputted into the BAP have also fed into the Tree Strategy, as have many of the other organisations. The potential for the two documents to be combined has been considered, but this was not considered appropriate. Trees have many important roles in addition to biodiversity, whilst biodiversity has many facets beyond trees. The Tree Strategy is also a more detailed document. However, there is considerable cross-referencing between the documents, and the documents have been reviewed to ensure that there is no inconsistency or unnecessary duplication.
- 4.10 It is proposed that public consultation take place over a five-week period, between 20th March and 24th April 2020. The BAP and Tree Strategy will be consulted upon together. Once consultation is completed, responses will be considered in drawing up a final version.
- 4.11 This report recommends that, for reasons of putting the BAP in place swiftly, a final version taking account of consultation responses be approved by the Deputy Director of Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillors for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport, Culture Heritage and Recreation and Neighbourhoods and Communities. It is expected that this would take place in May 2020.

(c) Other Options Considered

- 4.12 The alternative option is to not proceed with a revised BAP at this point. The previous BAP is out of date and has passed its end date, and this option would mean that there would be limited co-ordination of the Council and partner's efforts to deal with biodiversity loss, and would fail to adequately respond to the climate emergency.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 Approval of the Biodiversity Action Plan will contribute to the Council's priority of 'Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe' as set out in the Corporate Plan (2018-2021) by maintaining and enhancing habitats in Reading.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Preparing a new BAP is an essential part of the response to the climate emergency. Wildlife and habitats in Reading, as well as globally, will be affected heavily by climate change, and it is essential that the BAP seeks to address and mitigate this wherever possible.
- 6.2 The Reading Climate Emergency Plan (RCEP) contains a nature theme, the actions for which have significant crossover with the BAP. The BAP will help to deliver many of the actions around matters such as connectivity of

habitats, planting and habitat creation. The production of the BAP has been undertaken alongside the RCEP, to ensure that there is no contradiction and that the documents can work in tandem.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 The BAP has been drawn up in conjunction with a number of stakeholder groups with interest in biodiversity in Reading, which are referred to in paragraphs 4.7 and 4.8. These groups have contributed to drafts of the document as it has evolved.

7.2 Subject to approval, the BAP would be subject to a five-week period of public consultation in March and April. This will include publication on the Council's website, and sending to organisations and groups on the planning consultation lists. Consultation will take place in conjunction with the Tree Strategy. Responses received will be taken into account in preparing a final version of the document.

8. EQUALITY ASSESSMENT

8.1 The Scoping Assessment, included at Appendix 1 identifies that an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is not relevant to this decision. A full EqIA is not therefore required.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (Section 40), each public authority, including local authorities, has a duty regarding biodiversity, as follows:

“Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.”

9.2 Whilst having a BAP in place is not an explicit statutory requirement, it nevertheless helps to fulfil the duty by providing a framework for actions that a local authority will take to conserve biodiversity across the range of its functions.

9.3 There are a number of other existing pieces of legislation with reference to aspects of biodiversity. These includes the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Habitats Regulations 2017 (which implemented the European Habitats Directive into UK law).

9.4 The Environment Bill 2019-2020 had its first reading on 15th October and second reading on 28th October 2019, and was re-introduced to parliament following the general election on 30th January 2020. It includes a number of provisions relating to biodiversity and the natural environment. It would amend the Section 40 duty referred to above to include enhancing as well as

conserving biodiversity. It also includes a provision for 10% biodiversity net gain as a result of development, introduction of a standard national metric for measuring biodiversity impact of development and a requirement for five-yearly biodiversity reports reporting on the actions carried out in relation to these functions. The Bill would also introduce a requirement to produce local nature recovery strategies which would cover many of the actions dealt with in the BAP, including a statement of priorities and a habitat map. If the Bill becomes law, the Council will implement required procedures.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The BAP has been prepared within existing budgets.

10.2 Many of the actions set out in the BAP can be achieved using existing resources and within existing budgets. However, others could have financial implications depending on how the specific action is carried out in practice. For instance, the BAP highlights the need for biodiversity to be taken into account in procurement. These are high-level actions, and the implementation of specific measures will need to be thought through in more detail.

Value for Money (VFM)

10.3 A clear plan for addressing the loss of biodiversity represents good value for money, as it ensures that the Council's wide-ranging functions are all contributing towards the same overall aims. Producing the BAP alongside the timing of the Tree Strategy and the Climate Emergency Strategy ensures that the best use of resources is made in drawing the purposes of those documents together.

Risk Assessment

10.4 There are no direct financial risks associated with the report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Biodiversity Action Plan 2005-2015
- Environment Bill 2019-2020

APPENDIX 1: EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT SCOPING

Provide basic details

Name of proposal/activity/policy to be assessed:

Biodiversity Action Plan

Directorate: DEGNS - Directorate of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services

Service: Planning

Name: Mark Worringham

Job Title: Planning Policy Team Leader

Date of assessment: 04/02/2020

Scope your proposal

What is the aim of your policy or new service?

To set out objectives and actions for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity within Reading.

Who will benefit from this proposal and how?

The whole community will benefit from the protection and enhancement of biodiversity, which is essential to ensure a high quality natural environment, which contributes towards health and well-being.

What outcomes will the change achieve and for whom?

Halting the net loss of biodiversity and working towards an overall improvement will assist the retention and improvement of Reading's natural environment, which benefits the whole community.

Who are the main stakeholders and what do they want?

Local residents and environmental groups - protection and enhancement of biodiversity thus increasing the appreciation and understanding of the wildlife within Reading.

Council departments - clear targets and approaches to protection and enhancement of biodiversity, including management of areas of existing and potential wildlife significance.

Developers - a clear approach to the application of biodiversity net gain requirements

Assess whether an EIA is Relevant

How does your proposal relate to eliminating discrimination; promoting equality of opportunity; promoting good community relations?

Do you have evidence or reason to believe that some (racial, disability, gender, sexuality, age and religious belief) groups may be affected differently than others? (Think about your monitoring information, research, national data/reports etc)

Yes No

Is there already public concern about potentially discriminatory practices/impact or could there be? Think about your complaints, consultation, feedback.

Yes No

If the answer is **Yes** to any of the above you need to do an Equality Impact Assessment.

If **No** you **MUST** complete this statement

An Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant because: protecting and enhancing Reading's biodiversity does not have a differential effect on racial groups, gender/transgender, disability, sexual orientation, age or religious belief.

Signed (completing officer) Mark Worringham Date: 4th February 2020

Signed (Lead Officer) Mark Worringham Date: 4th February 2020

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Reading Biodiversity Action Plan

Draft for consultation

27 February 2020

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1. Executive summary

[To be completed]

DRAFT

2. Biodiversity

What is biodiversity?

Biodiversity (a contraction of 'biological diversity') refers to the variety of life and its processes; including the variety of living organisms, the genetic differences amongst them, and the communities and ecosystems in which they occur.

An ecosystem can be as large as a river system or as small as a rotting log. It is a community of plants, animals and microorganisms, along with their environment, that function together as a unit.

Why is biodiversity important?

Biodiversity is important both in its own right and as an indicator of the wider health of the environment.

We all rely on biodiversity for our physical needs; it provides natural services (sometimes referred to as ecosystem services) such as food, clean air and water.

Biodiversity improves people's quality of life, in terms of providing leisure and educational resources for society and opportunities to experience the natural world and access to nature has been shown to have numerous benefits for people's mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Biodiversity will help us adapt to climate change. As the climate changes healthy ecosystems and the services they provide will be increasingly valuable, but at the same time biodiversity will be threatened by an increasingly unpredictable climate.

What is a Biodiversity Action Plan?

A Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) is a framework for conserving and enhancing biodiversity. It sets out the actions that will be taken to achieve this.

Why does Reading need a Biodiversity Action Plan?

Across the globe biodiversity is declining, with rates of extinction now far in excess of background rates. Many scientists believe that we are entering

the sixth mass extinction. If this loss continues it will have serious consequences for humankind as the natural systems that we all rely on break down particularly as the council tries to tackle the Climate Emergency that was declared by Reading Borough Council and the national government and in 2019.

Reading is rich in biodiversity along its rivers, in its parks, gardens and open spaces. However, without action to prevent activities that harm biodiversity and to encourage those that help it, biodiversity will continue to decline, and we will be much poorer for it.

Actions to conserve biodiversity happen at a local level and Reading's BAP provides a framework to ensure that actions are coordinated and targeted.

The 2006 Reading BAP

Reading's previous BAP was written in 2006 and ran until 2015. It has not been updated. It was organised as a series of 19 'Action Plans', divided into Habitat Action Plans and Species Action Plans. These were:

Habitats

1. Urban I
2. Urban II
3. Semi-Natural Grasslands
4. Parkland and Veteran Trees
5. Ancient and Species Rich Hedgerows
6. Broad Leaved Woodland
7. Ponds (Standing Open Water) and Reedbeds
8. Rivers

Species

1. Black Poplar
2. Loddon Lilly
3. Glow Worm
4. Stag Beetle
5. Bat Species
6. Water Vole
7. Black Redstart

8. House Sparrow
9. Sand Martin
10. Great Crested Newt
11. Slow Worm

The updated BAP will be organised differently, around themes rather than habitats and species.

What is the vision for Reading's biodiversity?

In late 2019 and early 2020, a group of people from the council, nature conservation organisations and voluntary groups came together to write Reading's new BAP. They agreed on the following vision statement for biodiversity in Reading:

By 2030 Reading will be a borough rich in wildlife, accessible to and valued by its residents, better connected to the wider landscape including through its urban areas. The conservation and enhancement of biodiversity will be integral to the actions of the council and others and the decline in biodiversity will have been reversed. Important wildlife sites and habitats will be protected, maintained, restored and enhanced and new wildlife habitats will be created - both for nature itself and for the benefits it provides to the people of Reading - capable of withstanding the climate emergency, and helping to mitigate the effects of a changing climate.

How is the BAP structured, what are its aims, and who will it be used by?

Section 8 of this document sets out the new BAP's Themes for Action. Collectively these will ensure that:

- 1) Reading's biodiversity is protected
- 2) The decline in Reading's biodiversity is reversed
- 3) Important wildlife sites and habitats are restored, extend and enhanced
- 4) New wildlife rich habitats are created
- 5) Reading's biodiversity is valued by its residents

6) Reading's biodiversity is resilient to climate change and will help mitigate its effects.

It will be used by the council, particularly the following departments:

- Planning and development control
- Sustainability
- Highways
- Parks
- Education
- Housing
- Property

and other stakeholders including:

- Developers
- Private landowners
- Wildlife groups
- Governmental organisations such as the EA and the Canals and Rivers Trust
- Volunteer groups.

It will guide their actions, ensure those actions are coordinated and targeted and provide a baseline against which actions can be measured.

The BAP will be overseen by Reading Borough Council's Planning Policy Team. It will be reviewed annually and updated accordingly.

A report detailing the actions that have been taken will be published annually. A review of the BAP's actions will be undertaken when necessary with a report taken to the council committee whenever any major changes are proposed.

3. Policy and legislation

Reading Borough Council, along with all public bodies, has a legal duty to conserve biodiversity. This is set out under section 41 of the 2006 Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act (The NERC Act) as follows:

“Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.”

There is also a raft of other policy and legislation, including:

1. The Convention on Biological Diversity - signed by 168 countries including the UK in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.
2. European Union Directives, in particular the Habitats Directive, The Birds Directive and The Water Framework Directive. These have been transposed into UK law and will continue to apply unless or until the acts which have transposed them have been revoked.
3. Domestic legislation such as The Wildlife & Countryside Act, which amongst other things provides protection for nesting birds and prohibits the release of invasive species, and The Badgers Act.
4. Planning Policy, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Reading Borough's Local Plan.
5. Other Council and local policies such as The Tree Strategy and The Climate Change Action Plan (both of which have been updated at the same time as the BAP and provide a comprehensive approach to the conservation of Reading's environment).
6. The Environment Bill (likely to soon become The Environment Act) which sets out the government's targets, plans and policies for improving the natural environment and provisions about nature and biodiversity (if passed it will give the government's 25 Year Environment Plan on a statutory footing)

Further details are provided in Appendix 3

4. The state of biodiversity

We are living through an ecological and climate crisis. Biodiversity is diminishing across the globe and the quantity and diversity of wildlife even at a local level is declining. Many scientists now think that we are living through the sixth mass extinction event with a recent and sobering scientific studyⁱ concluding that:

“The evidence is incontrovertible that recent extinction rates are unprecedented in human history and highly unusual in Earth’s history. Our analysis emphasizes that our global society has started to destroy species of other organisms at an accelerating rate, initiating a mass extinction episode unparalleled for 65 million years. If the currently elevated extinction pace is allowed to continue, humans will soon (in as little as three human lifetimes) be deprived of many biodiversity benefits. On human time scales, this loss would be effectively permanent because in the aftermath of past mass extinctions, the living world took hundreds of thousands to millions of years to rediversify. Avoiding a true sixth mass extinction will require rapid, greatly intensified efforts to conserve already threatened species and to alleviate pressures on their populations—notably habitat loss, overexploitation for economic gain, and climate change. [...] However, the window of opportunity is rapidly closing.”

International context

A recent UN reportⁱⁱ found that:

“The average abundance of native species in most major land-based habitats has fallen by at least 20%, mostly since 1900. More than 40% of amphibian species, almost 33% of reef-forming corals and more than a third of all marine mammals are threatened. The picture is less clear for insect species, but available evidence supports a tentative estimate of 10% being threatened. At least 680 vertebrate species had been driven to extinction since the 16th century and more than 9% of all domesticated breeds of mammals

used for food and agriculture had become extinct by 2016, with at least 1,000 more breeds still threatened.”

National context

About every 3 years, The State of Nature partnership (comprising over 70 partners drawn from conservation NGOs, research institutes, and the UK and national governments) publishes an audit of Nature in the UK. The 2019 reportⁱⁱⁱ found:

1. Our indicator of average species’ abundance of 696 terrestrial and freshwater species has fallen by 13% since 1970; the rate of decline was steeper in the last 10 years, although not statistically significantly so
2. Our indicator of average species’ distribution, covering 6,654 terrestrial and freshwater species over a broad range of taxonomic groups, has fallen by 5% since 1970, and is 2% lower than in 2005.
3. More species have shown strong or moderate decreases in abundance (41%) than increases (26%) since 1970, and likewise more species have decreased in distribution (27%) than increased (21%) since 1970
4. Our wildlife is undergoing rapid change; the proportion of species defined as showing strong changes in abundance, either increasing or decreasing, rose from 33% over the long term to 53% over the short term.
5. Of 8,431 species that have been assessed using regional Red List criteria, 15% have been classified as threatened with extinction from Great Britain, and 2% are already extinct.
6. An assessment based on the best available data indicates that, although progress has been made, the UK will not meet most of the CBD’s 2020 Aichi target [In 2010, in Nagoya, Aichi Province, Japan, the signatories to the CBD published a Strategic Plan for Biodiversity for the years 2011-2020. This included five strategic goals and 20 targets referred to as the 'Aichi Targets'.]

Local context

Despite being an urban borough Reading is rich in wildlife:

1. It lies next to two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: the Chilterns to the north, and, the North Wessex Downs to the west.
2. It has two large rivers running through it, the Thames and the Kennet (and their floodplains) with a total of 62km of watercourses including streams.
3. Outside of private gardens, there are 200 hectares of woodland and 800 hectares of grassland, equating to around one quarter of the total area of the borough (4000 ha.).
4. There are five local nature reserves - Clayfield Copse, Blundells Copse, Round Copse, McIlroy Park, and, Lousehill Copse
5. There are 21 Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs).
6. There are two woodlands listed on Natural England's Ancient Woodland Inventory
7. Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) hold records of 274 priority, protected and or notable species that have been recorded within the borough since 1970. This includes 8 reptile & amphibian species, 109 bird species, 18 terrestrial mammals, 7 fish, 59 plant and 70 invertebrates. Not all of these species are resident, some may have been seen on just a few occasions, and some such as the palmate newt may no longer be found in the borough.

(See Appendices 1 and 2 for maps and species lists.)

Monitoring in Reading

TVERC collect and collate data about biodiversity in the Thames Valley. Reading Borough Council have a service level agreement with them.

TVERC has mapped habitats in Berkshire and Oxfordshire using a mixture of field survey data and aerial photograph interpretation. The habitat map is constantly improving as new data becomes available.

TVERC also collects and collates ecological records for the borough and members of the public are encouraged to submit their records to them. The council receives regular data updates.

TVERC also run the Local Wildlife Site project in Berkshire. They survey LWSs about once every 10 years. Further information on this is provided below.

Other than TVERC surveys and surveys to inform development proposals, there are very few direct studies of biodiversity in Reading. However, we do know that:

1. 85% of the borough's Local Wildlife Sites have management plans in place, meaning that they are being managed, at least in part, for wildlife, and are classified by DEFRA as being in "positive conservation management"
2. There is anecdotal evidence that some bird populations, including swifts and house sparrows, are declining.
3. Numbers of some species, such as the Red Kite, have increased.
4. Populations of some species, such as glow worms and water vole, are likely to have disappeared.

Recent actions

A number of projects in Reading over the last 10 years have helped conserve biodiversity. These include:

- The implementation of a Higher Level Stewardship agreement with Natural England which resulted in the meadows at Bugs Bottom, Clayfield Copse, McIlroys Park, Prospect Park, Hills Meadow and Arthur Newbury Park being managed as hay meadows.
- The production, with help from The Forestry Commission, of Woodland Management Plans for the majority of the council's woodlands.
- The creation of the Fobney Island Nature Reserve which by 2018 had become rich enough in wildlife to be designated as a LWS
- Detailed design input into new development proposals by the Planning Department's Natural Environment Team to ensure that nature is conserved and new habitat for wildlife is provided.

5. Habitats

TVERC has mapped habitats in Berkshire and Oxfordshire using a mixture of field survey data and aerial photograph interpretation. It includes most open spaces but does not include private residential gardens.

The habitat map is constantly improving as new data becomes available but there tend to be major updates whenever new aerial photography becomes available. In Reading, due to Heathrow airport, new aerial photography is collected less frequently than elsewhere. The most recent aerial photography data for Reading is from 2016.

Habitat classifications

There are a number of ways that habitats are classified in the UK and these are discussed below:

Phase 1

The Phase 1 habitat classification system was first published by the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) in 1990. It is a standardised system for classifying and mapping wildlife habitats in all parts of Great Britain, including urban areas, and is widely used as the standard technique for habitat surveys. Habitats are classified to a broad habitat such as woodland, grassland, open water etc., and then sub-divided further to provide the Phase 1 habitat type, such as broad leaved semi-natural woodland, calcareous grassland etc.

It was developed before the time when computer based geographical information systems were available and, due to the ways that habitats are mapped (as a mixture of point, line and polygon data), is not best suited to computer based analysis.

National Vegetation Classification

This is a detailed botanical survey. Habitats are classified according to published descriptions given in the National Vegetation Classification (NVC) (e.g. “w6 Alnus glutinosa - Urtica dioica woodland” or “CG1 Festuca ovina-Carlina vulgaris grassland”) developed and published in the 1980s by the

Joint Nature Conservation Council (JNCC). There is very little NVC survey data for Reading.

Integrated Habitats Classification (IHS)

The Integrated Habitat System (IHS) was developed by the Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC). It was designed to be used in the UK, and is an integration of existing classification systems including Priority Habitats (as defined under the NERC Act), Phase 1 and NVC.

It was developed for use with modern IT systems and is increasingly used for mapping habitats.

Priority Habitats

Priority Habitats are habitats that are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. The secretary of state is required to periodically publish (via the JNCC) a list of these habitats under Section 41 (S41) of the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act. The list evolved from the UK BAP that was first published in 1994. They are routinely referred to as Habitats of Principal Importance (HPI), Section 41 (S41) Habitats, UK BAP Habitats and Priority Habitats.

We refer to them as Priority Habitats in this document as this is this is the terminology used in National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

An overview of habitats in Reading

The table below lists the Phase 1 habitat types found in Reading and their extent as per the TVERC habitat dataset.

Phase 1 Habitats	Area (Ha.)
Grassland habitats	
Cultivated/disturbed land - amenity grassland	287
Improved grassland	184.6
Neutral grassland - semi-improved	304.6
Parkland and scattered trees	4.3
	Total 780.5
Woodland habitats	

Broadleaved woodland - plantation	11.8
Broadleaved woodland - semi-natural	151.5
Coniferous woodland - plantation	0.6
Mixed woodland - semi-natural	3.2
Scrub - dense/continuous	35.2
Scrub - scattered	1.3
Total	203.6
Wetland habitats	
Fen	5
Running water (Excl. River Thames)	23.9
Standing water	15.1
Swamp	22.6
Total	66.6
Other habitats	
Bare ground	2.4
Allotments	31.2
Ephemeral/short perennial	0.2
Tall ruderal herb	4.7
Quarry	8.8
Total	47.3

The table below lists the Priority Habitats found in Reading and their extent as per the TVERC habitat dataset.

Priority habitat	Area (Ha.)
Grassland habitats	
Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh	128.4
Lowland meadows	4.8
Total	133.2
Woodland habitats	
Lowland mixed deciduous woodland	134.5

Lowland wood pasture and parkland	33.9
Wet woodland	8.7
Total	177.1
Wetland habitats	
Reedbeds	1.1
Ponds	0.1
Lowland fens	26
Eutrophic standing waters	10.2
Total	37.4
Other habitats	
Traditional orchards	1.2
Open mosaic habitats on previously developed land	34.8
Total	36

Woodland, trees and hedgerows

Woodland

Excluding scrub, there are approximately 167 ha of woodland in Reading. Of this, RBC owns approximately 92 ha., with the remainder 75ha. in other ownership. There is a mixture of woodland types ranging from the ancient broadleaved woodland at Clayfield Copse to newly planted woodlands such as that at Balmore Walk.

It is important to manage our woodlands because many of our rarer and endangered species rely on the associated habitats, in particular the open and regenerating habitats, that woodland management produces. Lack of management has reduced habitat and structural diversity in Britain's woodlands and is the biggest threat to the UK's small woodlands.

Woodland management

Of the woodland managed by Reading Borough Council, most have a management plan in place. These were produced in conjunction with the Forestry Commission and adopted by the council in 2012. They are 10 year

plans and will need to be reviewed in 2022. The woodlands for which management plans were produced are:

1. Arthur Newbury and McIlroys Park
2. Blundells Copse
3. Bugs Bottom and Furzeplat
4. Clayfield Copse and Blackhouse Woods
5. Beech (or Highdown) Wood, Rotherfield Way Copse and Balmore Walk
6. Lousehill copse
7. Prospect Park, Devils Dip and Southcote Linear Park
8. Thames woodlands (Hills Meadow, Kings Meadow and View Island)
9. The Cowsey
10. Warren Woodland Escarpment

When the plans are reviewed it will be important to ensure that the following management considerations are addressed:

- New pests and diseases such as ash dieback and oak processionary moth
- Species selection to take account of climate change and resilience to new pests and diseases
- The retention of standing deadwood
- Where the council does not own or manage a woodland, it has only limited options to control changes, mainly through the planning system. For example, where a woodland has a Tree Preservation Order (TPO), the council can request that a management plan is drawn up when a TPO application is submitted, and planning policy protects woodlands (most of which is Priority Habitats) from removal.
- The council does however own small plots of woodland outside of public parks. It will be important that wherever possible these are kept in public ownership, as this means they are more likely to be managed beneficially for biodiversity.

Regenerating Ash at Clayfield Copse, much of which now suffers from Ash dieback. Management of our woodlands will need to account for this disease.



New woodland

Due to the size and urban nature of Reading there are likely only limited opportunities for new woodland planting. Where these opportunities do exist, they are likely to be associated with new development although there may be some areas in Reading's parks and open spaces that can be planted.

Ancient woodland

Ancient woodland is defined as land that has been continuously wooded since at least 1600. This is around the date of the earliest maps, and it is considered that if an area was woodland at this time then it is likely to have always been wooded.

In the 1990s English Nature, now Natural England, reviewed old maps; in particular, Ordnance Survey's First Series 1:25,000 maps, and created an inventory of woodlands more than 2ha in size. This was the basis for the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI).

In Reading there are two woodlands listed on the AWI - Kentwood Grove (McIlroys Park) and Blackhouse Woods (Clayfield Copse) (see appendix 1)

Natural England have advised local authorities that they should carry out their own assessments to identify smaller woodlands which were likely to be "ancient" and some authorities in Berkshire have commissioned TVERC to carry out such a review.

The council will work with voluntary groups such as Caversham Globe and Reading's Tree Wardens to carry out a review of ancient woodland in Reading.

Ancient and veteran trees

The NPPF defines an 'ancient' or 'veteran' tree as:

"A tree which, because of its age, size and condition, is of exceptional biodiversity, cultural or heritage value. All ancient trees are veteran trees. Not all veteran trees are old enough to be ancient, but are old relative to other trees of the same species. Very few trees of any species reach the ancient life-stage."

Such trees can be found as individuals or in groups and can be found in historic parkland, hedgerows, gardens and ancient woodlands. They support a variety of wildlife, such as the stag beetle, that are associated with dead or decaying wood.

The Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Inventory has a map showing ancient and veteran trees and many of Reading's ancient and veteran trees are shown on this map (see <https://ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>)

[Text box: Ancient woodlands and veteran trees and development control.

Ancient woodland and veteran trees are specially protected through the planning process and the NPPF reads:

"development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists"]

Veteran Yew Tree in Caversham Court (photo courtesy of Dave Kenny)



Wood pasture

Parts of Prospect Park fit the priority habitat description of 'Lowland Wood Pasture & Parkland': it is an old parkland landscape containing veteran trees over what was once grazed grassland, relatively unimproved and species rich in places, and managed as a hay meadow on the slopes below the Mansion House.

Street trees

The borough has numerous street trees, many of which were planted in the 19th Century, with particularly fine examples along London and Kendrick Road. These are managed by the council who have a rolling programme of street tree planting and management. The Council have produced a Tree Strategy, which details the measures that the council will take to manage these trees and as such they are outside of the remit of the BAP.

Hedgerows

The Priority Habitat description for hedgerows is as follows:

“any boundary line of trees or shrubs over 20m long and less than 5m wide, and where any gaps between the trees or shrub species are less than 20m wide. Any bank, wall, ditch or tree within 2m of the centre of the hedgerow is considered to be part of the hedgerow habitat, as is the herbaceous vegetation within 2m of the centre of the hedgerow. All hedgerows consisting predominantly (i.e. 80% or more cover) of at least one woody UK native species are covered by this priority habitat, where each UK country can define the list of woody species native to their respective country. Climbers such as honeysuckle and bramble are recognised as integral to many hedgerows, however they require other woody plants to be present to form a distinct woody boundary feature, as such they are not included in the definition of woody species. The definition is limited to boundary lines of trees or shrubs, and excludes banks or walls without woody shrubs on top of them.”

The Hedgerows Regulations 1997 are intended to protect important countryside hedges from destruction or damage. They are part of the planning regulations and administered by the local planning authority. It is an offence to remove an important hedgerow (as defined under the regulations) without have received written notice from the local planning authority that works can commence. They do not apply to hedgerows within the curtilage of, or marking a boundary of the curtilage of, a dwelling-house, and there are a number of other exemptions. An ‘important’

hedgerow is one that fulfils a number of criteria including the number of woody and ground flora species it contains, and its location.

There is no definitive list of hedgerows in Reading. However, it is likely that there are a number of hedgerows that fit the Priority Habitat description, but only a few, such as the hedgerow at the northern end of Bugs Bottom are likely to be considered as ‘important’ under the Hedgerow Regulations.

It will be necessary to ensure that existing hedgerows are retained and managed appropriately (for example by cutting them after the winter, but before the nesting season, so that they provide food for overwintering birds).

A mixed native hedgerow in an urban garden. This provides a greater diversity and abundance of food than ornamental hedgerows



Grasslands

Unimproved grasslands are grasslands that appear never to have been “improved” that is that they have not been reseeded, drained or fertilised. In England there are around 4.5 million hectares of grassland, of which just 100,000ha is “unimproved”.

Unimproved grasslands contain a much greater diversity of grasses, sedges, rushes and wildflowers and are much richer in wildlife. They are often referred to as wildflower meadows. Conversely, “improved” grasslands have far fewer species, often only a few grass species with the occasional weed, and offer very little value for wildlife.

However, there is a continuum between improved and unimproved grasslands and generally speaking the longer a grassland has been left without “improvements” the closer to an unimproved grassland it becomes. These grasslands are referred to as “semi-improved” grasslands.

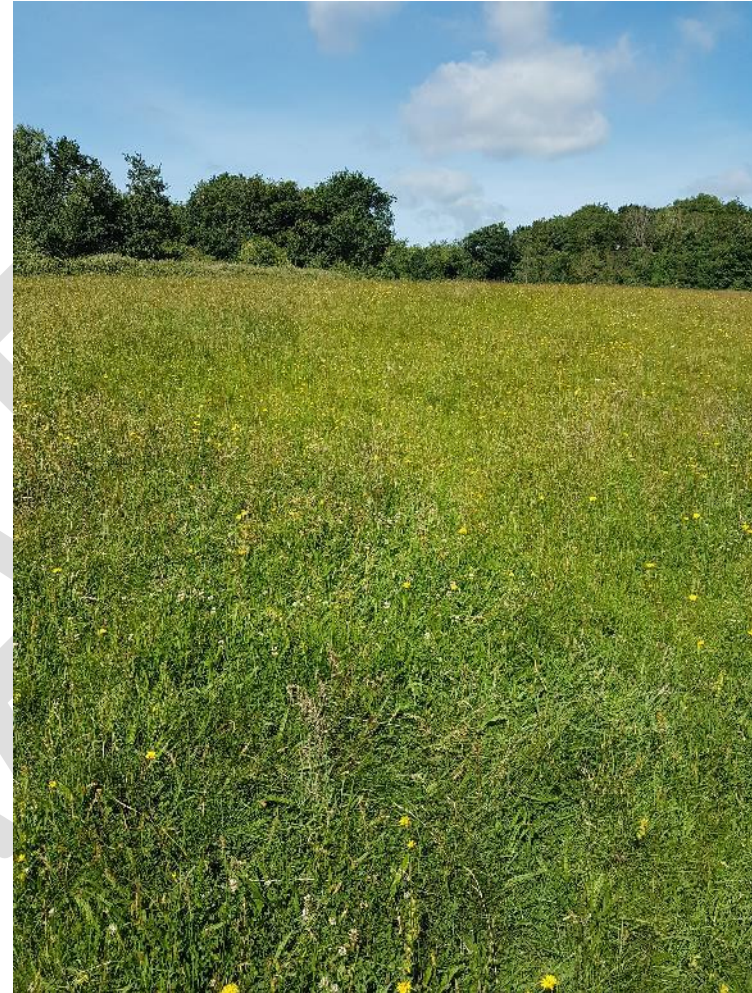
Grasslands can also be classified according to the soil type, either neutral, acid or calcareous, and or their level of waterlogging.

In Reading, other than the marshy grassland along the river valley to the west of the A33, there are no unimproved grasslands (it is possible that the grassland on the steep slopes of Balmore Walk has never been “improved” but due to the heavy mowing regime the species richness is likely to have declined). The majority of the grass is either short cut amenity grassland (287ha.) or other improved grasslands (185 ha.).

Reading’s hay meadows

Some of the semi-improved grasslands were bought into management as hay meadows in 2011 through a grant from Natural England through their Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme, and approximately 35 hectares of grassland are managed as wildflower meadow with a hay cut taken once per annum. Of these, parts of Clayfield Copse, McIlroys Park, Prospect Park and McIlroys Park were sown with a mix of wildflower seeds and the species diversity increased.

The reseeded meadow at Arthur Newbury Park 5 years after it was reseeded



It costs more to manage an area as a hay meadow than as amenity grassland. Therefore, when the HLS agreement comes to an end the council will need to commit to funding this management.

Road verges and roundabouts.

The council’s Highways Department is responsible for the operation and maintenance of 392km of road and 800km of pavements, much of which has

a grassed verge and roundabouts. Some areas are likely to contain rare species such as the Lizard Orchid that was found on the Basingstoke Road in 2019. These areas are, as a rule, managed as regularly cut amenity grassland, with only a few areas managed as less frequently cut grass.

Road verges are very important for allowing wildlife, particularly pollinators (such as bees) and other invertebrates, to move through the landscape. However, it can be more difficult to manage road verges for wildlife. This is because the arisings need to be removed and disposed of, and litter in long grass can be an issue; people's perception of tidiness can conflict with what is good for wildlife.

Parks

As with road verges, there may be parts of Reading's parkland and urban greenspaces that can be managed as less frequently cut grass. The council will need to carry out steps to identify suitable areas.

Watercourses

According to the EA's Detailed River Network dataset, there are 62Km (39 miles) of watercourses in Reading:

- Berry Brook - 0.9 km
- Christchurch Ditch - 1.1 km
- Foudry Brook - 2.2 km
- Green Park Flood Relief Channel - 2 km
- Kennet - 26.4 km
- Kingsley Close Ditch - 0.8 km
- Smallmead Ditch - 0.5 km
- Thames (Upper) - 6.8 km
- Unnamed watercourses - 20.3km

These are shown on in Figure 3(Appendix 1).

Both the Kennet and The Thames are regularly used by otters a species that nearly became extinct in the 1960's and 70's and sand martins nest in old drainage pipes in the brick walls and bridges in and over the Kennet.

Classification of rivers

Watercourses are designated by the Environment Agency (EA) as either Main Rivers or Ordinary Watercourses, primarily for flood risk purposes. Main rivers are usually larger rivers and streams and are shown on the Main River Map:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/main-river-map-for-england-proposed-changes-and-decisions>

The Environment Agency has the powers to carry out maintenance, improvement or construction work on Main Rivers to manage flood risk. The lead local flood authorities (including Reading Borough Council) carry out flood risk management work on ordinary watercourses.

The Main Rivers in Reading Borough are as follows:

1) The River Thames and its tributaries

- a) Christchurch Ditch
- b) Berry Brook

2) River Kennet (this is split into a number of channels in the Fobney area upstream of Reading town centre) and its tributaries:

- a) Holy Brook.
- b) Foudry Brook.
- c) Green Park Flood Relief Channel.
- d) Smallmead Ditch.
- e) Kingsley Close Ditch.

3) The Kennet and Avon Canal.

There are also a number of small ordinary watercourses, most of which are unnamed apart from the Gunters Brook close to the Queen's Road car park.

Water framework directive

Under the EU's Water Framework Directive (WFD) [transposed into UK law via The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) (England and Wales) Regulations 2017] the EA has legal duties to ensure that waterbodies, including rivers, achieve "good ecological status" or "good ecological potential":

- Good Ecological Potential (GEP) refers to the classification of WFD water bodies that are designated as Heavily Modified Water Bodies (HMWB).
- Good Ecological Status (GES) refers to the classification of WFD water bodies that are not designated as HMWB.

There are five categories of GES or GEP: high, good, moderate, poor and bad, established on the basis of specific criteria and boundaries defined against biological, physico-chemical and hydromorphological elements.

The 2019 WFD water body classifications have not yet been published so the most recent data is currently from 2016.

There are four WFD Cycle 2 river water bodies within Reading Borough, two of which are HMWBs and two are not:

Thames Wallingford to Caversham (EA reference: GB106039030331)

This is designated a Heavily Modified Water Body for navigation, recreation and flood protection reasons.

It was classified as at Moderate Ecological Potential in 2016, failing for invertebrates and phosphate.

Kennet and Holy Brook (EA reference: GB106039023140)

This is designated a Heavily Modified Water Body for recreation reasons.

It was classified as at Moderate Ecological Potential in 2016, failing for fish and dissolved oxygen.

Holy Brook (EA reference: GB106039023141)

This water body is not designated as a Heavily Modified Water Body.

It was classified as at Moderate Ecological Status in 2016, failing for plants and dissolved oxygen.

Foudry Brook (West End Brook to M4) (EA reference: GB106039017380)

This water body is not designated as a Heavily Modified Water Body.

It was classified as at Poor Ecological Status in 2016, failing for fish, plants and phosphate.

6. Designations

There are a series of nature conservation designations, many of which overlap. This section gives an overview of these (a map showing designated sites and priority habitats is given in Appendix 1, Figure 2)

National Character Areas

A National Character Area (NCA) is a natural subdivision of England based on a combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and economic activity. There are 159 National Character Areas and they follow natural, rather than administrative, boundaries. They are defined by Natural England, the UK government's advisors on the natural environment.

Reading is located within two NCAs: the Chilterns to the north of the River Thames and the Thames Valley to the south.

A map showing the NCAs and their underlying geology is provided in Figure 1 (Appendix 1) and a description of each is given below.

The Chilterns NCA

Caversham to the north of the River Thames and the north facing slopes of Tilehurst lie within the Chilterns NCA, which stretches north-east to Luton and north to Wallingford and Princes Risborough. It is an area of chalk overlain with a glacial outwash of clays, gravels and sands. This acid and calcareous mix gives rise to a patchy distribution of chalk grassland and woodland habitats.

On the northern edges of the borough, grassland, agricultural and woodland features of the Chilterns are evident, such as in Bugs Bottom and Clayfield Copse, and there are some remnants in Tilehurst at McIlroys and Arthur Newbury Park.

The river valley of the Thames to the west also retains significant areas of semi-natural habitat, including The Warren Escarpment, a wooded steep chalk bank, and Little John's Farm.

The Thames Valley NCA

The Thames Valley is a low-lying area stretching from Reading to the southwest fringe of London. The River Thames provides a unifying feature through a very diverse landscape of urban and suburban settlements, infrastructure networks, fragmented agricultural land, historic parks, commons, woodland, reservoirs and extensive minerals workings.

Most of Reading lies within the Thames Valley NCA, including the flood meadows to the south, with areas of mixed broadleaved woodland now only remaining on the steeper ridges.

Biodiversity Opportunity Areas

In Berkshire there are 29 Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs). These are areas identified by the Berkshire Nature Conservation Forum (which has now become the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership (BLNP)) where action to conserve biodiversity would be most beneficial. There are two such areas in Reading:

Kennet Valley East

This encompasses the floodplains at the eastern end of The Kennet between Reading and Newbury.

West Reading Woodlands

This encompasses the woodlands in Tilehurst, Lousehill Copse, Blundells Copse and McIlroys Park.

The BLNP outlook is currently uncertain and attendance at BLNP meetings has dwindled. As a result, little work has been undertaken on the BOA initiative. It is however likely that BOAs in Berkshire will form the basis for Nature Recovery Areas that are referred to in the government's 25 year Environment Plan.

Statutory Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation

In Reading there are five Local Nature Reserves (LNRs).

1. Blundells Copse
2. Round Copse (which is now part of McIlroys Park)

3. McIlroys Park
4. Lousehill Copse
5. Clayfield Copse

LNRs are designated under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act and are sites owned by the council and of local importance for nature conservation. The four Reading LNRs were designated in 1991 and 1992.

There are no other Statutory Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation in Reading.

Local Wildlife Sites

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are sites which include important and rare habitats and species. They are protected from the direct and indirect effects of development through planning policy as set out in Reading's Local Plan. To qualify as an LWS, a site is assessed by the LWS Selection Panel against the LWS Selection Criteria, a detailed document produced by TVERC.

The LWS Selection Panel meets annually and assesses sites that have been surveyed in the preceding year. Panel decisions result in sites being designated as LWS (if they meet the criteria), de-selected (if they don't meet the criteria) or deferred (if further survey information is required). Sometimes sites are extended to include adjacent valuable habitats; sometimes parts of sites are removed.

Survey work is carried out by TVERC staff and experienced volunteers, with the aim of surveying sites every 10 years.

There are 20 Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) in Reading, all but 3 of which (Cow Lane Depot, Meadway Fringe & Whitley Park Farm/St Patricks Hall Pond) are managed or part managed by The Council.

Local Authorities are required to report to DEFRA the proportion of LWS that are in "positive conservation management" each year. This is known as Single Data List (SDL) 160.

DEFRA consider those sites in "positive conservation management" to be those that:

1. have a Site Management Plan;
2. are under an Environmental Management Schemes (such as Higher Level Stewardship);
3. where there is a written record that conservation work has taken place, or
4. where a record was made where a landowner of a LWS had received management guidance or advice in the last 5 years and whether it was known if this was acted on.

TVERC assesses the LWS on behalf of Reading Borough Council and in 2019 in Reading 85% of LWS were assessed by TVERC as being in positive conservation management.

Green Links

On the Local Plan Proposals Map^{iv} there are a series of "Green Links". These were identified during a study of the borough by TVERC and either denote an existing link or illustrate an indicative location for where potential Green Links could be located to provide desired connectivity for wildlife between ecologically important areas. It should not necessarily be interpreted as a precise line, rather it may indicate an indicative potential connection between areas. In practice, most Green Links shown on the map are a mixture of existing and potential links, i.e. whilst there are existing aspects that contribute to the Network there is also significant potential for development to make a further contribution to improve the Network.

Green Infrastructure

A commonly used term is "green infrastructure". Natural England define this as:

"A network of multi-functional green space, both new and existing, both rural and urban, which supports the natural and ecological processes and is integral to the health and quality of life of sustainable communities".

In Reading, the parks, rivers, woodlands, grasslands, gardens, street trees and road verges, all make form part of this green infrastructure.

Species

TVERC hold records of 274 protected, priority, and or notable species that have been recorded within the borough¹. This includes 8 reptile & amphibian species, 109 bird species, 18 terrestrial mammals, 7 fish, 59 plant and 70 invertebrates (see Appendix 2).

Priority species - as with habitats, the secretary of state, under section 41 of the NERC ACT, is required to periodically publish (via the JNCC) a list of species that are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. The list evolved from the UK BAP that was first published in 1994. They are routinely referred to as Species of Principal Importance (SPI), Section 41 (S41) Species, UK BAP Species and Priority Species. In the NPPF they are referred to as “priority species” which is how they are referred to here.

Protected species- Reading also hosts a number of protected species such as badgers, bats and otters. Some of these are protected under EU Legislation (transposed into UK Law via the Habitat Regulations) and other under UK legislation such as the water vole. Most are also priority species.

Notable and red list species - Notable lists have been published by conservation organisations such as the of Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC). Species are classified according to set criteria set out in the lists. Those on the "red list" are the most under threat, whilst those on the amber and green are less so.

Not all those species recorded are resident, some may have been seen on just a few occasions, and some, such as the water vole, may no longer be found in the borough.

¹ Since:

- 1980 for more frequently recorded taxonomic groups e.g. plants, mammals, butterflies, reptiles and amphibians [this date will be changing to 1995 in March 2020]

The Hazel Dormouse, a European Protected Species, that is found in the Chiterns and could be present in the Reading's woodlands particularly those at the north of the borough (photo courtesy of Eric Palmer)



- 1960 for less frequently recorded groups such as more obscure invertebrate groups and lower plant groups.

7. Stakeholders

Who owns and manages land in Reading?

To effect change in the way that land is managed we first need to understand who owns and manages it.

Private landowners

Being an urban borough, most of Reading's outdoor space is in private gardens. There are a great variety of shapes and sizes. Some gardens, particularly when taken with the adjacent areas, can be large areas of wildlife rich space with a mosaic of habitats and a diversity of species. It is estimated that approximately 1,300 hectares of the borough, or 33%, is within the curtilage of residential gardens.

There are also numerous privately owned industrial and retail areas such as the Oracle in central Reading.

Reading Borough Council

The council owns approximately 1,000ha of land (including buildings). Of this approximately 420 hectares, excluding highways land, is fully accessible to the public and managed by the parks department. This includes 24 allotments, 9 cemeteries and churchyards and 70 parks and gardens.

Of particular value to wildlife are the council's woodlands and grasslands.

The highways department manages much of the remainder along with the property, housing and education departments.

The University and private schools

Reading University owns the campus, a large area of land in the east of the borough that crosses into Wokingham, with approximately 1/3rd of the campus (35 hectares) being within Reading Borough.

There are also several other education institutions that own land in Reading such as Queen Anne's School, Leighton Park School and The Abbey School.

Farmers

Much of the land to the west, along the Kennet valley floodplain, is owned by a local farming family. It is managed as low intensity grazing and provides some of Berkshire's best wetland habitats.

Little John's Farm, adjacent to the Thames and used by Reading Festival, is the other area of Farmland in Reading.

Network Rail

Network rail own and manage the land adjacent to the railway tracks. These act as important corridors for wildlife.

The Environment Agency

The Environment Agency carry out maintenance work primarily for flood risk purposes, on main rivers including the River Thames and River Kennet. They also control invasive, non-native species including floating pennywort and Japanese knotweed.

Canals and Rivers Trust

The Canals and River Trust is responsible for managing the Kennet and Avon Canal and the vegetation along its banks.

Other stakeholders

There are also numerous volunteer, local wildlife groups and amateur naturalist societies in Reading, including:

- The Conservation Volunteers
- Caversham Globe
- Tilehurst Globe
- ECONET (an umbrella group that encompasses several "Friends Of" groups and Reading Urban Wildlife Group)
- Reading Friends of the Earth.
- Berkshire Ornithological Club
- Reading and District Natural History Society
- Berkshire Mammal Group,
- Berkshire & South Bucks Bat Group

- Reading Tree Wardens

Berkshire's Local Nature Partnership

According to the www.gov.uk website, "Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) are partnerships of a broad range of local organisations, businesses and people who aim to help bring about improvements in their local natural environment."

Local Nature Partnerships originated in a vision set out in the UK government's 2011 'Natural Environment White Paper', which identified the need to take greater account of the value of the environment when strategic decisions are made that affect people and the local economy. 48 LNPs in England received approval from DEFRA, including the BLNP.

The BLNP outlook is currently uncertain, attendance at LNP meetings has dwindled and the chair has recently resigned. There is no funding for the LNP and to date it has no permanent staff member.

Neighbouring authorities

Nature crosses boundaries (particularly along rivers, rail and road verges) and it will be important to ensure that there is coordinated action with neighbouring authorities including Wokingham, South Oxfordshire and West Berkshire Council.

Biodiversity Opportunity Areas and the Nature Recovery Network and the LWS system are all examples of cross boundary working.

8. Themes for action

This section details the objectives of the BAP and the actions that will be taken to achieve them. It is intended to be iterative, whereby actions lead to further actions, with actions and progress towards them regularly updated.

Descriptive text in this section is limited to text that has not been covered in the sections above.

A) Legislation

As we exit the EU, the environmental protections that the EU’s Directives provide may no longer apply. Conversely it may be that new laws and or strengthened protections are brought in by the UK government. It will be important therefore to ensure that the council’s policies are updated to take account of any new laws, and wherever possible existing environmental protections are upheld.

Objective	Actions	Responsibility	Timeframe
The council will ensure that its policies and plans are up to date with wildlife and biodiversity legislation.	Review and update policy as new legislation comes into force.	RBC - all	Ongoing
	Uphold existing environmental protections	RBC - all	Ongoing

B) Designated Sites

In Berkshire there is a comprehensive system for designating LWSs and other than the four LNRs (which are all also LWSs) there are no statutory sites within the borough. There are no plans to comprehensively change this system.

It would be useful to have a system for determining whether a site had reached “favourable condition” rather than simply measuring whether it is being managed (as is currently the case). The council will work with TVERC and the LWS Selection Panel to see if such a system can be developed, possibly when each site is surveyed.

[When assessing Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Natural England refer to sites being in “Favourable Condition” but it may be that a different terminology is used.]

OBJECTIVES	Actions	Responsibility	Timeframe
To ensure that all LWS have reached “Favourable Condition” by 2030	To review and update management plans for all RBC managed sites	RBC Parks	Rolling programme
	To implement the management plans	RBC Parks	Ongoing
	To engage with the owners of LWS not managed by the council to encourage them to manage the LWS for wildlife	RBC Parks & Planning	Ongoing
	To work with TVERC and the LWSSP to draw up a system for defining and measuring the “Condition” of LWSs	RBC Planning	2022
To regularly survey, designate and de-designate LWSs in	To continue to fund TVERC to	RBC Planning	Ongoing

OBJECTIVES	Actions	Responsibility	Timeframe
accordance with the LWS Selection Criteria	carry out these works		

C) Planning and building control

The conservation and enhancement of biodiversity is a material consideration in, and an integral part of, the planning system. The council, as the local planning authority, needs to be satisfied that a development proposal complies with planning policy before it grants planning permission. Planning permission is set out at the national level through the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and at a local level through Reading Borough’s Local Plan. Planning Policy evolves as government policy and priorities change and through case law.

Appendix 3 includes key paragraphs from the NPPF and The Local Plan also includes policies to protect and enhance biodiversity.

Applicants need to demonstrate, through the provision of ecology surveys and reports, how their proposals comply with planning policy. The council can refuse planning applications that adversely affect biodiversity and can also set planning conditions and planning obligations to ensure that any effects are minimised, and biodiversity is enhanced.

Biodiversity net gain

One of the key drivers for biodiversity improvements over the coming years is likely to be the policy, as set out in the Government’s 25 Year Environment White Paper, to:

“Embedding an ‘environmental net gain’ principle for development, including housing and infrastructure”.

This is in accordance with paragraph 174b of the NPPF and Reading’s Local Plan which states (Policy EN12) that:

“In exceptional circumstances where the need for development clearly outweighs the need to protect the value of the site, and it is demonstrated that the impacts cannot be: 1) avoided; 2) mitigated or; 3) compensated for on-site; then new development will provide off-site compensation to ensure that there is “no net loss” of biodiversity. Provision of off-site compensation shall be calculated in accordance with nationally or locally recognised guidance and metrics. It should not replace existing alternative habitats, and should be provided prior to development.”

This is sometimes referred to as biodiversity offsetting or biodiversity net gain.

The idea behind this is that when a new development comes forward the developer will need to demonstrate that there will be a net gain for biodiversity. This is expressed in terms of biodiversity habitat units before and after the development. The units are a factor of habitat type, condition, area, time, anticipated time to target condition etc. If the calculation shows that there will not be a gain (the Environment White paper suggests that this should be 10%) then the developer needs to offset any losses by creating or enhancing habitats elsewhere.

Government Guidance on this matter is evolving but DEFRA have produced a calculator to calculate these impacts. However, a key decision that the council will need to make is where it is acceptable to offset biodiversity losses as there may only be limited opportunities within the borough. It may be, for example, that the council would accept an offsetting scheme within a set distance of the borough, or perhaps within a BOA.

Where Priority Habitats are to be affected the policy does not normally apply as these are protected from development through the planning process.

Ecological enhancements within development sites

In addition to Biodiversity Net Gain Calculations there are other opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments. For example, planning conditions can be imposed to secure

the provision of swift bricks, bird and bat boxes and native and wildlife friendly landscaping schemes (including green roofs and walls), and requirements for ‘hedgehog holes’ in new fences.

The council at present seeks ecological enhancements on most non householder developments. However, there is no system in place to record when, or whether, ecological enhancements are secured, and very little enforcement action when they are not. We also do not know whether and to what extent the enhancement measures are successful.

Objectives	Actions	Responsibility	Timeframe
To continue to assess all planning applications for their ecological impacts	To assess planning applications for their impact on protected, priority and notable species, and priority habitats, ancient woodland and protected sites	RBC planning	Ongoing
	To require developers to provide on-site ecological enhancements	RBC planning	Ongoing
To ensure that new development results in measurable net gain in biodiversity units.	To produce a supplementary planning document, possibly in conjunction with neighbouring authorities, that sets out the council’s approach to Biodiversity Net Gain.	RBC planning	2021
To monitor landscaping and the provision of ecological enhancements	To investigate new ways to monitor schemes	RBC planning	2021

Objectives	Actions	Responsibility	Timeframe
	To design and implement an internal RBC system for recording ecological enhancements that have been provided in development sites.	RBC planning	2021
	To work with TVERC to develop ways of capturing habitat creation data	RBC planning, TVERC	Ongoing

D) Woodlands, trees & hedgerows

The BAP should result in existing woodland being better managed and new woodlands, trees and hedgerows being planted.

OBJECTIVES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMEFRAME
To manage Reading’s woodlands for wildlife	To review RBC woodland management plans	RBC parks	By 2023
	To implement woodland management plans	RBC parks	Ongoing
	To identify funding opportunities for woodland management such as through the Forestry Commission	RBC parks	By 2023
	To engage with private woodland owners and to encourage them to manage their woodland for wildlife	RBC planning & RBC Parks	Ongoing

OBJECTIVES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMEFRAME
To retain woodlands in public ownership	Not to sell council owned woodlands other than where suitable compensatory environmental measures are implemented	RBC property	Ongoing
	Where new woodland habitat is created as part of planning applications to adopt this as publicly owned land securing its management through planning obligations as appropriate	RBC planning, property & parks	Ongoing
To identify suitable areas for new woodland creation	To assess parks and highways land and, other council owned and private land to identify and map those areas where new woodland could be created	RBC highways, parks, planning & property	By 2023
	To agree targets for new woodland creation in accordance with the tree strategy and CCAP	RBC highways, parks, planning & sustainability	By 2023
	Create new woodland areas within development sites (or as part of offsetting schemes - see separate theme)	RBC planning	Ongoing
To review Reading's Ancient	To review the ancient woodland inventory, including smaller woodlands (less than	RBC and volunteer groups such as Caversham	By 2022

OBJECTIVES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMEFRAME
Woodland Inventory	2ha.), in line with DEFRA guidance	Globe and Reading's Tree Wardens	

E) Grasslands and road verges

Reading's grasslands and road verges have significant potential as a wildlife resource, particularly for pollinators, and if they are managed as less frequently cut grass they will host a greater diversity and abundance of wildflowers. Recent research has shown that the part of the verge closest to the road contains fewer pollinators which is often the part that needs to be cut to maintain a tidy appearance. It also suggests that the later in the year that the grass is cut the better it is for pollinators^v.

The council will be trialling systems for cutting road verges less frequently and will be producing a highways grassland management policy shortly. It will also be looking to identify areas within parks that could be managed as less frequently cut grassland.

Objectives	Actions	Responsibility	Timeframe
To manage Reading's wildflower meadows for wildlife and look for opportunities to increase the extent of this habitat	To cut the grass annually as a hay cut	RBC parks	Ongoing
	To identify the resources to manage these areas after the current HLS funding runs out	RBC parks	By end of 2021
To identify and then manage road verges for wildflowers and pollinators	To identify road verges which could be sustainably managed as	RBC parks & highways	2020

Objectives	Actions	Responsibility	Timeframe
	longer grass and or pollinator strips		
	To test different road verge management regimes and draw up a road verge management policy	RBC parks & highways	To commence in 2020 then ongoing & iterative
To identify and then manage areas of amenity grassland for wildflowers and pollinators	To identify areas of RBC managed land that could be managed as less frequently cut long grass or wildflower meadow	RBC parks	2020
	To manage those areas as long grass	RBC parks	2021

F) The two rivers, their floodplains and other watercourses

Reading's watercourses are a major part of the Borough's Green Infrastructure. The council does not directly own the rivers but does manage the paths next to them in some locations. It also manages some of their floodplains such as Christchurch, Hills and Kings Meadows adjacent to the Thames, and Fobney Island, Waterloo Meadow and some of the farmland adjacent to the Kennet.

Development and urbanisation

The council is also responsible for determining planning applications and those that could affect Reading's watercourses must comply with policy EN11 in the Local Plan.

Development proposals next to a watercourse can enhance its environment. They can result in new wildlife friendly planting, the re-naturalisation of the watercourse banks, and new habitats features such as otter holts and sand martin nesting sites. Conversely, they can adversely affect it by overshadowing it and introducing light pollution and hard surfaces.

Urbanisation around watercourses, especially in and around the town centre, has resulted in artificial, hard river banks such as steel sheet piling, concrete or brick. Wherever possible these will be reinstated to natural banks and with a more natural profile, to restore river and riparian habitats.

Even if it's not possible to remove hard banks, there are still opportunities to establish marginal vegetation as has been done in Christchurch Meadow.

Some of the smaller watercourses do have natural banks but have been altered in other ways such as straightening, e.g. the Christchurch Ditch. Opportunities will be sought to re-naturalise these channels by re-meandering or introducing gravels and woody debris to enhance the in-channel habitats.

Lighting

Rivers are some of the most sensitive habitats for lighting as they are used by invertebrates, bats, birds and mammals, all of which are sensitive to artificial light.

Riverflies, for example, are a vital part of a River's ecosystem and are an important food source for birds, fish and other animals. It is likely that the increasing intensity and distribution of lights across Britain is affecting riverfly breeding and survival as many species depend on specific environmental cues for certain stages in their life cycle. The larvae are generally repelled by light but the adults are attracted to artificial night lights and could become disoriented around them. There are recorded incidents of high mortality of riverflies around light sources close to riverbanks. Such incidents have the potential to lure sufficient numbers of adult riverflies away from the water to cause population declines.^{vi}

Lighting alongside rivers should be kept to the minimum that is required and the council will explore options to reduce light levels as it replaces its streetlamps in these locations. Measures will include the use of baffles and shields, the use of lights of an appropriate frequency (research indicates that while lower UV components attract fewer invertebrates, warmer colour temperatures with peak wavelengths greater than 550nm cause less impacts on bats^{vii}).

In addition, where development proposals are adjacent to the river it should, as a minimum, not increase existing light levels and ideally should reduce them, this includes light from new windows.

Polarised light is also attractive to invertebrates, including beetles, dragonflies and adult riverflies. Polarised light pollution is the process whereby light reflects off smooth surfaces and is then scattered in the atmosphere or under water. Artificial lights are not necessarily part of this form of light pollution, but artificial lighting can make the situation worse. Adult mayflies are attracted to sources of polarised light as in nature they indicate a water surface on which the insects can breed and lay eggs. Artificial sources of polarised light such as dark building and smooth road surfaces can attract mayflies in the same way; however, any eggs laid on such surfaces will not develop. There are a total of 278 species of mayfly, stonefly and caddisfly in Britain, eight of which are Priority Species. All but the most polluted rivers in Britain support mayfly populations, therefore

artificial lighting and sources of polarised light pollution around all rivers should be minimised.

Management of parks

A number of Reading's parks have watercourses running through them. The watercourse and its banks do or could provide valuable habitat for wildlife. It will be important that these areas be managed sympathetically for wildlife, for example by allowing emergent vegetation and scrubby banks to develop and avoiding clearance where it is not needed.

Fish passages

There are salmonid fish passes on Caversham weir on the Thames and Blakes weir on the Kennet, but improvements for multi-fish species passage including eels are still required. Some of the smaller weirs, for instance at County Lock, are impassable to fish at low flows.

The EA and the council will seek ways to improve fish movement along Reading's watercourses

Light pollution over the Fobney Island Nature Reserve from the Thames Water treatment plant



Invasive, non-native species

Invasive, non-native species are a major cause of biodiversity decline as they outcompete local species. Due to their dynamic nature, rivers often support invasive species which can easily be transported long distances along them. Examples of invasive species found along Reading's rivers include:

- Floating pennywort
- Japanese knotweed
- Himalayan balsam
- Mink

Litter

Litter, in particular plastic, is a significant driver of biodiversity loss. It ends up in the river where it can harm fish and water birds, and gets washed downstream to the seas. Despite limited efforts at a national level, it is estimated that there will be a 20% increase in plastic waste by 2030^{viii} and much of this will end up in the oceans.

Reading has a number of riverside parks which are well used by the public. Many of the bins in these parks have open tops which means that litter can blow out and end up in the rivers; there are also too few bins in some parks for the litter generated.

The council will replace the open top bins and provide more bins where these are required.

Overflowing litter bin adjacent to the Kennet & Avon Canal



Other pollution

As well as light, litter and plastic pollution, other sources of pollution that can affect the rivers include sewage and foul water, runoff from farms, roads and factories, and microplastic pollution such as that from artificial sports pitches. This is exacerbated during large rainfall events when

pollution is rapidly washed into the drainage system and does not have time to settle out.

Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), which aim to replicate natural drainage as closely as possible, can reduce this pollution by slowing runoff rates and holding water on land so that polluting materials can settle out. They can also provide valuable wildlife habitats and reduce flood risk.

All new major developments must incorporate SuDS in their schemes in accordance with Policy EN18 in Reading’s Local Plan and national planning policy.

The Highways Department is responsible for much of the borough’s drainage systems including approximately 18,000 road drains. There are opportunities to incorporate SuDS elements on highways land and parks such as the flood attenuation basin at The Cowsey and by replacing hard surfaces with swales and tree planting.

The council will explore ways that this can be done.

The Kennet floodplain & its management

Fobney Meadow, at the eastern end of the Kennet Meadows and west of the A33 (a LWS and part of the East Kennet BOA), is a valuable wetland with breeding birds including Water Rail, Gadwall, Lapwing, Redshank (attempted), Little Ringed Plover (attempted), Barn and Little Owl (possibly), Grasshopper Warbler and Stonechat. It carries good numbers of Gadwall, Teal, Wigeon, Snipe in winter and is used by several wader species on migration.

However, it sometimes dries out with devastating effects on the breeding wetland species. The council, in partnership with the EA is assessing ways to stabilise this habitat by reducing water flows out of the meadow.

The Proposed Caversham & Reading Flood Alleviation Scheme

The Environment Agency is proposing a Flood Alleviation Scheme (FAS) that aims to address flood risk in the Reading suburb of Caversham on the north bank of the Thames and in Abbey ward on the south bank linked to the increased risk of flooding caused by climate change. The scheme would

reduce the risk of flooding to approximately 740 residential properties, as well as several roads and transport links, linked to the increased risk of flooding caused by climate change.

There are plans for a new Flood Alleviation Scheme (FAS) at Christchurch Meadow. This is to reduce the risk of flooding to properties in Caversham linked to the increased risk of flooding caused by climate change.

The council, as the local planning authority, will assess the scheme if and when a planning application is submitted and it will be important to ensure that, if the scheme goes ahead, it is designed to maximise its value for wildlife in line with adopted policies.

OBJECTIVES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMEFRAME
To ensure that Reading’s rivers reach good ecological and chemical status by 2025.	To work with the EA and others to identify potential pollution hotspots	RBC - all departments, EA	Ongoing
	All actions below		
To reduce light pollution on and adjacent to the rivers, minimising the effects it has on wildlife	To assess the council’s riverside lighting schemes, to define excessive light pollution, and to identify areas where such pollution occurs and where improvements can be made	RBC highways	2021

OBJECTIVES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMEFRAME
	(this could be Reading University student project)		
	To implement the improvements identified above	RBC highways	2024
To manage bankside vegetation sympathetically for wildlife	Allow emergent vegetation and scrubby banks to develop by avoiding clearance where it is not needed.	RBC - Parks	Ongoing
To halt the spread of invasive species along the rivers	To work with partners to manage invasive species such as floating pennywort, Japanese knotweed, mink	RBC- all departments	Ongoing
To halt plastic pollution into rivers, particularly from parks and open spaces	To replace all open topped bins in parks with closed top bins to	RBC Parks & Highways	2021

OBJECTIVES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMEFRAME
	stop wind-blown litter		
	To install new bins adjacent to Rivers and to empty them regularly	RBC Parks & Highways	2021
To maximise the wildlife value of the Kennet Valley East BOA	To raise the water levels in Fobney Meadow	RBC, EA, Friends of Fobney Island, Berkshire Ornithological Club and Local Residents	2023
	To reduce light pollution from the Thames water treatment works	RBC, EA, Thames Water	Ongoing
To ensure that the proposed Caversham & Reading FAS at Christchurch Meadow (if it is built) is designed to maximise its value for wildlife	To assess any scheme submitted by the EA.	RBC - Planning	Ongoing
To ensure that new development maximises the opportunities to conserve and enhance the biodiversity of Rivers	Ensure that, as a minimum, new development does not increase light spillage over rivers	RBC - Planning	Ongoing

OBJECTIVES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMEFRAME
	To seek opportunities to de-culvert watercourses	RBC -- Planning & Highways	Ongoing
	To ensure that any new landscaping adjacent to watercourses is predominantly native and wildlife friendly.	RBC - Planning	Ongoing
	To require the re-naturalisation of the river bank when new development is adjacent to it	RBC - Planning	Ongoing
To improve fish movement along Reading's watercourses	To improve existing and create new fish passes	EA and RBC	Ongoing

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The council also has a diverse property portfolio and landholding, some of which will be sold in the future. Other than in certain parks, no audit of this landholding's biodiversity has been carried out. Where land is sold it will be important to ensure that its future biodiversity value is realised by for example setting clear parameters for new development such as setting aside areas that are to be retained and enhanced for wildlife. At present there is no formal policy to safeguard the biodiversity of land that is disposed of.

OBJECTIVES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMEFRAME
To understand the ecological value of council owned land	To carry out a biodiversity audit of council owned land	RBC - Property	2022
To retain land of high ecological value in council ownership	Not to sell land that hosts priority habitats or species without appropriate measures of relocation or protection.	RBC - Property	Ongoing
To ensure that there is a net gain for biodiversity when RBC land is sold	To formally set out development parameters, as required under prevailing planning policy, to include ecological constraints and opportunities, when any land is sold and to ensure that legal agreements reflect this	RBC - Property	Ongoing

G) Management of council projects and the sale of land

The council is partly or fully responsible for numerous projects such as the south Reading MRT, the Fobney Island Nature Reserve, the new swimming pool at Palmer Park and The Green park Station. If Reading is to halt biodiversity loss and wildlife is to be restored it will be essential that all council projects are designed from the outset with the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity as an integral component.

OBJECTIVES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMEFRAME
To ensure that SUDS systems are designed to maximise their wildlife value	To produce a guidance document (supplementary planning document or equivalent) on SuDS standards for new development to include a requirement for native aquatic and marginal species	RBC - Policy	2022

H) Education, access to nature, public engagement & volunteering

There are 64 schools in Reading and the University of Reading and Reading College have campuses in the borough. Many of these have grounds that include semi-natural habitats which could be managed better for wildlife.

In addition, there are opportunities to involve students and staff in education, research and volunteering activities.

RBC have been running one such scheme, Reading Outdoor Classrooms for the past 10 years with 25 primary school classes per year being offered a free outdoor education session.

Nature Nurture, a Reading based, award winning Community Interest Company, runs events across the borough.

The University runs a variety of courses, including in ecology and wildlife conservation, and there are opportunities for students and staff to work with the council on specific projects such as the Tree Strategy and a lighting assessment of Reading's rivers.

The hedge at Fobney Island laid by volunteers



There are also a number of volunteer groups, in particular the Conservation Volunteers based on London Street, who run volunteering events across the borough. Such events don't only provide wildlife benefits but also help to maintain physical and mental health.

Reading is fortunate to have numerous other environmental groups such as Caversham and Tilehurst Globe, Econet² and Reading Friends of the Earth.

There are also numerous specialist wildlife groups based in and around Reading such as Berkshire Ornithological Club, Reading and District Natural History Society, Berkshire Mammal Group, Reading and Berkshire & South Bucks Bat Group. Many BBOWT members live in Reading.

Other groups such as the scouts, youth clubs and U3A³ may want to use the council's green spaces to access and learn about nature.

The council can help by providing this biodiversity action plan (a coordinated framework for action) and access to its open spaces for classes and work parties. It can also facilitate events where resources are available and engage with the public about the management of its estate, such as the management of road verges and street trees.

Objectives	Actions	Responsibility	Timeframe
Encourage Reading University and schools to manage their estate for wildlife	Ensure that planning proposals are designed to maximise wildlife value	RBC planning	Ongoing
To work with the university to undertake that could benefit wildlife in Reading	To produce a list of student projects and to share these with the university	RBC - All	Ongoing
Encourage schools to teach children about wildlife	Provide access to volunteer and educational	RBC parks	Ongoing

Objectives	Actions	Responsibility	Timeframe
	groups to RBC land		
	Facilitate programmes such as Reading's Outdoor Classrooms where resources allow	RBC - all	Ongoing
Facilitate volunteer groups	Provide access to volunteer and educational groups to RBC land	RBC parks	Ongoing
RBC engagement with the public about biodiversity and the management of its estate.	Production of online and published materials including a dedicated webpage for the BAP	RBC parks & planning	Ongoing

² Econet includes Friends of Clayfield Copse (FoCC), Friends of Mapledurham Playing Fields (FoMP), Friends of McIlroys Park (FoMP), Friends of Cemetery Junction (FoCJ), Conserve Reading on Wednesdays (CROW) and Reading Urban Wildlife Group

³ The University of the Third Age (U3A) is an international movement whose aims are the education and stimulation of mainly retired members of the community—those in their third 'age' of life. It is commonly referred to as U3A

I) Ecological records

It is vital that accurate ecological records are held and available to the council and others. Without this information it is not possible to determine whether actions to conserve biodiversity are succeeding or failing.

TVERC maintain databases of protected species, habitats and sites. RBC is a partner and will continue to fund TVERC, sitting on its steering group as appropriate. The council will also provide records to TVERC, encourage others to contact TVERC when they need ecological data and to submit their records to TVERC.

Objectives	Actions	Responsibility	Timeframe
To continue to support TVERC and their work	Continue with the TVERC SLA	RBC planning	Ongoing
	Submit records from planning applications to TVERC	RBC planning	Ongoing
	Encourage individuals and local wildlife groups to submit records to TVERC and access their data when needed	RBC all	Ongoing

J) Species and habitat specific actions

TVERC hold records of 274, priority, protected and or notable species that have been recorded within the borough since 1970. This includes 8 reptile and amphibian, 109 bird, 18 terrestrial mammal, 7 fish, 59 plant and 70 invertebrate species.

Not all of these species are resident, and some may have been seen on just a few occasions, however populations of many species will be declining. For example, anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of swifts in the borough, as with populations elsewhere, is declining.

Appendix 2 lists the priority, protected and or notable species that have been recorded in Reading and their likely status (as assessed by local experts).

The BAP does not include specific actions for species and the council will not have the resources to monitor such species, but many species will benefit from the actions set out in this BAP. There are however a number of species-specific actions that can be taken and, where resources are available, the council will undertake these works or encourage others to do so. Examples include the provision of swift bricks in new developments, the provision of peregrine platforms on new buildings, surveys for glow worms, and surveys for water voles.

There are also other Priority Habitats, such as ponds and brown field sites, within the borough. Again, the BAP does not have specific actions for these habitats but wherever possible the council will encourage the conservation and enhancement of these habitats.

It is anticipated that the list will evolve over time as the need for actions becomes apparent. The current list is provided in Appendix 4.

Objectives	Actions	Responsibility	Timeframe
To undertake works to benefit priority species	To maintain an up to date list of species and habitat specific actions that will benefit individual species and priority habitats	RBC planning	Ongoing

K) Connectivity

In his review of nature conservation, Making Space for Nature, in 2010, Sir John Lawton wrote:

“The essence of what needs to be done to enhance the resilience and coherence of England’s ecological network can be summarised in four words: more, bigger, better and joined.^{ix}”

Reading’s BAP should achieve all these aims, with the creation of more wildlife habitat, better management of existing sites, and improved connectivity through the urban environment as additional trees and wildlife friendly landscaping are provided reducing the barrier that an urban area can create for wildlife.

L) Coordinated approach across council departments and within policy documents

The council has numerous policy documents, across its various departments, all of which can affect biodiversity. It will be vital to ensure that biodiversity, and the actions within the BAP, are integral to these documents as they are conceived, developed, revised and published. Some of the relevant policy documents are listed below

- - Reading’s Tree Strategy
- - Local Transport Plan
- - Reading Climate Change Strategy (RCCS)
- - Open Spaces Strategy
- - Thames Parks Plan
- - Local Plan (Planning)
- - Reading Borough Council Corporate Plan
- - Highway Asset Management Plan
- - Air Quality Action Plan
- - Reading 2050 Vision

Objectives	Actions	Responsibility	Timeframe
To ensure that all other policy documents consider biodiversity	Coordinate approach across council departments and other national agencies	RBC - all, EA, Thames Water, Network Rail	Ongoing

M) Global biodiversity - what can the council do?

What we buy and where we buy it can have significant impacts on biodiversity. For example, timber from virgin forests results in those forests being lost and fish from unsustainable fisheries can kill our oceans. Investments in fossil fuel companies drive global warming which exacerbates biodiversity loss.

Green Public Procurement is a process whereby public authorities seek to procure goods, services and works with a reduced environmental impact throughout their life-cycle when compared to goods, services and works with the same primary function that would otherwise be procured.

Objectives	Actions	Responsibility	Timeframe
To ensure that RBC’s actions (and inactions) do not contribute to global biodiversity decline and increase biodiversity where possible.	To ensure that global biodiversity is considered as part of the Council’s procurement	RBC policy	Ongoing

N) Ongoing review

It will be important to regularly review the BAP to ensure that its actions are being implemented and, if they are not, to identify the reasons why.

As the BAP is intended as an iterative process, the annual review will include space on its agenda for new ideas, and a mechanism whereby those ideas can be gathered and monitored during the course of the year will also be devised. This process might initially be open to council staff only, but could potentially be widened out in order to enable partner organisations, other stakeholders, and the general public to put forward ideas. As such, the BAP would adopt a fairly flexible and expansive character, open to public engagement.

Objectives	Actions	Responsibility	Timeframe
To Regularly review the BAP and its actions	To hold a meeting annually to assess the actions that have been undertaken and update the BAP as appropriate	RBC policy	Once per year in March

Appendix 1 - Figures

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Figure 1 - Phase 1 habitat types in Reading

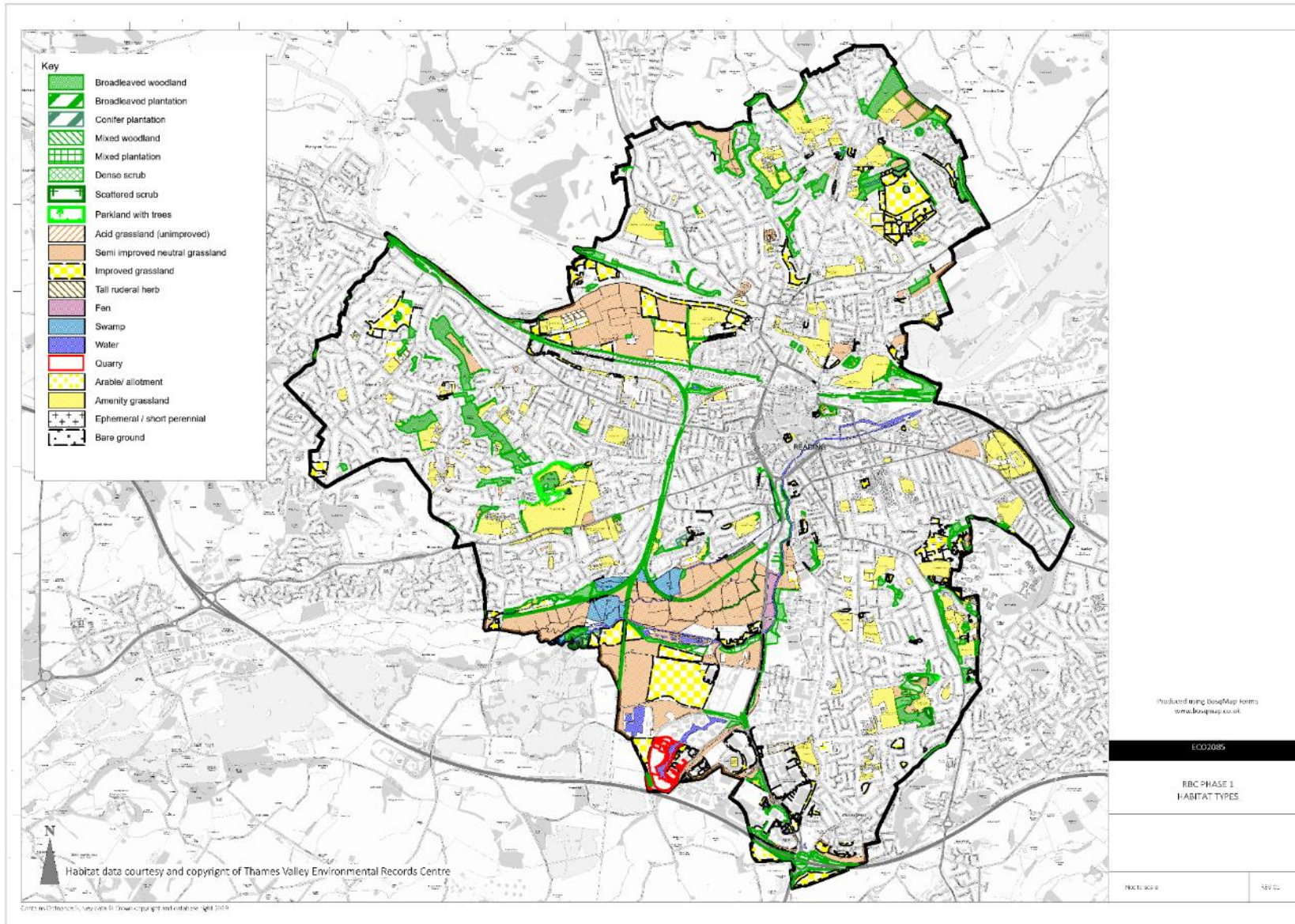


Figure 2 - Designated sites, priority habitats and ancient woodland

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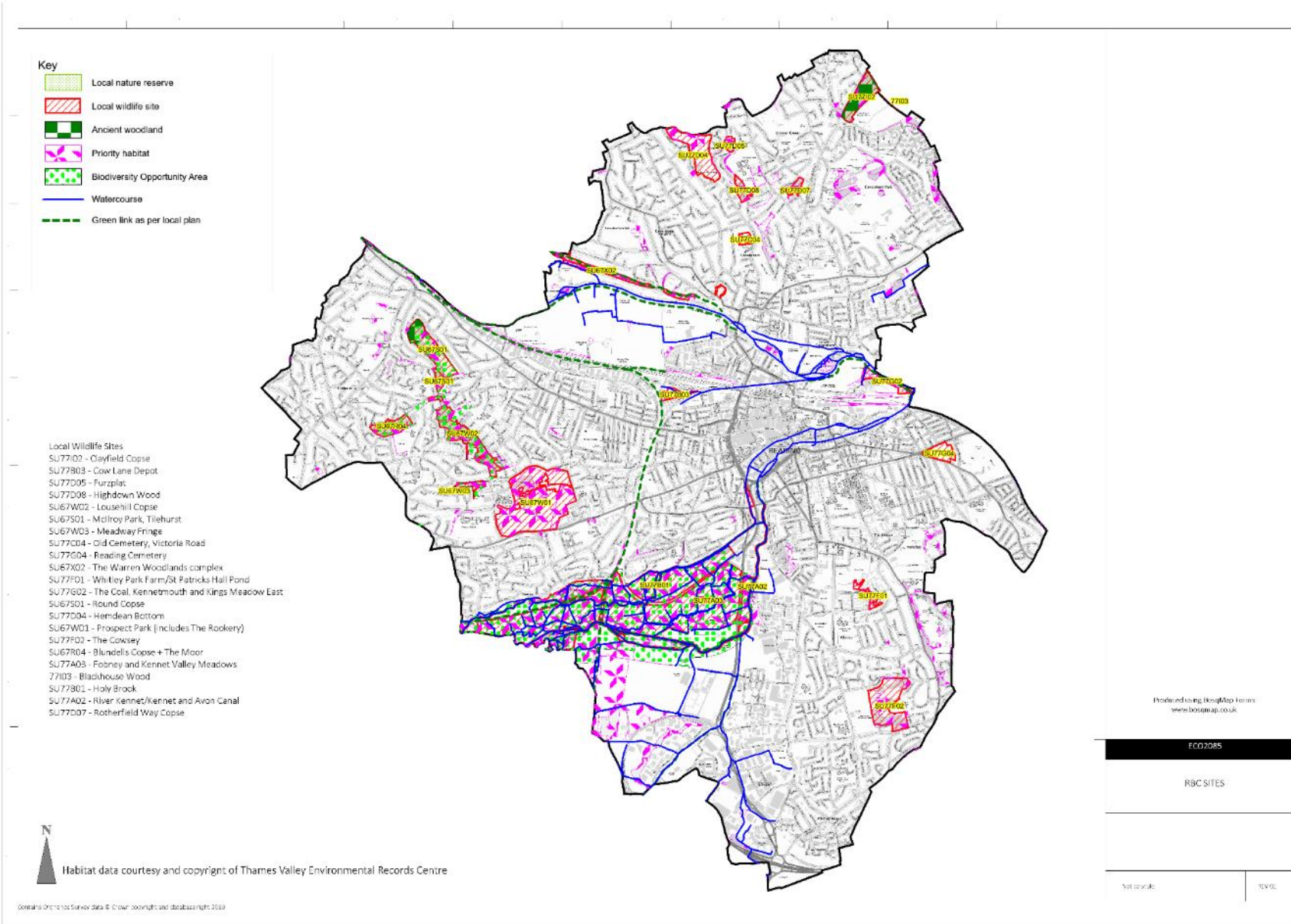


Figure 3 - Rivers

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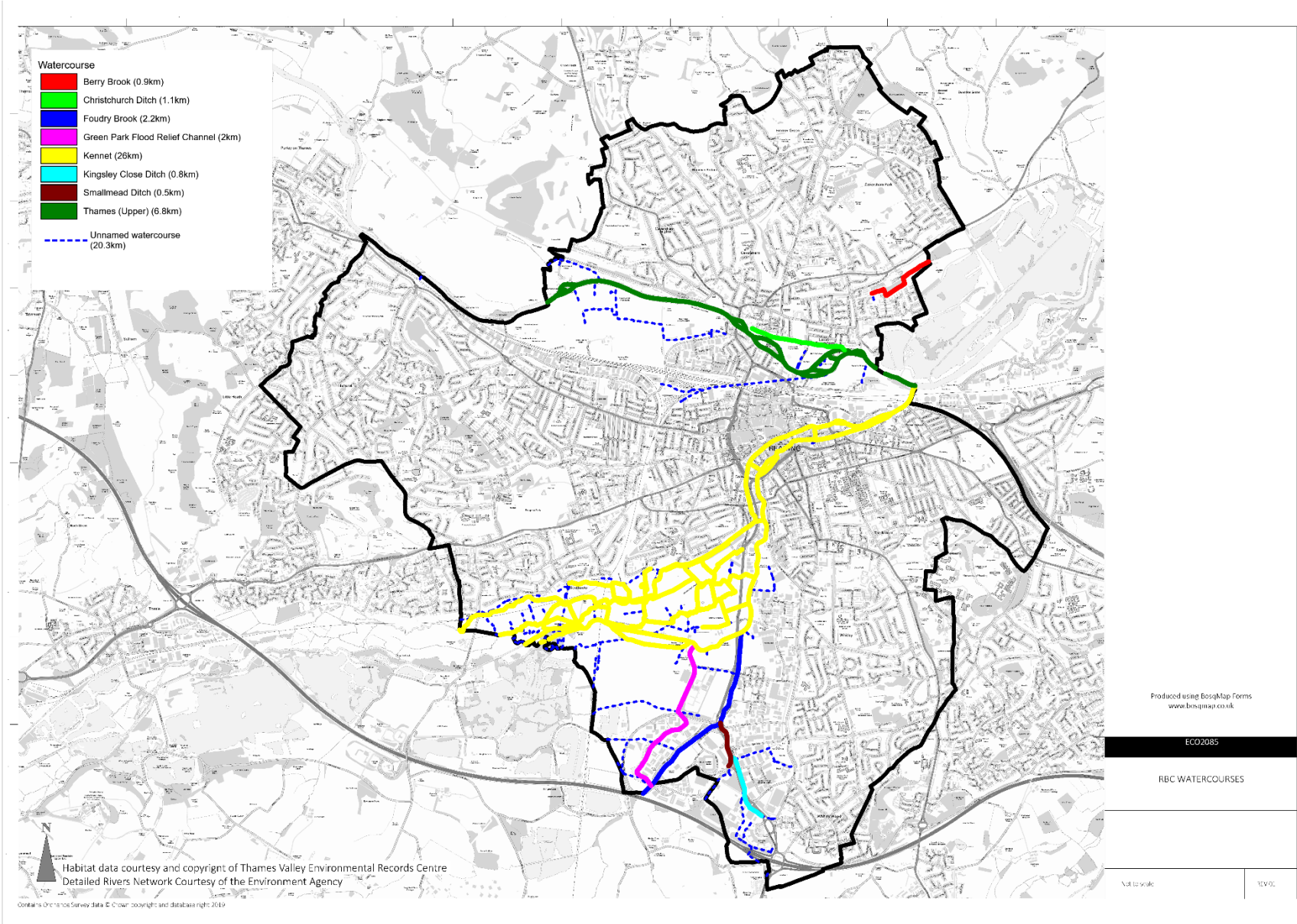


Figure 4 - woodland ownership in Reading

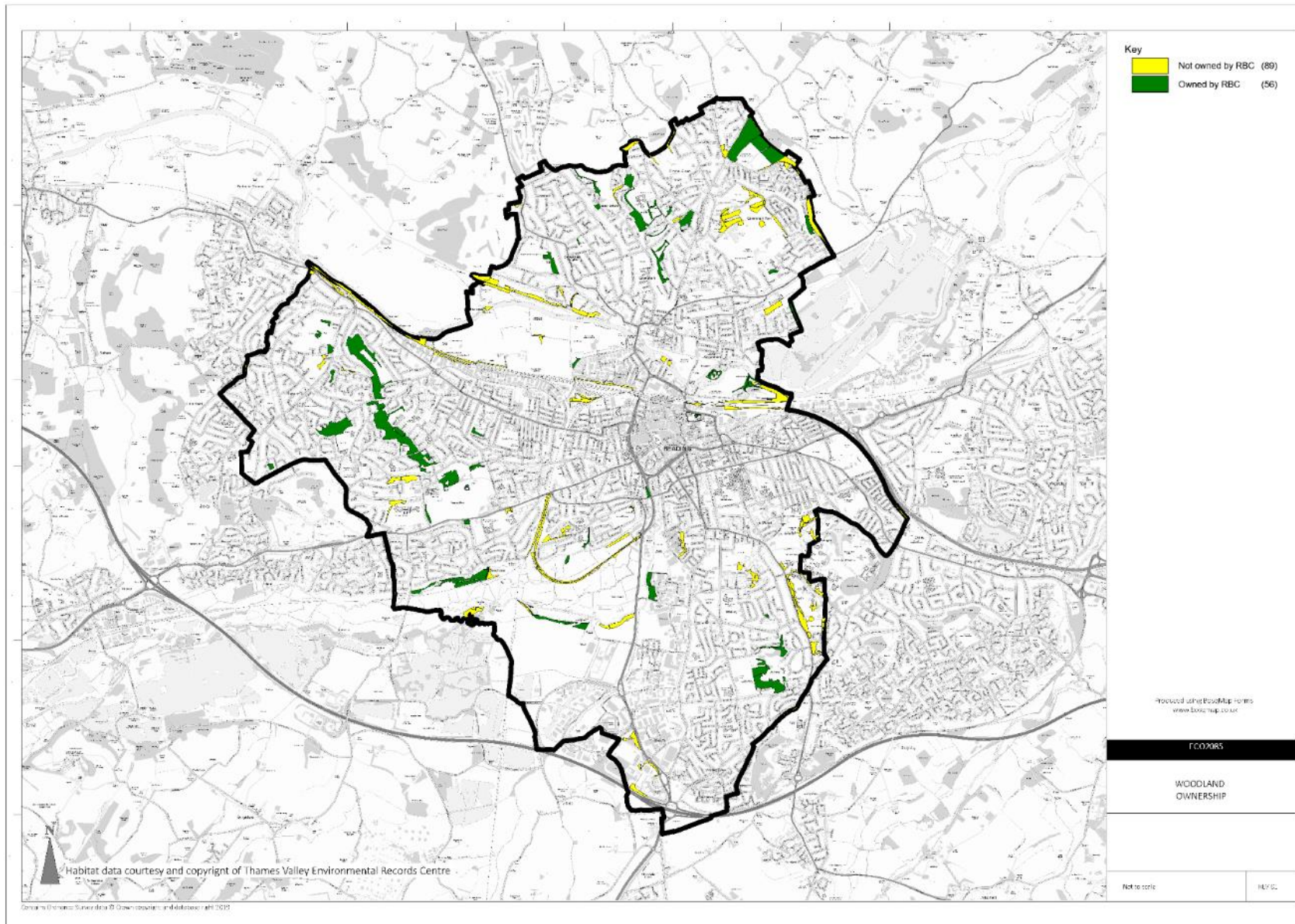
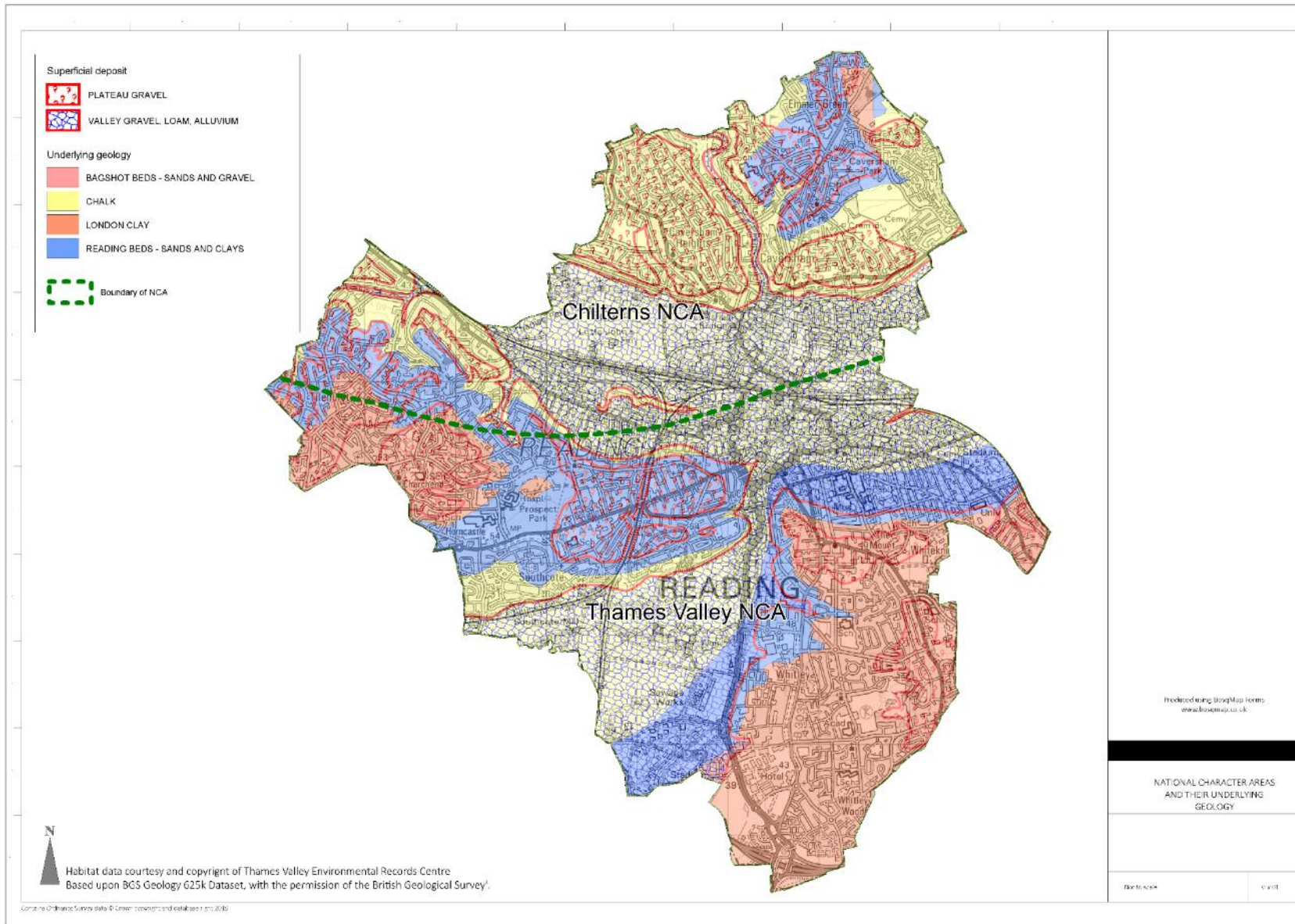


Figure 5 - Geology and National Character Areas



Appendix 2 - Rare and notable species records held by TVERC

Taxon group	Common name	Scientific name	Count of records	Most recent year recorded	European protected status	UK protected status	NERC Act Status	Conservation list status	Note on local status by Berks Ornithological Club (Coloured text = species where targeted conservation action may help the species)	Notes from local entomologist and herpetofauna expert (Mike Turton)
Amphibians	Common Frog	Rana temporaria	74	2016		WACA-Sch5-s9.5a				
Amphibians	Common Toad	Bufo bufo	31	2014		WACA-Sch5-s9.5a	NERC-S41			
Amphibians	Great Crested Newt	Triturus cristatus	2	2017	HabDir-A2np, HabDir-A4	HabReg-Sch2, WACA-Sch5-s9.4b/s9.4c/s9.5a	NERC-S41			
Amphibians	Smooth Newt	Lissotriton vulgaris	16	2016		WACA-Sch5-s9.5a				
Birds	Avocet	Recurvirostra avosetta	2	2012	BirdsDir-A1	WACA-Sch1-p1		Bird-Amber	VAGRANT	
Birds	Bar-tailed Godwit	Limosa lapponica	2	2012	BirdsDir-A1			Bird-Amber	VAGRANT	
Birds	Barn Owl	Tyto alba	5	2010		WACA-Sch1-p1			RESIDENT	
Birds	Bewick's Swan	Cygnus columbianus	2	2010	BirdsDir-A1	WACA-Sch1-p1	NERC-S41	Bird-Amber	VAGRANT	
Birds	Black Redstart	Phoenicurus ochruros	31	2015		WACA-Sch1-p1		Bird-Red	SUMMER VISITOR (LIKELY TO BE BREEDING)	
Birds	Black-headed Gull	Chroicocephalus ridibundus	21	2015				Bird-Amber	RESIDENT	
Birds	Black-tailed Godwit	Limosa limosa	1	2003		WACA-Sch1-p1	NERC-S41	Bird-Red, RL-Global-post2001-NT	MIGRANT	
Birds	Black-throated Diver	Gavia arctica	1	2010	BirdsDir-A1	WACA-Sch1-p1		Bird-Amber	VAGRANT	
Birds	Brambling	Fringilla montifringilla	18	2006		WACA-Sch1-p1			WINTER VISITOR	
Birds	Bullfinch	Pyrrhula pyrrhula	41	2012			NERC-S41	Bird-Amber	RESIDENT	
Birds	Caspian Tern	Hydroprogne caspia	1	2010	BirdsDir-A1				VAGRANT	
Birds	Cetti's Warbler	Cettia cetti	12	2011		WACA-Sch1-p1			RESIDENT	
Birds	Common (Mealy) Redpoll	Acanthis flammea	4	1997				Bird-Amber	WINTER VISITOR	
Birds	Common Crossbill	Loxia curvirostra	1	2005		WACA-Sch1-p1			VAGRANT	

Taxon group	Common name	Scientific name	Count of records	Most recent year recorded	European protected status	UK protected status	NERC Act Status	Conservation list status	Note on local status by Berks Ornithological Club (Coloured text = species where targeted conservation action may help the species)	Notes from local entomologist and herpetofauna expert (Mike Turton)
Birds	Common Gull	Larus canus	4	2012				Bird-Amber	WINTER VISITOR	
Birds	Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos	6	2012				Bird-Amber	MIGRANT	
Birds	Common Scoter	Melanitta nigra	1	1994		WACA-Sch1-p1	NERC-S41	Bird-Red	VAGRANT	
Birds	Common Tern	Sterna hirundo	24	2013	BirdsDir-A1			Bird-Amber	SUMMER VISITOR (LIKELY TO BE BREEDING)	
Birds	Crane	Grus grus	1	2012	BirdsDir-A1			Bird-Amber	VAGRANT	
Birds	Cuckoo	Cuculus canorus	11	2011			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	SUMMER VISITOR (BREEDS ON THE KENNET MEADOWS)	
Birds	Curlew	Numenius arquata	1	1994			NERC-S41	Bird-Red, RL-Global-post2001-NT	VAGRANT	
Birds	Dunlin	Calidris alpina	1	2005				Bird-Amber	MIGRANT	
Birds	Dunnock	Prunella modularis	51	2018			NERC-S41	Bird-Amber	RESIDENT	
Birds	Fieldfare	Turdus pilaris	15	2012		WACA-Sch1-p1		Bird-Red	WINTER VISITOR	
Birds	Firecrest	Regulus ignicapilla	1	1994		WACA-Sch1-p1			RESIDENT	
Birds	Gadwall	Anas strepera	8	2012				Bird-Amber	PREDOMINANTLY WINTER VISITOR BUT DOES BREED IN LOW NUMBERS	
Birds	Glaucous Gull	Larus hyperboreus	1	2005				Bird-Amber	VAGRANT	
Birds	Golden Plover	Pluvialis apricaria	3	2005	BirdsDir-A1				VAGRANT	
Birds	Goldeneye	Bucephala clangula	1	1994		WACA-Sch1-p2		Bird-Amber	WINTER VISITOR	
Birds	Goshawk	Accipiter gentilis	2	2005		WACA-Sch1-p1			MIGRANT	
Birds	Grasshopper Warbler	Locustella naevia	3	1994			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	SUMMER VISITOR (LIKELY TO BE BREEDING)	
Birds	Great Black-backed Gull	Larus marinus	6	2007				Bird-Amber	WINTER VISITOR	
Birds	Green Sandpiper	Tringa ochropus	18	2012		WACA-Sch1-p1		Bird-Amber	WINTER VISITOR	
Birds	Greenshank	Tringa nebularia	3	2007		WACA-Sch1-p1		Bird-Amber	MIGRANT	
Birds	Grey Partridge	Perdix perdix	2	2005			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	VAGRANT	

Taxon group	Common name	Scientific name	Count of records	Most recent year recorded	European protected status	UK protected status	NERC Act Status	Conservation list status	Note on local status by Berks Ornithological Club (Coloured text = species where targeted conservation action may help the species)	Notes from local entomologist and herpetofauna expert (Mike Turton)
Birds	Grey Plover	Pluvialis squatarola	1	2012				Bird-Amber	VAGRANT	
Birds	Grey Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea	41	2015				Bird-Red	RESIDENT	
Birds	Greylag Goose	Anser anser	10	2013				Bird-Amber	RESIDENT	
Birds	Hawfinch	Coccothraustes coccothraustes	2	2005			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	VAGRANT	
Birds	Herring Gull	Larus argentatus	6	2007			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	RESIDENT	
Birds	Hobby	Falco subbuteo	21	2012		WACA-Sch1-p1			SUMMER VISITOR (LIKELY TO BE BREEDING)	
Birds	Honey-buzzard	Pernis apivorus	3	2000	BirdsDir-A1	WACA-Sch1-p1		Bird-Amber	VAGRANT	
Birds	Hoopoe	Upupa epops	8	2005		WACA-Sch1-p1			VAGRANT	
Birds	House Martin	Delichon urbicum	26	2013				Bird-Amber	SUMMER VISITOR BREEDS IN SEVERAL PLACES SUCH AS CRESCENT ROAD	
Birds	House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	45	2017			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	RESIDENT	
Birds	Iceland Gull	Larus glaucoides	3	2004				Bird-Amber	VAGRANT	
Birds	Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus	30	2012				Bird-Amber	RESIDENT	
Birds	Kingfisher	Alcedo atthis	37	2019	BirdsDir-A1	WACA-Sch1-p1		Bird-Amber	RESIDENT	
Birds	Knot	Calidris canutus	1	2004				Bird-Amber	VAGRANT	
Birds	Lapwing	Vanellus vanellus	11	2012			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	RESIDENT	
Birds	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Larus fuscus	4	2012				Bird-Amber	RESIDENT	
Birds	Lesser Redpoll	Acanthis cabaret	7	2004			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	WINTER VISITOR	
Birds	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Dendrocopos minor	11	2012			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	RESIDENT	
Birds	Linnet	Linaria cannabina	8	2007			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	RESIDENT	
Birds	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta	35	2012	BirdsDir-A1				RESIDENT	
Birds	Little Ringed Plover	Charadrius dubius	16	2012		WACA-Sch1-p1			SUMMER VISITOR (LIKELY TO BE BREEDING)	
Birds	Little owl	Athene noctua							BREEDS IN OR AROUND WHITEKNIGHTS CAMPUS AND FOBNEY ISLAND.	

Taxon group	Common name	Scientific name	Count of records	Most recent year recorded	European protected status	UK protected status	NERC Act Status	Conservation list status	Note on local status by Berks Ornithological Club (Coloured text = species where targeted conservation action may help the species)	Notes from local entomologist and herpetofauna expert (Mike Turton)
									RECORD FROM BOC. NOT YET REPORTED TO TVERC.	
Birds	Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	57	2015				Bird-Amber	RESIDENT	
Birds	Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus	1	2011	BirdsDir-A1	WACA-Sch1-p1		Bird-Red, Bird-Amber	VAGRANT	
Birds	Marsh Tit	Poecile palustris	11	2012			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	RESIDENT	
Birds	Meadow Pipit	Anthus pratensis	5	2012				Bird-Amber	WINTER VISITOR	
Birds	Mediterranean Gull	Larus melanocephalus	6	2004	BirdsDir-A1	WACA-Sch1-p1		Bird-Amber	RESIDENT (RARE)	
Birds	Merlin	Falco columbarius	4	2005	BirdsDir-A1	WACA-Sch1-p1		Bird-Red	VAGRANT	
Birds	Mistle Thrush	Turdus viscivorus	36	2016				Bird-Red	RESIDENT	
Birds	Montagu's Harrier	Circus pygargus	1	2004	BirdsDir-A1	WACA-Sch1-p1		Bird-Amber	VAGRANT	
Birds	Mute Swan	Cygnus olor	29	2017				Bird-Amber	RESIDENT	
Birds	Nightingale	Luscinia megarhynchos	6	2005				Bird-Red	SUMMER VISITOR (LIKELY TO BE BREEDING)	
Birds	Osprey	Pandion haliaetus	5	2011	BirdsDir-A1	WACA-Sch1-p1		Bird-Amber	VAGRANT	
Birds	Oystercatcher	Haematopus ostralegus	2	2010				Bird-Amber	SUMMER VISITOR (LIKELY TO BE BREEDING)	
Birds	Peregrine	Falco peregrinus	34	2019	BirdsDir-A1	WACA-Sch1-p1			RESIDENT	
Birds	Pied Flycatcher	Ficedula hypoleuca	5	2004				Bird-Red	VAGRANT	
Birds	Pintail	Anas acuta	31	2005		WACA-Sch1-p2		Bird-Amber	WINTER VISITOR	
Birds	Pochard	Aythya ferina	2	2007				Bird-Red	WINTER VISITOR	
Birds	Red Kite	Milvus milvus	132	2017	BirdsDir-A1	WACA-Sch1-p1		RL-Global-post2001-NT	RESIDENT	
Birds	Redshank	Tringa totanus	3	2012				Bird-Amber	SUMMER VISITOR (HAS BRED IN THE PAST MAY BREED AGAIN WHEN FOBNEY MEADOW IS RE-WETTED)	
Birds	Redstart	Phoenicurus phoenicurus	17	2012				Bird-Amber	MIGRANT	
Birds	Redwing	Turdus iliacus	32	2012		WACA-Sch1-p1		Bird-Red	WINTER VISITOR	

Taxon group	Common name	Scientific name	Count of records	Most recent year recorded	European protected status	UK protected status	NERC Act Status	Conservation list status	Note on local status by Berks Ornithological Club (Coloured text = species where targeted conservation action may help the species)	Notes from local entomologist and herpetofauna expert (Mike Turton)
Birds	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	15	2012			NERC-S41	Bird-Amber	RESIDENT	
Birds	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	1	2004				Bird-Red, Bird-Amber	SUMMER VISITOR (HAS BRED WHEN SUITABLE HABITAT IS AVAILABLE. THERE IS NO SUITABLE HABITAT AT PRESENT)	
Birds	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>	3	2010	BirdsDir-A1	WACA-Sch1-p1		Bird-Red	MIGRANT	
Birds	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	1	2012				Bird-Amber	MIGRANT	
Birds	Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	1	2003	BirdsDir-A1			Bird-Amber	MIGRANT	
Birds	Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>	11	2010		WACA-Sch1-p1	NERC-S41	Bird-Red	VAGRANT	
Birds	Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	2	2003				Bird-Red	VAGRANT	
Birds	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	2	2011				Bird-Amber	RESIDENT	
Birds	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	2	2010	BirdsDir-A1			Bird-Amber	WINTER VISITOR	
Birds	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	5	2003				Bird-Amber	WINTER VISITOR	
Birds	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	12	2012			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	RESIDENT	
Birds	Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	12	2014				Bird-Amber	WINTER VISITOR	
Birds	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	123	2016			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	RESIDENT	
Birds	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	8	2005			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	SUMMER VISITOR	
Birds	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	1	1994				Bird-Amber	VAGRANT	
Birds	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	50	2015			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	RESIDENT	
Birds	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	13	2012				Bird-Amber	RESIDENT	
Birds	Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	249	2018				Bird-Amber	SUMMER VISITOR. BREEDS AT MANY SITES BUT NUMBERS APPEAR TO BE DECLINING	
Birds	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	9	2009				Bird-Amber	RESIDENT	
Birds	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	9	2012				Bird-Amber	WINTER VISITOR	
Birds	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	1	1994			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	EXTINCT	
Birds	Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	2	2011			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	EXTINCT	

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Birds	Whimbrel	Numenius phaeopus	3	2010		WACA-Sch1-p1		Bird-Red	MIGRANT	
Birds	Whinchat	Saxicola rubetra	4	2011				Bird-Red	MIGRANT	
Birds	White-fronted Goose	Anser albifrons	2	2011				Bird-Red	VAGRANT	
Birds	Wigeon	Anas penelope	3	2010				Bird-Amber	WINTER VISITOR	
Birds	Willow Warbler	Phylloscopus trochilus	35	2009				Bird-Amber	MIGRANT	
Birds	Wood Sandpiper	Tringa glareola	2	2010	BirdsDir-A1	WACA-Sch1-p1		Bird-Amber	MIGRANT	
Birds	Wood Warbler	Phylloscopus sibilatrix	2	2009			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	MIGRANT	
Birds	Woodcock	Scolopax rusticola	3	2012				Bird-Red	WINTER VISITOR	
Birds	Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava	5	2005			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	MIGRANT	
Birds	Yellow-legged Gull	Larus michahellis	5	2010				Bird-Amber	WINTER VISITOR	
Birds	Yellowhammer	Emberiza citrinella	6	2005			NERC-S41	Bird-Red	VAGRANT	
Fish - Bony	Atlantic Salmon	Salmo salar	5	2004	HabDir-A2np, HabDir-A5	HabReg-Sch4	NERC-S41			
Fish - Bony	Barbel	Barbus barbus	35	2016	HabDir-A5	HabReg-Sch4				
Fish - Bony	Brown Trout	Salmo trutta subsp. fario	5	2014			NERC-S41			
Fish - Bony	Brown/Sea Trout	Salmo trutta	3	2016			NERC-S41			
Fish - Bony	Bullhead	Cottus gobio	7	2011	HabDir-A2np					
Fish - Bony	European Eel	Anguilla anguilla	59	2016			NERC-S41	RL-Global-post2001-CR		
Fish - Jawless	Brook Lamprey	Lampetra planeri	1	1994	HabDir-A2np					
Higher Plants - Ferns	Maidenhair Fern	Adiantum capillus-veneris	1	1970				Status-NS		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Alexanders	Smyrnum olusatrum	1	2015				Oxon-Scarce		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Annual Beard-grass	Polypogon monspeliensis	1	2007				Status-NS		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Bitter-vetch	Lathyrus linifolius	1	1982				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Bluebell	Hyacinthoides non-scripta	86	2018		WACA-Sch8				

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Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Bur Medick	<i>Medicago minima</i>	1	1994				Status-NS, RL-Eng-post2001-VU, RL-GB-post2001-VU		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Butcher's-broom	<i>Ruscus aculeatus</i>	10	2010	HabDir-A5					
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Carlina Thistle	<i>Carlina vulgaris</i>	1	1986				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Cat-mint	<i>Nepeta cataria</i>	1	1997				RL-Eng-post2001-VU, RL-GB-post2001-VU		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Chamomile	<i>Chamaemelum nobile</i>	1	1982			NERC-S41	RL-Eng-post2001-VU, RL-GB-post2001-VU		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Chicory	<i>Cichorium intybus</i>	8	2017				RL-Eng-post2001-VU		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Chives	<i>Allium schoenoprasum</i>	3	1986				Status-NS		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Common Cudweed	<i>Filago vulgaris</i>	1	1986				RL-Eng-post2001-NT, RL-GB-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Common Rock-rose	<i>Helianthemum nummularium</i>	1	1986				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Common Valerian	<i>Valeriana officinalis</i>	11	2013				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Corn Marigold	<i>Glebionis segetum</i>	1	2008				RL-Eng-post2001-VU, RL-GB-post2001-VU		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Corn Mint	<i>Mentha arvensis</i>	5	2015				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Crosswort	<i>Cruciata laevipes</i>	2	2009				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Dittander	<i>Lepidium latifolium</i>	1	1994				Status-NS		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Dwarf Spurge	<i>Euphorbia exigua</i>	1	2004				RL-Eng-post2001-VU, RL-GB-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	English Whitebeam	<i>Sorbus anglica</i>	2	2018				Status-NR, RL-Eng-post2001-		

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								VU, RL-GB-post2001-NT, RL-Global-post94-VU		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Field Mouse-ear	Cerastium arvense	1	1986				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Field Scabious	Knautia arvensis	9	2011				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Fritillary	Fritillaria meleagris	1	2016				Status-NS		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Frogbit	Hydrocharis morsus-ranae	1	1986				RL-Eng-post2001-VU, RL-GB-post2001-VU		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Galingale	Cyperus longus	1	2009				Status-NS, RL-Eng-post2001-NT, RL-GB-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Goldenrod	Solidago virgaurea	5	2012				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Good-King-Henry	Chenopodium bonus-henricus	3	1998				RL-Eng-post2001-VU, RL-GB-post2001-VU		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Grape-hyacinth	Muscari neglectum	3	2014			NERC-S41	Status-NR, RL-GB-post2001-VU		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Heath Cudweed	Gnaphalium sylvaticum	1	1984				RL-Eng-post2001-EN, RL-GB-post2001-EN		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Heath Speedwell	Veronica officinalis	4	1998				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Heather	Calluna vulgaris	1	1998				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Hoary Plantain	Plantago media	8	2004				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Hound's-tongue	Cynoglossum officinale	1	2015				RL-Eng-post2001-NT, RL-GB-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Lesser Spearwort	Ranunculus flammula	6	2006				RL-Eng-post2001-VU		

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Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Marsh Arrowgrass	Triglochin palustre	1	1986				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Marsh Cinquefoil	Potentilla palustris	1	1982				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Marsh Ragwort	Senecio aquaticus	6	2005				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Marsh Speedwell	Veronica scutellata	1	2005				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Marsh Valerian	Valeriana dioica	5	2006				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Mountain Currant	Ribes alpinum	1	2004				Status-NS		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Narrow-leaved Bitter-cress	Cardamine impatiens	1	1986				Status-NS, RL-GB-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Quaking-grass	Briza media	3	2010				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Ragged-Robin	Silene flos-cuculi	13	2017				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Sainfoin	Onobrychis viciifolia	1	1986				RL-Eng-post2001-VU, RL-GB-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Sanicle	Sanicula europaea	21	2018				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Slender Parsley-piert	Aphanes australis	1	2015				Oxon-Scarce		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Stinking Chamomile	Anthemis cotula	1	2007				RL-Eng-post2001-VU, RL-GB-post2001-VU		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Stinking Hellebore	Helleborus foetidus	3	2008				Status-NS		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Summer Snowflake	Leucojum aestivum subsp. aestivum	7	2019				Status-NS		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Tormentil	Potentilla erecta	3	2008				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Treacle-mustard	Erysimum cheiranthoides	1	1994				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Velvet Bent	Agrostis canina	2	1986				Oxon-Scarce		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Water-violet	Hottonia palustris	2	1986				RL-Eng-post2001-VU		

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Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	White Helleborine	Cephalanthera damasonium	1	2004			NERC-S41	RL-Eng-post2001-VU, RL-GB-post2001-VU		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Whorled Water-milfoil	Myriophyllum verticillatum	1	1985				RL-Eng-post2001-NT, RL-GB-post2001-VU		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Wild Pansy	Viola tricolor	1	1985				RL-Eng-post2001-NT, RL-GB-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Wild Strawberry	Fragaria vesca	21	2018				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	Wood-sorrel	Oxalis acetosella	8	2018				RL-Eng-post2001-NT		
Invertebrates - Ants, Bees, Sawflies & Wasps	An Ant, Bee, Sawfly or Wasp	Dolichovespula (Dolichovespula) media	1	1993				Notable-A		
Invertebrates - Ants, Bees, Sawflies & Wasps	Brown Tree Ant	Lasius brunneus	4	1993				Notable-A		Unconfirmed record. Nearest confirmed record on iRecord is Winnersh
Invertebrates - Ants, Bees, Sawflies & Wasps	Meadow Ant	Formica pratensis	1	1998			NERC-S41	RL-GB-pre94-EX, RL-Global-post94-NT		Unconfirmed record. Nearest confirmed record on iRecord is Winnersh
Invertebrates - Ants, Bees, Sawflies & Wasps	Red-girdled Mining Bee	Andrena (Poecilandrena) labiata	1	1997				Notable-A		Possible misidentification as this species is probably now extinct on the UK mainland.

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Invertebrates - Ants, Bees, Sawflies & Wasps	Red-shanked Carder-bee	Bombus (Thoracobombus) ruderarius	4	1997			NERC-S41			More recent records on iRecord - 2016 & 2019
Invertebrates - Ants, Bees, Sawflies & Wasps	Red-tailed (Hill) Cuckoo Bee	Bombus (Psithyrus) rupestris	1	2013				Notable-B		Unconfirmed - possible but very similar to red-tailed bumble bee
Invertebrates - Ants, Bees, Sawflies & Wasps	Sharp-collared Furrow Bee	Lasioglossum (Evylaeus) malachurum	1	2013				Notable-B		ID confirmed
Invertebrates - Beetles	A Beetle	Tachyporus formosus	23	2015				Notable-A		Record from experienced recorder and accepted, so this is a valid record.
Invertebrates - Beetles	Adonis' Ladybird	Hippodamia (Adonia) variegata	1	2013				Notable-B		Unconfirmed record. Nearest confirmed record on iRecord is Winnersh
Invertebrates - Beetles	Large Fruit Bark Beetle	Scolytus mali	1	2003				Notable-B		Record from experienced recorder and accepted, so this is a valid record.
Invertebrates - Beetles	Stag Beetle	Lucanus cervus	742	2017	HabDir-A2np	WACA-Sch5-s9.5a	NERC-S41	Notable-B		Very difficult to split out except by dissection. The only Berks record on NBN is from Wokingham
Invertebrates - Butterflies	Chalk Hill Blue	Polyommatus coridon	1	1992		WACA-Sch5-s9.5a		RL-GB-post2001-NT		
Invertebrates - Butterflies	Purple Emperor	Apatura iris	1	1991		WACA-Sch5-s9.5a		RL-GB-post2001-NT		Unconfirmed record. There

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										are a few records from the Oxfordshire side of the Thames between Mapledurham and Pangbourne
Invertebrates - Butterflies	Small Blue	Cupido minimus	1	1995		WACA-Sch5-s9.5a	NERC-S41	RL-GB-post2001-NT		Several records on NBN just outside Reading BC in Earley.
Invertebrates - Butterflies	Small Heath	Coenonympha pamphilus	7	2014			NERC-S41	RL-GB-post2001-NT		UKBMS records adjacent to RBC area
Invertebrates - Butterflies	Wall	Lasiommata megera	4	1992			NERC-S41	RL-GB-post2001-NT		NBN rec for 2014. UKBMS record
Invertebrates - Butterflies	White-letter Hairstreak	Satyrrium w-album	2	1993		WACA-Sch5-s9.5a	NERC-S41	RL-GB-post2001-EN		No records from RBC area. 1 from Hurst
Invertebrates - Caddis Flies	A Caddis Fly	Leptocerus lusitanicus	3	2014				RL-GB-pre94-VU		1 record from university campus. Possibly include planting of disease-resistant elms to encourage this species.
Invertebrates - Dragonflies & Damselflies	Common Club-tail	Gomphus vulgatissimus	24	2017				RL-GB-post2001-NT		NBN 1984. Records from Pangbourne are nearest on iRecord

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Invertebrates - Dragonflies & Damselflies	Variable Damselfly	Coenagrion pulchellum	1	2017				RL-GB-post2001-NT		Declining on the River Thames and elsewhere. Needs banks and riverside walls to climb up and emerge. Need to bear this in mind with Thames FAS.
Invertebrates - Mayflies	Southern Iron Blue	Baetis niger	1	1994			NERC-S41			All records close to the population in Burghfield, so probably wanderers from there.
Invertebrates - Molluscs	Depressed (or Compressed) River Mussel	Pseudanodonta complanata	1	2013			NERC-S41	RL-Global-post2001-VU		Unconfirmed record.
Invertebrates - Molluscs	Fine-lined Pea Mussel	Pisidium tenuilineatum	1	2006			NERC-S41			NBN 2013
Invertebrates - Molluscs	Freshwater Pearl Mussel	Margaritifera (Margaritifera) margaritifera	1	1985	HabDir-A2np, HabDir-A5	WACA-Sch5-s9.1k/s9.1t/s9.2/s9.4a/s9.4b/s9.4c/s9.5a	NERC-S41	RL-GB-post2001-CR, RL-Global-post94-EN		NBN 2006.
Invertebrates - Molluscs	Thames Ramshorn	Gyraulus (Gyraulus) acronicus	2	1994			NERC-S41	RL-GB-post2001-VU		
Invertebrates - Moths	A Moth	Mecyna flavalis subsp. flaviculalis	3	1993				RL-GB-pre94-VU		NBN 1995
Invertebrates - Moths	Beaded Chestnut	Agrochola lychnidis	8	2009			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Blood-vein	Timandra comae	14	2018			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Brindled Beauty	Lycia hirtaria	32	2007			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Brown-spot Pinion	Agrochola litura	1	1996			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Buff Ermine	Spilosoma lutea	45	2018			NERC-S41			

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Invertebrates - Moths	Bulrush Veneer	Calamotropha paludella	1	1996				Notable-B		
Invertebrates - Moths	Centre-barred Sallow	Atethmia centrago	6	2008			NERC-S41			Unconfirmed. No Reading records - nearest records Mere oak Park and Winnersh.
Invertebrates - Moths	Cinnabar	Tyria jacobaeae	43	2018			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Dark-barred Twin-spot Carpet	Xanthorhoe ferrugata	6	2004			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Deep-brown Dart	Aporophyla lutulenta	1	2005			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Dot Moth	Melanchra persicariae	34	2009			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Dusky Brocade	Apamea remissa	8	2005			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Dusky Thorn	Ennomos fuscantaria	6	2008			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Garden Tiger	Arctia caja	3	2008			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Ghost Moth	Hepialus humuli	1	1981			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Green-brindled Crescent	Allophyes oxyacanthae	1	2009			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Grey Dagger	Acronicta psi	33	1996			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Knot Grass	Acronicta rumicis	8	2009			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Lackey	Malacosoma neustria	4	2004			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Large Nutmeg	Apamea anceps	10	2004			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Minor Shoulder-knot	Brachylochia viminalis	1	2004			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Mottled Rustic	Caradrina morpheus	47	2009			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Mouse Moth	Amphipyra tragopoginis	2	2004			NERC-S41			

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Invertebrates - Moths	Mullein Wave	Scopula marginepunctata	1	2009			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Oak Hook-tip	Watsonalla binaria	5	2005			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Olive Crescent	Trisateles emortualis	1	1987			NERC-S41	RL-GB-pre94-R		
Invertebrates - Moths	Powdered Quaker	Orthosia gracilis	11	2009			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Rosy Minor	Litoligia literosa	3	1981			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Rosy Rustic	Hydraecia micacea	2	2004			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Rustic	Hoplodrina blanda	32	2009			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Sallow	Cirrhia icteritia	1	1997			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	September Thorn	Ennomos erosaria	2	2008			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Shaded Broad-bar	Scotopteryx chenopodiata	3	1997			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Shoulder-striped Wainscot	Leucania comma	6	2009			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Small Emerald	Hemistola chrysoprasaria	3	2004			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Small Phoenix	Ecliptopera silaceata	1	1981			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Small Square-spot	Diarsia rubi	31	2008			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Spinach	Eulithis mellinata	6	1996			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	Sprawler	Asteroscopus sphinx	1	2011			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	V-Moth	Macaria wauaria	6	1981			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - Moths	White Ermine	Spilosoma lubricipeda	18	2018			NERC-S41			
Invertebrates - True Bugs	A True Bug	Aquarius paludum	4	2007				Notable-B		
Invertebrates - True Flies	A True Fly	Helina parcepilosa	3	2013				RL-GB-pre94-VU		Unconfirmed
Invertebrates - True Flies	Hornet Robberfly	Asilus crabroniformis	2	1999			NERC-S41	Notable		Valid record.

Taxon group	Common name	Scientific name	Count of records	Most recent year recorded	European protected status	UK protected status	NERC Act Status	Conservation list status	Note on local status by Berks Ornithological Club (Coloured text = species where targeted conservation action may help the species)	Notes from local entomologist and herpetofauna expert (Mike Turton)
Mammals - Terrestrial (bats)	Brown Long-eared Bat	Plecotus auritus	61	2017	HabDir-A4	HabReg-Sch2, WACA-Sch5-s9.4b/s9.4c/s9.5a/s9.5b	NERC-S41			Unconfirmed. Possible - nearest confirmed iRecord records are in Sonning.
Mammals - Terrestrial (bats)	Common Pipistrelle	Pipistrellus pipistrellus	391	2018	HabDir-A4	HabReg-Sch2, WACA-Sch5-s9.4b/s9.4c/s9.5a/s9.5b				
Mammals - Terrestrial (bats)	Daubenton's Bat	Myotis daubentonii	43	2016	HabDir-A4	HabReg-Sch2, WACA-Sch5-s9.4b/s9.4c/s9.5a/s9.5b				
Mammals - Terrestrial (bats)	Lesser Noctule	Nyctalus leisleri	7	2017	HabDir-A4	HabReg-Sch2, WACA-Sch5-s9.4b/s9.4c/s9.5a/s9.5b				
Mammals - Terrestrial (bats)	Long-eared Bat species	Plecotus	29	2018	HabDir-A4	HabReg-Sch2, WACA-Sch5-s9.4b/s9.4c/s9.5a/s9.5b	NERC-S41			
Mammals - Terrestrial (bats)	Nathusius's Pipistrelle	Pipistrellus nathusii	7	2018	HabDir-A4	HabReg-Sch2, WACA-Sch5-s9.4b/s9.4c/s9.5a/s9.5b				
Mammals - Terrestrial (bats)	Natterer's Bat	Myotis nattereri	4	2017	HabDir-A4	HabReg-Sch2, WACA-Sch5-s9.4b/s9.4c/s9.5a/s9.5b				
Mammals - Terrestrial (bats)	Noctule Bat	Nyctalus noctula	166	2018	HabDir-A4	HabReg-Sch2, WACA-Sch5-s9.4b/s9.4c/s9.5a/s9.5b	NERC-S41			
Mammals - Terrestrial (bats)	Nyctalus Bat species	Nyctalus	2	2013	HabDir-A4	HabReg-Sch2, WACA-Sch5-s9.4b/s9.4c/s9.5a/s9.5b	NERC-S41			
Mammals - Terrestrial (bats)	Serotine	Eptesicus serotinus	13	2018	HabDir-A4	HabReg-Sch2, WACA-Sch5-s9.4b/s9.4c/s9.5a/s9.5b				

Taxon group	Common name	Scientific name	Count of records	Most recent year recorded	European protected status	UK protected status	NERC Act Status	Conservation list status	Note on local status by Berks Ornithological Club (Coloured text = species where targeted conservation action may help the species)	Notes from local entomologist and herpetofauna expert (Mike Turton)
Mammals - Terrestrial (bats)	Soprano Pipistrelle	Pipistrellus pygmaeus	292	2018	HabDir-A4	HabReg-Sch2, WACA-Sch5-s9.4b/s9.4c/s9.5a/s9.5b	NERC-S41			
Mammals - Terrestrial (bats)	Whiskered Bat	Myotis mystacinus	1	2011	HabDir-A4	HabReg-Sch2, WACA-Sch5-s9.4b/s9.4c/s9.5a/s9.5b				
Mammals - Terrestrial (excl. bats)	Brown Hare	Lepus europaeus	3	1999			NERC-S41			
Mammals - Terrestrial (excl. bats)	Eurasian Badger	Meles meles	87	2018		Badgers-1992				
Mammals - Terrestrial (excl. bats)	European Otter	Lutra lutra	8	2018	HabDir-A2np, HabDir-A4	HabReg-Sch2, WACA-Sch5-s9.4b/s9.4c/s9.5a	NERC-S41	RL-Global-post2001-NT		
Mammals - Terrestrial (excl. bats)	European Water Vole	Arvicola amphibius	21	2009		WACA-Sch5-s9.4a/s9.4b/s9.4c	NERC-S41			
Mammals - Terrestrial (excl. bats)	Polecat	Mustela putorius	2	2005	HabDir-A5	HabReg-Sch4	NERC-S41			
Mammals - Terrestrial (excl. bats)	West European Hedgehog	Erinaceus europaeus	76	2019			NERC-S41			
Reptiles	Adder	Vipera berus	1	2008		WACA-Sch5-s9.1k/s9.5a	NERC-S41			
Reptiles	Common Lizard	Zootoca vivipara	1	2010		WACA-Sch5-s9.1k/s9.5a	NERC-S41			This is a possible misidentification as the species is now very rare in Berkshire and Oxfordshire
Reptiles	Grass Snake	Natrix helvetica	33	2016		WACA-Sch5-s9.1k/s9.5a	NERC-S41			
Reptiles	Slow-worm	Anguis fragilis	80	2016		WACA-Sch5-s9.1k/s9.5a	NERC-S41			

Appendix 3 - Policy and legislation

A summary of key policy and legislation is provided below.

The Rio Convention (Convention on Biological Diversity).

In 1992, at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the UK, along with 168 other countries made a formal commitment to work together to protect the environment. Amongst other treaties the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was signed. This had three main goals: the conservation of biodiversity; the sustainable use of its components; and the equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources.

For the first time in international law the treaty recognised that the conservation of biological diversity is ‘a common concern of humankind’. The CBD is one of the key drivers of biodiversity conservation worldwide.

In 2010, in Nagoya, Aichi Province, Japan, the signatories to the CBD published a Strategic Plan for Biodiversity for the years 2011-2020. This included five strategic goals and 20 targets referred to as the ‘Aichi Targets’.

The next conference will be held in 2020 in Italy.

The 2001 European Union Summit

At the 2001 European Union Summit in Gothenburg, European leaders made a commitment to halt biodiversity loss by 2010.

The 2010 target was not met. In March 2010 the EU made a new commitment to

“Halt the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services in the EU by 2020, and restore them in so far as feasible, while stepping up the EU contribution to averting global biodiversity loss.”

The last review, in 2015, concluded that:

“Overall, biodiversity loss and the degradation of ecosystem services in the EU have continued since the EU 2010 biodiversity baseline, as confirmed by the 2015 European environment - state and outlook report. This is consistent with global trends and has serious implications for the capacity of biodiversity to meet human needs in the future. While many local successes demonstrate that action on the ground delivers positive outcomes, these examples need to be scaled up to have a measurable impact on the overall negative trends.”

The strategy will be reviewed again in 2020.

Key directives

There are three EU Directives that are key to the conservation of biodiversity in Europe. As with all EU directives, have been transposed into national law. After the UK leaves the EU it is likely that in the UK the directives will continue to apply unless or until the acts which have transposed them have been revoked.

The Birds Directive

First adopted in 1979 The Birds Directive aims to protect all of the 500 wild bird species naturally occurring in the European Union. Member states have a duty to maintain populations of all wild birds species, designate Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for the rarest and most vulnerable species, restrict the sale and keeping of wild birds, and restrict the hunting and killing of wild birds.

The Habitats Directive

The Habitats Directive promotes the maintenance of biodiversity. Member states are required to:

- Maintain or restore European protected habitats and species listed in the directive at a favourable conservation status
- Contribute to a coherent European ecological network of protected sites by designating Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for habitats listed on Annex I and for species listed on Annex II of the directive.
- Ensure conservation measures are in place to appropriately manage SACs and ensure appropriate assessment of plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on the integrity of an SAC. Projects may still be permitted if there are no alternatives, and there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest.
- Undertake surveillance of habitats and species
- Ensure strict protection of species listed on Annex IV
- Report on the implementation of the Directive every six years, including assessing the conservation status of species and habitats listed on the Annexes to the Directive.

The NATURA 2000 Network

This is a coherent European ecological network of protected sites and is made up of SACs and SPAs make up the Natura 2000 network.

Water Framework Directive

The Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC is an EU directive which commits European Union member states to achieve good ecological and chemical status of all water bodies (including marine waters up to one nautical mile from shore) by 2015. Most waterbodies did not meet the target and the deadline for achieving it has been extended.

The EIA Directive

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive (2014/52/EU), ensure that all projects, above a certain threshold, are assessed for their potential impacts on the environment, through a process known as Environmental Impact Assessment. It is transposed into UK law through regulations such as The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (the '2017 Regulations').

United Kingdom

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan, first published in 1994, was the UK Government's response to signing the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The plan set out a programme for conserving the UK's biodiversity and led to the production of 436 action plans for many of the UK's most threatened species and habitats. The UK BAP was superseded by the 'UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework' in July 2012 to reflect the devolution in the UK.

The UK BAP priority list was last reviewed in 2007 and includes 1,150 species and 65 habitats that are a priority for conservation actions. It has not been reviewed again since but the habitats are the “priority habitats” referred to in planning policy.

25 Year Environment Plan

In 2018 the government published its 25 year Environment Plan. It has 19 policies as follows (those most relevant to the Reading BAP are highlighted in **bold**):

1. **Embedding an ‘environmental net gain’ principle for development, including housing and infrastructure**
2. Improving how we manage and incentivise land management
3. Improving soil health and restoring and protecting our peatlands
4. **Focusing on woodland to maximise its many benefits**
5. Reducing risks from flooding and coastal erosion
6. **Protecting and recovering nature:**
 - i. **Publishing a strategy for nature**
 - ii. **Developing a Nature Recovery Network**
 - iii. **Providing opportunities for the reintroduction of native species**
 - iv. **Exploring how to give individuals the chance to deliver lasting conservation**
 - v. **Improving biosecurity to protect and conserve nature**
7. Conserving and enhancing natural beauty
8. Respecting nature in how we use water
9. **Helping people improve their health and wellbeing by using green spaces**
10. **Encouraging children to be close to nature, in and out of school**
11. **Greening our towns and cities**
12. Making 2019 a Year of Action for the environment
13. Maximising resource efficiency and minimising environmental impacts at end of life.
14. Reducing pollution
15. Introducing a sustainable fisheries policy as we leave the Common Fisheries Policy
16. Achieving good environmental status in our seas while allowing marine industries to thrive
17. Providing international leadership and leading by example
18. Helping developing nations protect and improve the environment
19. **Leaving a lighter footprint on the global environment**

England

The most up to date strategy for England is “Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England’s wildlife”. It was published in 2011. It describes what is needed to halt overall biodiversity loss by 2020 and sets ambitious goals for:

- better wildlife habitats - quality goals for priority habitat and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)
- more, bigger and less fragmented areas for wildlife - an increase in priority habitats by at least 200,000ha
- the restoration of 15% of degraded ecosystems - as a contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation
- establishing a Marine Protected Area network
- managing and harvesting fish sustainably
- marine plans in place by 2022
- an overall improvement in status of our wildlife and prevention of further human induced extinctions of known threatened species
- significantly more people engaged in biodiversity issues, aware of its value and taking positive action

In line with the 25 year Environment Plan it will soon be replaced by a new strategy for nature.

Key legislation

The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949

This act provides mechanisms to designate National Nature Reserves and Local Nature Reserves (of which there are two in Reading).

The 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act(as amended).

This act:

- Protects wild birds and their nests, including special penalties for rare or vulnerable species (such as the black redstart) as listed on Schedule 1 of the act
- Protects animal listed on Schedule 5 (such as water voles, reptiles and amphibians) and plants listed on Schedule 8 from (depending on the species) disturbance, killing, injury, taking, uprooting or sale.
- Contains measures to prevent the establishment of non-native species which may be detrimental to native wildlife, prohibiting the release of animals and planting of plants listed on Schedule 9.
- Provides for the notification (designation) of Sites of Special Scientific Interest which are the best examples of different habitat types.

The Habitats Regulations 2017

These regulations transpose the Habitats Directive into UK law and gives strict protection to our rarest species (known as European protected species) such as bats, great crested newts, otters and dormouse. It also

The NERC Act

This created a biodiversity duty for all public bodies, including local authorities. Section 40 reads:

“Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.”

It also created a duty for the government to:

“publish a list of the living organisms and types of habitat which in the Secretary of State’s opinion are of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity. “

These are the “priority habitats” and the “priority species” referred to in the NPPF

The Environment Bill

The Environment Bill (likely to soon become The Environment Act) if adopted will put the government’s 25 Year Environment Plan on a statutory footing and set out:

- a. Provisions for the Office for Environmental Protection;
- b. Provision about waste and resource efficiency;
- c. Provisions about air quality;
- d. Provision for the recall of products that fail to meet environmental standards;
- e. Provisions about water;
- f. Provisions about nature and biodiversity;
- g. Provision for conservation covenants;
- h. Provisions about the regulation of chemicals; and for connected purposes.

Key paragraphs from the NPPF

The NPPF states that there are three overarching objectives of sustainable development: an economic objective; a social objective and an environmental objective (including helping to improve biodiversity). At paragraph 170 the NPPF reads:

“170. Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services - including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;
- c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;

- d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
- e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and
- f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.”

And at paragraph 174 and 175 it reads:

“174. To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:

- a) Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation; and
- b) promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.

175. When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:

- a) if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;
- b) development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments), should not normally be permitted. The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
- c) development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and
- d) development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity.”

Appendix 4 - List of species and habitat specific actions

This section is to be discussed and expanded on in the next meeting.

Ecological enhancements within and adjacent to development sites

Hedgehog gaps under new fencing

Swift bricks

Sand martin nesting tubes

Bat boxes

Stag beetle loggeries

Peregrine platforms

Black redstart nesting sites and habitats

House sparrow terraces and planting to provide invertebrates and seeds

Surveys

Amphibian surveys for palmate newt, great crested newts and toads

Glow worm surveys

Water vole surveys

Loddon lilly

Barn owl

Pollinators

Other

Otter holts in parks

Planting rarer native trees such as black poplar, wild service and wild pear.

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Appendix 5 - Acknowledgements

[List of individuals and organisations who contributed to the BAP]

DRAFT

Appendix 6 - References

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READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	11TH MARCH 2020	AGENDA ITEM:	
TITLE:	TREE STRATEGY		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR ROWLAND	PORTFOLIO:	CULTURE, HERITAGE AND RECREATION
SERVICE:	PLANNING	WARDS:	ALL
LEAD OFFICER:	MARK WORRINGHAM	TEL:	0118 9373337
JOB TITLE:	PLANNING POLICY TEAM LEADER	E-MAIL:	mark.worringham@reading.gov.uk

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report concerns a draft Tree Strategy 2020, which is proposed for public consultation. The preparation of a new strategy, to replace the 2010 version, is an important part of the Council's response to the Climate Emergency. The strategy includes ambitious aims and objectives for tree planting to 2030 and 2050, and includes details of how the existing tree stock will be protected and maintained. Views on the strategy from key environmental groups have already been sought and fed into the draft. Public consultation on the strategy is proposed to take place in March and April.
- 1.2 Appendices
 Appendix 1 - Equality Impact Assessment Scoping
 Appendix 2 - Draft Tree Strategy 2020

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Tree Strategy (Appendix 2) be agreed for public consultation.
- 2.2 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 Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 Reading Borough Council declared a Climate Emergency at Council on 26th February 2019, and set out its commitment to work towards becoming carbon neutral by 2030. Trees can make an important contribution to both mitigating effects on climate change and on adapting to the climate change that is already inevitable. Ensuring that there is a robust strategy for trees is therefore a key part of the Council's response to the climate emergency.
- 3.2 At the same time, there are existing policy documents which make clear the importance of trees in Reading. The Reading 2050 Vision sees Reading as a 'City of Rivers and Parks' and includes potential measures of which trees are a key part, including connectivity of green spaces and introducing vegetation within the built environment. The Council's Corporate Plan 2018-2021 includes a priority of 'Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe'. The new Local Plan adopted in November 2019 includes policies to secure tree planting within development sites. In addition, the Council and community organisations are reviewing the range of conservation area appraisals across the Borough, and trees are usually a vital part of the historic significance of those areas.

4. THE PROPOSAL

(a) Current Position

- 4.1 The Council's existing Tree Strategy dates from 2010. Whilst there has been considerable success since that time, including planting of around 2,000 trees on Council land, it is now time that the Strategy is reviewed to meet the new challenges, particularly climate change.
- 4.2 The Council itself owns and manages approximately 12,500 specimen trees in addition to woodlands and groups of trees. Overall, the tree canopy cover of Reading is 18% of the Borough's area, although this differs substantially in different parts of the Borough, from 6.7% in Battle ward to 32.2% in Mapledurham.

(b) Option Proposed

- 4.3 This report recommends that a Draft Tree Strategy 2020 is approved for public consultation. The Draft Tree Strategy is included as Appendix 2. The Strategy, including any amendments made at this meeting, will also be considered at Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on 16th March.
- 4.4 The Tree Strategy is built around a number of objectives, with actions against each objective. The Strategy looks at tree management and planting on the Council's own land, as well as measures dealing with trees on private land.
- 4.5 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 can achieve their full potential thus ensuring that Reading's Urban Forest is resilient to the impacts of climate change and provides the maximum role in mitigating its effects.
3. Tree planting - plant at least 3,000 'standard' trees¹ by 2030 on Council land.
4. Canopy cover - increase overall canopy cover to 25% by 2050; ensure that all wards have at least 12% canopy cover by 2050; 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.
5. Protection of private trees - the Local Planning Authority will 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 will 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 are either native or of wildlife value, particularly in semi-natural areas; by ensuring that tree planting does 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 are 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 will 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.

¹ A 'standard' tree will be of a minimum 8-10cm girth and 2.5m in height at the time of planting.
N.B. the majority of the 3,000 trees are expected to be above this minimum

- 4.6 In terms of quantitative targets, the strategy includes 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 take some time to mature, it would be a number of years before increased tree planting in line with this strategy is reflected in increased canopy cover, and this is why no canopy cover target by 2030 is proposed. There are four wards which fall 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.
- 4.7 There is an important relationship between the Tree Strategy and the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), which is also to be considered at this meeting. Production of the BAP has been co-ordinated with the Tree Strategy. Council officers who have inputted into the BAP have also fed into the Tree Strategy, as have many of the other organisations. The potential for the two documents to be combined has been considered, but this was not considered appropriate. Trees have many important roles in addition to biodiversity, whilst biodiversity has many facets beyond trees. The Tree Strategy is also a more detailed document. However, there is considerable cross-referencing between the documents, and the documents have been reviewed to ensure that there is no inconsistency or unnecessary duplication.
- 4.8 It is proposed that public consultation take place over a five-week period, between 20th March and 24th April 2020. The Tree Strategy and BAP will be consulted upon together. Once consultation is completed, responses will be considered in drawing up a final version.
- 4.9 This report recommends that, for reasons of putting the Strategy in place swiftly, a final version taking account of consultation responses be approved by the Deputy Director of Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation. It is expected that this would take place in May 2020.

(c) Other Options Considered

- 4.10 There are two alternative options to progressing with the Tree Strategy as drafted:
- (a) continue to rely on the 2010 Tree Strategy; and
 - (b) preparing a strategy that aims for a higher level of canopy cover.
- 4.11 Not progressing with a new strategy would mean reliance on a strategy which is now ten years old and which was not drafted to reflect the Climate Emergency. This would not result in increased levels of tree planting, and miss out on all of the associated environmental benefits.
- 4.12 A strategy which aims for a higher level of canopy cover, for instance 30-40% would not be achievable, given the primarily urban nature of the Borough. Even without the constraint of being an urban area, most of the Borough is not in Council ownership, and the Council would not therefore be able to effectively influence whether this is achieved. There would also be possible

issues in that some of the areas where trees might be possible to plant to achieve these targets are already important habitats in their own right (e.g. flood meadows) and this approach might therefore have a detrimental impact on biodiversity.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 Approval of the Tree Strategy will contain proposals for continuing to expand the tree stock and canopy cover of Reading, and to protect and manage the existing stock. This will play a major part in achieving the Council's priorities of 'Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe' and 'Promoting health, education, culture and wellbeing' as set out in the Corporate Plan (2018-2021).

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 A new Tree Strategy which increases the tree stock and canopy cover of the Borough would have significant positive environmental implications.
- 6.2 Trees can have a mitigating effect on climate change, by absorbing carbon dioxide and therefore offer a role in the decarbonisation of the Borough. Similarly, tree planting is a way of mitigating the adverse effects of poor air quality.
- 6.3 Trees can also make a particular contribution to adapting to the effects of the climate change that is already occurring. Trees can cool the town through transpiration and shading, prevent surface water run off by absorbing water through their leaves, branches and roots, and their fallen leaves feed the soil allowing for further carbon absorption.
- 6.4 The Tree Strategy considers how the approach to trees can best maximise these positive effects, through, for instance, inclusion of trees with a large canopy, ensuring the right balance between native and non-native species, and making sure that wildlife-friendly species are planted.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 The Tree Strategy has been subject to a stakeholder consultation with key groups over a period of three weeks between 3rd and 24th February 2020. The groups involved were as follows:
- Globe groups (Caversham, Tilehurst);
 - Residents associations;
 - Reading Tree Warden Network;
 - Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT);
 - The Conservation Volunteers;
 - Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC);
 - Environment Agency;
 - Thames Water;
 - Network Rail;

- Reading UK CIC;
- Local Nature Partnership;
- Reading Climate Action Network;
- Econet (Reading) (includes the Friends of groups and CROW);
- The Woodland Trust;
- Trees for Reading;
- Natural England; and
- University of Reading

7.2 A total of seven responses from these groups to this initial consultation were received. Many of these related to matters of detail, and these comments have been considered in preparing the draft of the Tree Strategy. Some of the groups considered that the Tree Strategy should be more ambitious in terms of new planting and/or canopy cover. However, these targets have been carefully considered to be achievable within the timescales, subject to resources being available.

7.3 Subject to approval, the Tree Strategy would be subject to a five week period of public consultation during March and April. This will include publication on the Council's website and sending to organisations and groups on the planning consultation lists. Consultation will take place in conjunction with the Biodiversity Action Plan. Responses received will be taken into account in preparing a final version of the document.

8. EQUALITY ASSESSMENT

8.1 The Scoping Assessment, included at Appendix 1 identifies that an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is not relevant to this decision. A full EqIA is not therefore required.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 A Tree Strategy is not a statutory requirement in itself, but it does state how the Council will undertake some of its statutory functions.

9.2 Under Part VIII (Special Controls), Chapter I Trees, Section 197 of The Town and Country Act 1990 states (no change since 2010):

“Planning permission to include appropriate provision for preservation and planting of trees.

It shall be the duty of the local planning authority—

- (a) to ensure, whenever it is appropriate, that in granting planning permission for any development adequate provision is made, by the imposition of conditions, for the preservation or planting of trees; and*
- (b) to make such orders under section 198 as appear to the authority to be necessary in connection with the grant of such permission, whether for giving effect to such conditions or otherwise.”*

- 9.3 Section 198 relates to the serving of Tree Preservation Orders, which the Council continues to do when appropriate.
- 9.4 The Environment Bill 2019/2020 had its first reading on 15th October and second reading on 28th October 2019. The Bill was reintroduced to parliament, following the general election, on 30th January and had its second reading on 26th February 2020. If brought into law, it will have implications for trees. Included within the Bill are measures to ‘improve the air we breathe’ and ‘restore and enhance nature and green spaces’, both of which tree planting can contribute to. Within this latter measure, The Environment Bill introduces a ‘Duty to Consult’ which will give the public the opportunity to understand why a street tree is being felled and express any concerns regarding this. If the Bill becomes law, the Council will implement required procedures.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Tree Strategy has been prepared within existing budgets.
- 10.2 Many of the actions set out in the Tree Strategy can be achieved using existing resources and within existing budgets.
- 10.3 The ambitions in terms of tree planting, which are to plant 3,000 trees on Council land by 2030, and will result in enhanced canopy cover, will require funding. Tree planting on current average levels of around 200 each year reflects the size of the tree planting budget, and the Tree Strategy makes clear that if an increase is to be achieved, this will have budgetary implications. This level of tree planting would require the purchase of an additional bowser (quotes currently being sought), additional vehicle costs to tow (around £12K p.a.) and an additional half post (£17K p.a.), as well as an approximate 50% increase in the tree planting budget from £50K to around £75K). There is also likely to need to be a 5% increase in the annual maintenance budget to cover items such as recording, inspection and formative pruning. Capital funding of £50k per annum for 20/21, 21/22 and 22/23 has been agreed as part of the Council’s annual budget setting, the revenue implications of this will not be realised until 21/22. The service will seek to manage within existing resource, with a growth bid considered as part of next years budget setting if required.

Value for Money (VFM)

- 10.4 Trees are a cost-effective way of having a significant positive effect on the Borough’s environment, in terms of mitigating and adapting to climate change, enhancing the appearance and character of the area, improving air quality, providing for biodiversity and complementing the town’s heritage.

Risk Assessment

- 10.5 There are no direct financial risks associated with the report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Tree Strategy 2010

APPENDIX 1: EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT SCOPING

Provide basic details

Name of proposal/activity/policy to be assessed:

Tree Strategy

Directorate: DEGNS - Directorate of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services

Service: Planning

Name: Mark Worringham

Job Title: Planning Policy Team Leader

Date of assessment: 29/01/2020

Scope your proposal

What is the aim of your policy or new service?

To set out the strategy, objectives and actions for protecting, managing and expanding the tree stock of Reading

Who will benefit from this proposal and how?

The whole community will benefit from the continued protection and maintenance of existing trees and the increase in number of trees and canopy cover.

What outcomes will the change achieve and for whom?

An increase in tree planting on Council land, and increased canopy cover, which will be beneficial to all residents in the Borough.

A particular focus on tree planting on treed corridors and in the wards where tree cover is lowest, which will benefit residents of Abbey, Battle, Katesgrove and Whitley in particular.

Continued protection of important trees, which will benefit all residents.

Who are the main stakeholders and what do they want?

Local residents and environmental groups - protection of important trees, additional tree planting to contribute to climate change reduction/adaption, improved air quality, biodiversity, local character.

Council departments - clear targets and approaches to new tree planting and management of existing trees, supported by sufficient resources.

Landowners - a clear approach to protection of trees on their land.

Developers - a reasonable approach to new tree planting requirements which does not affect development viability and achievability.

Assess whether an EIA is Relevant

How does your proposal relate to eliminating discrimination; promoting equality of opportunity; promoting good community relations?

Do you have evidence or reason to believe that some (racial, disability, gender, sexuality, age and religious belief) groups may be affected differently than others? (Think about your monitoring information, research, national data/reports etc)

Yes No

Is there already public concern about potentially discriminatory practices/impact or could there be? Think about your complaints, consultation, feedback.

Yes No

If the answer is **Yes** to any of the above you need to do an Equality Impact Assessment.

If No you **MUST** complete this statement

An Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant because: protecting, managing and expanding Reading's tree stock does not have a differential effect on racial groups, gender/transgender, disability, sexual orientation, age or religious belief.

Signed (completing officer)	Mark Worringham	Date: 29 th January 2020
Signed (Lead Officer)	Mark Worringham	Date: 29 th January 2020

Reading Borough Council Tree Strategy 2020



March 2020



www.reading.gov.uk

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Reading
Borough Council
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context

- i. **It is now 10 years since Reading's last Tree Strategy was produced and adopted. The need for review is made more urgent by the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency in February 2019, and the production of a revised Climate Change Action Plan to respond to this.** This new Tree Strategy is intended to be an adaptable document that can be reviewed as and when required.
- ii. The benefits of trees are many. Environmental benefits include absorbing carbon dioxide, improving air quality, reducing flooding, shading and sheltering to reduce urban temperatures, providing a wildlife habitat and movement network and reducing noise. There are also aesthetic benefits that make our environment more enjoyable, as trees contribute to local character, make up a valued part of the historic environment, enhance privacy and add greenery and colour. These factors all help to contribute to better mental and physical health.
- iii. Trees have historically been an intrinsic part of Reading, with street tree planting and tree planting within open spaces a particular feature of the Victorian and Edwardian expansion of the town. Reading has a significant tree stock, in particular in its parks, school grounds, housing areas and along its highways. There is an extensive network of woodlands within the Borough, often on elevated ridgelines, and trees are also a key element of the perimeters of the flood meadows of the Thames and Kennet, as well as the railway corridors.
- iv. The Council itself owns and manages approximately 12,500 specimen trees in addition to woodlands and groups of trees, and therefore has a major role in implementing the strategy as a landowner. Since 2010, around 2,000 trees have been planted by the land-owning departments **of the Council. Overall, the tree canopy cover of Reading is 18% of the Borough's area.**
- v. There have been a number of changes since 2010 which the new Tree Strategy has to take into account. New national planning policy and environmental legislation affect matters around planning and management of trees. At a local level, the Reading 2050 vision sees Reading as a **'City of Rivers and Parks', whilst the new Local Plan strengthens planning policy around trees.**

Objectives

- vi. The 2020 Tree Strategy has the following objectives
 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 can achieve their full potential thus **ensuring that Reading's Urban Forest is resilient to the impacts of climate change and provides 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 have at least 12% canopy cover by 2050; 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.

5. Protection of private trees - the Local Planning Authority will 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 will 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 are either native or of wildlife value, particularly in semi-natural areas; by ensuring that tree planting does 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 through government and other funding streams and partners.
10. Biosecurity - continually review RBC purchasing and working practices to ensure RBC are 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 will 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.

Our aims and how we're going to achieve them

- vii. Section 3 sets out detailed measures for achieving the objectives, and leads to an Action Plan (Appendix 1) that states how the objective will be achieved, by whom, over what timescale, and how it will be resourced.
- viii. Information is included on how the Council will manage its own tree stock. This covers the various functions of the Council which have some responsibility for land on which trees stand.
- ix. The strategy aims to increase canopy cover. On its own land, the Council will plant at least three trees for every non-woodland tree felled. Guidance is included on new tree planting, and the emphasis will be on tree planting to achieve a more diverse tree stock. Priority areas for planting will be around the treed corridors shown on the map in Appendix 3. The Council tree planting aims depend on increases in funding.
- x. The strategy sets out how trees will contribute to mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change in Reading. This includes an emphasis on diversity and larger canopies. The contribution trees can make to improving air quality is also a key part of the strategy.
- xii. Strong and effective protection of important trees, including ancient woodlands and ancient and **veteran trees, will continue through the Council's tree protection powers. The Council will** practice good biosecurity methods in its own activities to prevent the spread of pests and disease and will work to create a more resistant tree population. There will be a strong cross-relationship with the new Biodiversity Action Plan.
- xiii. Improved monitoring and reporting of gains and losses of trees, both in Council ownership and on development sites, will be required to ensure that the strategy is effective.

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Front cover photo:
Forbury Gardens
(*Anna Iwaschkin*)

PART ONE

- IMPORTANCE OF TREES TO READING
- CHANGES SINCE 2010
- LINKS TO OTHER COUNCIL STRATEGIES

Introduction

- 1.1 The benefits of trees are well documented. They contribute many social, environmental, economic and health benefits to an urban Borough such as Reading. Ensuring appropriate retention, maintenance and planting of trees within the Borough is vital to provide these **benefits, enable climate change proofing of the Borough, to meet the Council's environmental aims** and to make the town a desirable place to live and work.
- 1.2 In 2010, Reading Borough Council formally adopted its first Tree Strategy. It set out a shared vision and strategy for both private and public sector trees in Reading and set out a strategic approach towards their future management. It is appropriate 10 years on to review the previous aims, reflect on the achievements met and set out our aims for both the short and long term.
- 1.3 **Climate change is one of the greatest challenges we face, the Council's climate emergency declaration in 2019 committed us to work towards a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.** Tree retention and planting will aid in meeting that challenge. Over the last 10 years, acceptance of the importance of tree retention and planting, for the multiple benefits they provide, has increased, particularly as a result of the extremes of weather that climate change brings and the continued loss of biodiversity that occurs. A revised Climate Change Strategy has been produced and this new Tree Strategy complements it, addressing some of its actions. **The benefits of trees are much wider, however, and include contribution to our town's character and heritage, improving air quality and providing a habitat for wildlife.**
- 1.4 This revised Tree Strategy will be an adaptable one; being updated as and when required to remain current, in line with changes to national and local policy, procedures, best practice and Government guidance.



Limes at Victoria Recreation Ground (Anna Iwaschkin)

Trees in Reading

- 1.5 Reading has Saxon origins and rose to particular prominence as a medieval religious centre with the foundation of the Abbey. There was a significant expansion in the 19th century supporting major employers, such as Huntley and Palmers, Sutton Seeds, various brick and tile works and Simonds Brewery. To support these industries, rapid residential development took place. This **phase of the town's evolution created its network of characteristic street tree planting.** London Road, Caversham Road, Kendrick Road, Coley Avenue and numerous side roads were planted with stately Plane trees in the form of avenues or were lined with Lime trees. Numerous parks, recreation grounds and open spaces were laid out at this time, all using trees as an important component of their design and legacy. Some other open spaces derived from former estates outside the urban area, such as Caversham Park and Whiteknights, where trees had long held an important role. Today we are fortunate to benefit from the significant tree planting that took place in the Victorian and Edwardian eras and, to a lesser extent, in later periods.
- 1.6 The Council owns (freehold) approximately 25% of the land within the Reading Borough area. Within that land, the Council is responsible for a significant number of trees and woodlands growing in a wide range of locations e.g. in parks and woodlands, schools, care homes, housing areas, along highways. Reading contains numerous parks and other open spaces. Parks such as Prospect, Palmer, and the Thameside Promenade provide the opportunity for people to experience trees of various forms, types and ages in a relatively dense urban environment. In addition there are prestigious open spaces of notable character in the centre of Reading such as **St Mary's Churchyard (Reading Minster), The Forbury Gardens and St Laurence's Churchyard,** or others such as at Caversham Court just outside the town centre.
- 1.7 There are extensive networks of woodlands and groups of trees across the Borough in both private and public ownership. These are remnants of what are likely to have been larger wooded areas, that historically provided food and fuel. They form significant and distinctive landscape features and help to define the landscape character of Reading. The concentration of woodland and other trees on higher ground defines the very visible wooded ridges that are an **acknowledged feature of the skyline and character of Reading, which are designated as 'Major Landscape Features' in our Local Plan.**



Beech trees at McIlroy Park (Anna Iwaschkin)

- 1.8 Other landmark trees coincide with the generally older housing stock, particularly within the 15 conservation areas in the Borough, where they contribute strongly to their character and appearance. The Conservation Area Appraisals for these 15 areas includes reference to important open spaces and trees where these form an integral element of the value of the area.
- 1.9 Street trees have an important role in helping to define the character of many areas; enhancing the street scene and softening the hard urban environment as well as providing a barrier to noise and pollution.
- 1.10 Trees also form significant parts of the landscape along the Thames, Kennet and Holybrook rivers, alongside the railways, and on the various arterial roads running into and out of the centre of Reading - **these are the 'treed corridors'**.
- 1.11 The benefits of trees are many. The environmental benefits include:
- They absorb carbon dioxide, the major climate change gas, reducing levels of this gas in the atmosphere;
 - Tree canopies intercept rain, delaying rainfall onto hard surfaces and into the mains drainage systems, thereby reducing surface water runoff and flooding caused by heavy rain (important to help mitigate the impacts of increases storms as a result of climate change);
 - They provide shelter and shading from wind, rain and sun and reduce urban temperatures as well as the temperatures of watercourses (especially important with regard to climate change adaptation);
 - They improve air quality by removing gaseous air pollutants, such as ozone and nitrous oxides, and particulate matter such as soot and smoke and they release oxygen;
 - They reduce noise, particularly noise from traffic;
 - **They provide habitat for wildlife and are a vital component of the town's green** infrastructure with street and urban trees providing wildlife corridors and stepping stones across the urban area.
- 1.12 In addition, there are significant aesthetic benefits, including
- They are a significant feature of the character of many streets, reinforcing their scale and proportion and enhancing their attractiveness;
 - Developments/housing with an established tree stock can result in higher property prices;
 - They screen undesirable features, enhance privacy and add greenery and colour;
 - **They are of historical importance, providing link to Reading's past and to mark wider** historical events; and
 - They can reduce certain types of anti-social behaviour such as graffiti, in some circumstances.
- 1.13 As a result of all of the factors above, trees and provision of green spaces have been shown to contribute to better mental and physical health.



Verdun Oak, Forbury Gardens (Geoff Sawers)

Since the 2010 Strategy ...

1.14 As was detailed in the 2010 Strategy, in October 2008, a Council motion was agreed as follows:

“This Council has always recognised the significant and positive contribution that trees can make to the quality of the urban environment. In particular, it notes that:

- 1. Trees can greatly enhance the visual amenity of our environment, are vital for people’s sense of well-being and contribute to everyone’s quality of life.*
- 2. Trees are essential in maintaining and enhancing the Borough’s biodiversity.*
- 3. Trees play a crucial role in reducing urban temperatures, mitigating the effects of climate change and facilitating better urban drainage.”*

1.15 In the ten years since the adoption of the Tree Strategy, a number of relevant Council plans, policies and procedures have changed requiring the Tree Strategy to be updated to reflect these.

National policy

NPPF

1.16 **Chapter 15 ‘Conserving and enhancing the natural environment’ of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF) states that:**

“Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- ...
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services - including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;*
- ...”*

- 1.17 It goes on to state that when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply a number of stated principles, including:
- “development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and”***
- Town and Country Planning Act 1990
- 1.18 Under Part VIII (Special Controls), Chapter I Trees, Section 197 of The Town and Country Act 1990 states (no change since 2010):
- “Planning permission to include appropriate provision for preservation and planting of trees. It shall be the duty of the local planning authority—***
- (a) to ensure, whenever it is appropriate, that in granting planning permission for any development adequate provision is made, by the imposition of conditions, for the preservation or planting of trees; and*
- (b) to make such orders under section 198 as appear to the authority to be necessary in connection with the grant of such permission, whether for giving effect to such conditions or otherwise.*
- 1.19 Section 198 relates to the serving of Tree Preservation Orders, which the Council has and continues to do when appropriate. Section 211 relates to trees within Conservation Areas and requires notice (a Section 211 Notice) to be submitted to the local planning authority 6 weeks prior to carrying out tree works (with a few exceptions). The Council will continue to serve Tree Preservation Orders where trees of sufficient merit within Conservation Areas are proposed for felling.
- Environment Bill 2019/2020
- 1.20 **This Bill is one of the Government’s key vehicles for delivering its vision set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan.** The Bill had its first reading on 15 October 2019 and second reading by MPs on 28 October 2019 unopposed but with MPs acknowledging that weaknesses in the Bill require improvements. It was re-introduced to parliament following a general election on 30 January 2020 and had its second reading on 26 February .
- 1.21 **Included within the Bill are measures to ‘improve the air we breathe’ and ‘restore and enhance nature and green spaces’, both of which tree planting can contribute to.**
- 1.22 **Within this latter measure, The Environment Bill introduces a ‘Duty to Consult’ which will give the public the opportunity to understand why a street tree is being felled and express any concerns regarding this.**
- 1.23 If the Bill becomes law, the Council will implement required procedures. The Council is in the Spring of 2020 establishing a Tree Forum that will consist of Third Sector volunteers and **organisations to heed the ‘Duty to Consult’ as above as a recognised element of joint working with the community.**

Reading Borough Council - Corporate

- 1.24 The Corporate Plan 2018-2021 (refreshed in spring 2019) sets out in Chapter 13 the Council's priority to:
- 'Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe' with a vision for the Borough to be 'clean, green and safe'.***
- 1.25 Tree retention and planting will contribute towards a number of the projects identified within the Plan such as improving air quality, working towards a carbon zero town and investments in our parks.
- 1.26 In 2019, the Council declared a Climate Emergency and pledged to work towards making Reading a carbon neutral town by 2030. The Council is also working alongside the Reading Climate Change Partnership in coordinating the development of the new Reading Climate Change Strategy, which will be launched in April 2020. Retention and planting of trees will be a vital part of dealing with climate change by, e.g. rainfall interception, cooling the local environment, providing shade and CO2 sequestration by trees to reduce of CO2 levels.
- The Reading 2050 Vision
- 1.27 Following on from Reading's 2020 Vision (developed in the mid 1990s), through the Reading 2050 Vision, project partners Barton Willmore, Reading UK and the University of Reading aim to excite and engage with people across Reading: local communities, businesses, education providers and public sector, to support Reading's economic growth and evolution as a smart and sustainable city.
- 1.28 The Vision celebrates the achievements of Reading as a place, including:
- 408HA of open space throughout the town, including woodlands, wetlands, parks, play areas, pitches and allotments which includes 5 Historic Parks and Gardens
 - 32% Carbon emissions reduction Reading-wide since 2005
- 1.29 **The Vision acknowledges Reading as a 'City of Rivers and Parks' and suggests ways of enhancing this, including:**
- Develop greater connectivity through our green spaces and waterways via a considered strategy which includes greening the IDR to act as a lung for the city, and embedding the **'internet of things' technology within it**
 - Engage with leading built environment industry specialists to encourage the considered provision of open spaces, bodies of water and vegetation in our urban spaces, inside and on buildings, in order to minimise heating and cooling requirements and pre-empt climate change impacts
 - Enhance and encourage understanding of the ecology and biodiversity of our open space for informal leisure activity and educational purposes
- 1.30 The objectives of the Tree Strategy can assist in enabling these visions.

Planning

- 1.31 **The Council’s new Local Plan was adopted in November 2019. The Local Plan provides planning policies detailing expectations for developments within the Borough relating to trees, landscaping and biodiversity.**
- 1.32 Policy EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodlands) states that:
- “Individual trees, groups of trees, hedges and woodlands will be protected from damage or removal where they are of importance, and Reading’s vegetation cover will be extended. The quality of waterside vegetation will be maintained or enhanced.***
- New development shall make provision for tree retention and planting within the application site, particularly on the street frontage, or off-site in appropriate situations, to improve the level of tree coverage within the Borough, to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area in which a site is located, to provide for biodiversity and to contribute to measures to reduce carbon and adapt to climate change. Measures must be in place to ensure that these trees are adequately maintained.”*
- 1.33 Through the use of both national and local policies the Council will continue to ensure the appropriate retention and protection of trees within development proposals and secure landscaping within new sites in order to contribute to our corporate aims and the aims of this Tree Strategy, although this needs to be supported by resources for monitoring and enforcement. It is an expectation that all development has due regard to tree related planning policies and to the aims of this Strategy.
- 1.34 There are 1500+ Tree Preservation Orders across the Borough and 15 designated Conservation Areas. Protection of significant trees within Conservation Areas will be expected in accordance with EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment. The Council has and will continue to retain, protect and seek replanting of trees through its powers under The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and The Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation) (England) Regulations 2012.
- 1.35 **In addition, Policy EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network) introduces a series of ‘green links’** which link together areas of biodiversity significance and potential significance, many of which consist of groups or corridors of trees, whilst EN13 identifies the important Major Landscape Features, three of which in particular (West Reading wooded ridgeline, East Reading wooded ridgeline and the North Reading dry valleys and Chilterns escarpment) are characterised by their tree cover.
- 1.36 **‘Protection’ of hedges falls under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997, which is administered by the Planning Section. If hedges meeting set criteria are proposed for removal, a Hedgerow Removal Notice must be served to the Council. The Council then has 42 days to determine whether the hedge is an ‘important’ hedge, as defined by the Regulations and if so, whether they want to serve a Hedgerow Retention Notice, taking into account the exemptions that apply. A Hedgerow Retention Notice is permanent but can be withdrawn by the Council at any point. The Council cannot refuse permission to allow the hedgerow to be removed other than by serving a Notice. If a hedge is removed in contravention of the regulations the owner can face a fine of up to £1000 in a Magistrates’ Court, an unlimited fine in the Crown Court and a requirement to replace the hedge. ‘Important hedges’ do not include any within or bordering a domestic garden, hence those fitting the criteria are limited within Reading Borough.**

RBC tree management

Ownership, management and composition of the Council's tree stock

- 1.37 At present, the Council owns and manages approximately 12,500 specimen trees in addition to woodlands and groups of trees. There are 12,987 features on the database, of which 491 are groups of trees. The breakdown by land-owning department is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of trees (or groups of trees) in public ownership by land-owning department

Highways	Parks	Cemeteries	Housing communal areas	Education excl. schools	Other
5,209	4,768	398	1,927	204	481

- 1.38 Since the adoption of the first Tree Strategy in 2010, the Council has undertaken a review of its tree stock in line with good tree management practice and has introduced a new tree management system in order proactively to manage its trees in line with tree health and personal Health and Safety requirements. Both case law and increased incidents of extreme weather in the last decade have highlighted the importance of the adoption of a tree management system.
- 1.39 The new management software has enabled a Borough-wide tree survey allowing the Council to determine the condition, age, and make-up of its tree stock in order to assist in prioritising and devising tree planting plans on an annual basis.
- 1.40 Trees are surveyed on a three- to five-year rolling programme, with trees in higher target areas on a more frequent inspection schedule. Trees with defects are monitored more regularly.
- 1.41 The database also allows the Council to manage trees by their family group and genus or species. A full list of trees by family and genus/species is in Appendix 4. The ten most common families and associated genus/species are in Table 2 below, and largely reflect historic - mainly Victorian - planting preferences.

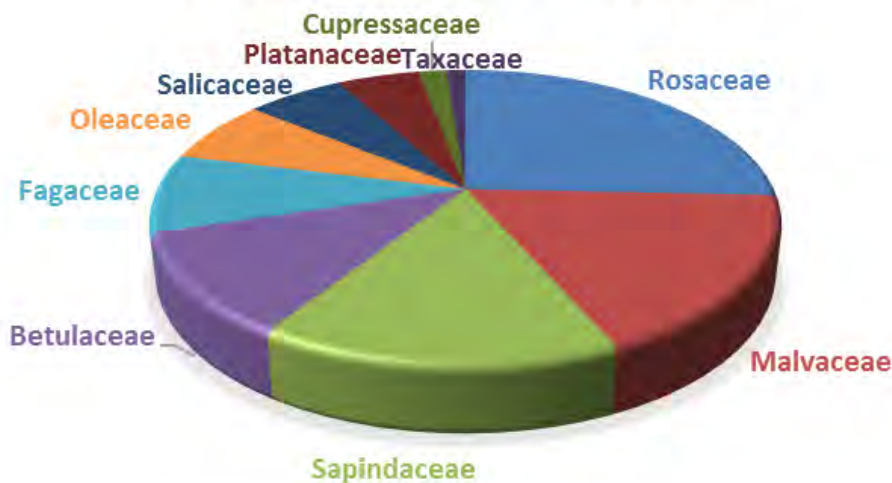
Table 2: Ten most common genera/species of tree in public ownership

Family	Genus/species	Common name	Numbers
Malvaceae	Tilia sp.	Lime	1997
Rosaceae	Prunus sp.	Cherry	1441
Fagaceae	Quercus sp.	Oak	882
Oleaceae	Fraxinus	Ash	789
Sapindaceae	Acer pseudoplatanus	Sycamore	665
Betulaceae	Betula	Birch	591
Platanaceae	Platanus	Plane	576
Sapindaceae	Acer platanoides	Norway maple	568
Rosaceae	Sorbus sp.	Whitebeam, rowan and service tree	493
Rosaceae	Malus	Apple	410

Table 3: Ten most common tree families in public ownership

Family	Common name	Number
Rosaceae	Rose	2898
Malvaceae	Mallow	1997
Sapindaceae	Soapberry	1770
Betulaceae	Birch	1273
Fagaceae	Oak or beech	968
Oleaceae	Olive	789
Salicaceae	Willow	687
Platanaceae	Plane	576
Cupressaceae	Cypress	196
Taxaceae	Yew	133

COMPARISON OF TREE FAMILY NUMBER WITHIN PUBLIC OWNERSHIP



- 1.42 In addition to the routine maintenance of individual trees, the Council has adopted, and implemented, woodland management plans for a number of its woodlands, with help from the Forestry Commission and from voluntary and community organisations such as The Conservation Volunteers (TCV), Nature Nurture and 'Friends of' groups.
- 1.43 There are individual management plans for Bugs Bottom and Clayfield Copse, as well as for large sites with areas of woodland, such as Prospect Park. TCV has ongoing projects at Blundells Copse, Bugs Bottom and Clayfield Copse and Blackhouse Woods, as well as at Lousehill Copse.



Tree felling

- 1.44 Trees are monitored and managed with a view to retaining them for as long as possible without compromising public safety. Management for retention includes canopy reduction and pollarding/re-pollarding. In some cases, valuable trees, e.g. ancient and veteran trees, are fenced in order to prevent public access where this may be dangerous, and/or ensure the continued health of the tree.
- 1.45 Sometimes the risk becomes too great to retain a tree, and the decision is taken to fell it. Felling is a last resort after exploring other ways of addressing the risk. Recording of felling was started in 2014. Table 4 below shows the numbers of trees felled in the past six years, a total of 257, or an average of 43 trees annually.

Table 4: Tree felling in Reading Borough, 2014-19

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
47	57	68	44	24	17

- 1.46 Where trees are felled, the locations are recorded for consideration of replacement tree planting in the following season.

Tree planting

- 1.47 The adoption of the 2010 Strategy resulted in the allocation of an annual tree planting budget to cover all planting costs (trees, labour and establishment maintenance). This has enabled the Borough to carry out comprehensive planting over the last 10 years.
- 1.48 The capital budget is supplemented by allocations from Housing Department budgets, **Section106 agreements, and schools' budgets. This has enabled the planting of an average of 200 trees annually for the past decade (excluding woodland planting).** On average, therefore,

the Council is planting five times as many trees as it removes. Where trees are felled on the public highway, tree pits are left open, to allow for replacement planting.

1.49 The numbers of trees planted over the past decade by land-owning department is in Table 5 below. The effects of a reduced capital budget for tree planting in 2018-2020 can be seen.

Table 5: Tree planting in Reading Borough by land-owning department

Year	Highways	Housing	Parks	Schools	Total
2010/11	56	86	152		294
2011/12	160	101	69		330
2012/13	Not known	124	24	25	173
2013/14	130	62	9	32	233
2014/15	64	72	54		190
2015/16	94	10	38	3	145
2016/17	95	14	32	20	161
2017/18	156	40	46		242
2018/19	55	33	20	19	127
2019/20	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	162 (to date)
					2,057

1.50 The allocation of capital for tree planting is determined by the priorities of the 2010 Tree Strategy, with priority given to areas with low canopy cover and to replacement of trees that need to be removed for Health & Safety reasons. In addition, requests from members of the public, communicated directly, via councillors or via the Reading Tree Wardens Network (RTWN) are given priority when there is funding available.

1.51 In addition to standard tree planting, substantial planting of whips has been undertaken across the Borough, which includes significant work with volunteer groups, and has taken place in areas such as Bugs Bottom and Palmer Park. There will be improved recording and mapping of the location of this planting to ensure their long-term success.

1.52 Alongside adoption of the 2010 Strategy, the Reading Tree Warden Network (RTWN) was set-up. The RTWN has, over the last 10 years, provided invaluable help in securing funds for tree planting and carrying out tree planting projects alongside the Council. These projects have included:

- Significant street tree planting across the Borough, including the inaugural planting of Plane trees in Richfield Avenue
- Avenue planting in various parks/open spaces, e.g. Prospect Park and Long Barn Lane
- **Tree planting within St Mary's Churchyard (alongside the Diocese)**
- Tree planting on the Reading Festival site
- Tree Planting on Hartland Road
- Tree planting on Brunel Road
- Tree planting within six Whitley schools.



RTWN planting Oaks in Hartland Road (Anna Iwaschkin)

- 1.53 The RTWN also carries out maintenance jobs on trees across the Borough e.g. watering in drought periods, rescuing trees from canine damage as well as reporting dangerous tree situations. They also look out for pests and other threats to trees.
- 1.54 In addition, the adoption and implementation of the woodland management plans (see paragraph 1.42), with help from the Forestry Commission and from voluntary and community organisations, has included tree planting with the Borough’s woodlands.
- 1.55 Finally, as part of its management strategy, suitable tree planting locations are noted whilst **trees are being surveyed in order to build up a ‘bank’ of tree planting locations for** consideration each planting season. These locations will be shared with RTWN and other groups that we have relationships with in planting trees throughout the town.

Transport

- 1.56 **Transport for London’s (TFL) ‘Healthy Streets’ initiative aims to introduce more trees and** greenery to make streets more attractive, more biodiverse, to tackle air pollution, to provide resilience to climate change (extreme weather) and to provide shade and shelter. RBC is proposing to integrate these principles as a core element of our new transport strategy for the period 2020-36 (subject to consultation), to help achieve a shift towards sustainable transport, walking and cycling by creating more attractive streets within Reading.
- 1.57 As part of the assessment of major infrastructure projects within the Borough, the inclusion of trees and other planting will be factored in alongside the considerable benefits of promoting a shift from private car use to sustainable transport, walking and cycling. Previous major projects such as Junction 11, Reading Station interchanges and the A33 MRT scheme have included tree planting which was vital to mitigate tree loss and soften an inevitable increase of hard landscape.



Plane trees in Kendrick Road (*Nicola Tipler*)

- 1.58 At full Council on 22 May 2019 a new interest group ‘Cleaner Air and Safer Transport Forum (Transport Users Forum)’ was formed in response to the Council’s declaration of a climate emergency. Several of the duties of this forum link to the aims of the Tree Strategy, namely:
- To propose measures to improve air quality across the Borough
 - **To identify and share best practice in relation to clean and green ‘healthy streets’** initiatives which promote sustainability, healthy living, energy efficiency, sustainable transport and carbon reduction.

1.59 The transport network includes the cycle and walking network alongside which tree planting will be incorporated where feasible. It also includes the railway network, which is managed by **Network Rail. Appendix 7 contains detail on Network Rail’s vegetation management.**

Canopy cover

1.60 The 2010 Tree Strategy included aims around increasing canopy cover. The overview map **identified areas of ‘10% or less canopy cover’ and these became priority areas for tree retention and planting.** The overall aim was a 10% increase in canopy cover by 2030.

1.61 **Unfortunately, the 2010 Strategy lacked a baseline figure for the Borough’s canopy cover, so it is impossible to categorically confirm whether the aims set out in 2010 are likely to have been**

achieved. Around 2,000 trees have been planted by the Council since 2010, and this is certainly **more than a 10% increase in the number of ‘arboricultural features’ that our tree management software records**, which is currently almost 13,000. However, this includes woodlands and copses as individual features. Therefore, Council planting of 2,000 trees, combined with administration of Tree Protection Orders (TPOs) and new planting on development sites, whilst certainly having extended the canopy cover by 2010, is unlikely to be on track for a 10% increase

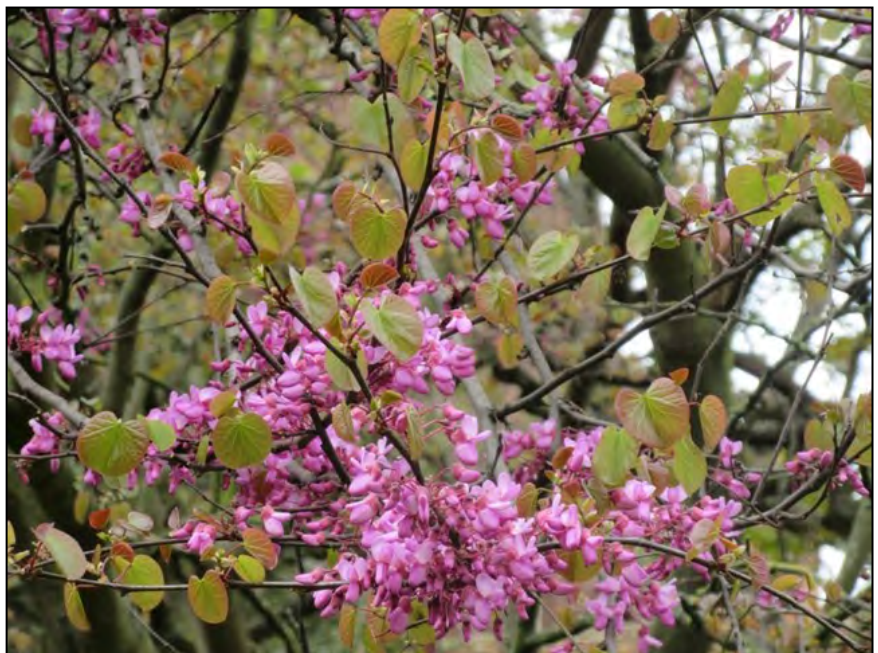
- 1.62 As part of the preparation of the new strategy, i-Tree Canopy has been used to identify the current canopy cover of the Borough in total and by ward and therefore give us the baseline figure that the 2010 Strategy lacked. This has enabled us to have a clear idea of the current areas where canopy cover is low, i.e. where tree retention and planting should be focused, and provides information for future comparison, as well as to assess the cover within individual **wards. The results are set out in part 3 of this document, along with this Strategy’s aims for expanding cover.** Canopy cover will be assessed again in 2030, which is considered to be an appropriate minimum period for any comparison to be meaningful.
- 1.63 **The Council will assess the Borough’s canopy / trees further for the benefits they provide using i-Tree Eco** within the next 5 years and then remeasure whenever appropriate. This assessment is based upon the canopy cover, and should be tied to the date of the canopy cover objectives in section 2. i-Tree Eco is currently designed to provide estimates of:
- Urban forest structure - Species composition, number of trees, tree density, tree health, etc.
 - Pollution reduction - Hourly amount of pollution removed by the urban forest, and associated percent air quality improvement throughout a year. Pollution removal is calculated for ozone, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide and particulate matter 2.5 (<2.5 microns).
 - Public health impacts - Health incidence reduction and economic benefit based on the effect of trees on air quality improvement for the United States only.
 - Carbon - Total carbon stored and net carbon annually sequestered by the urban forest.
 - Energy Effects - Effects of trees on building energy use and consequent effects on carbon dioxide emissions from power plants.
 - Avoided runoff - Yearly avoided runoff attributed to trees summarized by tree species or strata.
 - Forecasting - Models tree and forest growth over time; considers factors like mortality rates, tree planting inputs, pest and disease impacts and storm effects. Some ecosystem services including carbon and pollution benefits are also forecasted.
 - Bio-emissions - Hourly urban forest volatile organic compound emissions and the relative impact of tree species on net ozone and carbon monoxide formation throughout the year.
 - Values - Compensatory value of the forest, as well as the estimated economic value of ecosystem services.
 - Potential pest impacts - based on host susceptibility, pest/disease range and tree structural value.

Treed corridors

- 1.64 The Reading Tree Strategy - Overview Map incorporated within the 2010 Tree Strategy identified **‘treed corridors’ across the Borough, consisting of railways, roads and watercourses, which were** and are a priority for tree retention and planting to provide green corridors into, out of and through the town. These remain within this new Strategy and are cross referenced with priority routes for tree planting to address high air pollution areas within the Borough.
- 1.65 It would also be appropriate for Green Links, as identified in the Local Plan, to be identified as **‘treed corridors’ within this Strategy in order to help link and strengthen these.**
- 1.66 **The Council will also explore opportunities to ‘green’ the cycle and walking network through** tree planting to make these more pleasant for users by, for example, providing shade in the summer and the filtering of air pollution and particulates.

Climate change and disease proofing

- 1.67 It is becoming increasingly important for trees to form an integral part of any town for the multiple benefits they provide. In order to climate change proof our town, we need to assess the species make-up of our tree stock and work towards a greater diversity of tree species as the effects of climate change are not clear in terms of species survival.
- 1.68 In addition, pests and disease introductions as a result of global movement of goods have resulted in a significant detrimental impact on a number of species within the UK. An appropriate diversity of tree species will therefore also help to ensure that canopy cover is better protected should a pest or disease affect a particular genus or species.



Judas tree, St Lawrence’s churchyard (Anna Iwaschkin)

Links to other Council strategies

1.69 It is important that the Tree Strategy compliments other Strategies across the Council and vice versa:

- Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)
- Local Transport Plan
- Reading Climate Change Strategy (RCCS)
- Open Spaces Strategy
- Thames Parks Plan
- Reading Borough Local Plan
- Reading Borough Council Corporate Plan
- Highway Asset Management Plan
- Air Quality Action Plan
- Reading 2050 Vision
- Woodland management plans
- Conservation area appraisals.

PART TWO—OBJECTIVES 2020-2050

OBJECTIVE 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.

OBJECTIVE 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 can achieve their full potential thus **ensuring that Reading's Urban Forest is resilient to the impacts of climate change and** provides the maximum role in mitigating its effects.

OBJECTIVE 3

Tree planting—**plant at least 3,000 'standard' trees* by 2030 on Council land.**

* See Glossary

OBJECTIVE 4

Canopy cover - increase overall canopy cover to 25% by 2050; ensure that all wards have at least 12% canopy cover by 2050; 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.

OBJECTIVE 5

Protection of private trees - the Local Planning Authority will 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.

OBJECTIVE 6

RBC will 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.

OBJECTIVE 7

Improve biodiversity across the Borough by; selecting trees that are either native or of wildlife value, particularly in semi-natural areas; by ensuring that tree planting does not compromise or adversely affect other habitats; and by protecting ancient woodlands and ancient/veteran trees.

OBJECTIVE 8

Identify all areas suitable for street tree and other planting on Council land - initial study to be completed by 2021, with continued updates.

OBJECTIVE 9

Funding - continue to secure funding for tree planting and maintenance through government and other funding streams and partners.

OBJECTIVE 10

Biosecurity - continually review RBC purchasing and working practices to ensure RBC are working to good arboricultural practice to minimise the chance of introducing and/or spreading pests, diseases or invasive species within the Borough.

OBJECTIVE 11

Trees & Development - tree retention, protection and planting within development sites will be in accordance with the aims of the Tree Strategy and Local Plan policies.

OBJECTIVE 12

Monitor progress - record and report net tree gain on an annual basis and reassess canopy cover in 2030.

PART THREE

OUR AIMS AND HOW WE'RE GOING TO ACHIEVE THEM

- 3.1 The overall aims are to increase tree planting and canopy cover across Reading, and to effectively protect, maintain and manage the important trees that we already have. This is essential if we are to work towards a carbon neutral Reading, and to make sure that Reading can cope with the climate change which is already occurring.
- 3.2 These aims fit in with the overall framework and actions of the Climate Change Strategy, which is to be published in March 2020. It has six main themes of:
- Energy and Low Carbon Development
 - Natural Environment and Green Spaces
 - Water Supply and Flooding
 - Transport and Mobility
 - Health
 - Resources
- It also has four overarching themes of:
- Education
 - Adaptation (Resilience)
 - Business
 - Community.

Management of the Council's tree stock

- 3.3 **Objective 1 of the 2010 Tree Strategy was related to the management of the Council's tree stock.** In order to meet with this objective, we introduced the use of ArborTrack Tree management software. All of the Council's trees, excluding schools and land within individual Housing properties, have been surveyed and added to this database to enable proactive management of the tree stock by:
- Map based system which can be updated using tablets in the field allowing easy identification of individual trees.
 - Each tree has an inspection regime allocated to it depending on age and condition.
 - The system produces inspection schedules.
 - Details of faults and disease can be recorded and monitored at each inspection.
 - Works schedules and bills of quantities can be easily produced and the works recorded in each tree's record.
- 3.4 Other data can be obtained from ArborTrack to help the Council decide on strategic tree management, such as identification of mature trees for which succession planting needs to be planned and identification of genus and species diversity to identify which are over-represented within the Borough. The former is vital in ensuring appropriate allocation of resources for planting to provide future replacements prior to felling. The latter is necessary to ensure that our tree stock is resilient to future pest and disease outbreaks and to mitigate the impacts of climate change.
- 3.5 Council trees are surveyed on a 3-5 year cycle, depending on their location, although some are noted for annual inspection. Data are stored in the specialist database, ArborTrack. Urgent and priority works noted during inspection are carried out as soon as practical.

3.6 The Council undertakes tree work principally to maintain the health and safety of the trees and on land that it owns. We prune trees for health and safety reasons, to remove actionable nuisances, in order to clear the public highway, or where trees are causing foreseeable damage to property. We do not cut back branches that block light or TV signals, drop leaves, flowers or fruit, or drip honeydew on cars.

3.7 Where there is no alternative to felling, trees are removed. It is not Council policy to grind out stumps, except where trees are to be replaced, where leaving a stump will create a hazard or where stump removal is prudent due to the presence of e.g. Honey fungus .

Table 6: Tree felling on public land, excluding works undertaken as part of woodland management, in Reading Borough (as recorded)

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
47	57	68	44	24	17	240

3.8 When trees are felled on the public highway, the tree pit is made safe but kept open, so that a new tree can be planted in the pit during the following planting season (or later, if the tree succumbed to a soil-borne pathogen).

3.9 Almost all tree maintenance is carried out by our in-house teams of arborists, who are fully trained in all aspects of tree work, as well as first aid and working safely on the public highway. Training is regularly refreshed when the relevant qualifications need to be refreshed under the law, or to keep arborists up to date with good practice.

3.10 **The Council carries out all tree work to the current British Standards Institute’s BS 3998: 2010 ‘Tree work - Recommendations’ and all tree planting and procurement to BS 8545: 2014 ‘Trees: from nursery to independence in the landscape. Recommendations’.** The Council observes the law in respect of bird nesting and protected species. Procedures relating to work on trees in Conservation Areas and trees subject to Tree Protection Orders are also observed. This relates both to internal Council trees and to work carried out for private and public sector clients on a commercial basis. Whilst works to Council owned and managed trees are exempt from requiring a Section 211 Notice (Notice of works to trees in a conservation area) to be submitted, we notify the Natural Environment Team in Planning for their information.

3.11 The Council also expects third parties to observe the law in respect of interventions involving trees within the Borough. This includes application of National Joint Utilities Group (NJUG) guidelines to utilities companies. Highways inspectors have been advised to inform the Tree Officer of infringements. Violations are inspected, and penalties imposed, although the Council prefers a cooperative approach, and will work with utilities contractors to find a solution to **works near trees (see later details under ‘Streetworks’)**.

3.12 Insurance claims against Council-owned trees are investigated, and trees are neither pruned nor felled where there is insufficient evidence to warrant this. Again, the Council will take a reasonable approach in situations when one of its trees is confirmed to be contributing to damage of property as part of its duty of care to neighbours.

- 3.13 **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)** will be published on the Council’s website in order to assist with common queries. This will also include information to volunteers in regards to tree and whip planting within the Borough.
- 3.14 **In relation to the Council’s woodlands, these are managed separately. Woodland Management Plans** have been produced for 90 hectares of Reading’s woodlands (across 18 sites), which started in 2013. Implementation of the plans will benefit wildlife, amenity and the community - and the Forestry Commission part fund the works through the England Woodland Grant Scheme. Further information can be found at: <http://www.reading.gov.uk/groundsmaintenance>
- 3.15 Under Part 8 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 (which came into effect in 2005), people whose light is affected by neighbouring evergreen trees / hedges are able to make a formal complaint to the Council if they are unable to resolve the matter themselves and if the trees/hedges meet set criteria. The Council will aim to maintain its evergreen hedges to ensure that they do not affect the reasonable enjoyment of neighbouring gardens and/or houses in relation to light.



Weeping Beech, Reading Old Cemetery (Cemetery junction) (Anna Iwaschkin)

Highways

- 3.16 RBC has adopted a Highways Asset Management Policy which sets out the means by which the Council will manage the creation/construction, acquisition, operation, maintenance, rehabilitation and disposal of all Council Highway Assets. This will be achieved by applying a systematic management approach to every aspect the highway including asset planning, community expectations, risk assessment and management, asset accounting, budget allocation, the Highways Asset Management Plan (HAMP), the Highways Maintenance Manual and reporting and defining roles and responsibilities. All Highways assets, including trees will be covered by this approach with regular inspections and remedial/renewals being carried out as part of the highways condition surveys and safety inspections.
- 3.17 The Highways tree stock is an important asset with 5,209 street trees currently under management using the ArborTrack system, which complements the Asset Management approach to highways maintenance adopted by the Highways Department. The highway offers significant

tree planting opportunities both for replacements and new planting, subject to underground and aboveground services and visibility constraints.

- 3.18 Under Section 154 of the Highways Act 1980, where private trees are considered a threat to users of the public highway or public footpaths, the Council can require the owner to make the tree(s) safe. If trees and hedges are causing an obstruction to the highway the Council will issue a letter requesting works to be carried out to remove the obstruction within 28 days. If the works are not carried out in this time a formal notice will be issued giving a further 14 days to have the works carried out. If the works are still not carried out after this time legal proceedings may be instigated, which can result in the Council carrying out the work if it is not undertaken within the required period, and recovering costs.
- 3.19 Reading Borough Council has set the statutory heights of 5.5m for the carriageway (road) and 2.75m for the footways / footpath (pavements), i.e. tree branches must be maintained above these heights. If a tree is protected by a TPO or is situated in a Conservation Area, formal approval is not required for pruning to achieve these heights, however the Planning Section should be given prior notice of the intended works.
- 3.20 New tree planting locations within the highway will take into account the location of highway furniture, e.g. signs, lampposts, bus stops, and to avoid future obstructions. In addition, it will be ensured that planting on Council land and on development sites will not obstruct sight line safety. Where trees are planted on private land close to the public highway, advice will be given to landowners / developers to install suitable root barriers to prevent future root damage to pavement and road surfaces in order to avoid trip hazards occurring. Please see the section on Tree Planting.
- 3.21 Similarly when new highway furniture is installed it will be ensured that the locations minimise the likely need to significantly prune or fell existing highway trees during their expected lifespan.

Street works

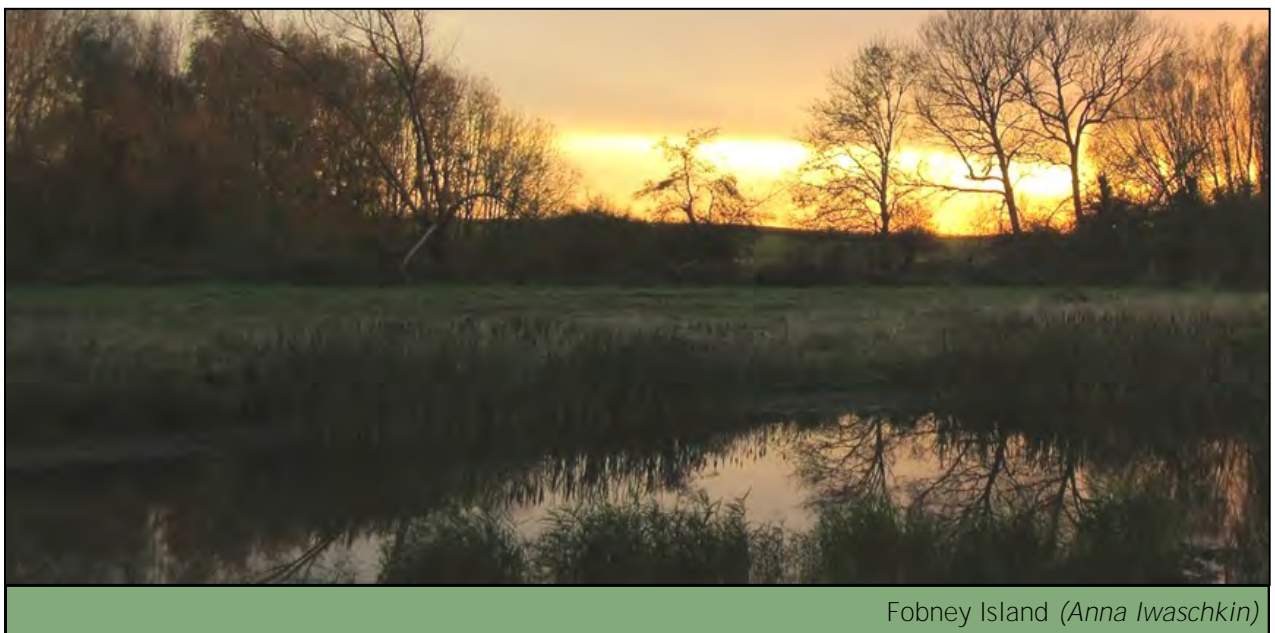
- 3.22 Works within the public highway by utility companies/Statutory Undertakers has the potential to cause significant harm to important street trees and adjacent private trees where works are within the pavement. Reading Borough Council expects all companies carrying out works within the Borough to have due care for Council and private trees adjacent to or within their working area. We expect all utility companies/Statutory Undertakers to follow **National Joint Utilities Group Volume 4: ‘Street Works UK Guidelines for the Planning, Installation and Maintenance of Utility Apparatus in Proximity to Trees’ (NJUG 4) at a minimum and be able to fully justify any works that do not conform to this.** Statutory Undertakers are encouraged to liaise with appropriate officers at the Council where conflicts with trees arise and agree a method of working prior to commencement. If Statutory Undertakers are found to have caused unnecessary harm to Council trees, we will seek monetary compensation for any subsequent tree works that are necessary and for the full cost of planting a replacement tree if required. In addition, where the condition of a street tree has deteriorated since its last inspection, checks will be made to our street works register to establish if these are the likely cause of the deterioration and if necessary the relevant utility company will be approached for compensation.
- 3.23 The Council has sought a written agreement from the main five Statutory Undertakers (SSE,

Southern Gas Network, Virgin Media, Thames Water and BT) confirming their commitment to carry out their works with the expected consideration for adjacent trees. This has been in the form of a declaration which we have asked them to sign. This Declaration can be found in Appendix 5.

- 3.24 **The Council’s aim is to ensure that Highways Inspectors are fully aware of NJUG 4 with sufficient understanding of the document in order to challenge the working methods of contractors working on behalf of Statutory Undertakers close to trees. It is also an aim for Highways Inspectors to be trained to have basic arboricultural knowledge relating to the law and tree hazard identification.**

Waterways

- 3.25 Reading is fortunate to have a number of watercourses running through the town; namely the River Thames, River Kennet, Kennet & Avon Canal and the Holybrook. The watercourses benefit the town from an aesthetic point of view but also provide outdoor leisure opportunities, wildlife habitats and an alternative transport route. A mix of light and shade on river banks creates a diversity of habitats on the banks and in the channel and that the shade from trees helps keep rivers cool to resist the impacts of climate change. The Thames and the Kennet / Kennet & Avon are identified as treed corridors on the map in Appendix 3, hence are priority routes for tree retention and planting.
- 3.26 Although the embankments / towpaths are generally not public highway, Reading Borough Council, as Lead Local Flood Authority, encourages land owners to carry out tree works, but step in to clear any dangerous / damaged / overhanging vegetation that is causing a blockage or could potentially increase flood risk. The Council would look to recharge where appropriate. The Environment Agency also has powers to remove trees or carry out tree works alongside main rivers where they cause a flood risk.
- 3.27 The Highways department works with the Parks department to arrange and pay for tree and vegetation clearing works, for example at Holybrook adjacent to Brook Street West and along the Holybrook flood plain below Southcote / Lesford Road.



Fobney Island (Anna Iwaschkin)

3.28 Highways annually inspect the local highway ditches and non-critical ordinary watercourses that are on our asset register and arrange for tree and vegetation works as appropriate and required.

Education

3.29 In relation to education land, individual schools are responsible for the management of trees on their land and must allocate resources within their budget for this. Regular inspection and maintenance of trees by schools is of utmost importance given both the high target zones and **that under an occupier's 'common duty of care', as defined by The Occupiers Liability Act 1957, 'an occupier must be prepared for children to be less careful than adults'.**

3.30 **Within the Council Health & Safety Department's 'Property Management and Compliance Guide', schools are required to have their trees inspected by a competent person on a monthly basis to industry best practice.** In addition, they are required to have a statutory inspection every 3-5 years (dependent on individual tree risk) by an approved contractor.

3.31 The Education Department within Reading Borough Council will encourage schools to carry out regular inspections to meet with their duty of care to the pupils and to comply with Health & Safety requirements.

3.32 Education officers will also encourage schools to carry out tree planting for e.g. shading and pollution filtration, providing advice on free or grant funding for tree planting, and to encourage pupils to be involved in the planting in order that future generations can appreciate the benefits tree provide.

Housing

3.33 Housing land across the Borough contains a significant number of trees, including 1,927 within communal land. Tenancy agreements make explicit what tenants can and cannot do in respect of trees on rented properties in order to avoid unauthorised loss. To ensure no unnecessary felling of trees and to encourage appropriate management and tree planting, the Housing Department will devise a tree policy as an addendum to the current tenancy agreements. Housing Officers will promote the objectives of the Tree Strategy to tenants.

Valuation

3.34 In order to avoid loss of good trees within the Borough, once Council land is identified for sale, the Valuation Section has and will continue to request that the trees be surveyed to identify any Health & Safety issues and assessed for a possible inclusion within a TPO. Where it is agreed that trees merit inclusion, a TPO may be served prior to the sale of the land in order that any potential purchasers are aware of tree constraints should they wish to redevelop the land where it is considered appropriate so to do.

3.35 The Valuation department will aim to avoid disposal of areas of woodland (or other high value wildlife habitat) which may result in pressure to fell or develop these areas, or where they are retained by the new owners, are less likely to be managed appropriately.

Tree planting

- 3.36 The overall aim is to significantly increase tree planting on Council land, to plant 3,000 trees by 2030, subject to achieving the necessary funding.

Make-up of tree stock

- 3.37 **We have identified that the Council's tree stock currently consists of a large variety of trees,** dominated by particular genera. The list of trees by family, genus and species is in the table in Appendix 4. The most common tree is Lime (*Tilia*), of which there are almost 2,000, followed by Cherry (*Prunus*) (1,441). There is also a surprisingly large variety of different conifers.

- 3.38 Annual tree planting over the next 30 years will focus on the families, genera and species which are underrepresented in order to create a more diverse tree stock. The reasons for this are not only aesthetic; diversity provides protection against pests and diseases spreading through particular varieties of tree, as well as supporting a greater range of fauna. The aim is to work towards a tree stock containing only 30% of any one Family, 20% of any one Genus and 10% of any one species. This will take time, as the historic, largely Victorian, planting has resulted in a predominance of certain trees. These are a relatively long-term investment, and there is no intention to fell trees to help achieve a greater mix. Replacement will therefore occur over time as trees senesce, as well as taking opportunities for mixed planting in new locations.

- 3.39 The need to increase certain tree species and avoid planting of others to achieve diversity will also be considered when landscaping schemes for development sites are assessed. There will be an expectation that developers and their landscapers will have due regard to our diversity aim and that landscaping will be designed accordingly.

- 3.40 It is known that some species can have a negative impact on human health. Therefore, species choice, particularly within well-used areas, will need to be mindful of these effects.

- 3.41 The Council will undertake to produce a preferred species list by 2022 that takes account of these considerations.

Native versus non-native

- 3.42 The 2010 Tree Strategy suggested that native species should be planted in preference to non-native species where appropriate. Native trees generally support a greater number and diversity of wildlife than non-native trees; their association with wildlife having built up over a longer period. The incorporation of native planting will continue to be of importance to **compliment the aims of the Council's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), and only native species will** be planted in semi-natural habitats and particularly along wildlife corridors. However, the inclusion of non-native species will also be appropriate to make the Borough more resistant to climate change and the impact of pests and diseases. When selecting non-native trees, the Council will focus on those that are beneficial to wildlife in its planting schemes and will expect developers to do the same. There will be instances where exotic, ornamental planting will be justified, for example in public parks and in Conservation Areas to maintain their original character.



Handkerchief tree, Forbury Gardens (Anna Iwaschkin)

Where and how to plant

- 3.43 As mentioned above, the Council is proactively identifying locations for tree planting in order to have a bank of locations ready for each tree planting season. As well as identifying the more obvious places for planting, i.e. within soft landscape areas, the Council will also look at potential creative ways of introducing space for tree planting where it does not currently exist, e.g. build-outs in narrow streets and planters of sufficient sizes, where this does not compromise highway use by all users.
- 3.44 When determining the right species to plant in any location, the Council will have due regard to **the ‘Right tree, Right Place’ principle and will add ‘the right tree pit’ to that.**
- 3.45 The potential negative aspects of trees are acknowledged, such as shading solar panels and **interrupting television signals, ‘nuisance’ from natural trees debris (e.g. leaves, branches, twigs, honeydew), roots blocking drains, direct and indirect damage to buildings and structures (walls, hard surfacing) and even temporary traffic disruptions for tree works adjacent to the highway.** Tree debris is a natural consequence of having trees and cannot be eliminated, only **managed appropriately to minimise hazards.** **New tree planting under the ‘right tree, right place, right pit pits’ principle aims to address the other issues to avoid future conflict thereby ensuring trees can achieve their optimum size and lifespan without the need for detrimental pruning.** Developers will be expected to approach planting with these same principles in mind and private landowners will be encouraged to consider these potential conflicts over the lifespan of any tree prior to planting.
- 3.46 The Council recognises the importance of good quality tree pits in order for trees to not only survive, but to thrive and achieve their optimum size and life span for maximum environmental

benefits. Tree pits will continue to be designed to meet the requirements of the location and species in order to provide a sufficient rooting environment and prevent damage to adjacent structures. As more creative locations for planting are identified, this will mean a greater cost per tree, hence, within the limitations of the annual budget, the number of trees in such locations will not be as great.

- 3.47 The Council will use the tree canopy data (including at ward level), air pollution data and **identified ‘green corridors’ to assist in defining where tree planting should be increased.** These priority locations can be seen on the maps in Appendices 2 and 3.

Maintenance

- 3.48 An appropriate portion of the annual tree planting budget will continue to be used for maintenance. The need for regular watering to ensure survival of new trees has been highlighted in recent years where drought and high temperatures have taken their toll on new planting. The Council does however have 99% survival rate for new planting by regular manual watering throughout the growing season (with the exception of the very dry summer of 2018, when losses exceeded 10%). Throughout the maintenance periods, where new trees have failed, they will be replaced unless it has been determined that soil conditions will prevent establishment. In view of the higher temperatures and reduced rainfall we are already experiencing and which is likely to continue, we will explore introducing alternative methods of watering and moisture retention, which may include greater community involvement. There will also be a need for more careful strimming around trees.

- 3.49 **With the climate emergency more groups have come forward wishing to undertake ‘mass whip plantings’ and this is expected to grow in the future. Whilst whip planting can produce canopy** for the future, the chance for survival unless properly tended to, can be minimal. Groups are encouraged to come to the Council to suggest places appropriate for whip planting. Once an area is planted, this will be added to a mapping system so that the areas can be noted in the future. Whips should be clearly marked out and a regular watering and clearing of the areas undertaken by the groups to ensure their success.

Funding

- 3.50 Meeting the objectives in section 2 of increasing tree planting on Council land, as well as canopy cover overall, can only be achieved if it is adequately resourced, and an increase in planting will need an increase in funding.
- 3.51 In relation to the funding of tree planting, the Council will continue to proactively seek grant funding and other funding streams, to secure money through Section 106 agreements where there is a need for off-site planting, and to facilitate memorial tree planting in order to increase the tree stock and provide adequate maintenance. The Council will also consider introducing match funding for local communities to encourage tree planting in their neighbourhoods.
- 3.52 Partners in tree planting initiatives include Trees for Cities, which annually gives a grant to the Reading Tree Warden Network for a joint planting scheme with the Council, and Ethical **Reading’s Trees for Reading, a new business-funded venture.**
- 3.53 The Council also encourages neighbourhood associations and neighbours to work together to

raise funding for tree planting in residential streets, and there have been several successful projects improving streets that are deficient in canopy cover.

- 3.54 Internally, the result of the i-Tree Eco assessment will provide a value for the Council's tree stock (a Council Asset) in terms of its 'ecosystem service'. This will enable due consideration for a review of the budget allocated for tree maintenance and planting.
- 3.55 The Council will continue to use its powers under The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and The Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation) (England) Regulations 2012 to secure replanting in Conservation Areas and where protected trees are felled, wherever possible and appropriate. Where replanting within a Conservation Area cannot be enforced by law, owners will be encouraged to replant in order to meet the objective of the Tree Strategy and will be offered advice if required.



Boundary Lane (Sarah Hanson)

Hedge planting

- 3.56 Hedgerow retention and planting will play an important part in responding to the climate emergency and will contribute to the aims of the revised Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). Hedgerows capture carbon, assist in reducing air pollution in urban areas, help soften the urban environment, function as noise barriers, aid wind mitigation (making areas more pleasant to walk and cycle) and are an important resource for wildlife providing both food and shelter. Appropriate management of existing and new hedgerows will be important, to maximise these benefits that they provide. New hedgerows will help strengthen identified green links, in addition to trees, and will be of particular importance where trees cannot be accommodated in order to provide the link between areas of habitat. There will be an expectation for new developments to incorporate hedge planting within landscape schemes, especially where sites **fall within the vicinity of green links or are on identified 'treed corridors'**.

Climate change

- 3.57 The Tree Strategy is important in how it can work in collaboration with the Climate Emergency Strategy and any resulting actions. Trees sequester (absorb) carbon dioxide and therefore can **offer a role in assisting in reducing Reading's carbon footprint.**
- 3.58 However, estimating the contribution that a tree will make to reducing carbon emissions is difficult, and can depend on its species, size and maturity. A rule of thumb often used is that a tree will absorb one tonne of carbon over an assumed lifespan of 100 years. This is only an approximate measure, but on this basis, the additional 3,000 trees would absorb 30 additional tonnes of carbon per year, although the expectation is that this will be supported by tree planting on private land. Clearly, tree planting can only be part of a much wider response to reducing carbon emissions.
- 3.59 The most significant value of trees as part of the climate emergency response is in how they protect people and environments from adverse climate impacts. For example, they cool the town through transpiration and shading, they prevent surface water run off by absorbing water through their leaves, branches and roots, and their fallen leaves feed the soil allowing for further carbon absorption. Overall, the Tree Strategy will be important in adapting current tree provision and mitigating/preventing future issues related to climate change.
- 3.60 In order to ensure the tree population of Reading is resistant to climate change, we will:
- Improve species diversity to make the tree population more resistant to species loss/failure as a result of a changing climate;
 - Plant large canopy trees wherever feasible on Council owned land;
 - Aim to secure space for large canopy species within development sites;
 - Aim to secure natural Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs) within development sites, i.e. trees and landscape features as opposed to attenuation tanks, as the default position;
 - **Aim to secure green walls / green roof planting within development sites where 'on the ground' planting space is limited; and**
 - Plant trees in clusters where appropriate.
- 3.61 The risk is flooding is likely to increase with increasing frequency of storm events as a result of climate change. Tree planting is an important part of any flood alleviation strategy, contributing to natural flood management systems. Trees act to intercept rainwater, some of which evaporates directly back into the atmosphere; interception of the remaining (even when not in leaf) resulting in a slowing of the water flow into the drainage system, thereby relieving pressure on these during storms. The uptake of water by tree roots and the increase in soil infiltrations rates where trees exist also contributes to storm water management.

Canopy cover

- 3.62 Canopy cover is a useful measure of the proportion of an area which is covered by the canopy of a tree. In terms of the climate change agenda, as well as for other matters such as air quality, it is a more meaningful measure than absolute numbers of trees. The Council has utilised i-Tree Canopy to estimate tree coverage within the Borough as a whole and within the individual wards. This has provided baseline data so that the increase in canopy cover can be followed over time. It has enabled us to identify the areas with low tree coverage where tree retention and planting can be prioritised.

3.63 The results are shown on the chart in Appendix 2 and the individual details for each ward are show in the table below.

Table 7: Percentage canopy cover in each ward

Ward	Canopy cover (%)
Abbey	11.6
Battle	6.72
Caversham	15.8
Church	22.8
Katesgrove	10.4
Kentwood	27.9
Mapledurham	32.2
Minster	19.7
Norcot	18.9
Park	17.7
Peppard	23.6
Redlands	16.7
Southcote	22.1
Thames	27.0
Tilehurst	21.1
Whitley	7.95
Total for the Borough	18

CANOPY COVER COMPARISON BY WARD



3.64 The current canopy cover is approximately 18%. This includes 12,496 number of individual Council trees, excluding those within non-communal Housing land, in schools and the 15 woodlands across the Borough. It also includes privately owned land, demonstrating the need to promote the value of trees to residents and land owners in the Borough.

- 3.65 It is important for this Strategy to aim to increase canopy cover. This aim must balance ambition with what can realistically be achieved, taking account of the geography of the area. Including ambitions that are undeliverable is not the purpose of this Strategy.
- 3.66 Reading is a highly urban borough, with the fourth highest population density in the South East **at the 2011 Census. Almost half of Reading's area is covered by the footprint of buildings, road carriageways and railway lines.** Some of the remainder includes 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 is notable that Reading's tree cover is already higher than the average for towns and cities of 16%** (Forest Research, 2018). There is limited additional land available for planting, and even less land over which the Council is able to exercise control.
- 3.67 In addition, it takes time for newly-planted trees to mature to the point where they make a significant contribution to extending canopy cover, unless mature or semi-mature trees are planted, which in virtually all cases is financially prohibitive. The canopy cover objective of this Strategy should therefore be longer term than tree planting objectives.
- 3.68 For this reason, this Strategy aims to increase canopy coverage within the Borough to 25% by 2050. This is considered to reflect the amount of land that is likely to be suitable and potentially achievable for extended cover. It would represent a 39% increase in canopy cover over existing levels. It will be achieved by ensuring the number of trees planted significantly exceeds that felled on Council land, but will also rely on canopy cover being extended on private land, including development sites.
- 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 2050, and this will require improvement in four wards in particular - Abbey, Battle, Katesgrove and Whitley. This will be achieved through Council planting (subject to funding), net increases in tree numbers on development sites and retention of trees through TPOs.
- 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.

Biosecurity

- 3.72 To deal with the threats from pests and diseases, the Council will continue to practice good biosecurity measures when carrying out tree work and disposing of waste wood.
- 3.73 **The Council's current tree surveying includes inspection for known and expected pests, in order that appropriate action can be taken in line with Government guidance.** The arborists are also **trained to look for defects in trees when they are working on them. In addition to the Council's**

inspection programme, the Forestry Commission monitors 12 sites for Oak Processionary Moth. The Tree Wardens are also vigilant, and notify the Council of suspected infections.

- 3.74 **In order to keep abreast of developments, the Council's Arboricultural Team subscribes to** Landscape Institute, Forestry Commission and Arboricultural Association alerts about biosecurity issues.
- 3.75 There are pockets of Chalara, Ash dieback, on Council sites. Where these are found, periodic clearance of affected trees, usually young trees, occurs. Any replanting which takes place will consider alternate species or dieback resistant Ash (if and when these become available).
- 3.76 The choice of varieties of tree to plant will be influenced by biosecurity concerns; varieties less subject to disease are being planted more frequently and mixed rather than monoculture planting is increasingly being done.
- 3.77 In addition, we will carefully consider suppliers of seeds, plants, trees and wood products to ensure they have appropriate biosecurity procedures in place in line with Government guidance. The Council currently uses tree nurseries which have good biosecurity policies in place. In addition, bedding plants are currently purchased from a UK supplier who grows their own from seed. Shrubs are purchased from a UK supplier who grows their own, buying in larger plants from reputable sources. Suppliers are asked to confirm that they have regular Ministry inspections and hold a Plant Passport, which denotes that they can issue plant passports for all plants that they handle. All suppliers are expected to keep up with any changes and ensure compliance with current Regulations (plant health regulations having changed in December 2019).
- 3.78 The Council are currently working on formulating a procedure to deal with disposal of arisings to take biosecurity issues into account.
- 3.79 Biosecurity will also be considered on development sites where there will be an expectation for developers to ensure that plants and trees are from suppliers with appropriate biosecurity measures. Developers will also be expected to deal with invasive species in line with government guidance.

Pest and disease resistance

- 3.80 The incidence of pest and disease introductions has had a significant effect on the UK tree population over the last 50 years, e.g. Dutch Elm disease, Horse chestnut leaf miner, Ash dieback and Oak Processionary Moth to name a few. To help create a tree population within the Borough more resistant to the impact of pests and diseases, we will:
- Improve tree diversity to reduce the impact on the tree population as a whole from the loss of any one species / genus;
 - Ensure good biosecurity working practices to prevent the introduction and spread of pests and diseases;
 - **Carefully consider all tree work to minimise the impact on the trees' future health, e.g.** timing of the work (phenology), keeping pruning to the minimum required and following good arboricultural practices;
 - Keep new trees healthy - right tree, right place, right tree pit and right maintenance of Council trees;
 - Securing sufficient landscape maintenance for new planting on development sites.

Air pollution

- 3.81 Clean air is essential for our health, quality of life and the environment. Air pollution is not only harmful to human health but also has harmful effects on plants and animals as well corroding materials and buildings. There are areas close to congested roads where levels of nitrogen dioxide exceed the air quality objectives and where levels of particulates are elevated. Particulates are classified by their mass (PM10 and PM2.5), with the smaller particulates, PM2.5 being more harmful due to their ability to travel further into the lung.
- 3.82 The Environment Act 1995 requires local authorities to review and assess air quality on a regular basis, against a set of Air Quality Objectives (AQOs) set out in the Air Quality Regulations. Local authorities are required to declare Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) in any area where the AQOs are exceeded and there is relevant human exposure, and must draw up an action plan to show what steps it intends to take to improve local air quality.
- 3.83 In September 2006, Reading Borough Council declared six AQMAs. In September 2009, monitoring then indicated there were 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 covers perceived and actual exceedances. An Air Quality Action Plan was subsequently drawn up and measures from it to improve air quality are being implemented.
- 3.84 The AQMA is shown on the Local Plan Proposals Map and highlights the main area of concern which includes much of the central area and main radial transport corridors. As such these **correspond with ‘treed corridors’ identified on the map in Appendix 3, hence priority planting** along these routes will provide green corridors which help improve air quality.
- 3.85 Policy EN15: AIR QUALITY of the new Local Plan requires that:
- “Development should have regard to the need to improve air quality and reduce the effects of poor air quality”.***
- 3.86 Trees directly absorb harmful polluting gasses such as oxides of Nitrogen, Sulphur dioxide and ground-level ozone as well as trapping particulate matter in their leaf surfaces.
- 3.87 The use of trees to help tackle air pollution can be maximised by careful species selection, i.e. choosing trees that will tolerate air pollution, and planting large canopy trees where possible. This can be considered both through Council planting and securing appropriate planting on **development sites. Guidance, such as The Trees and Design Action Group’s (TDAG’s) ‘Tree Species Selection for Green Infrastructure’ (<http://www.tdag.org.uk/>) and Barcham’s Tree Species Selection Guide (<https://www.barcham.co.uk>)** will be utilised for this purpose. The former, more extensive guidance, provides information of the tree characteristics useful for trapping pollution, e.g. dense crowns and textured leaves, along with advice on providing a mix of tree height and dimensions to allow air turbulence/mixing in order to disperse pollution. It **contains a long list of species suitable for ‘transport corridors’ which can be considered for use** in highway and major infrastructure planting.
- 3.88 As stated in the policy text for EN15, mitigation measures for development may include planting and green walls. This planting (trees, hedges, shrubs & green walls), along with green roofs, is

also important to improve air quality and will therefore be expected within development sites alongside tree planting or as an alternative where tree planting is demonstrated to be unfeasible.

- 3.89 In addition, it is important that we continue to secure and implement other methods of reducing air pollution for the benefit of the trees and vegetation that already exists.

Biodiversity

- 3.90 Trees and woodlands provide a vital resource for wildlife. They provide nesting and roosting sites, food in the form of foliage, wood, fruits and seeds and invertebrates. Numerous species depend on trees for their survival.
- 3.91 Whilst woodlands tend to be the most important, trees within the urban environment play a vital role by providing corridors and stepping stones for wildlife.
- 3.92 Reading has 193 hectares of woodland and scrub, much of which (approximately 50% - 95 hectares) is owned (freehold) by the Council. Other landowners include Network Rail, the University of Reading, schools and private land owners.
- 3.93 The majority of the RBC woodland is being managed in accordance with woodland management plans that were adopted in 2013 - these will need to be updated in 2023.
- 3.94 It will be important to avoid tree planting on certain valuable habitats where tree cover is not a feature of that habitat to avoid degrading the value they provide.
- 3.95 The Council is currently undertaking a review of its Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), prepared alongside this strategy, and the Tree Strategy aims to compliment this. To maximise biodiversity through planting we will:
- Carefully consider species selection, planting predominantly native or wildlife friendly species. The introduction of some non-native species will be acceptable to 1) retain the character of the older parts of the town where exotic species were historically planted and 2) to add to climate proofing the tree population
 - Prioritise planting along green corridors/links (as identified in the Local Plan), which incorporate wildlife corridors, both on Council land and on development sites.
 - Continue to protect existing trees through service of Tree Preservation Orders and retention of trees on development sites.
 - Aim to secure naturalistic SUDs provision on development sites as the default position.



Oak at Prospect Park (Anna Iwaschkin)

Ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees

- 3.96 Despite being a very urban borough, Reading is fortunate to have several pockets of ancient woodland; those being in Tilehurst (Kentwood Grove -McIlroys Park) and Emmer Green (Blackhouse Woods - Clayfield Copse). As an Action of our new Biodiversity Action Plan, we will **be carrying out an exercise to identify woodlands that are likely to be “ancient” which are below the 2ha. threshold used for identifying woodlands in Natural England’s Ancient Woodland Inventory.**
- 3.97 In addition to ancient woodland, there are scattered Ancient and Veteran trees across the borough, mainly within Parks but also within the grounds of old manor houses and occasionally within smaller private gardens.
- 3.98 These trees are an important heritage asset by providing a link to the history of Reading, from ancient parkland such as Prospect Park to stately homes and former estates such as Caversham Park and Whiteknights.
- 3.99 Ancient woodland, that being land which has been continuously wooded since at least 1600AD, now covers only approximately 2.4% of the UK’s land area. These woodlands tend to be richer in plants and animals than other woodland areas and contain many rare and vulnerable species. Preventing their felling is important, but not enough alone to protect all their associated wildlife. Management of some of the woodland is also required, e.g. coppicing to provide open, sunny, sheltered glades for butterflies. Maintaining and managing these, along with other woodland, is vital to maintain an adequate amount of appropriate habitat to allow the species within them to thrive.

3.100 The NPPF provides the following definition:

“Ancient or veteran tree: A tree which, because of its age, size and condition, is of exceptional biodiversity, cultural or heritage value. All ancient trees are veteran trees. Not all veteran trees are old enough to be ancient, but are old relative to other trees of the same species. Very few trees of any species reach the ancient life-stage”.

3.101 Ancient and veteran trees, which can be considered as an ecosystem in themselves, provide a habitat and a food source for a myriad of species, some of which are only found on such trees. Both standing (within the tree) or fallen deadwood on and around such trees (and within woodlands) is important as a resource (habitat, nesting and food source) for many species of bird and for nesting and roosting sites for bats. Also, many rare invertebrates associated with wood decay require ancient woodlands in which there has been a continuous succession of ancient trees and in turn these deadwood fauna are an integral part of the woodland wildlife community. Long standing dead wood is an important habitat for rare fungi such as the ecologically important and protected Oak polypore, *Piptoporous quercinus*.

3.102 As is acknowledged within the NPPF, such woodland and trees are irreplaceable habitats. The Council will continue to protect these through a combination of appropriate management, objecting to development proposals that would have a detrimental impact and the service of TPOs to prevent felling. There may also be opportunities for expansion through natural regeneration.



Veteran Oak within a private garden in Caversham Park Village (circumference just over 8m)
(Sarah Hanson)

Tree protection

- 3.103 The protection of both Council and private trees across the Borough will be vital alongside planting. To protect trees we will:
- Continue to use our powers under The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and The Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation) (England) Regulations 2012 to serve new Tree Preservation Orders, prioritising those where there is a foreseeable threat to a tree(s), and to serve new Tree Preservation Orders where felling is proposed in a Conservation Area, i.e. where a Section 211 Notice is submitted, if the tree(s) is worthy of a TPO.
 - Continue to use our powers under The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and The Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation) (England) Regulations 2012 to take legal action where contraventions take place to demonstrate the importance of trees in the Borough
 - Use national and local planning policies, along with relevant British Standards and good practice guidance to ensure the retention of trees (where appropriate) on development sites and to secure new tree planting to ensure a net gain in tree number, including on Council owned development sites.
 - Retain Council trees until such time as they pose an unacceptable risk to people or property, with the exception of trees which are deemed to have outgrown their location where felling due to a future foreseeable risk/nuisance is appropriate.
 - Take legal action or seek mitigation action / planting where Council trees are damaged / felled by third parties using Capital Asset Valuation of Amenity Trees (CAVAT) to determine a value for the tree where monetary compensation is required.
 - Aim to develop better working relationships with external bodies, e.g. utilities companies and large land owners, whose actions can have a significant affect.
 - Consider the potential harm to good quality trees and the amenity they provide when assessing High Hedge complaints.
 - Retain important hedgerows, where allowed by the Hedgerow Regulations 1997.
- 3.104 **Reading Borough Council's internal planning applications** - RBC will respect the aims of tree policy and of this Strategy when considering its own internal planning applications. The Council should lead by example in tree retention, protection and planting on new / redeveloped sites.

Development

- 3.105 The Reading Borough Local Plan, adopted in November 2019, contains a strong new policy (EN14) on retention and planting of trees. In view of the climate emergency, the Council will apply the provisions of this policy rigorously. Where new planting is secured on development sites by condition, the Council will seek to secure resources to ensure that this is monitored and, where necessary, enforced.
- 3.106 Under The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended), land owners are able to carry out specified works without the need for planning consent. The works allowed, such as extensions, outbuildings and driveways, all have the potential to harm adjacent trees. Permitted Development (PD) rights do not override a Tree Preservation Order hence any PD works that might affect a protected tree must be agreed with the Local Planning Authority. The Council, through the planning service, will remind land owners of this. The same would apply to trees in Conservation Areas - in both situations, trees can only be removed without approval/notice being given if required in order to implement full planning approval.

Community engagement

- 3.107 The canopy cover objective of this Strategy, as well as many of the other objectives, cannot be achieved by the Council alone. As well as the major landowners referred to elsewhere in this Strategy, there will also be a need for appropriate planting and maintenance by private residents, and support from community organisations.
- 3.108 There is already substantial co-operation between community and volunteer groups and the Council. As set out in paragraph 1.52, the Reading Tree Warden Network (RTWN) was set up 10 years ago, and it will continue to be of considerable assistance in helping to achieve the objectives of this Strategy. As well as a history of successful community engagement on this issue, the Council has also recently looked to involve community groups on other matters such as heritage, and this demonstrates that such approaches can be of great assistance.
- 3.109 A Tree Forum for Reading is about to be established in spring 2020. This will include volunteers **and community organisations, and it will provide a platform for undertaking the ‘Duty to Consult’ introduced by the Environment Bill. There may be opportunities for additional joint working through that route.**
- 3.110 **The Council’s website will need to be one of the main points of contact for community engagement, and will require improvement to fulfil this purpose.** There should be a single location, where information on trees, including this Strategy, are set out in a clear, easy to access format. This will enable the Council to produce information for residents or landowners on important aspects of planting and maintenance. Subject to resources, the Council will also need to consider targeted distribution of information that can help us meet the objectives for trees.

Trees on a wider scale

- 3.111 Within the Reading 2050 Vision, Vision Statement 6 states:
- “Welcomes ethical and sustainable businesses that support Reading”***
- 3.112 **Reading Borough Council’s actions and decisions can also have an impact on a wider scale through our waste strategies and procurement policies. The new Climate Change Action Plan will detail the Council’s policies on these and the issue will also be addressed in the revised BAP.**
- 3.113 **In relation to the Council’s own green waste production, we recycle as much of our tree arisings as possible.** Chippings are distributed throughout the Borough, for example in woodlands for path surfacing, in parks for use as a mulch on flowerbeds and to allotment holders for use on their allotments.
- 3.114 A percentage is sold to contractors as and when they require them.
- 3.115 When working in woodlands logs and chippings are left as habitat stacks for biodiversity.

Monitoring and reporting

- 3.116 It is our aim to publish annual figures on our website to demonstrate our net gain in tree number in the Borough.
- 3.117 The Planning Section will keep a record of the number of trees felled on development sites against the number included in approved landscape schemes to demonstrate a net gain.
- 3.118 Parks (as the department carrying out tree work on most Council owned land) will keep a record of the number of trees felled against number planted to demonstrate a net gain.
- 3.119 Individual residents, private land owners and organisations are encouraged to let us know when they undertake planting so we can record this. Details of tree planting can be emailed to: Planning.naturalenvironment@reading.gov.uk

GLOSSARY

Air Quality Management Area (AQMA)	An area where air quality objectives are not likely to be met. There is a requirement to draw up an action plan for each AQMA.
BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
BEIS	BEIS - Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-local-authority-and-regional-carbon-dioxide-emissions-national-statistics-2005-to-2017
Capital Asset Valuation of Amenity Trees (CAVAT)	This provides a method for managing trees as public assets rather than liabilities. It is designed not only to be a strategic tool and aid to decision-making in relation to the tree stock as a whole, but also to be applicable to individual cases, where the value of a single tree needs to be expressed in monetary terms. https://ltoa.org.uk/resources/cavat
CO ₂	Carbon dioxide
i-Tree Eco	A software application to quantify the structure and environmental effects of urban trees, and calculate their value to society. Data from an i-Tree Eco survey can be used for making effective resource management decisions, develop policy and set priorities for a town's trees and greenspaces. <i>(Definition from Forest Research)</i>
National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)	A document setting out national planning policy for England. This was finalised in 2019, and replaces a variety of previous national guidance within a single document.
NJUG	The National Joint Utilities Group Ltd (NJUG) is the UK's trade association. representing utilities and their contractors solely on street works matters.
RBC	Reading Borough Council
RCCS	Reading Climate Change Strategy
Reading 2050 Vision	https://livingreading.co.uk/reading-2050
RTWN	Reading Tree Warden Network
'Standard' trees	For the purposes of Objective 3, a 'standard' tree will be of a minimum 8-10cm girth and 2.5m in height at the time of planting. N.B. the majority of the 3,000 trees are expected to be above this minimum.
Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)	For the purposes of this document, this term is taken to cover the whole range of sustainable approaches to surface water drainage management.
TDAG	Tree Design Action Group
TfL	Transport for London



TPO	Tree Preservation Order
Trees for Cities	UK charity working at a national and international scale to improve lives by planting trees in cities. https://www.treesforcities.org/
Trees for Reading	Partnership providing funding from local businesses for tree planting in their locality (Ethical Reading).

APPENDIX 1: ACTION PLAN

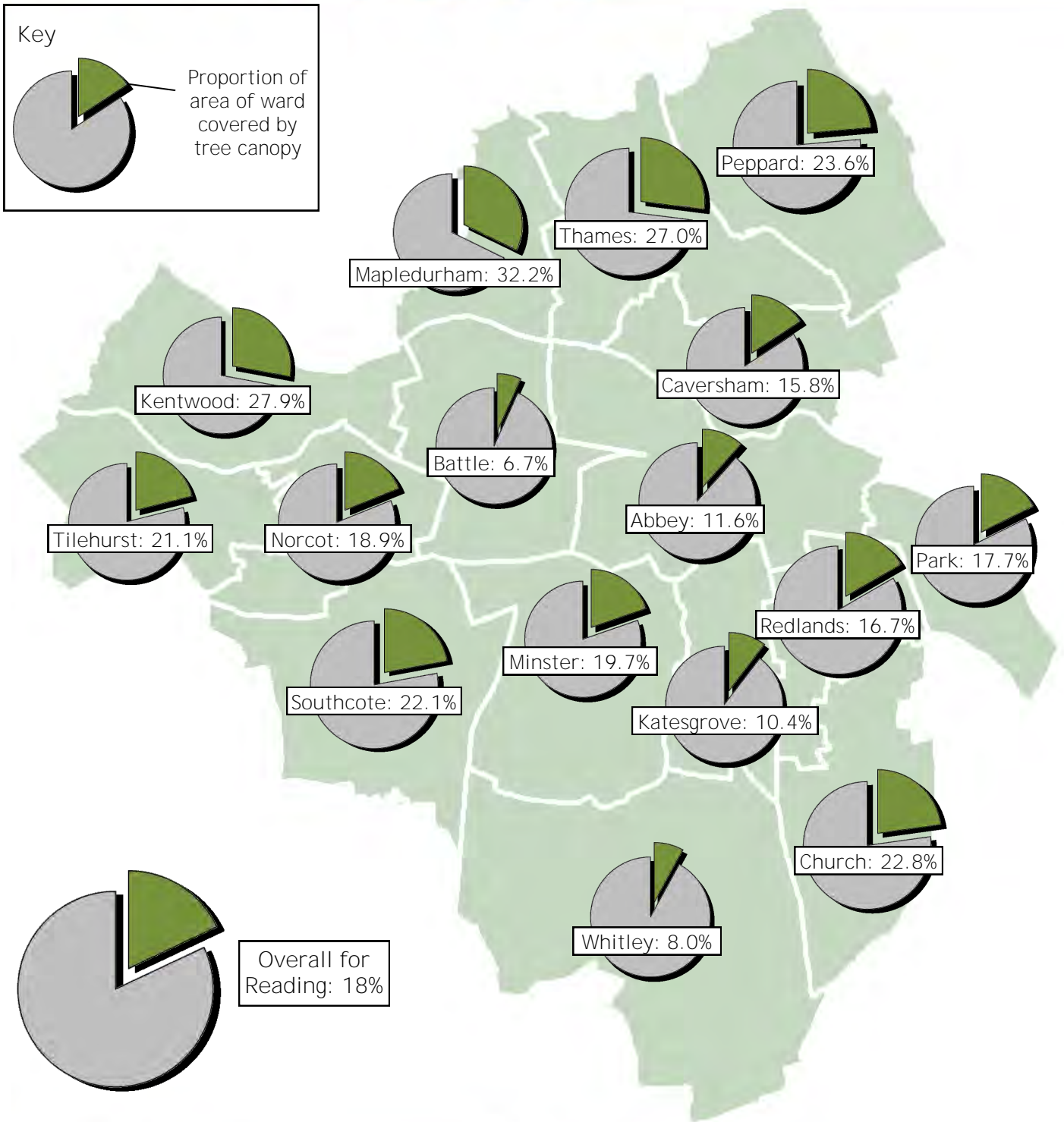
Objective	Action	Who	How	Resource scope / issues	Timescale
1. RBC Tree Stock - protect, retain, manage and plant trees to ensure an increased canopy cover of healthy trees resistance to pest & diseases and climate change and to reduce air pollution.	Protect Council trees from third party threats; only fell for health & safety reasons or when there's damage to property; manage trees in line with good arboricultural practice; plant with consideration of species and 'right tree, right place, right tree pit' principle; continue street tree planting	All Council land owning / managing departments	Careful consideration of development on RBC land; identify trees for TPOs on RBC land to be sold; RBC to seek compensation for damage to tree stock by external persons; manage trees in line with good arboricultural practice for optimum health; continue annual planting; increase species diversity & large canopy planting	Existing staff resources	Ongoing
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 and keep trees healthy in order that they can achieve their full potential to ensure that Reading's Urban Forest is resilient to the impacts of climate change so that it provides the maximum role in mitigating its effects	Careful consideration of species selection on RBC land and private land; plant large canopy trees where feasible; ensure appropriate maintenance of new trees to ensure establishment; maintain trees in line with good arboricultural practice; plant trees where appropriate on river banks to keep rivers cool (on average 50% of the water surface with dappled shade is desirable); devise a preferred species list for the Borough.	All Council land owning/managing departments, led by Parks; Planning Department; Developers; private householders; planning agents; Landscapers, Tree Consultants	Through appropriate planting and maintenance of Council trees and through the development control process to secure appropriate planting and maintenance on development sites. Tree works may also be required to reduce flood risk.	Existing staff resources	Ongoing. Preferred species list by 2022.

Objective	Action	Who	How	Resource scope / issues	Timescale
3. Tree planting - plant at least 3,000 trees by 2030 on Council land.	Continue planting on Council land and private land to ensure a net gain in tree number, especially within priority areas; focus on larger canopy trees where feasible.	All Council land owning / managing departments; Planning; private land owners; Developers; private householders; planning agents; Landscapers, Tree Consultants	Retention, protection and planting of trees on Council land; Planning Department through development control; encouragement of planting by private land owners	Additional staff and funding resources required.	Ongoing, with specific targets to 2030 and 2050.
4. Canopy cover - increase overall canopy cover to 25% by 2050; ensure that all wards have at least 12% canopy cover by 2050; and target priority areas for tree planting based on canopy cover, air pollution, treed corridors, green links and areas of high landscape value					
5. Protection of private trees - the Local Planning Authority will 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	Make TPOs where necessary and expedient; ensure development proposals retain appropriate trees & protect them during the construction process in line with good arboricultural practice and in accordance with agreed methods	Planning Department (including Planning Enforcement); Legal Services	Service of TPOs and through planning conditions	Existing staff resources	Ongoing
6. RBC will engage with partners, public and landowners to raise awareness of the Tree Strategy aims and good arboricultural management practices	Improve advice on RBC website; encourage RTWN to include advice/links on their website, providing support to RTWN on the website where possible; provision of advice to owners of protected trees; guidance to volunteer groups on tree and whip planting; continue to liaise with Network Rail over management of lineside vegetation.	All Council departments; external bodies; public; Tree Contractors and Consultants; Landscape architects; businesses	Promotion of good tree management practices through the Council and RTWN website; promotion of good arboricultural practice to tree owners with TPOs and in Conservation Areas	Existing staff resources	Ongoing

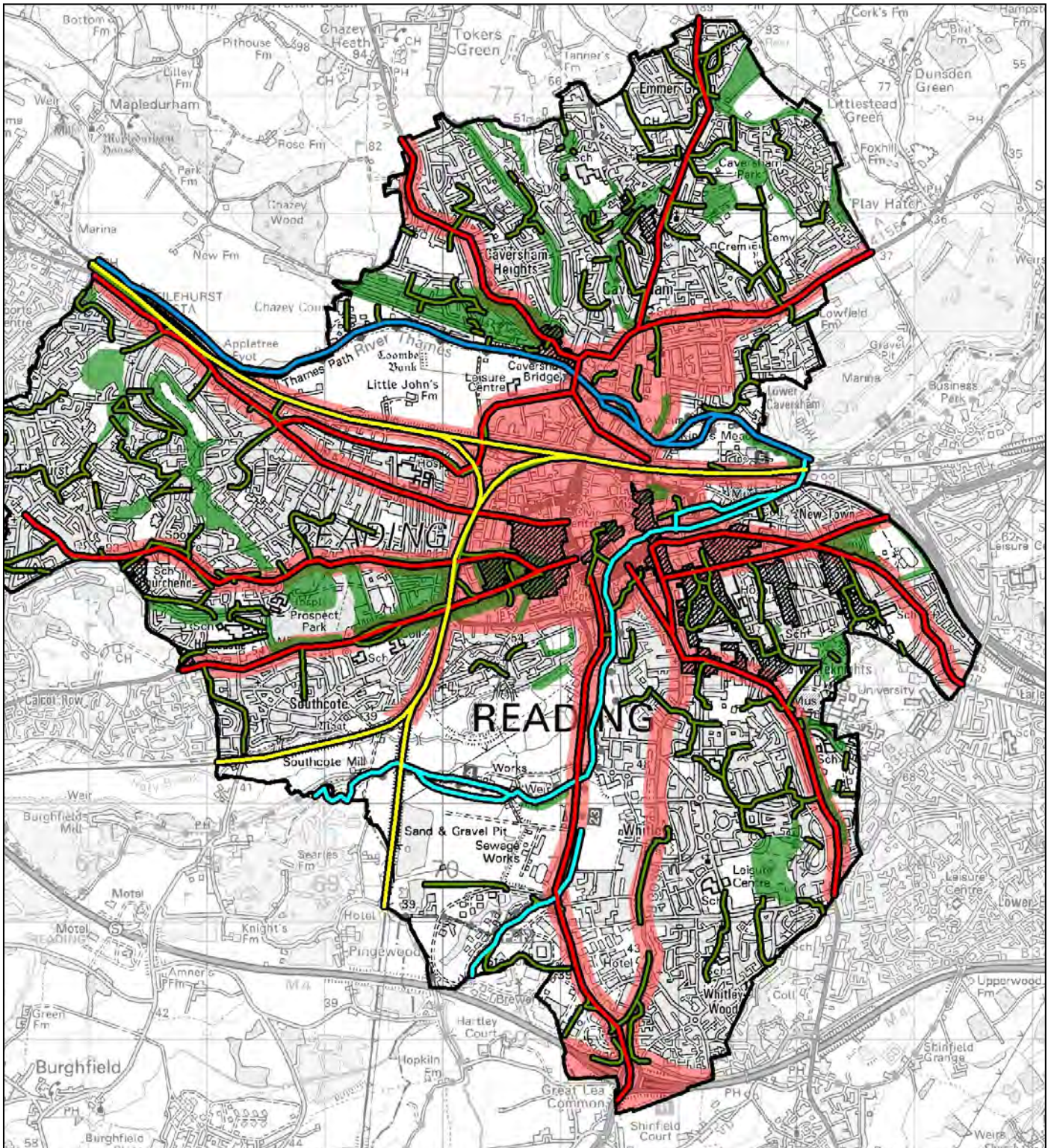
Objective	Action	Who	How	Resource scope / issues	Timescale
7. Improve biodiversity across the Borough by selecting trees that are either native or of wildlife value, particularly in semi-natural areas, and by ensuring that tree planting does not compromise or affect other habitats	Ensure species selection on RBC land and development sites maximises biodiversity benefits; prioritise planting along identified green routes and links; promote green walls and roofs where tree planting not feasible; promote natural SUDs; promote aims of the BAP; Manage woodland so as to maximise their value to wildlife for example by retaining standing and fallen deadwood, opening up rides and glades and encouraging natural regeneration on the edge of woodlands; Avoid planting trees on areas of high biodiversity value such as wildflower meadows and wetland areas	All Council Departments; Developers; private householders; planning agents; Landscapers, Tree Consultants	Through planting on Council land and through maximisation of greening on development sites in accordance with Tree Strategy, Local Planning Policies and BAP; Implementation of woodland and ecological management plans	Existing staff resources	Ongoing
8. Identify all areas suitable for street tree and other planting on Council land - initial study to be completed by 2021, with continued updates	Built up a bank of potential planting sites on RBC land in preparation for annual planting and external requests for new planting	All Council Departments, primarily Parks	By identifying potential tree planting sites when tree surveying and recording these	Existing staff resources	Ongoing
9. Ensure continuing funding for tree planting	Continue to identify sources and work with external bodies to secure funding for annual tree planting	All Council land owning/managing departments, led by Parks.	Via Trees for Cities, Trees for Reading, RTWN, Memorial planting, S106, CIL, crowd funding, public funding (match funding), potential further budget following financial valuation of tree stock	Existing (and potentially increased) RBC tree budget; external funding; planning obligations	Ongoing

Objective	Action	Who	How	Resource scope / issues	Timescale
10. Biosecurity - continually review RBC purchasing and working practices to ensure RBC are working to good arboricultural and horticultural practice to minimise the chance of introducing and/or spreading pests and diseases within the Borough; ensure biosecurity is considered on development sites	Continually review RBC purchasing and working practices to ensure RBC are working to good arboricultural and horticultural practice to minimise the chance of pest/disease introduction to, and spread within, the Borough; ensure and encourage good practice to private land owners; ensure landscape schemes on development sites consider biodiversity when sourcing and maintaining trees; devise action plan on dealing with invasive species.	All Council land owning/managing departments, led by Parks; Planning Department; Developers; private householders; planning agents; Landscapers, Tree Consultants	Ensure working practices and management follow Government guidance; consider biosecurity when agreeing details of landscaping and maintenance on development sites.	Existing staff resources	Ongoing
11. Trees & Development - tree retention, protection and planting within development sites to be in accordance with the aims of the Tree Strategy and Local Plan policy	Ensure tree retention and landscape schemes on development sites contribute to the aims of the Tree Strategy and comply with Local Plan Policy and that any opportunities for additional planting are secured.	Planning Department; Council landowning department when submitting a planning application on RBC land; Developers; private householders; planning agents; Landscapers, Tree Consultants; RBC Streetworks	Through the development control process, securing appropriate planning conditions and objecting to proposals which do not meet the objectives of the Tree Strategy and Local Plan policies; improve liaison with utility companies; additional resources for monitoring and enforcing compliance with landscaping conditions and contravention of planning law.	Existing staff resources	Ongoing
12. Monitor progress - Record and report net tree gain on an annual basis; reassess canopy cover in 2030	Continue recording of tree felling and planting on Council land; create a database for recording felling and planting secured on Development sites; provide a facility to allow private landowners to inform RBC of trees planted	Planning, Parks, private land owners, business owners	Annual reporting on the Council's website of net gain in tree number on development sites, Council land and new planting by private individuals and businesses	Existing staff resources	Ongoing

APPENDIX 2: MAP SHOWING CANOPY COVER BY WARD



APPENDIX 3: MAP SHOWING TREED CORRIDORS AND OTHER CONTEXT



Treed corridor (existing and potential) -

- railway
- River Thames
- road
- River Kennet and tributaries
- Green Link

- Area with high treescape value
- Air Quality Management Area
- Conservation Area

APPENDIX 4: COUNCIL TREE NUMBERS BY FAMILY AND GENUS

Family	Genus/Species	Numbers
Adoxaceae	Sambucus nigra	2
Altingiaceae	Liquidambar	85
Aquifoliaceae	Ilex	89
Araucariaceae	Araucaria auricana	3
Betulaceae	Betula	591
Betulaceae	Carpinus	197
Betulaceae	Alnus sp.	138
Betulaceae	Corylus	42
		968
Bignoniaceae	Catalpa bignonioides	18
Cupressaceae	Chamaecyp.	110
Cupressaceae	Cupressus	32
Cupressaceae	Sequoiadendron giganteum	24
Cupressaceae	Thuja plicata	15
Cupressaceae	Taxodium distichum	8
Cupressaceae	Metasequoia	7
		196
Fabaceae	Robinia	77
Fabaceae	Laburnum sp.	29
Fabaceae	Gleditsia triacanthos	21
Fagaceae	Quercus sp.	882
Fagaceae	Fagus	215
Fagaceae	Castanea sativa	49
		1273
Ginkgoaceae	Ginkgo biloba	2
Juglandaceae	Juglans regia	48
Magnoliaceae	Liriodendron tulipifera	37
Magnoliaceae	Magnolia	9
		46
Malvaceae	Tilia sp.	1997
Myrtaceae	Eucalyptus sp.	4
Nothofagaceae	Nothofagus sp.	6

Family	Genus/Species	Numbers
Oleaceae	Fraxinus	789
Pinaceae	Cedrus	126
Pinaceae	Pinus	95
Pinaceae	Larix decidua	21
Pinaceae	Picea sp.	18
Pinaceae	Abies sp.	15
Pinaceae	Pseudotsuga	9
		284
Platanaceae	Platanus	576
Rosaceae	Prunus sp.	1441
Rosaceae	Sorbus sp.	493
Rosaceae	Malus	410
Rosaceae	Crataegus sp.	371
Rosaceae	Pyrus sp.	171
Rosaceae	Amelanchier sp.	12
		2898
Salicaceae	Salix sp.	365
Salicaceae	Populus sp.	322
		687
Sapindaceae	Acer pseudoplatanus	665
Sapindaceae	Acer platanoides	568
Sapindaceae	Aesculus	368
Sapindaceae	Acer sp.	169
		1770
Simaroubaceae	Ailanthus altissima	9
Taxaceae	Taxus sp.	133
Ulmaceae	Ulmus sp.	75
	Other Conifer	30
	Unidentified	383

Groups: other broadleaf	367
Groups: mixed	124

APPENDIX 5: DECLARATION FOR STATUTORY UNDERTAKERS



Giorgio Framalicco
Deputy Director Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services

Agreement between Reading Borough Council and [company]

We the undersigned recognise the importance of trees within the Reading Borough Council area for the multiple benefits they provide. As such we commit to undertaking our required works with due care and consideration to both private and public trees. We recognise that Council trees are a public asset with environmental, social and economic benefits for both the residents of Reading and those that pass through and visit the town. As a public asset, we understand that their management is paid for by the public and therefore that any works or felling required as a result of our works should be paid for by us and that where possible replacement trees should be planted for any trees that must be felled during works.

When working within the Reading Borough boundary, we agree to the following:

- To fully assess the potential impact of our works on adjacent public and private trees, seeking our own arboricultural advice if necessary.
- To ensure our working practices comply with National Joint Utilities Group Volume 4: 'Street Works UK Guidelines for the Planning, Installation and Maintenance of Utility Apparatus in Proximity to Trees' (NJUG 4), at a minimum, and will communicate this to all contractors and sub-contractors.
- If we cannot conform to NJUG 4, we will fully justify this and agree a method statement prior to commencement of any works.
- Should our work result in the immediate or future need for tree works, we will provide reasonable monetary compensation. We accept the Council's use of Capital Asset Valuation of Amenity Trees (CAVAT) in assessing the monetary value of compensation should a tree need to be felled in order to implement, or as a result of, our works.

Signed:.....

Name:.....

Position:.....

Company:.....

Date:.....

APPENDIX 6: I-TREE READING CANOPY ANALYSIS

Prepared by Georgia England, University of Reading

Results

The I-Tree Canopy assessment calculated the canopy cover of Reading to be 18%, which is 2% higher than the UK average (in towns and cities). It also means Reading is within reach of the UK target canopy cover of 20%. Individual I-Tree Canopy assessments were completed for each of the Reading wards, the results of which can be found in Figure 1. The ward canopy cover ranges from 6.7% to 32.2%. Canopy cover was greatest in the Mapledurham, Kentwood and Thames, which were determined to be 32.2%, 27.9% and 27% respectively. Whilst Whitley, Battle and Katesgrove wards had the lowest (8%, 6.7% and 10.4% respectively).

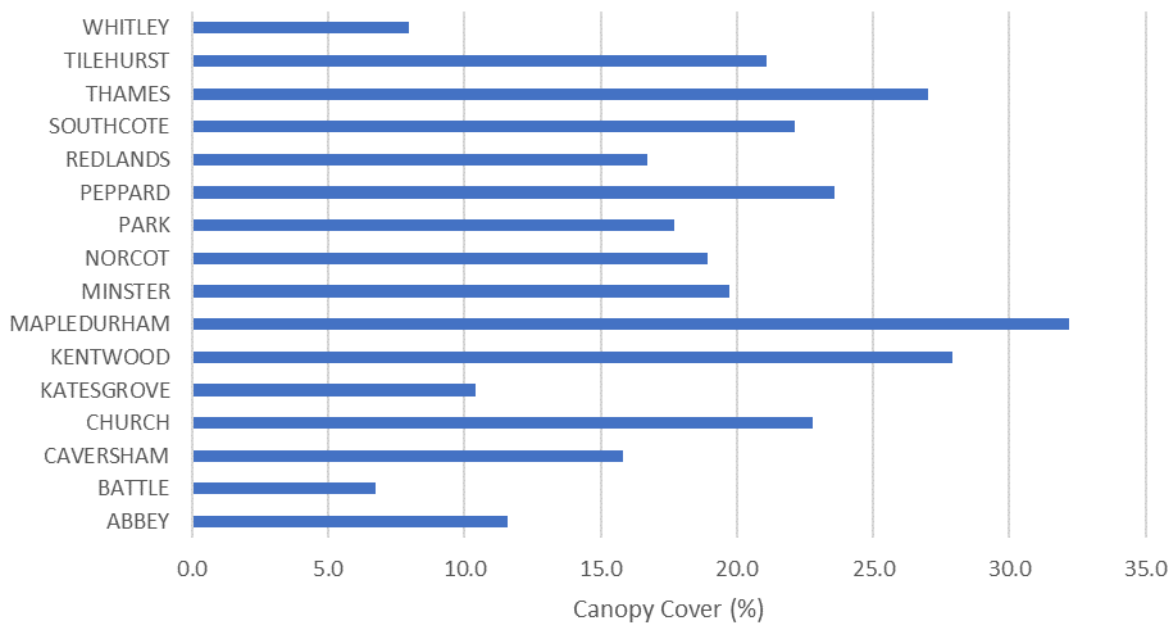


Figure 1 Canopy cover by Ward in Reading

In addition to canopy cover, I-Tree Canopy calculates 'benefits' provided by the tree assets. The benefits are pollutant removal services; such as carbon monoxide (CO), carbon dioxide, Ozone, particle matter etc. Figure 2 shows the annual mass removed of three pollutant examples; carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and sulphur dioxide (SO₂). From this data it is clear that Thames, Southcote, Peppard and Kentwood provide the majority of chemical removal benefits out of all the Reading catchments. Battle and Katesgrove remove the least pollutants in terms of mass.

From the data we also see that Mapledurham and Whitley provide similar benefits, despite the major difference in canopy cover (32.2% and 8% respectively). This is because the benefits are also dependent on the area of the ward. Despite Mapledurham having high canopy cover, its area is one of lowest out of all the Reading wards (147ha). In comparison, Whitley has a low canopy cover but has the largest area of all the Reading wards (508ha).

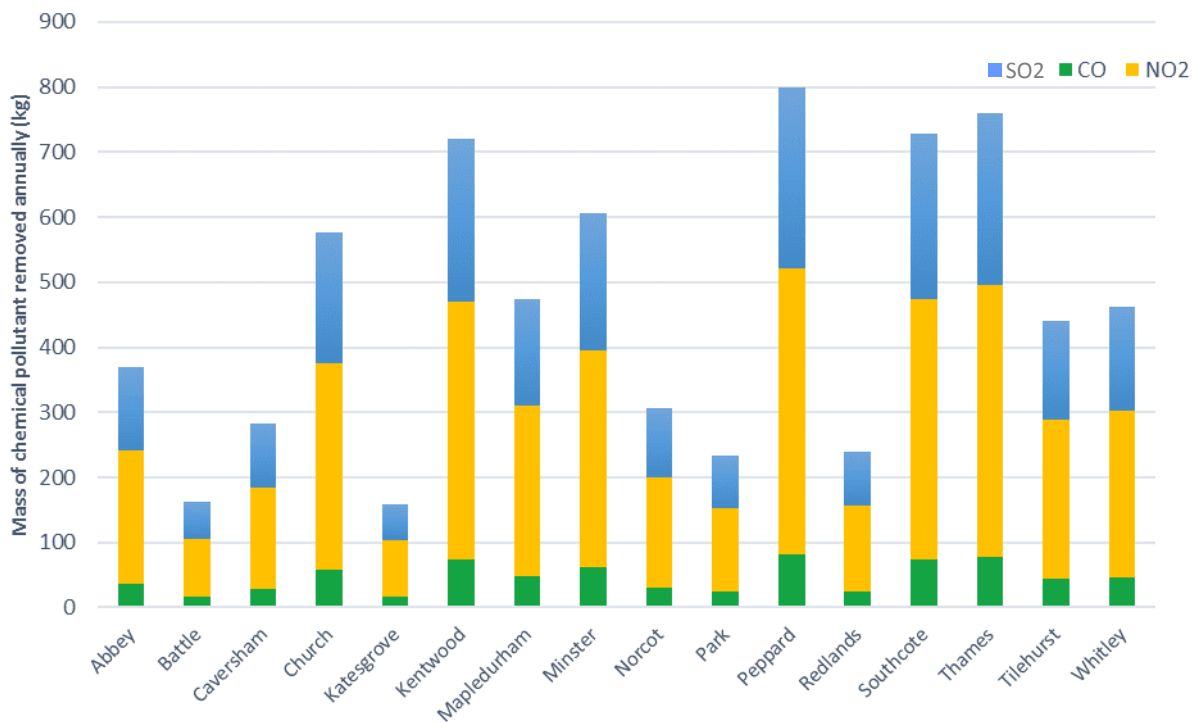


Figure 2 I-Tree results calculating the estimated mass of pollutant removed annually by trees within Reading wards

Another benefit determined by I-Tree Canopy is carbon storage; the overall carbon stored in Reading is determined to be 204,470t. Figure 3 presents the carbon stored within each ward as a percentage of this value. As expected from analysing the other benefits, Peppard, Kentwood, Southcote and Thames hold the highest percentage of overall carbon storage. Whereas Katesgrove, Park and Redlands contribute the least, reflected in their low percentages.

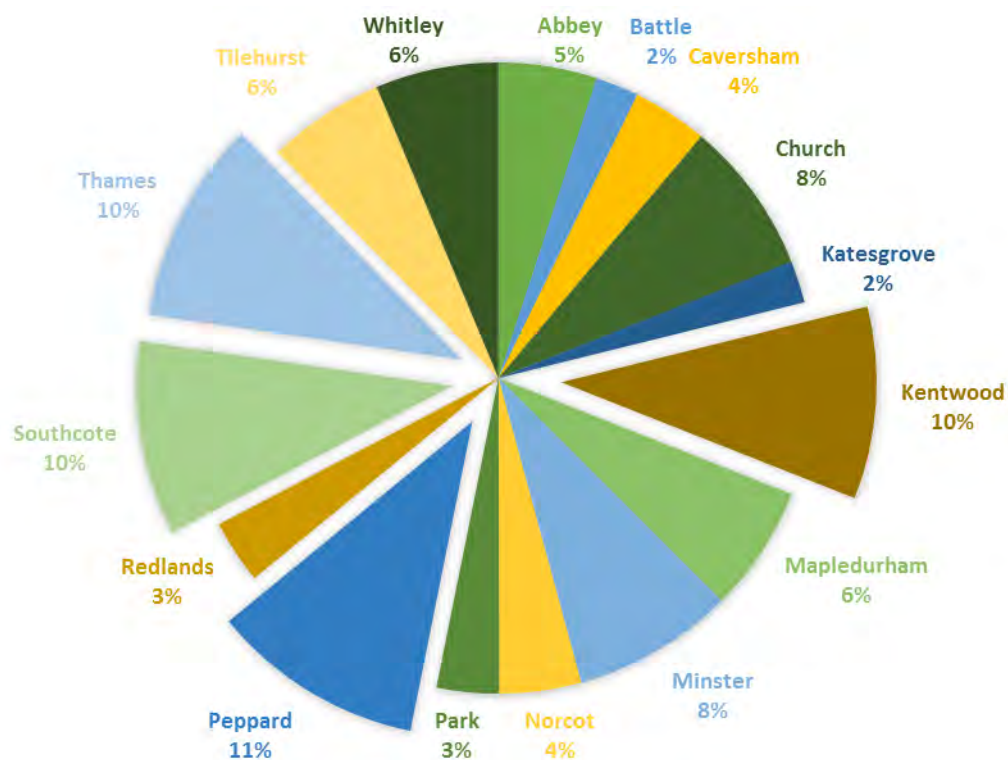


Figure 3 Total carbon stored per ward as a percentage of the overall carbon stored within Reading

I-Tree Canopy also calculates an economic valuation of the benefits provided. Figure 4 presents the total annual benefit value in £s for each Reading ward. The difference between the highest and lowest valuation is £30,000, which emphasises the difference in benefits being received between wards. Consistent with the other results, Peppard (£37,325), Southcote (£33,971), Thames (£35,489) and Kentwood (£33,279) have the greatest calculated values. In contrast, Battle and Katesgrove are valued at £7533 and £7291 respectively.

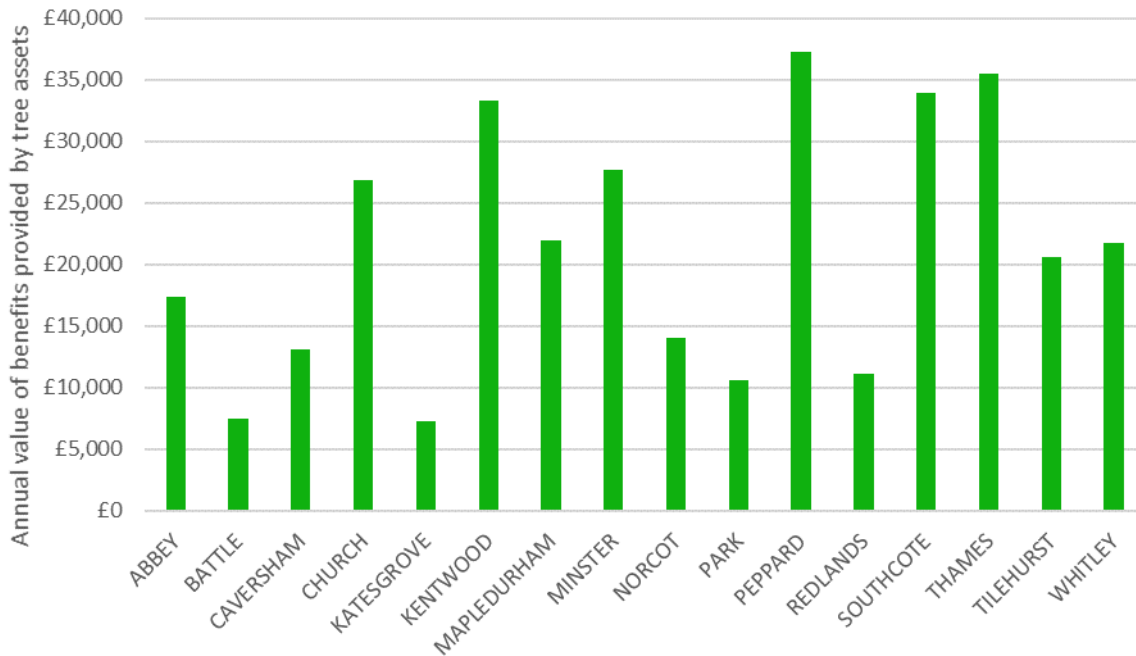


Figure 4 Total value of benefits provided by tree assets annually by Reading ward

Discussion

On reflection of the data obtained from the I-Tree Canopy assessment it is clear that canopy cover can vary significantly on a local scale. In Reading alone, the canopy cover results of individual wards varies by 25.5%. The impact of this difference can be seen from the variation in benefits provided by the tree assets within the wards.

The benefits are dependent of canopy cover and ward area, therefore wards with high canopy cover and larger area have the greatest calculated benefits. However, Whitley is the ward with the largest area (508ha) yet currently has an average benefit provision. In fact, the benefit values are matched by Mapledurham, a ward that is less than a third of the area of Whitley. This enforces how influential canopy cover percentage is on benefit provision.

Removal of these pollutants is beneficial for human health, as the chemicals can cause illness and respiratory problems. By increasing canopy cover of an area, the annual removal of these pollutants also increases. Furthermore, increased canopy cover has been linked to other benefits; including improving mental health, urban flooding and shading, as well as environmental benefits (e.g. biodiversity and connectivity).

Limitations

There are limitations to using the I-Tree Canopy assessment method. The accuracy of the canopy cover results is dependent on the number of points identified (tree or non-tree), the more points completed the higher the accuracy. In this assessment the points were identified until the standard error was equal to $\pm 1.50\%$. There is potential for human error in identifying whether the point fell on a tree or not, although the likelihood of this significantly influencing the results is low.

However, the benefit results present higher potential inaccuracies, which is due to uncontrolled variables. For example, trees vary in their ability to remove pollutants; depending on age, species and location. These limitations mean the standard errors for the benefits are high.

Future recommendations

The UK target canopy cover is 20% for urban areas; 6 of the 16 wards already exceed this target. However, to optimise the canopy cover in Reading and reach the proposed target, the primary focuses should be on the wards Whitley, Battle and Katesgrove. As these wards would require extensive tree planting to reach achieve the canopy cover goal.

However, if benefit provision is prioritised it would be more important to focus on planting in Battle, Katesgrove, Park and Redlands. The current ward tree assets provide significantly low benefits, it would be advantageous to increase canopy cover in these areas.

APPENDIX 7: INFORMATION ON NETWORK RAIL'S VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Network Rail's (NR's) estate is approximately 51-52,000 hectares in size and 16,000 km long (double if you count both sides) with an average width of 12m from the track to the fence. It contains approximately 6 million trees (taken to be those 3m tall and above) with Ash being the most prevalent species (16%); other species including Sycamore, Oak and Birch. Certain works in recent years resulted in a public outcry the result of which (following political involvement) was that NR had to undertake a formal review of their procedures. As part of this, there have been improvements to their website to help explain their vegetation management policies and a national helpline from which you can be linked to the local team in order to answer specific enquiries.

NR's management guidance provides the required safety zones to both allow safe working zones for NR staff and to manage the potential risk of harm to the rail network or trains from falling trees, the effect of which can be major disruption or injury. A railway cross-section is divided into 4 zones:

- 1 The area immediately around the trains and railway infrastructure must be kept clear for the safety of passengers and staff;
- 2 **Near the railway wild flower grasslands are encouraged which are perfect for insects and butterflies;**
- 3 Bushes and brambles provide habitats for small animals such as hedgehogs and amphibians. Smaller birds such as sparrows and robins are attracted to berries which grow along the railway;
- 4 At a safe distance further back from the railway, taller trees provide habitats for animals such as squirrels and larger birds.

NR believe that these different lineside habitats help create a more biodiverse ecosystem than a uniform line of trees.

Given the differing levels of the railway across the network, some of which runs through deep cuttings, each location is assessed by local engineers and is treated in a site-specific manner, taking into account such factors as slope angle, vegetation type and soil type in order to determine likely root stability. Where alternatives to felling are appropriate, these are implemented.

Prior to recent lineside vegetation works through Reading and Wokingham, NR engaged with RBC, Wokingham BC, RTWN and Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association. NR is a significant landowner **within the Borough and the railway is a designated 'treed corridor' in this Strategy.** As such, NR will be an important contributor in helping the Borough meet the objectives for canopy cover, therefore RBC will continue to liaise with NR in order to minimise tree removal and discuss replacement planting.

Weblink to NR environment pages:

<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/communities/environment>

Weblink to vegetation management and community involvement:

<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/communities/environment/vegetation-management/keeping-lineside-neighbours-involved-in-vegetation-management>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Tree Wardens - thanks to the members of RTWN who provided some lovely photographs of trees and woodlands in Reading.

Georgia England, University of Reading - big thanks to Georgia for sharing her canopy cover assessment & data for the Reading Borough area.

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