

To: Councillor Davies (Chair)
Councillors Barnett-Ward, Ennis, Hoskin,
Lovelock, Manghnani, McGonigle,
O'Connell, Rowland and R Singh

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

NOTICE OF MEETING - HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE 15 DECEMBER 2020

A meeting of the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee will be held on Tuesday, 15 December 2020 at 6.30 pm as an online Teams Meeting. The Agenda for the meeting is set out below.

	<u>WARDS</u>	<u>Page No</u>
	<u>AFFECTED</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 MEETING HELD ON 11 MARCH 2020		5 - 16
3. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES		17 - 22
Community Safety Partnership – 17 September 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.		
5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS		

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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 2021 ANNIVERSARY PLANS **BOROUGH WIDE** **23 - 26**

This report is to advise the Committee of the plans to mark 2021, a year of culturally significant anniversaries in Reading.

8. HIGH STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE PROGRAMME 2020-2024 - UPDATE REPORT **BOROUGH WIDE** **27 - 34**

This report is inviting the Committee to note the High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) Programme aims and objectives, the plans to deliver the HSHAZ programme over the next four years and the main activities and key milestones over the next 6 months.

9. ALLOTMENTS CONSULTATION AND NEXT STEPS **BOROUGH WIDE** **35 - 54**

This report summarises the results of the consultation and recommends next steps and proposals for a future strategy for the management and maintenance of the allotments service.

10. REWILDING AND THE WILDFLOWER PLAN. INCREASING BIODIVERSITY ON HIGHWAYS VERGES **BOROUGH WIDE** **55 - 88**

This report gives further details of the operational changes involved in the rewilding project, updates the Committee on the results of the experiment and the recommended next steps contained in the draft Wildflower Plan.

11. FOODWASTE AND 140L BIN PROJECT - EARLY ADOPTERS AND PROJECT UPDATE **BOROUGH WIDE** **89 - 126**

This report updates on the progress of the kerbside food waste collections in the five early adopter areas and on the main Phase 1 roll-out planned for 1 February 2021.

12. FIRE SAFETY IN TALL BUILDINGS **BOROUGH WIDE** **127 - 136**

This report provides an update on the Council's response following the Grenfell Tower fire in Kensington on 14th June 2017 including action taken in relation to the Authority's own housing stock and privately-owned high-rise residential blocks within the Borough boundaries.

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

Apologies: Councillors Hoskin and Lovelock.

18. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

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

19. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the following meetings were submitted:

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

Resolved - That the Minutes be received.

20. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Questions on the following matters were submitted:

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

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

21. READING FESTIVAL 2019

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

Noel explained that the changes that had been made for the 2019 festival had been successful. They had included working with more agencies to promote safeguarding and wellbeing, new main stage barriers and line up gates for the pit, additional clean-up volunteers and greater use of car sharing. Noel added that sustainability measures had also been successful with the following improvements on the previous year:

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

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

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

Resolved -

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

22. DRAFT HOUSING & HOMELESS STRATEGIES

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

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

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

Resolved -

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

23. READING, PLACE OF CULTURE' (GREAT PLACE SCHEME)

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

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

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

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

- Deliver year two and three cultural commissions and their associated action research, data collection, social impact measurement and case studies;
- Further training to upskill the sector; e.g. RBC had commissioned MB Associates to deliver evaluation and social impact measurement training for the cultural commissions; RBC were bringing CC Skills to Reading for creative employment training for cultural organisations working with children and young people;
- Deliver a conference aimed at local cross-sector organisations and commissioners to take place in November 2020 to disseminate learning from the research and commissioning strands;
- Following research carried out by the Whitley Researchers and feedback from grassroots BAME arts culture and heritage organisations, the University would coordinate a BAME grassroots cultural organisation exchange to provide more opportunities for networking, peer support and exchange;

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- Complete Ageing Well pilot programmes and support Cultural Champions to advocate for older people's engagement;
- Continue to advocate the role of arts, culture and heritage with commissioners from other sectors, creating and publicising research and case studies to illustrate impact;
- Set up a Business Ambassadors programme to link more local businesses to the arts culture and heritage sector;
- Use the Reading Thames Festival as a transition to prepare for a larger celebratory year in 2021. This would support Reading's existing festivals and provide them with an infrastructure, which was sustainable beyond this grant funding;
- Expand the Young Researchers programme to three new schools in Reading;
- Build on the existing partnerships that had been developed organically, to create a strategic cultural development partnership for Reading that focused on supporting the development and growth of the arts, culture and heritage sector in Reading.

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

Resolved -

- (1) That the progress made in delivering 'Reading, Place of Culture' in its second year, be noted;
- (2) That the proposals to further develop the programme of work in the third and final year of delivery as set out in section 5 of the report be noted.

24. PRIVATE SECTOR RENEWAL & DISABLED ADAPTATIONS POLICY

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

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

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

Resolved:

- (1) That the Private Sector Renewal & Disabled Adaptations Policy, effective from 1 April 2020, be approved;

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

25. EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

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

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

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

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

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

Resolved:

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

26. BIODEIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

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

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

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

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

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

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- Coordinated approach across council departments and within policy documents - noting the need to co-ordinate efforts with a range of Council and partner strategies.
- Global biodiversity - actions the Council and partners could make to avoid contributing to global biodiversity loss, for instance in terms of procurement.
- Ongoing review - an action for an annual review.

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

Resolved:

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

27. TREE STRATEGY

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

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

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

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

1. RBC Tree Stock - protect, retain, manage and plant trees to ensure an increased canopy cover of healthy trees resistant to pest & diseases and climate change and to reduce air pollution.

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2. Climate adaptation - increase the diversity of the tree stock (family, genus and species) to provide resistance to climate change; plant large canopy species wherever feasible; maintain and keep trees healthy in order that they could achieve their full potential thus ensuring that Reading's Urban Forest was resilient to the impacts of climate change and provided the maximum role in mitigating its effects.
3. Tree planting - plant at least 3,000 'standard' trees by 2030 on Council land.
4. Canopy cover - increase overall canopy cover to 25% by 2050; ensure that all wards had at least 12% canopy cover by 2050; and target priority areas for tree planting based on canopy cover, air pollution, treed corridors, green links, areas of high landscape value and ensure RBC and planting on development sites considers these.
5. Protection of private trees - the Local Planning Authority would continue to use its powers under the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 to make Tree Preservation Orders and to retain & protect trees on development sites in line with good arboricultural practice.
6. RBC would engage with partners, public and landowners and work with key partner volunteer groups to raise awareness of the Tree Strategy aims and good arboricultural management practices.
7. Improve biodiversity across the Borough by: selecting trees that were either native or of wildlife value, particularly in semi-natural areas; by ensuring that tree planting did not compromise or adversely affect other habitats; and by protecting ancient woodlands and ancient/veteran trees.
8. Identify all areas suitable for street tree and other planting on Council land - initial study to be completed by 2021, with continued updates.
9. Funding - continue to secure funding for tree planting and maintenance through government and other funding streams and partners.
10. Biosecurity - continually review RBC purchasing and working practices to ensure RBC were working to good arboricultural practice to minimise the chance of introducing and/or spreading pests, diseases or invasive species within the Borough.
11. Trees & Development - tree retention, protection and planting within development sites in would be in accordance with the aims of the Tree Strategy and Local Plan policies.
12. Monitor progress - record and report net tree gain on an annual basis and reassess canopy cover in 2030.

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

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

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Resolved:

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

- (a) Objective 4 of the Tree Strategy be amended to state:

“Canopy cover - increase overall canopy cover to 25% by 2030; ensure that all wards have at least 12% canopy cover by 2030; and target priority areas for tree planting based on canopy cover, air pollution, treed corridors, green links, areas of high landscape value and ensure RBC and planting on development sites considers these.”

- (b) the references to Objective 4 in the Executive Summary and the Action Plan in Appendix 1 be changed from 2050 to 2030.

- (c) That paragraphs 3.65-3.69 the Strategy be amended as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

These two paragraphs remain as is:

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

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

And to add:

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

- (2) That the Deputy Director of Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services be authorised to make any changes necessary as a result of

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consultation and approve the final Tree Strategy, in consultation with the Lead Councillors for Culture, Heritage & Recreation and Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport.

(The meeting opened at 6.30pm and closed at 9.45pm).

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Agenda Item 3

COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP EXECUTIVE GROUP - 17 SEPTEMBER 2020

Present:

Cllr Adele Barnett-Ward (Chair)	Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities, in Chair for Nick John
Cllr Jason Brock	Leader, RBC
Cllr Tony Page	Deputy Leader, RBC
Cllr Raj Singh	Observer, RBC
Anthony Brain	Community Safety Manager, RBC
Kelly Reed	Thames Valley Police, Victim Reduction Unit
Ash Smith	Thames Valley Police
Giles Allchurch	Brighter Futures for Children
Catherine Marriott	Office of the PCC
Kathryn Warner	PACT
Jo Middlemass	Anti-Social Behaviour Team Manager, RBC
Deborah Glassbrook	Director of Children's Services, Brighter Futures for Children
Paul Gresty	Brighter Futures for Children
Joanne Anderson	Reading Borough Council
Melanie Smith	Probation Service
David Munday	Consultant in Public Health, RBC
Julie Quarmby	Committee Services, RBC

Apologies:

Zelda Wolfle	Assistant Director of Housing & Communities, RBC
Nick John	Thames Valley Police
Dave Turton	Thames Valley Police
Natausha VanVliet	PACT
Vicky Rhodes	Strategic Lead for Early Help, Brighter Futures for Children
Jeanie Herbert	PACT
Chris Juden	Reading Magistrates
Donna Gray	Safeguarding Children, Brighter Futures for Children
Lou Everatt	Thames Valley CRC
Kate Stockdale	Reading Borough Council
Nicola Bell	Manager, Willow Project

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

2. HOSPITAL NAVIGATOR SCHEME, VIOLENCE REDUCTION UNIT

Kelly Reed, Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), submitted a report on the Hospital Navigator Scheme. The report explained that the scheme aimed to provide point of contact for people who were victims of violence, in particular young people under the age of 25 and victims of domestic violence, within the Accident & Emergency setting. The scheme anticipated that the Navigators (most of whom would be volunteers) would build trust with patients who presented at hospital as a result of existing issues including substance abuse, mental health issues, poor diet or personal care and violence itself. When in hospital, there was a reachable moment when the patient could be reflective and open to intervention. The Navigator would ask for consent to refer the patient onto a third sector organisation who could provide the specialist support required to navigate them back into the community, building resilience and offering mentoring in an attempt to prevent further incidents which could lead them back into hospital.

The report added that the project also incorporated the Community Initiative to Reducing Violence (CIRV - pronounced 'Serve'). This was a multi-agency programme designed to introduce clients to a suite of interventions in an attempt to divert them away from violent offending. Clients would be identified either through Regency, Frequency and Gravity (RFG) data, local multi agency meetings (predominantly Under 18's) or through the Police Tasking process and would have a history of being involved in violence with intelligence suggesting they posed a current risk of causing serious harm. Once a client had been identified, they would be approached by either a mentor, or a person from an outside agency with which they already had a good rapport. If the client refused to engage, then the Police and partner agencies would conduct a two-week period of enforcement and disruption. Once the client had engaged, they would complete a Needs Assessment where the issues in their life were identified and they would be supported by a mentor and a dedicated Police Officer to remove the blocks in their life and work towards gaining training and employment.

Kelly reported that it was hoped to have the navigators in place by December, a peak month for violence. The VRU was also looking at how to fund the scheme going forward, once the original funding stream stopped.

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

- Anthony Brain noted that this scheme would be incorporated into the Crime Reduction Plan;
- The VRU would provide regular updates via the Violent Crime workstream.

AGREED: That the report be noted and the Hospital Navigation Scheme be welcomed.

3. YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN

Giles Allchurch submitted the latest version of the Youth Justice Plan for information. He explained that the key points of the Plan were:

- Trying to reduce the number of first-time entrants into the Youth Justice system;
- Developing an information pack for young people at risk of violent relationships, to help them to learn how to have a healthy relationship;
- Working with the Management Board to audit the work being carried out to ensure that it met national standards;
- Asking service users and their families about their experiences of the service to help to improve the provision.

Giles also reported that going forward, the Youth Justice team would be working alongside schools to try to divert young people from entering the system, and also carrying out work to identify and address disproportionality within the young people entering the service.

The Partnership noted that whilst there appeared to be a large increase in youth violence and other serious crimes, Reading was a small Youth Offending Team area, and that a small number of additional incidents could make a relatively big difference to the statistics.

AGREED: That the Youth Justice Plan be noted.

4. IMPACT OF INCIDENT AT FORBURY GARDENS

Anthony Brain led a brief discussion on the impact of the recent terrorist incident at Forbury Gardens on services within Reading. The Partnership noted that a number of groups had been set up to help support people and communities, both those that had been directly affected, and where there were concerns over the impact of the incident. Ash Smith added that there

had been a massive impact on residents and communities and that TVP had appointed a Bronze Inspector to lead on reaching out to those affected as well as staff welfare support for those personnel who had attended the incident and dealt with the follow-up. Melanie Smith reported that the alleged offender was known to the Probation Service, and that counselling had been made available for those staff who wanted it. Deborah Glassbrook stated that BFFC had been working with schools on a programme of work to manage children's responses and reactions, although this had been somewhat affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

AGREED:

- (1) That the Partnership place on record their gratitude for the bravery of the police officers attending the incident;
- (2) That Deborah Glassbrook liaise with the TVP schools officers regarding the programme of work with children following the incident.

5. PRIORITY SUB-GROUP ACTION PLANS

Anthony Brain, Community Safety Manager, RBC, reported that, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Sub-Groups had not been able to meet since March 2020, although they had been able to carry out some cross-partnership work. The three Sub-Group action plans had now been collated in to one action plan, which had been circulated to the Partnership.

(A) Class A Drugs

David Munday, Consultant in Public Health, RBC, reported that, during lockdown, the provision of services for drug and alcohol treatment had been a particular challenge, as staff worked to ensure a secure method of delivering daily methadone prescriptions to users. David also reported that the number of people in contact or treatment for opiate-based addiction had increased significantly since January 2020. This was encouraging as it meant that more people had been engaging with services. David also reported that work would restart on the harm reduction programme during the autumn.

(B) Violent Crime

Ash Smith, Thames Valley Police, reported that the recent lockdown had affected the delivery of the initiatives to reduce violent crime, as it had not been possible to engage with target groups such as schools as had been planned and that as a result the strategy was being rewritten. Ash also reported that there had been an increase in knife crime, with four individuals being stabbed during July and August in Reading. There had also been an incident over the weekend of 12/13 September which was just over the border into West Berkshire. More funding had now been made available to provide an increased police presence and assist with community engagement.

(C) Adult Exploitation and Modern Slavery

Not discussed.

AGREED: That the reports be noted.

6. PCC UPDATE

Catherine Marriot, PCC, gave an update on the Early Intervention Youth Fund, which had funded a two-year programme for diversion and prevention of serious violence among young people, setting out what had been achieved over the period and on those actions that could be continued going forward. Catherine also explained that a report had been produced showing

how each Community Safety Partnership allocated the funding that it had received, and how the spending was being monitored. These confidential reports were circulated to the Partnership with the minutes of the meeting.

Catherine also reported that the elections for the PCC Commissioner had been postponed due to the pandemic and would now be held in May 2021. She explained that the policies of the successful candidate could significantly affect funding for the CSPs and suggested that it would be helpful for all partners to look at the impact on services should there be cuts of 10%, 25% or 50% to funding. The Partnership noted that Community Safety Partnerships were not classed as core funding streams and that financial support could not be taken for granted going forward.

AGREED: That the position be noted.

7. CRIME PERFORMANCE

Anthony Brain submitted the crime performance report as at the end of July 2020. He reported that there had been a decrease in crime during the period of lockdown but that incidents were beginning to rise again as restrictions had been lifted.

For all British Crime Survey crimes there had been a 12% decrease compared to the same period last year, with Reading's performance remaining average for the Most Similar Group of CSPs (MSG).

For burglary there had been a 10% increase over the same period and again the performance remained average within the MSG.

There had been a 4% increase in violent crime for the year to date, and Reading's performance remained average amongst the MSG. Anthony explained that, as expected violent crime had fallen considerably during lock down however since the restriction have been reduced there had been a significant increase in violent crime at a greater rate than in other MSG areas. Nick John, TVP, was working to pull together a profile of violence in Reading to identify the causes of the increase and to adapt plans to address the situation accordingly.

Anthony also reported that there had been a major increase in the number or cycle thefts in Reading, especially in the town centre where many people commuted by bike. Mobile CCTV had been deployed at the station, which was a particular hotspot, and there had been some success there. Councillor Page noted that Reading Borough Council had been promoting cycling and that the Council had a responsibility to investigate the provision of better, more secure cycle parking. He added that TVP should publicise their successes where possible to reassure cyclists that the thefts were being taken seriously and that cyclists should be encouraged to use appropriate locks. Catherine Marriott noted that a scheme to improve cycle security had been set up in Oxford, and that she would bring updates to future Partnership meetings.

AGREED: That the position be noted.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Ash Smith reported that a significant number of the crimes committed in Reading took place in Abbey and Battle wards and along the Oxford Road. TVP had met with interested parties to discuss what could be done to reduce crime and how best to engage with residents. A survey would be launched on 21 September 2020 to gain a clear picture of residents' concerns.

Ash also reported that Simon Wheeler had been seconded to visit licensed premises in the area, and had so far visited 18 shops. Ash noted that, subject to cover being available, Simon's secondment could be extended should the work he was undertaking be successful.

AGREED: That the position be noted.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETING

Future meetings for 2020/21 would take place on:

Thursday 12 November 2020;

Thursday 4 February 2021;

Thursday 22 April 2021.

All meetings start at 9.30am, venue to be confirmed.

(The meeting commenced at 9.35 am and closed at 11.05 am)

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DRAFT

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	15 DECEMBER 2020		
TITLE:	READING 2021 ANNIVERSARY PLANS		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR KAREN ROWLAND	PORTFOLIO:	CULTURE HERITAGE AND RECREATION
SERVICE:	CULTURE	WARDS:	ALL
LEAD OFFICER:	DONNA PENTELOW	TEL:	07921 941 075
JOB TITLE:	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR CULTURE	E-MAIL:	donna.pentelow@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the committee on the plans to mark 2021, a year of culturally significant anniversaries in Reading. 2021 marks the 900th anniversary of the founding of Reading Abbey as well as the 250th anniversary of the Thames Conservancy, 150 years of Reading Football Club, 75 years of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, 70 years of MERL, 50 years of Reading Festival and 30 years of the Rising Sun Arts Centre. Given these significant anniversaries the council and these organisations have been working together to develop a programme of activity during 2021 to celebrate these special milestones. Covid19 has had a profound impact on the ability to finalise plans, so, these should be considered in light of this and the need to remain agile should the situation with covid19 change.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 The committee is invited to note the plans set out in the report to celebrate the various anniversaries being celebrated in 2021.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2018 - 2021 (refreshed in June 2019) sets out the key priorities for the Council which include and 'Promoting health, education, culture & wellbeing'. The plans and recommendation set out in this report directly contribute to these priorities by creating covid19 secure events and activities that promote and celebrate Reading's culture and contribute towards its sense of place and economic recovery in response to covid19. It is likely that some of the social restrictions currently in place will remain in 2021 which may impact on the way the live events are delivered. The council and its partners also recognise 20 June 2021 will be the first anniversary of the tragic events that took place in Forbury Gardens. All plans for events in Forbury Gardens will be considered in light of this. There is work taking place to recognise and mark this important date next year and we are looking at ways to engage and consult with the community on the most appropriate way of marking the anniversary.

4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Since January 2020, the council has convened a small working group of partners to share plans and ideas to celebrate 2021. Covid19 continues to create uncertainty in terms of scheduling, availability of external funding opportunities, and any ongoing social restrictions, which impact on organisations' abilities to plan. Therefore, a working principle of digital first has been adopted alongside live events. Unfortunately the loan of the original transcript of *Sumer is Icumen*, which is one of the earliest recorded pieces of music from England and believed to have been written at Reading Abbey, won't be visiting Reading in 2021 due to the impact of covid19 on the British Library. However, we are continuing to work with the British Library on future collaborations.

Options Proposed

- 4.2 Covid19 creates ongoing uncertainty in terms the ability to plan therefore plans need to remain agile and adaptable. Therefore, this programme remains subject to change. The programme has a strong digital presence, with the expectation of some live events. One of the highlight events will be the celebration of the 900th anniversary of the founding of Reading Abbey, which is scheduled to take place on Saturday 19 June 2021, in Forbury Gardens, Abbey Ruins and along the Kennet in the town centre. This event will showcase the Abbey, the story of its founding and build on the successful reopening event of the Abbey Ruins that took place in 2018. On the same day, Water Fest will be held which showcases the significance of the Kennet and Avon Canal in Reading. The size and format of the two events will be dependent on the restrictions in place at the time. We may need to look at delivering the event in a more Covid compliant way, for example, by using staggered arrival times and ticketing entry - which will allow us to restrict numbers and track and trace all visitors to the event. All plans for Saturday 19 June will be sensitive to any commemorative events taking place on the Sunday and will be foremost in the minds of everyone in the shaping of this day.
- 4.3 A year long programme of events and activities focusing on the Abbey is being developed and will be promoted alongside the main event in June. This programme includes the carving of one of the uncarved finial head stops on the eastern elevation of the Abbey to represent a figure from the gateway's post dissolution history. The previous sculptures added in 1861 and 1900 depicted either ecclesiastical or historical figures from the abbey's medieval history.

The proposed shortlisted figures are:

- Queen Elizabeth I
- Jane Austen
- Sir George Gilbert Scott
- Dr Jamieson Hurry (who gifted the 1900 carved head stops)
- A modern stone mason

- 4.4 It is proposed to put this shortlist to a public online vote early in 2021, after which the winning design will be carved and unveiled by autumn 2021.
- 4.4 Museums Partnership Reading (MPR) are planning an exhibition, provisionally titled '1971' that will display historic photography of the first Reading Festival, drawing on the Jill Furmanovsky's Rockarchive, alongside material from both Reading Museum and the Museum of English Rural Life exploring life and times in 1971. With support from the Arts Council Cultural Recovery Fund, the Museum of English Rural Life will mark its 70th year through 51 Voices, a digital project that will draw on its Festival of Britain and other collections from 1951.

- 4.5 Berkshire Record Office will celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Thames Conservancy. From 1771 this body managed the river from its source until its tidal reach in Teddington. It built the river that we know today, including the locks, weirs and towpaths. It also had responsibility for flood management and controlling pollution - functions now inherited by the Environment Agency and Thames Water. The archive is of national importance and officers will create an online exhibition with highlights from it. This exhibition will launch in May 2021.
- 4.6 The Hexagon's resident orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra are planning both digital and live performances throughout the year to mark their 75th anniversary. Reading Football Club are planning various activities and events, including a dedicated microsite, to mark their 150th season.
- 4.7 Reading Culture Live will be the key delivery platform for the digital content. Activities will be joined together under an umbrella heading, which is to be finalised, but will reflect Reading remembering and celebrating as part of its economic recovery in response to covid19. This will enable other activities that are organised throughout the year, particularly in the Abbey Quarter, but aren't yet able to confirm their plans, to be part of the programme.

Other Options Considered

- 4.9 In light of covid19, a purely digital offer could be delivered, however, this would limit the reach and opportunity for celebrating these special anniversaries. Instead it is proposed to plan for a blend of both digital and live, with digital being the fall back position in the event that covid19 restrictions prevent live events.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The plans set out contribute towards the council's Corporate Plan priority of ensuring that there are good education, leisure and cultural opportunities for people in Reading. They also contribute towards the Council's strategic aim of to establish Reading as a learning City and a stimulating and rewarding place to live and visit.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no environmental or climate implications as a result of this report.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 The plans set out have been developed by representatives from MERL, Royal Philharmonic, Rising Sun Arts, Reading UK and Reading Football Club with representatives from the council including Reading Museum, and Berkshire Records Office.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 The plans set out above do not have any adverse or differential equality implications.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 No relevant legal issues identified by the report

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The service will be seeking to secure external grant contributions to fund the planned Abbey 900 celebrations, if these bids are unsuccessful then activities will be scaled back accordingly, however, there may be a need to drawdown on the Reserve created

in 2019/20 which has £62k set aside in 20/21 and a further £85k in 21/22. These funds will not be required until January 2021 at the earliest.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 None

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	15 th DECEMBER 2020		
TITLE:	HIGH STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE PROGRAMME 2020 - 2024 UPDATE REPORT		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLORS PAGE / ROWLAND	PORTFOLIO:	DEPUTY LEADER AND STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT / CULTURE, HERITAGE AND RECREATION
SERVICE:	PLANNING AND CULTURE	WARDS:	ALL
LEAD OFFICER:	CHRISTELLE BEAUPOUX	TEL:	0118 9374097
JOB TITLE:	PROJECTS MANAGER	E-MAIL:	Christelle.Beaupoux@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Reading is one of 68 areas of England to receive a share of a £95 million government fund having secured High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) status for three conservation areas in the centre of the town. As a result, Reading will receive up to £806,500 from Historic England. The Council will match-fund £808,500 to deliver a £1.6 million implementation programme over the next 3.5 years. The Council has entered into a contract with Historic England to run the programme from 1 April 2020.
- 1.2 The High Street Heritage Action Zones (HSHAZ) scheme is a regeneration initiative lead by Historic England, working with local councils and the community to create economic growth and improve the appearance and quality of life in historic high streets.
- 1.3 The context in which the Council is delivering this programme is very different from when the bid was made a year ago. The impact of the coronavirus is far reaching and has already had major effects on high streets, including local businesses and their communities. Furthermore, the recent lockdowns and safety restriction measures are also impacting on the delivery of the programme. However, the HSHAZ programme can play an important role in the recovery of our high streets. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with more details of the programme and the current situation.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 The committee is invited to note the HSHAZ programme aims and objectives, the plans to deliver the HSHAZ programme over the next four years and to update on the main activities and key milestones over the next 6 months.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 Reading's High Street Heritage Action Zone programme's approach contributes directly to the long-term Reading 2050 Vision, which aims to establish Reading as an internationally recognised and economically successful city region. It envisages a place where low carbon living is the norm, and where the built environment, technology and innovation have all combined to create a smart, dynamic and sustainable city, providing a high quality of life and equal opportunity for all.
- 3.2 The Borough's new Local Plan also supports these aspirations for Reading as a dynamic, inclusive community of the 21st Century and has an expanded section on heritage, including new policies on both enhancement of conservation areas (EN3) and new development in a historic context (EN6). In the pre-amble at para 4.2.2 it is stated:

'Protecting Reading's heritage assets contributes to a sense of place and doing so can contribute to other important planning goals. Investment in heritage and culture, in turn, generates more spending in the local economy. For example, previous investment in publicly owned heritage assets within the Abbey Quarter, like the Forbury Gardens and Simeon Monument, has created an attractive environment for high-quality commercial investment including Forbury Square and Forbury Hotel. A vibrant historic environment also contributes to town centre vitality, sustainable transport, residential development, good design and the natural environment. Heritage assets can be a positive force for regeneration. New development can be beneficial to heritage assets through providing or encouraging new uses or better revealing their significance'.

4. THE PROPOSAL

Current Position

- 4.1 The Reading's HSHAZ programme with a total budget of £1.6 million programme has clear objectives:
- To enhance the understanding of Reading's heritage by revealing its hidden histories and to give the community a sense of pride and ownership in their town.
 - To improve the physical condition and viability of the high streets within the three conservation areas by identifying those properties most at risk and engaging with property owners to help them to restore the buildings, to show them how to maintain the buildings and to share best practice. We want to see premises viably and fully occupied and footfall and customer satisfaction increasing.
 - To develop a comprehensive strategy to improve the public realm across the HSHAZ. The outcome will be a better experience and sense of place for those living or working in or visiting the town centre.
 - To support local businesses, the economy and local community and cultural initiatives by creating a positive sense of place through contributing to the heritage of their high street.

- 4.2 The Reading's HSHAZ programme, focusing on three Conservation Areas (Castle Hill/Russell Street/Oxford Road, St Mary's Butts/Castle Street, Market Place/London Street) will deliver across three complementary strands:
- **Physical interventions:** to buildings, including repair, reinstating lost features, supporting the conversion of historic buildings for new uses and improvement of shared spaces, drawing on the lessons learnt in Streets for All
 - **Community engagement:** giving local communities a key role in deciding what works they want to see happening on their high street and what sort of place they want it to be
 - **Cultural programme:** activities and events celebrating the history of the high street and its importance to local communities
- 4.3 **The Programme update**
Since the Policy committee report submitted on the 20 July 2020, a range of actions set out below have taken place.
- 4.4 **Programme governance**
- Two project officers have been recruited:
- A Conservation Officer, who will focus on developing the conservation projects and activities within the conservation strands
 - A Community Engagement and Cultural Officer, who will focus on implementing the community engagement strand and the cultural programme
- A programme steering group was established with key officers and partners. The group virtually met for the first time on the 10 November 2020 and terms of reference for the group have been drafted.
- 4.5 **Communication and Branding**
- The national HSHAZ scheme was formally launched by Historic England (HE) and DCMS on the 19th September 2020. The Reading team created a new designated webpage on the Council website: www.reading.gov.uk/hshaz. The page will be updated as the programme progresses with separate pages for the different project strands. The team is currently developing a logo and a clear branding for the programme to comply with HE's branding guidance.
- 4.6 **Strands update**
- In advance of the wider cultural programme, Historic England offered several Pilot Grants to initiate and test projects to engage communities. In September 2020, Reading was successful in achieving a grant of £9,231 to run a pilot project for the HSHAZ. This pilot project focus is on the Oxford Road conservation area, specifically the east end between Howard Street to Russell Street.
- 4.7 The newly appointed Conservation Officer is refining the priority list of the buildings and shop fronts which have been identified as needing improvement, when confirmed and costed this list will be subject to consultation.
- 4.8 The initial community engagement work is helping with the development of a community mapping and engagement framework that will help the programme team to communicate and engage with the various communities within the three conservation areas that form the HSHAZ.

- 4.9 The newly appointed Community Engagement and Cultural officer has established contact and already made strong connections with community groups with a focus on the Oxford Road area.
- 4.10 Wider Cultural Programme: Historic England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Art Council England are providing local cultural grants for the HSHAZ programmes through their Cultural Consortium. Each scheme can apply for up to £100K, to develop a programme of activities and events to celebrate their local character and heritage, making our high streets a key place to experience and participate in culture. Reading's Programme through its established cultural consortium is developing a cultural proposal around the three conservation areas.

5.0 Next Steps and Milestones over the next 6 months:

- 5.1 Conservation and public realm projects: To review and refine the conservation plans and to submit them for consultation. To engage with key internal and external partners to ensure a holistic approach to the implementation of conservation plans within the town centre. To comment on planning applications submitted within the HSHAZ areas.
- 5.2 Community engagement: To develop and produce a community engagement plan, which will give a framework for meaningful engagement with community groups and key stakeholders within the three conservation areas. Giving a voice to the grassroots organisations and hard to reach communities within the HSHAZ.
- 5.3 Cultural pilot: To deliver the activities of the cultural pilot project from October 2020 to the end of February 2021, including an evaluation report.
- 5.4 Cultural programme: The initial community engagement for the cultural pilot grant project will inform and be the basis of our wider cultural programme bid for the three conservation areas, to deliver Covid-19 secure activities and events that build lasting community trust, engagement and participation. To submit the application by the 11th December 2020.
- 5.5 Programme monitoring evaluation: To ensure regular communication and reporting to Historic England, including quarterly update reports and grant claims.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 6.1 The HSHAZ programme supports the Corporate Plan priorities 4, 5 & 6 by supporting the town's high streets and the businesses working there and encouraging more to visit them:
1. Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable;
 2. Providing the best start in life through education, early help and healthy living;
 3. Providing homes for those in most need;
 4. Keeping the town clean, safe, green and active;
 5. Providing infrastructure to support the economy; and
 6. Remaining financially sustainable to deliver these service priorities.
- 6.2 The programme also complements the Council's approach to the recovery from the Covid Pandemic (as reported to Policy Committee 22 June 2020) and in particular supports the third objective to secure the economic future of Reading.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).

7.2 The HSHAZ programme has at its heart the principal of making better use of the heritage assets of the town to help the town to prosper economically and socially. By making better and full use of our older buildings, many of which have unused empty space above ground floor, the programme can be seen as complementary to the Council's ability to respond to the Climate Emergency and achieve a carbon neutral Reading by 2030, taking into account the Council's Climate Change Strategy and its associated action plan and the Local Transport Plan along with any other relevant policies and statements.

8. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

8.1 Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to involve local representatives when carrying out "any of its functions" by providing information, consulting or "involving in another way".

8.2 The aims and objectives of the HSHAZ programme are to meaningfully inform and engage with communities and stakeholders with a strong focus on local communities in the most deprived areas. The Council will need to produce a Programme Community Engagement Plan and the key objectives will include:

- To inform and actively engage with a wide range of local communities and stakeholders on the Reading's HSHAZ programme proposals and to ensure, as far as possible, they have every opportunity to express their views to the project team at the design stage and before decisions are finalised;
- To ensure that the views and the needs of the local community are embedded within Reading's HSHAZ programme;
- To actively involve the communities and key interest parties in the enhancement of their local heritage to renew their sense of pride, identity, and ownership in developing the town's future;
- By taking an active and collaborative role with the programme and training opportunities, the community and local businesses are learning new skills, good practice and are becoming more resilient, creating a more prosperous and better maintained neighbourhood.

9. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 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.

9.2 The HSHAZ programme does not have a differential impact on: racial groups, gender, people with disabilities, people of a particular sexual orientation, people due to their age, or people due to their religious belief. The programme will promote equality of services/opportunity to all sectors of the community. The project will regularly engage, consult stakeholders and community and evaluate the various strands of the project. Activities will provide opportunities for enjoyment and learning for all regardless of ethnic origin, social background or financial means.

9.3 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not relevant to deliver the Reading’s HSHAZ Programme.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Reading Borough Council has entered in to a legal agreement with Historic England on 29th May 2020. In accordance with Council’s constitution, the Council’s s151 Officer and Executive Director of Resources has authority to enter into grant agreements specifically section (3)(3) which reads “accept capital and revenue funding from external sources, and associated terms and conditions of grants within the context of the Council’s approved budget framework”. The project will follow Reading Borough Council and HE’s standing orders and procurement rules.

10.2 The Council’s Financial Regulations state that a capital programme is prepared on an annual basis for consideration by the Policy Committee. However, schemes may be added to, or removed from, the capital programme outside of the annual budget setting process with the approval of the Policy Committee, where the scheme is financed by external funding and/ or subject to financing from Section 106 contributions (see Financial Regulation 4.3.5).

11.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The total projected budget over the four years of the project; (April 2020 to 31 March 2024) is £1.615 million, £1.185m of capital expenditure and £0.430m of revenue expenditure.

11.2 The project has grant funding of £0.807m from Historic England, £0.430m will be used for revenue expenditure to ensure the project does not put an additional budget pressure on the revenue budget. This leaves £0.377m of the grant available towards the capital expenditure. The remaining capital expenditure of £0.808m will be funded by S106 and the allocation of an element of the 15% Central CIL funding.

11.3 The HSHAZ programme was successful in receiving a small cultural pilot grant of £9,231. This grant is not part of the main budget and will be added as a separate table below.

11.4 The table below shows a breakdown of the revenue and capital costs as well as the funding:

	From 2020 to 2024 £m
Revenue	
Employee costs	0.180
Running costs	0.250
Total	0.430
Historic England Grant	(0.430)
Net Revenue Cost to the Council	-

	From 2020 to 2024 £m
Capital	
Capital costs	1.185
Historic England Grant	(0.377)
CIL (local 15%) and S106	(0.808)
Net Capital Cost to the Council Total	-

Cultural Pilot grant	From October 2020 to March 2021
HE grant award	£9,231

12.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 *High Street Heritage Action Zone, Policy Committee report, 20 July 2020*

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READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	15th DECEMBER 2020	AGENDA ITEM:	
TITLE:	ALLOTMENTS CONSULTATION REPORT AND NEXT STEPS		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	KAREN ROWLAND	PORTFOLIO:	CULTURE, HERITAGE AND RECREATION
SERVICE:	ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	ANDREW EDWARDS	TEL:	0118 937 3468
JOB TITLE:	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES	E-MAIL:	andrew.edwards@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Reading Borough Council is committed to providing an allotments service to residents. The Council is conscious that some tenants rely on the produce that they grow on their plots to feed themselves and their families. The Council is also aware that maintaining an allotment has significant physical and mental health benefits and, in view of the declared climate emergency, that the use of allotments needs to be supported as a local, sustainable food source with essentially near zero food miles being created.
- 1.2 The Council is undertaking a review of the current allotment management and charging model in order to achieve an agreed budget saving to support the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
- 1.3 A consultation with all tenants was initiated on 17 August 2020 to gauge tenants' interest in and ability to form site associations that could take on aspects of self-management, specifically including site management, some grounds maintenance and waste management.

- 1.4 This report summarises the results of the consultation and recommends both the immediate next steps and proposals for a more comprehensive strategy for future management and maintenance of the allotments service.

Appendix A: Allotments Consultation Report

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Members note the report and the findings of the consultation of tenants.
- 2.2 That the committee endorse the next steps as shown in section 6 of this report.
- 2.3 That an updated Allotments Plan is created, is subject to public consultation and is reported for approval to a future Committee.
- 2.4 That an annual Allotment Plan progress report is brought to HNL Committee at its Autumn meeting in 2021.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The provision of allotments is a statutory service. Under S.23 of the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908, a Council has a statutory duty to provide a sufficient number of allotments and to let them to persons residing in its area who want them.
- 3.2 Reading Borough Council continues to provide and promote allotments not only as part of statutory requirement but also because of the significant social, health and environmental benefits.
- 3.3 The Council's Corporate Plan 2018 - 2021 'Shaping Reading's Future' sets out the Council's priorities, which include promoting healthy lifestyles, as well as good education, leisure and cultural opportunities for people in Reading.
- 3.4 In view of the declared climate emergency, the use of allotments needs to be supported as a local, sustainable food source.

4. THE CURRENT SITUATION

- 4.1 Reading Borough Council manages 20 allotment sites, consisting of 1,338 workable plots, and covering 41.5 ha of land (see table 1). Most of these are statutory sites: allotment sites owned by local authorities can be designated

as 'statutory' or 'temporary' where 'statutory' sites are subject to some protection under the Allotments Act 1925; 'temporary' sites have no security beyond the usual planning system requirements.

Table 1: Allotment sites provided by Reading Borough Council

Statutory Sites	Area (Ha)	Temporary Sites	Area (Ha)
Bulmershe	13.73	Ardler Road	0.11
Coley	1.81	Ashampstead Road	0.19
Emmer Green	0.74	Balmore	0.55
Goddards Farm	1.76	Caversham Court	0.41
Lower Southcote	4.37	Circuit Lane	1.03
Newcastle Road	0.64	George Street	0.23
Oakley Road	0.68	Henley Road	2.67
Oaktree Road	2.22	Meadway	0.59
Scours Lane	5.36	Mockbeggar	0.38
Waterloo Meadows	3.52	Victoria Road	0.48
Total	34.83	Total	6.63

- 4.2 In 2006 the Council carried out a full review of its allotments, drawing up an Allotments Strategy that dealt with streamlining administration and physical improvements to allotments infrastructure on a site-by-site basis. By 2009, following a surge in demand for allotments, the Strategy required review. Proposed actions included converting whole plots to half plots; moving to a policy of only one plot per household; improving eviction rates of absent tenants; and acquiring new land for plots, either by purchase or by converting other public open space to allotments. Due to practical and financial constraints only the re-sizing of plots has been achieved to date.
- 4.3 During 2017, an efficiency saving designed to increase income from allotment rentals from £35k to £70k p.a. spread over 2 years was included in the annual budget-setting process. This required doubling the basic rental, removing tiered concessions - limiting these to people on income support - and carrying out a review of the current plot sizes. A remaining savings target of £26k remains to be secured and the proposals in this paper support the delivery of this.
- 4.4 However, the Council is conscious that significant rent increases may impact badly on some tenants who rely on the food that they grow on their plots and for whose physical and mental wellbeing allotments gardening is important. Consequently, the Council is considering ways to reduce costs without further significant increases to those managing an allotment.
- 4.5 Over the past few years, the Council has been approached by allotments tenants looking for more say in the management of sites, faster turn-around times in letting vacant plots, and different ways of delivering a range of

allotments services. This interest does coincide in a timely way with the need by the Council to streamline its use of resources, which is now even more urgent with the extra costs of the coronavirus pandemic.

5. PUBLIC CONSULTATION

5.1 In 2020 a consultation with all tenants was undertaken from 17 August to 17 September on the following issues:

- Self-management of sites
- Tenant maintenance of sites
- Alternatives to rubbish removal

5.2 A consultation letter was sent to all tenants; emails (including an information sheet) were sent to tenants with email; leaflets were left on 400 plots and sheds; following the completion of a Covid risk assessment, an officer visited each site at least twice to encourage participation and answer queries; and the officer was invited to six tenant-arranged site meetings.

5.3 Responses were directed to an online consultation survey and to the Allotments email inbox. Tenants met on site visits were encouraged to discuss the issues with others, and to respond individually or collectively.

5.4 A total of 452 responses or contacts were received: 197 via the online survey, 70 via the Allotments inbox, 185 tenants through site visits, and a few phone calls were made direct to the Parks Team.

5.5 Appendix A Allotments Consultation Report sets out a summary of the responses from the consultation. There are several clear messages arising from the consultation:

- There is some understanding of the financial constraints facing councils, and the implications of this for the Allotments Service; many tenants believe that RBC does a reasonable job under the circumstances and accept that allotments are not the Council's only priority
- The main issues that tenants would like to see resolved are the number of vacant or untended plots, the encroachment of boundaries leading to lost plots, the behaviour of other tenants and illegal or inappropriate dumping of household waste in waste-designated or undesignated areas
- Tenants are particularly concerned by delays in re-letting plots that fall vacant or are untended
- Many respondents have been disappointed by the Council's speed to deal with unkempt plots, and the maintenance of communal areas

- Roughly half of respondents are willing to be involved in self-management of sites, although only a quarter want to be involved in some sort of committee
- The extent and form of this involvement differs from site to site; tenants were relieved that the Council has not pre-designed the model it wishes to see implemented for imposition on tenants
- Most respondents interested in a degree of self-management want support in setting this up from the Council or other organisations, like Food4Families or horticultural societies
- Seven sites are ready to take on some form of self-management immediately.
- Around two thirds of respondents are willing to be involved in tenant maintenance of sites, particularly in looking after the area around their plots; there is also support for tenant work parties
- Tenants want sites cleared and repairs carried out before they get involved in either management or maintenance
- Tenants have conflicting views on waste management: many want waste and compost piles, with the Council removing waste, while others are concerned that waste heaps become opportunities for fly-tipping
- Respondents are sanguine about rent rises and/or other charges, like a deposit when the offer of a plot is taken up or a charge for waste removal.

6. THE PROPOSAL

6.1 The Council needs time to put together detailed actions arising out of the consultation. Given the significant variety in levels of willingness and in the form and extent of involvement to which tenants wish to contribute, no one-size-fits-all approach will be possible, and progress will be in different directions at different speeds on different sites.

6.2 However, there is momentum arising out of the successful consultation, and, in order to take advantage of the groundswell of enthusiasm, some early action will be taken to encourage those who are ready to be involved.

6.3 It is proposed that:

- The Council will commence working with representatives on the seven sites that are interested in self-management focusing on the vexed issue of identifying untended plots, resolving whether these are available for re-letting, and issuing offers. Site representatives will notify the Council about which plots require ‘weedy letters’ (notification to plot holders by letter about overgrown plots) and then will meet prospective new tenants to show them the plot and hand out keys once a contract has been exchanged. The Council will retain administrative and invoicing functions. Learning

outcomes from these seven sites will be recorded and used to influence the revised Allotments Plan reported below.

- The Council will initiate immediately a programme of clearances of unkempt plots on these seven sites as a matter of priority, as well as other winter works, like hedge cutting and fence and driveway repairs. This will meet the requests for sites to be in good order before site representatives get involved in management tasks.
- Maintenance on other sites will follow, so that no site is left untidy at the end of the winter.
- Regular reports on occupancy ratios and re-letting turnover will be published on a new allotments page on the website, as a way to allow the other RBC sites to observe the improvements that are possible with very limited tenant involvement.
- Information about self-management schemes and other issues of interest to allotment holders will also be published on the website.
- The Council continue with its progress towards electronic payments and communication for all hired services by applying this to allotment rental payments from January 2021, making allowances for the small number of tenants unable to make electronic payments
- During 2021-22, a revised Allotments Plan, setting out the Council's longer-term objectives for the service, will be drafted and then circulated for wider consultation with tenants and elected Members.
- Groups like Food4Families and horticultural societies be engaged to support tenant groups that wish to take on management and/or maintenance tasks
- Fees, charges and concessions will be reviewed and a new structure agreed for implementation in January 2022
- Additional personnel for engagement with allotment tenants will be sought for the period during which the Allotments Plan is drawn up and being consulted on.
- Where available, bids will be made for funding to make good site infrastructure on those sites working towards self-management. This includes fence replacement where needed and road repairs.'
- The Allotments Plan will be presented to a future committee to allow time to notify tenants of any material changes to be applied when leases are renewed in January 2022.

Programme for proposed changes

ACTION	NOTES	DATE	METHOD
Housing Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee Report		December 2020	Written report
CONSULTATION RESULTS & PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS	All tenants	December 2020	Email Website
SELF-MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SOURCES		December 2020	Website
ON-GOING COMMUNICATION WITH TENANTS	Site reps and all tenants	When required	Email Notice boards
MEETINGS WITH SITES READY FOR SELF-MANAGEMENT		February 2021	Site meetings
PROVISIONAL TARGETS - 7 SITES ENGAGED IN SOME SELF-MANAGEMENT - SITE AUDITS OF PILOT SITES - WINTER CLEAN-UP FOR PILOT SITES - WINTER WORKS TO OTHER SITES		End Mar 2021 Completed Nov/Dec 2020 Jan/Feb 2021	Officer engagement GM teams GM teams
RENTS, FEES AND CHARGES	Inflation only Full review	January 2021 Effective Jan 22	Electronic invoicing Letter; electronic invoicing
ALLOTMENTS PLAN	Draft Policy Committee	Summer 2021 Autumn 2021	
MONTHLY UPDATES		When required	Website

7. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

7.1 The proposals contained in this report are in line with the following Corporate Plan priorities:

- Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe
- Promoting health, education, wellbeing and culture
- Ensuring the Council is fit for the future

7.2 The Councils has also adopted a Strategic Framework (March 2020) which sets out the Council's key priorities including:

- To keep social care services running for the children and adults who need them
- To support vulnerable and isolated people during the crisis
- To support business and the economy, which will secure the long-term recovery of Reading

8. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

8.1 Updates and other useful information should be provided regularly via the Council website, social media, and on-site signboards.

9. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, the Council 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.

9.2 The Council has reviewed the scope of the project as outlined within this report and considers that the proposals have no direct impact on any groups with protected characteristics.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Rights and responsibilities relating to allotments provision are defined in the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The proposals set out in this paper seek to deliver all or part of the commitment to save £26k as required by the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- 11.2 Where available, bids will be made for funding in in order to make improvements to infrastructure are identified in this report.

12. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 In view of the declared climate emergency and the adoption of the Climate Change Strategy the use of allotments needs to be supported as a local, sustainable food source with essentially near zero food miles being created.

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 13.1 Appendix A : Allotments Consultation Report

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ALLOTMENT CONSULTATION REPORT NOVEMBER 2020

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1. OBJECT

To gauge each allotment sites' appetite and ability to form site associations/societies that could take on aspects of self-management (including site management, grounds maintenance and waste management). This was set out in letter to all tenants as:

- Self-management of sites: Many other Councils now have agreements with allotment groups to provide management of their own sites, which reduces the cost of administration, increases the sense of community, and often means that tasks are done more efficiently, particularly reallocating plots to new tenants and following up on unmanaged plots. We would like to speak to anyone who would be interested in becoming involved in the management of their site.
- Tenant maintenance of sites: In some areas, allotment holders also carry out grounds maintenance of communal areas on their sites instead of the Council, such as grass cutting of footpaths and cutting of boundary hedges.
- Rubbish removal: The cost of waste removal and disposal is considerable, and a significant saving will be made by removing the rubbish bay facilities from each site. The rubbish in the shared bays is often contaminated and therefore no use for composting, and tippage costs are high. We would like to encourage tenants to compost their green waste on their own plots instead and take other rubbish home

To stimulate interest and debate on the sites about the potential opportunities of on-site collaboration, working in partnership with RBC, or taking over full management responsibility for their site.

To use findings to ascertain what level of self-management is achievable for each site; to develop a programme of site audits and works; and to further plan how to help each site maximise their autonomy.

2. CONSULTATION METHOD

A consultation letter sent to all tenants; emails (inc. information sheet) were sent to tenants with email; explanatory/signposting leaflets were left on 400 plots and sheds; an officer visited each site at least twice to encourage participation and answer queries; the officer was invited to six tenant-arranged site meetings.

Responses were directed to an online consultation survey and/or to the Allotments inbox. Tenants met on site visits were encouraged to discuss the issues with others, and to respond individually and/or as collectives. Tenants were asked to respond on behalf of others who cannot respond electronically.

3. RESPONSES - RESULTS

A total of 452 responses or contacts were received: 197 were via the online survey, 70 via the Allotment inbox, 185 tenants were met on site visits, and a few phone calls were made direct to the Parks Team.

3.1 ONLINE RESPONSES. Total responses 197

Online Q 1. “Would you be interested in being INVOLVED IN THE MANAGEMENT of your site?”

Yes 97. No 99. NA 1. Of written responses about involvement, 86 were expressions of positive intent, 2 were weak, and 5 were against any involvement. **Types of involvement.** Group/Committee/Society 48. Management 10. Admin/Liaison 8. Allocating/Monitoring Plots 21. Meet New Tenants 7. Manual work 14. Waste 6. Need more info 3. Security 1.

Online Q 2. “Would you be willing to CONTRIBUTE TO THE MAINTENANCE of your site?”

Yes 127. No 67. NA 3. Of written responses about contributing to maintenance, 98 included positive intent to contribute, 31 were statements that ‘I keep my plot/paths/area clear myself’ and 11 were strongly against making any further contribution. Of that 11, two stated their age was a limitation and 9 said that the Council alone should deal with trees, hedges, boundaries and on-site roads. **Types of contribution:** I’ll do anything 13. Communal areas 7. Hedge-work 17. Grass cutting 43. Waste/composting 16. Working Party/Groupwork 12. Directed manual labour 5. Helping older tenants 1. Biodiversity action 1. Paying more rent 8. Rework 2. Use of heavy plant 2. Security (combi-locks, key-pads, CCTV)

Online Q 3. “Do you have any other ideas to reduce costs?”

The 129 written responses included 155 positive suggestions and 35 negative observations. **Positive suggestions:** Better allocation/monitoring to maximise income 41. Increase rents/decrease discounts 24. Deposit/Admin Fee 8. Benefits of Self-Management/Groupwork 10. Funding/fund-raising bids/charging for waste disposal 5. Recycling/Waste (advice, facilities, collections) 48. Pre-let plot prep & waste removal 4. Collection of perennial weeds/diseased plants 7. E-communication 4. Water conservation measures 1. Responsible bonfires 4. **Negative comments:** lack of service from RBC 11, RBC to retain major works tasks (boundaries, paths, water, trees) 5, fear of personalities in a committee being unrepresentative and overbearing 2. Cannot comment unless RBC releases budget information for their site 11. Complaints about fly tipping and on-site dumping 6.

Online Q 4. “Do you have any other feedback or comments?”

The prompted many long free text comments that expanded on points already raised such as the need for the Council to reduce the time it takes to clear and relet plots, preferably in partnership with site groups (27). 25 asked for more information about ‘site budgets’ prior to committing further. 13 suggested increased rents, 2 reduced discount levels and 5 opposed any rent rise. 5 were critical of the Council service while 9 asked for increased service input through increased Admin, a dedicated Allotment Supervisor, a Council rep to sit on their committee, support with reaching good governance, to arbitrate in disputes and to tackle problem tenants. Few novel suggestions were made in Waste collections/recycling (23) and site security/fly-tippers (15) comments.

Novel suggestions were the Council using consultation results to inform a new Allotment Strategy and service that prioritises self-management; making all sites statutory; encouraging developers to provide new allotments; considering alternative but still green alternative uses of areas of underused sites.

3.2 EMAIL RESPONSES TO ALLOTMENT INBOX. 130 RESPONDENTS

76 individual emails and 4 group responses (representing 54 tenants) were received. Email responses were longer, more detailed and more strident in positive and negative opinions. Two thirds of respondents asked for more information (about rent levels, ‘allotment budgets’, GDPR, ownership and future ownership of sites) or for site-specific issues to be attended to. Mockbeggars, Scours Lane and Waterloo Meadows

submitted group responses that were supportive of self-management and that included outline action plans. Newcastle Road has done so too after the feedback was analysed.

65 tenants (50% of email respondents) expressed keenness to be involved in self-management.

48 (40%) recognised benefits of self-management, but either could not involve themselves, saw problems with committee accountability, could not identify who would run it, or simply wanted more information before making a firm decision either way.

17 tenants (17%) objected to or so no future for self-management on their sites.

All e-mail respondents have been thanked for their input and asked if they wished to remain in contact with the project as a sounding-board.

Numerous issues raised via e-mail are being treated as service requests by the Parks Service. The service hopes that when tenants receive the finalised Consultation Report, more tenants will be able to decide for or against self-management.

3.3 FEEDBACK FROM SITE VISITS. 183 tenants seen.

The purposes of site visits was to stir tenants up to discuss and debate the consultation with fellow tenants in order to increase the online and email response rates, to show that the Council was investing in the consultation and subsequent service developments. Furthermore, the site visits were used to find out which sites have community characteristics such as an existing site committee and social media networks. The exercise leaned more to making things happen than gathering quantitative data.

42 site visits were carried out by one officer, every site visited at least twice, often on evenings or weekends. 183 tenants were met over just 4 weeks. The officer was invited to 6 tenant- site meetings. The service posted signs encouraged participation on all entry gates, while the officer posted 400 info leaflets on conspicuously tended plots and in shed doors.

Discussions revolved around, A. "what did you read into the consultation and letter", B. comments about the allotment service, C. self-management, D. waste management on site, and E. use of IT. The visiting officer also shared his experience of setting up self-management on his own site outside Reading, along with the benefits arising and challenges overcome.

3.3.1 On site Reaction to the consultation.

13 tenants said they will not respond. Critics said the letter was vague, it was a cost-cutting exercise and that RBC might be pulling the plug on allotments. Some said the exercise was too vague and said the withholding of rent increase levels put their hackles up. However, most said they would respond (including 8 mentions of responding as a group). There is a general understanding about the financial difficulties Councils face. Many tenants were surprised and grateful that RBC had put an officer in the field for the exercise with one saying, "as I can tell others that someone from the Council came out to see us, I reckon it'll double your response numbers". Some identified that RBC budget pressure was the reason for the consultation and that tenants were faced with a choice of 'doing RBC's job or paying more rent'. Even then, some tenants identified that the outcomes would not be this simple either/or, but would be a mix of improved income generation, cost saving and community development. Some felt the consultation to be an opportunity to connect with their fellow tenants for the good of their site, the Council and themselves.

3.3.2 On site Comments about the Allotment Service

A common theme was that RBC does a reasonable job given the circumstances and that allotments are not the highest priority in a Council. Many commented on the 'lack of any service' or felt the sole service running

was that of Parks Admin. Some felt that promoting self-management was solely driven by budget pressure, though some saw self-management as worthwhile on social grounds.

Some felt allotments have been forgotten about yet understood that Covid responses had distracted RBC away from the area. The biggest bones of contention were the number of vacant or untended plots, the encroachment of boundaries leading to lost plots, the behaviour of other tenants, and illegal or inappropriate dumping of household waste in waste-designated or undesignated areas. Some said the service needs to be proactive yet has been barely reactive. The loss of the allotment officer was raised often. Surprisingly, 20 tenants suggested, unprompted, that rents should be increased, or discounts dropped, if income generated was reinvested in allotments. 5 were vehemently opposed to rent rises.

3.3.3 On site Comments on Self-Management

The exercise has stimulated discussion among tenants. Many see value in or support self-management or helping with maintenance. Some suggested that existing Horticultural Associations or Allotment Charities might join in with self-management of their sites. On this theme, Food for Families were most often referenced. Of self-management, a concern was that they could not see who would take the task on, it could easily go wrong, and that self-appointed site 'leaders' might not be representative or accountable.

Higher level self-management proved intimidating, especially on the largest sites, with some asking RBC to help Associations to form, to monitor site governance and assist with funding bids. No tenant expressed an appetite for taking on Council roles like major groundworks or legal processes. Some called for a new Allotment Supervisor to help develop self-management on a site-buy-site basis in a way that suited the needs and capabilities of each site. The irony of asking for more Council investment now was not lost on some, who tended to frame their requests as "invest to save" ideals. Some expected the Council to dictate the level of model of self-management all sites should adopt or provide the preferred template.

There is a strong expectation that the Council will release a site budget before self-management is adopted. The clearest message in this domain was that self-management was conditional on being given a 'clean site' to start with, once again raising the potential early-stage costs of the exercise to the Council.

Finally, some asked if they were expected to take on 'all-or-nothing' and if failure to self-manage would simply mean rent rises. Some requested more time to respond with more detailed proposals, others talked of 'baby-steps' and others saw it is the beginning of a journey to a new way for their sites. The most negative response to the self-management idea was, *"There's absolutely no chance of this site taking it on. Most tenants despair of RBC and wouldn't take on the responsibilities that aren't even being met now. Managing the wait list would be a nasty business and self-management would be an onerous burden poorly executed"*.

3.3.4 On site Comments on Waste Management

Though touched on in point C above, tenants prefer to keep the Council's waste collection service for many reasons, the most important of which is disposal of perennial weeds and diseased plants. The issue of non-tenants accessing sites to fly-tip and of tenants dumping non-green waste on site vexes many. Fly-tipping could be cut through better site security and gate-locking. No one could solve the problem of stopping tenants dumping household waste onto site. A few called for waste bays to be scrapped, though more asked for clearly signed waste bays, periodic skips/collections, and scrap metal collection. One said of on-site waste, *"We are our own worst enemies, some simply don't follow the script"*. Dumping on abandoned plots or site boundaries attracts more waste. Many suggested the solution was a combination of a joint clear-up between tenants and Council, then clear guidance and monitoring by tenants and an allotment supervisor. The issue of waste left behind by ex-tenants could be addressed through charging a deposit refundable if the plot is left in good order.

3.3.5 On site Comments on IT

Of those that expressed a view, 6% cannot carry out web-based transactions or communicate with the Council via e-mail. A common observation was that, “there’s no named person to call, they keep changing staff all the time”. Once again, the loss of the last allotment officer was cited as significant in sentiments of detachment from the landlord.

3.3.6 On site - Other topics raised.

Some site representatives stated they cannot gauge interest in self-management without the Council providing all tenants’ contact details, despite this information being personal data under DPA. To improve communication, 4 sites stated they had started a Tenant WhatsApp group. Sites without notice boards asked for them to be installed. There were complaints made about specific tenants’ behaviour that the service is acting on. A few tenants stated the Council has a Statutory Duty to provide allotments, while one noted the Council has no statutory duty to clear up after bad tenants.

4. SUMMARY RESULTS TABLE

The table below summarises consultation results. Feedback was received from all sites, though not necessarily across all contact types (i.e. Met in person, email, online responses). For example, despite 3 visits each to Emmer Green and Ardler Road, the consultation officer met no tenants at either.

	MET ON SITE		Email replies	Email Prov Con Self-mgt nos	ONLINE REPLIES	ONLINE Question 1. 'Interested in Self-Management?'			ONLINE Question 2. 'Interested in Site-Maintenance?'			Does site have existing Social Media Group ?	Does site have an Existing Site Committee ?	Site linked to local Horticult Assoc ?	Is there a Trading Shed on site?
	A nos	B nos				Q1 YES	Q1 NO	Q1 % YES	Q2 YES	Q2 NO	Q2 % YES				
ARDLER ROAD	0		0	n/a	1	1	0	100	1	0	100	N	N	CHA	N
ASHAMPSTEAD	2		0	n/a	2	1	1	50	1	1	50	?	N	SGA	N
BALMORE	1		3	0	5	4	1	80	4	1	80	?	N	CHA	N
BULMERSHE	25	1	9	4v1	29	13	16	45	18	11	62	Y	Y	ERHA	Y
CAVERSHAM COURT	3		8	2v2	8	1	7	13	6	2	75	?	FCCG?	CHA	N
CIRCUIT LANE	4		1	1v0	6	2	4	33	4	2	67	?	N	SGA	N
COLEY	8		1	1v0	9	5	4	56	7	2	78	?	N	SGA	N
EMMER GREEN	0		6	3v0	15	3	12	20	4	11	27	?	N	CHA	N
GEORGE STREET	2	1	0	na	3	1	2	33	3	0	100	Y	TBA	N	N
GODDARDS FARM	8		5	3v0	10	5	5	50	6	4	60	?	N	N	N
HENLEY ROAD	13	1	10	2v3	20	9	11	45	8	12	40	Y	N	CHA	Y
LOWER SOUTHCOTE	5		3	1v0	9	7	2	78	6	3	67	?	N	SGA	Y
MEADWAY	3		2	0v1	4	1	3	25	3	1	75	?	N	?	N
MOCKBEGGARS	6		6	6v0	4	2	2	50	4	0	100	Y	TBA	N	N
NEWCASTLE ROAD	13	1	2	2v0	7	7	0	100	6	1	86	Y	TBA	N	N
OAKLEY ROAD	1		1	1v0	8	5	3	63	6	2	75	?	N	CHA	Y
OAK TREE ROAD	32	1	14	2v2	17	9	8	53	11	6	65	Y	N	THA	Y
SCOURS LANE	41	1	35	33v2	29	18	11	62	19	10	66	Y	TBA	THA	N
VICTORIA ROAD	2		5	0v5	3	1	2	33	3	0	100	?	N	CHA	N
WATERLOO MEADOWS	8		15	13v1	7	2	5	29	5	2	71	Y	Y	N	N
SITE UNKNOWN			4		1	0	1	0	1	0	100				
	177	6	130	65v17	197	97	100	49%	126	71	64%				

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 About the Consultation. The consultation may have some flaws but was widely welcomed. The decision not to dictate a model proved problematic for some, but others found the Council's non-prescriptive approach allowed for freedom to investigate which level of self-management might work best for them.

It undoubtedly prompted all sites to talk, some set up social media groups and at least 3 to set up a committee. Though limited in timespan and affected by the C-19 regime, the consultation reached the widest audience and garnered an excellent response rate with over 400 contacts/responses plus 400 leaflets distributed on site. Tenants praised the Council for sending an officer to the sites as it *"makes it feel like the Council wants to listen to us"*.

The consultation has helped open communication between landlord and tenant and provides new opportunities for constructive dialogue. Asking tenants to give their emails to the service will help in future communication, including further consultation.

5.2 About Self-Management. Positive feelings towards and appetite for self-management outweighed negatives. 49% of online respondents (11.4% of all tenants) stated a wish to be involved in self-management. In community development terms, starting with anything over 10% of all users wanting to participate is very promising.

The exercise itself has triggered action to form allotment societies on 3 sites and to create social media networks on more. The latter is a necessary precursor to forming a society, especially during C-19 restrictions. Sites that already have representatives might not be the opportunity originally imagined because of mistrust of these existing volunteers and because of concerns that they may want to run the sites along private member's club lines.

While some sites see no opportunity gain in self-management, more said that they would move toward it but only on condition that the Council were to hand over a cleaned up site and carried on with the difficult tasks of major groundworks, legal issues and rent collection. A strong feeling was that the Council should not leave newly-emerging societies to forge their own way without some level of oversight. Also requested were improved staffing resources in the admin and supervisor roles. The investment required for such invest-to-save principles may prove prohibitive. In that case, many tenants identified that the opportunities would come from them starting lower self-management while income would rise through rent increases and a review of discounts.

One element of self-management gaining traction was adopting a partnership approach to identifying and letting of untended or vacant plots. Reluctance to view plot allocation as an early attainable task is founded on the sites' problems with plot numbering and knowing whether a plot is let or just untended.

At the outset, officers wondered whether any community groups such as the Horticultural/Gardeners' Associations would suggest they could act as all or part of self-managed committees. This turned out not to be the case, but the position may change. The potential for groups like Food for Families to take a more strategic or management role was not a rare suggestion.

5.3 About Site Maintenance. Through all response types, the eagerness to take on maintenance tasks was stronger than the appetite for self-management. 11.5% of online responses indicated a will to contribute, and a further 3.6% said their contribution is to keep their own areas tidy. That tenants said that they would volunteer to help on site, but not to sit on a committee, is understandable given that maintenance works are time-limited and do not come with the responsibilities and liabilities required in management committee positions. Tenants asked that the Council remains responsible for major-groundworks and asked that the Council be an active partner in a coordinated programme of joint site maintenance.

5.4 About Cost Reduction. Opposition to rent increases and discount reductions was expected. The overall support for increasing fees was a wholly unexpected outcome. Many drew attention to the profound difficulty councils have in balancing allotment services among other higher priorities since austerity. These and ideas about tenant deposits for the plot and/or keys, and about fee-based waste collection illustrate that some tenants are prepared to contribute in cash what they might not be willing or able to contribute toward self-management or site maintenance. Most suggesting increased fees made their suggestion conditional on the Council improving the service offer, or sometimes actually providing a service. The feeling that the rent covers ground rent with no service is deeply held.

5.5 About Waste-Management. On-site dumping by tenants, fly-tipping, overgrown unlet plots and unkempt occupied plots are the common bugbears of tenants and landlords across the country. Tenants want more secure gates that are easier to use to prevent fly-tippers. They want on-site dumping removed swiftly so it attracts no further dumping. They want vacant plots to be tidied up, numbered, with waste removed (mainly by the Council, though some suggested by tenant bodies) and swiftly offered for rent in good order. And tenants want lacklustre tenants to be given one chance or face eviction. All sites recognised the role tenants can play in this regard, but all assert that the Council’s input remains necessary. More tenants/sites asked for clearly signed separate waste bays with clear instructions that said that waste bays should be removed. The vexing question of bonfires cropped up with a few asking for permission to burn with strict guidelines. Some saw injustice that neighbouring homes could have bonfires while they are not permitted to do so.

5.6 About Electronic Transactions. More comments were made on behalf of those without IT by people with IT than those without. It is no surprise that the Council must continue to allow non-e-transactions for a shrinking number of tenants without IT. Sites asked for notice boards for their and the Council’s use to be erected. The formation of site Societies was identified as an opportunity to keep those without IT connected within the site community.

5.7 Overall Conclusions. The consultation has started a movement on some sites but has generated many questions too. The baby-steps being taken now may falter if the Council takes the consultation results as approval to raise rents without making the required contribution to self-management. Without information and support, sites’ ambitions may wither. The journey to self-management is akin to community development. It rarely works when dictated by authority yet can falter without the support of authority. That the consultation found there is latent potential for a ground-level movement to self-management is unsurprising given the wealth of skills and knowledge that can be found in 850 allotment holders. Harnessing this potential is the key to the Council helping to develop sustainable and competent self-management.

6. SELF-MANAGEMENT POTENTIAL OF EACH SITE

Estimating the appetite of each site for self-management combines quantitative data and more qualitative observations of the consultation officer set out in the table below.

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING POTENTIAL FOR SELF-MANAGEMENT OF SITES.
Numbers of respondents via different media by site.
Strength of support for ideas of self-management and site-maintenance by site.
Any existing infrastructure (such as a pre-existent site committee, social media groups, links to area-based Horticultural Associations and the presence of Trading sheds on site).
Sites that submitted detailed proposals or group consultation reports.
Consultation officer opinion informed by dialogue with tenants/groups on site, or via other media. The officer tried to gauge each site’s ‘community connectedness’.

Each site's potential is set out in the table below. Groupings are based on a snap-shot informed by feedback received by October 2020. Groupings may have already changed without the Council being aware.

While the response rate was high, those that responded might not represent the views of all tenants. Even on individual sites, widely divergent views exist. The labels given to each site may not be truly representative and arise at a time when the Covid pandemic has hampered group dialogue, but they form a starting point. This consultation report may serve to encourage sites to draw up their own tenant surveys to better inform decision making so that sites strive towards a level of self-management that suits them.

**SITES ALREADY MOVING TO SELF-MANAGEMENT or EXPRESSING KEENNESS TO DO SO NOW.
Bulmershe. George Street. Mockbeggars. Newcastle Road. Scours Lane. Waterloo Meadows.**

Distinguishing characteristics, include; On-site social media. Already self-managing some aspects of their whole site. Elected or informal committee in place. Pre-existing potential that has increased in the consultation. Submitted detailed suggestions via email and requested further discussion with the Council. Arranged tenant/RBC meetings during consultation period. Existing links to Horti Assoc. Presence and potential use of Trading Shed.

SITES EXPRESSING SOME INTEREST IN or NOT COMPLETELY REJECTING SELF-MANAGEMENT, but with RESERVATIONS, and/or THE NEED FOR FURTHER INFORMATION/DISCUSSION, and/or WHOLLY CONDITIONAL ON CONTINUED COUNCIL INVOLVEMENT.

Ardler Road. Ashampstead. Balmore. Coley. Goddards Farm. Henley Road. Lower Southcote. Oakley Road.

Sites with tenants recognising potential, but without a coordinated tenant groundswell pushing hard for self-management. Tenants on these sites are more likely to say, *"It could work, but who is going to do it?"* Some sites with relatively positive feedback, but based on a low response rate, either because of lack of engagement or because of low occupancy rates on sites. Sites stating that a local Horti Association are more likely to do it than the tenants. Sites where self-management aspirations are dampened by concerns about the long-term security of the site or by ongoing behaviour of 'problem' tenants. Sites where the difference between responses was widest. Sites requiring RBC groundworks prior to tenants considering self-management.

SITES LEAST POSITIVE ABOUT or MOST AGAINST SELF-MANAGEMENT or WHERE LOW RESPONSE RATES INDICATE THAT THE COUNCIL SHOULD RENEW EFFORTS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION TO AND ENGAGE WITH TENANTS.

Caversham Court. Circuit Lane. Emmer Green. Meadway. Oak Tree Road. Victoria Road.

The least likely to embrace self-management are those with strong sentiments that they are 'the forgotten site' or that the site is earmarked for redevelopment. Sites that stated the need for more Council service over any other notion. Sites with high vacancy rates and thus a feeling that there are too few tenants to take on responsibilities. Sites where anti-social tenants dampen the enthusiasm of others. Sites where a need for planned and proactive major works (trees, hedges, fences, tracks, water) was identified as a reason for shying away from self-management. Sites where potential will not be evident until further community feedback is sought.

"If RBC can't manage tenants and maintain our sites with all their budgets and staff, what hope has a group of volunteers got?"

"I just want to work my plot in peace. I don't have time, and I can't see anyone else being up for it here. I pay my rent and that is that".

7. OPTIONS

7.1 REDUCE SERVICE PROVISION. Council provides minimal services (lettings, rent collection, site security, trees, roads, water) leaving sites to manage their own waste.

Will damage Council/tenant relations. Energy generated by consultation discussions will be wasted. Sites might not cope with own waste disposal, causing dumping and loss of workable plots to increase to a level where Council would have to invest in disposal. Generates minimal savings, may be not providing a service at all, loss of tenants and difficulties in letting to new tenants.

7.2 DO NOTHING. Leave sites to grow their own self-management and maintenance plans. At the least, encourage site associations to join the National Allotment Society for advice and guidance. Maintain service input and costs.

Sites will not move toward self-management if Council does not support nascent groups, collaborate in a forward strategy and hand over a clear site. Doing nothing may result in loss of some sites impetus for autonomy. If the only outcome of the exercise is that rents are increased, tenant dissatisfaction could manifest in higher vacancy rates and withdrawal of goodwill needed to kick-start and sustain self-management. Will generate no savings in short term

7.3 SITE-BY-SITE APPROACH. Select five sites exhibiting skill and will to self-management as pilots. In partnership with site reps/committee/association, conduct site audit. Audit to include review of rent/discounts; vacancy rates/waiting lists; plot conditions; identify starter bed potential; security; waste disposal (problems, solutions) and recycling opportunities; tenant capacity to handle aspects of management; outstanding major works. Develop collaborative site management plan with agreed targets for reaching agreed level of self-management; provide support for developing communication and governance. Form steering group of reps from pilot sites to share good practice. Steering group assesses cost/benefit of each site and combined project. Share findings with non-pilot sites and invite to join Self-Management project.

Requires Council resource to invest in capital groundworks at outset and to support and monitor development of self-management. Scale and timing of savings arising difficult to gauge as community development generally does not yield savings in early stages. Will generate goodwill that in turn enhances savings on pilot sites, though non-pilot sites may feel left behind. Perhaps include a site with least promise, while investing support service to help non-pilots find their way into forming associations and pushing to self-management.

So that no site is left untended, the usual winter works maintenance at other sites will follow.

7.4 ALL SITES TASK-BY-TASK APPROACH. Select a theme to study and improve across all sites, possibly waste management and recycling linked into plot preparation to enable swift lettings. A problem is that themes are so inter-dependent. Dumping of off-site waste hinges on improved site security and on-site behaviour – on site waste disposal behaviour depends on starting with a clean slate, provision of fool-proof recycling facilities, peer-pressure and pride in site – pride in site is built on a sense of community that comes from good communication, trust and collaboration that arise from allotment societies. So, allied to a theme-based approach across all sites should be sustained effort to coax all sites towards forming societies and accepting self-management responsibilities. Sites already leaning towards self-management will continue their efforts along all other tasks/themes but may prove to be achievers in the task chosen for an all site approach.

As with 7.3, no sites would be left out. Council investment in site clear-ups may persuade unlikely sites to discover an appetite for self-management after all. Recall sites say they would not take on higher level responsibility unless the Council provided a clear site to begin with. Tackling the waste collection requires

initial investment, but if it works well it will derive savings on an expensive task. Different tasks/themes need different types of Council input and support. Waste/recycling being a groundworks issue. Setting up and supporting representative management committees to cover all tasks requires input from staff with community development and strategy skills.

7.5 COMPREHENSIVE SELF-MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME. Combines all elements of site-by-site AND task-by-task approaches on the ground, but also includes identifying and making improvements to the service offer in terms of back office functions, communication and planned maintenance. Form and provide secretariat to an Allotment Self-Management Steering Group. Investigate potential organisations willing to take on umbrella management of associations. Include review of rents and discounts.

Clearly the most expensive option that will generate savings by maximising lettings, increasing on-site recycling and so reducing the need for waste collection, building community pride in sites that boosts voluntary contributions. Probably best viewed as a 3- or 5-year project that the Council would have to make front-end investment and ongoing investment of support staff. Supports the Council's Green credentials and community development aspirations.

8. FURTHER OPTIONS, ACTIONS, SUGGESTIONS

1. Follow up all queries arising from the survey including detailed emails submitted. Failure to do so will be a let-down to tenants who tried to engage with the Council.
2. Review rent levels to reflect feedback on highly discounted rents. Remove Passport to Leisure discount and replace with self-certified link to means-tested benefits. Overhaul rent structure to reduce number of rent categories.
3. Open discussions with existing community enterprises that have the skills to help sites develop their self-management aspirations.
4. Consider paying the membership fee for sites wishing to join the National Allotment Society. Sites use the NAS as support service for self-management.
5. Parks Services and Estates/Valuation Team investigate suitable alternative land uses in accordance with the Green Space Strategy for underutilised areas within sites.
6. Develop a new Allotment Strategy in partnership that gives the drive to self-management, service improvement and cost reduction equal priority.
7. Use collaborative site-maintenance as the first step for all sites. There is more interest in site-maintenance than in self-management. Once site-maintenance delivers visible outcomes in partnership, sites may be more open to trying higher level self-management.
8. Review all sites' security set-up, making it easier to use locks. Arrange for change over to combi-locks and system of changing combinations.
9. With Legal Services, review landlord processes for handling non-compliant tenants.
10. Use the wider service's Fundamental Service Review to identify efficiencies in back office functions and to budget for provision of support to Self-Management of allotments, and opportunities for the same in other assets/services.
11. Plan a complete overhaul of Ardlar Road, the site in poorest state and with the longest waiting time.
12. Attempt to improve engagement with sites that had low engagement levels in the consultation period, notably Ashampstead, Emmer Green and Oakley Road.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	15th DECEMBER 2020	AGENDA ITEM:	
TITLE:	REWILDING AND THE WILDFLOWER PLAN. INCREASING BIODIVERSITY ON HIGHWAY VERGES		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	KAREN ROWLAND	PORTFOLIO:	CULTURE, HERITAGE AND RECREATION
SERVICE:	ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	ANDREW EDWARDS	TEL:	0118 937 3468
JOB TITLE:	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES	E-MAIL:	Andrew.edwards@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Rewilding means restoring, reclaiming and protecting natural habitats and native species and involves the encouragement of wildflowers to grow on areas of mown grassland. This project is aimed at dealing with two different aspects of the climate emergency: carbon sequestration and biodiversity.
- 1.2 As part of the Council's response to the climate change emergency declared in February 2018 an experimental project to rewild some larger highways verges was being planned at the time when the first Covid related lockdown happened in March. The pandemic resulted in temporary staff absence of up to 20% and the subsequent re-deployment of the highways grass cutting teams to the main parks.
- 1.3 This gave an opportunity to bring forward the rewilding experiment and the grass on a number of larger highways verges was left un-cut during the summer, allowing wild flower species to grow and seed. Site condition of each location was then assessed and the Wildflower Plan prepared. The experimental change in grass mowing regime was not extended to parks, however the Wildflower Plan suggests that a similar experiment is conducted

in 2021 to assess whether the 40 hectares of grass in parks which is currently managed for wildflowers can be expanded by up to 5%.

- 1.4 This report gives further details of the operational changes involved in the rewilding project, updates members on the results of the experiment and the recommended next steps contained in the draft Wildflower Plan.

Appendix 1 shows the on - site rewilding information signs used during the experiment.

The Wildflower Plan is also appended to the report.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Committee note the report and the progress of the Rewilding experimental project in 2020.
- 2.2 That the committee endorse the recommendations of the Wildflower Plan as shown in section 4.2.4 of this report.
- 2.3 That the Wildflower Plan is subject to public consultation and its adoption is then sought at a subsequent Committee.
- 2.3 That an annual rewilding progress report is brought to HNL Committee at its Autumn meeting.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 In February 2018 the Council declared a climate emergency, and, together with partners from all sectors (public, business, voluntary, education), has been working on a range of initiatives and policies to attempt to address this.
- 3.2. In November 2020 the Reading Climate Change Partnerships' Reading Climate Emergency Strategy (RCES) was adopted by the Council. Within the 'Nature' theme of the strategy is a wide-ranging requirement to improve the urban environment for flora and fauna an initiative directly supported by the rewilding experiment.
- 3.3 Earlier in the year, the Council consulted on the Biodiversity Action Plan. The plan is focused on promoting natural solutions to climate challenges, such as improving habitats to help wildlife and people adapt to the impacts of climate change. It sets out priority objectives and actions for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity within Reading.
- 3.4 The rewilding project sits within the framework of the Council's new Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), which is focused on promoting natural solutions to climate challenges, such as improving habitats to help wildlife and people adapt to the impacts of climate change. Rewilding directly

addresses the following themes of the BAP by reviewing and changing the mowing regime of some highways verges to allow, where appropriate, more species-rich long grass in corridors along the highway:

- New wildlife rich habitats are created
- Reading's biodiversity is valued by its residents
- The decline in Readings' biodiversity is reversed.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 The experimental rewilding project began in March 2020 and in order to test the following:

- what different verges in different parts of Reading look like over the course of the flowering and seed-setting seasons;
- how residents respond to changes in the mowing regime;
- how to carry out practical maintenance issues like cutting and collecting, margin mowing, etc.
- whether there are ecological improvements coincident with changes to mowing patterns.

It was comprised of the following elements:

4.2. Change in mowing regime.

The sites included in Phase 1 are shown in Table 1 of the Wildflower Plan and include the larger areas of highways grass and banks and bunds. The normal grass cutting 'let-fly' regime was suspended and the areas cut once in September/ October with the arisings being removed or composted in piles on site. However in order to preserve a 'cared for' look close mown margins were maintained next to roads and footpaths, to create fire breaks in larger areas and to maintain sight lines. The areas rewilded this summer account for less than 5% of the area of highways grass in the Borough which are currently cut up to 8 times per year. Currently 40 hectares (10%) of parks grass is managed in this way and the target is to re-wild up to 20% of the highways and parks grass areas within 5 years.

4.3 Promotion and feedback.

Feedback from residents was a key aim of the rewilding experiment as one of the main themes of the BAP is to encourage the appreciation of a biodiverse environment by residents. Feedback was pro-actively sought and was substantially positive throughout the trial.

The project was supported by attractive promotional signs on verges (as shown in Appendix 2, a dedicated e mail inbox, social media posts, a press release and details on the RBC website.

4.4 Assessment of the trial

The results of the site by site assessment of Phase 1 are set out in detail in the Wildflower Plan and they are summarised below:

- From a maintenance point of view it was a success. Cut and collect mowing was effective and left a neat finish. Litter build up was a problem on a limited number of sites but it was removed prior to cutting.
- All steep banks will be returned to the routine 8 cut per annum regime as cut and collect mowing was found to be impractical.
- The response of residents was overwhelmingly positive. Around 115 responses were received, mainly through the dedicated inbox, of which about 20% were critical and the remainder enthusiastically supportive. Details are shown in the Wildflower Plan.

4.5 Conclusion and next steps: The Wildflower Plan.

The end of season review concluded that the experiment had worked in most areas from the point of view of both maintenance and appearance and was overwhelmingly positive.

The review has led to the Wildflower Plan, which is appended to this report. It captures the results of the rewilding experiment and makes the following recommendations for achieving the expansion and improvement of the rewilded areas in the Borough, as summarised below:

It is recommended that:

1. Rewilding of larger verges continues.
2. The maintenance regime be changed from an annual cut-and-collect on some rewilded sites to a three-times-a-season cut-and-collect in order to assess the effect on biodiversity and the vigour of both flowers and grass. Vigorous grass competes out other species. The most effective way to encourage wildflowers to flourish in grass is to reduce soil fertility. This is done by repeatedly cutting grass and removing the cuttings. The grass draws nutrients out of the soil, so, if it is cut and removed, nutrients are taken away and not returned to the soil.

Over successive seasons, the result is shorter grass and greater species diversity. Over time, it should be possible to reduce the cutting regime from 10 cuts annually to 2 or 3 cut-and-collect mowings each season, and the grass remains relatively short, because growth is suppressed. There are also more wildflowers, which are, in fact, an incidental by-product of the process. This regime was recommended by the ecologist Dr Philip Sterling, who has pioneered the ecological approach to amenity grass management its use on highways verges in Dorset and Devon.

3. Some sites be sown with locally sourced wildflowers and cut only at the end of the season to allow establishment.

4. Marginal rewilding (changing the mowing regime around parks boundaries and margins) be trialled at twelve locations in parks, adding around 2ha (5%) to the current area of conservation grassland. These will be assessed on the basis of biological performance, appearance and difficulty of management at the end of the season.

5. The Council continue the public information and consultation started in 2020.

6. The Council works with business partners to create enhanced-flowering, wild-looking commercial centre schemes that will raise the profile of the rewilding initiatives and contribute to refocusing perceptions of Reading as a 'green/wild city'.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The proposals contained in this report are in line with the following Corporate Plan priorities:

- Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe
- Promoting health, education, wellbeing and culture
- Ensuring the Council is fit for the future

5.2 In addition, the Council has adopted a Strategic Framework (March 2020) which sets out the Council's key priorities including:

- To keep social care services running for the children and adults who need them;
- To support vulnerable and isolated people during the crisis;
- To support business and the economy, which will secure the long-term recovery of Reading.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

6.1 The rewilding project was widely promoted via the Council website, social media, on-site signs and a press release.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, the Council 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.

- 7.2 The Council has reviewed the scope of the project as outlined within this report and considers that the proposals have no direct impact on any groups with protected characteristics.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Under Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 the Council as Highways Authority has a duty to maintain the highway maintainable at public expense.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 A bid has been submitted to the Capital programme to fund the additional cut and collect machinery required and for additional wild-flower seed for sowing over the next 4 years. The capital programme will be considered in February 2021.
- 9.2 The rewilding project will result in a net reduction in the parks revenue budget of £30k per annum by financial year 2023/24 (£15k in 21/22 and £15k in 23/23).

10. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The rewilding project will benefit the climate by contributing to two different aspects of the climate emergency: carbon sequestration and biodiversity.
- 10.2 Rewilding responds to the Climate Crisis declared by the Council in February 2019 and will contribute to achieving our target of a carbon neutral Reading by 2030 in accordance with the Climate Change Strategy.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Appendix 1 - Rewilding information signs
11.2 Wildflower Plan - October 2020

Advice from a Honey Bee



Create
a buzz!
#RewildingRDG

We are leaving the grass and flowers to grow for the birds and the bees.

For more information on this project, see www.reading.gov.uk/rewilding

Please let us know what you think. Email us on rewilding@reading.gov.uk

Advice from a Butterfly

Take time to
smell the flowers
#RewildingRDG



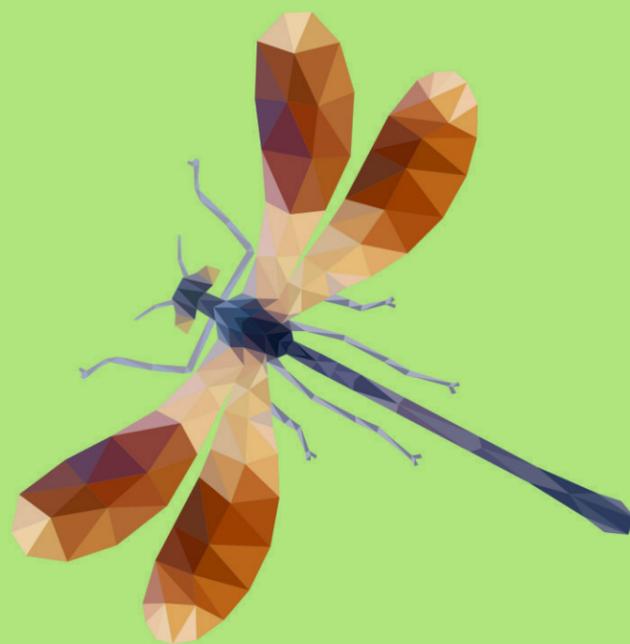
We are leaving the grass and flowers
to grow for the birds and the bees.

For more information on this project,
see www.reading.gov.uk/rewilding

Please let us know what you think.
Email us on rewilding@reading.gov.uk

Advice from a Dragonfly

Just wing it!
#RewildingRDG



We are leaving the grass and flowers to grow for the birds and the bees.

For more information on this project, see www.reading.gov.uk/rewilding

Please let us know what you think. Email us on rewilding@reading.gov.uk

Advice from a Wildflower



Be wild and
wonderful!
#RewildingRDG

We are leaving the grass and flowers to grow for the birds and the bees.

For more information on this project, see www.reading.gov.uk/rewilding

Please let us know what you think. Email us on rewilding@reading.gov.uk

Advice from a Meadow



Explore
new horizons
#RewildingRDG

**We are leaving the grass and flowers
to grow for the birds and the bees.**

**For more information on this project,
see www.reading.gov.uk/rewilding**

**Please let us know what you think.
Email us on rewilding@reading.gov.uk**

Advice from a Caterpillar



We are leaving the grass and flowers to grow for the birds and the bees.

For more information on this project, see www.reading.gov.uk/rewilding

Please let us know what you think. Email us on rewilding@reading.gov.uk

**ENVIRONMENT AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES
DIRECTORATE OF ECONOMIC GROWTH
AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES**



**WILDFLOWER PLAN 1.0
OCTOBER 2020**

Version	Author	Review date	Completed by
1.0	CJ	31 October 2021	



Flowers on Lansdowne Road bunds, June 2020

Executive Summary

1. This Wildflower Plan is one of a suite of policies to address Reading's declared climate emergency, and sits with the Climate Emergency Strategy and the Biodiversity Action Plan, as well as Reading Borough Council's Corporate Plan.
2. A Rewilding Project was initiated in 2020, which identified large verges where more species-rich long grass could be grown in corridors along the highway. An internal assessment was carried out, and feedback from residents proactively sought. Feedback was substantially positive, and the internal assessment concluded that the experiment had worked in most areas from the point of view of both maintenance and appearance.
3. It is proposed that rewilding of larger verges continues.
4. The way in which grassland is managed affects the diversity and vigour of the wildflowers within it; more frequent cutting and collecting of arisings weakens grass allowing wildflowers to compete.
5. It is therefore proposed that the maintenance regime be changed from an annual cut-and-collect on some rewilded sites to a three-times-a-season cut-and-collect in order to assess the effect on biodiversity and the vigour of both flowers and grass.
6. The assessment also found that some sites would benefit from an enhancement of the seed bank through the sowing of native perennial wildflowers.
7. It is therefore proposed that some sites be sown with locally sourced wildflowers and cut only at the end of the season to allow establishment.
8. The first phase of the project did not involve making any changes in the parks. The Council currently has over 40ha of conservation grassland, which is mown annually in September. There is some scope for additional rewilding, mainly of the edges of parks to create corridors for fauna.
9. It is proposed that marginal rewilding be trialled at twelve locations in parks, adding around 2ha (5%) to the current area of conservation grassland. These will be assessed on the basis of biological performance, appearance and difficulty of management at the end of the season.
10. It is proposed that the Council continue the public information and consultation started in 2020.
11. While most people say that they respond positively to a 'natural' look, the reality is that many respond better when nature has been enhanced. On high-profile sites, it may be desirable to consider naturalistic but idealised meadow-like landscapes that include more colour and provide pleasure for a long period. This might involve excluding most grasses and introducing some non-natives.
12. It is proposed that the Council works with business partners to create enhanced-flowering, wild-looking commercial centre schemes that will raise the profile of the rewilding initiatives and contribute to refocusing perceptions of Reading as a 'green/wild city'.

1. Current situation

1.1 Background

The Council's rewilding project is aimed at dealing with two different aspects of the climate emergency: carbon sequestration and biodiversity.

In 2018 the Council declared a climate emergency, and, together with partners from all sectors (public, business, voluntary, education), has been working out what changes should be made to attempt to address this.

In early 2020 the Reading Climate Change Partnership consulted on the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy (RCES). Within the 'Nature' theme of the strategy is a wide-ranging requirement to improve the urban environment for flora and fauna.

At the same time, the Council was consulting on the Biodiversity Action Plan. The plan is focused on promoting natural solutions to climate challenges, such as improving habitats to help wildlife and people adapt to the impacts of climate change. It sets out priority objectives and actions for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity within Reading.

Independently, the Council has been receiving an increasing number of enquiries from residents about improvements for biodiversity across the Borough, the most frequent of which are for a change to highways verges cutting practices and tree planting. This needs to be considered together with the desire for a higher level of tidiness and quality of the public realm, and the Parks Department is aware of the potential for un-cut grass verges to attract complaints. These will be addressed by maintaining close cut margins to all the rewilded verges, litter picking and by installing information signs.

The Council is aware of the importance of grassland in combatting climate change. Grassland is an effective store of carbon: globally soils contain about twice as much carbon as is present in the atmosphere and three times what is stored in vegetation. From the point of view of carbon sequestration, rewilding is a quicker win than tree planting. In trees, most carbon is stored in the canopy, and carbon sequestration increases as canopies expand. In grassland, most carbon is stored below ground. Here, the storage is stable, as carbon is released only when ground is disturbed (2012, Natural England). Recently published research found that the more diverse the grassland in terms of species variety, the greater the carbon storage (2019, *Nature Communications* 10).

1.2 Rewilding Project Phase 1

A Rewilding Project was initiated under the new Biodiversity Action Plan, as one commitment in the RCES Nature theme. The project started by reviewing the mowing regime of highways verges to allow, where appropriate, more species-rich long grass in corridors along the highway. The first objective was to find out what this 'rewilding' would look like.

The changes in the first year were an experiment, testing several things: (i) what different verges in different parts of Reading look like over the course of the

flowering and seed-setting seasons; (ii) how residents respond to changes in the mowing regime; (iii) how to carry out practical maintenance issues like cutting and collecting, margin mowing, etc.; and (iv) whether there are ecological improvements coincident with changes to mowing patterns.

The changed regime involved not cutting many large and long verges, monitoring these sites for the quality and variety of grasses and other plants, and encouraging members of the public to spot and report insect life and any rare or unusual plant species.

Public information was provided by on-site signage as well as on the website. Feedback was encouraged, both supportive and dissatisfied, and this was monitored throughout the growing season.

To preserve a cared-for appearance, the rewilded verges were to have borders close mown: 2m minimum width adjacent to a road, and one mower deck width alongside footpaths, and an effort was made to increase the frequency of cutting of these mown borders and smaller verges so that the public realm looked tidy and cared for. Even on verges to be left uncut, traffic splays and other sight lines were cut, and on large verges, mown paths acting as firebreaks were maintained.

The first phase of the project did not involve making any changes in the parks. The Council currently has 40ha of conservation grassland, which is mown annually in September, and this is unchanged. The primary reason was that, in 2020, it was necessary to close-mow as much as possible, so that people had well-maintained space for outdoor exercise during Covid-19-related lockdown.

1.3 Assessment of Phase 1

The trial was intended to inform future decisions about rewilding that took account of local preferences, botanical and biodiversity value, and landscape value. An assessment was planned, so that, for future years, it could be decided which verges to leave and which to resume mowing. Consideration would also be given to which verges may require enhancements in the form of adding to the reserve of wildflowers.

The assessment of the success or otherwise of the experiment has four aspects:

- Does it work from a management and maintenance point of view?
- What did the sites look like later in the season?
- How did each site work in terms of the variety of flora (and fauna) found?
- Did the project receive the approbation or criticism of residents?

Inspections were carried out during and at the end of the season. A site-by-site assessment based on these inspections is set out below in Table 1. This tabulated report seeks to answer the first two questions above. Thumbnail photographs are included for most sites.

Table 1: Assessment of Phase 1 verges not mown for rewilding purposes

	Assessment	Photograph
A33 both sides	This is a gateway site, with seminatural areas on both sides, so lends itself to rewilding. Make separate bid for funding to sow with native/non-native mix for long flowering season.	
Rose Kiln lane bank	Not possible to cut and collect this steep bank so return to regular mowing.	
Basingstoke Road/ Gillette Way	Lots of publicity earlier in the year on twitter and other social media about rare wild flowers in this area. Not so much flora in the latter half of the year after the hot spell of weather. Historical drinking site: literally hundreds of beer cans removed from bushes and undergrowth. No access for tractor. Would need to be smaller machine for cut and collect. Few complaints about untidiness plus potential interest from new owners of old Gillette buildings. Recommended to retain.	
Northumberland Avenue roundabouts	Subject to ASB (people driving over the roundabouts); long grass does not stop this, and makes tracks more evident. Mow.	
Swallowfield Drive	Would benefit from wildflower sowing, providing some colour amongst the buildings in this area. Easy to maintain site and no complaints. Recommended rewild and enhance.	
Blagdon Road	Most of the verges on Blagdon Road are managed by Affinity Housing. The section on the top was left unmown, and attracted positive responses from local people, one of whom is collecting money to enhance with wildflower seeds.	
Hexham Road	Laid to wildflower turf in 2012. This has survived remarkably well, and an independent assessment after 5 years found it to be one of the most species diverse sites in urban areas ever seen by the ecologist.	
Rembrandt Way banks	Long grass stems with large seed heads and little else. Not possible to cut and collect this steep bank so not one for the future.	
Tilehurst Road/ Liebenrod Road roundabout	Large roundabout on a busy road. The roundabout is banked so may prove difficult to maintain regularly. Perhaps we could extend the rewilding area (or replace it) in nearby Prospect Park.	
Circuit Lane/ Devils Dip	Circuit Lane/Devil's Dip rewilding area is another area which used to be left as conservation grass in the past. Traveller incursions forced us to install bollards around the area and the site has been rewilded ever since. Good variety of flowers including the omnipresent Achillea millefolium (Milfoil) and Hypochaeris radicata (Spotted cat's-ear), Blue Mallow, Docks and Thistle. We have extended the uncut area to encompass part of Circuit Lane. No real feedback of note. Retain.	

Florian Gardens	A good site, especially in the spring. Looks well maintained with the edges strimmed; low litter accumulation. No access issues or negative feedback; ideal site. Retain.	
Dwyer Road/ Burghfield Road	Dwyer Road has all the usual flora in evidence Achillea millefolium (Milfoil), Hypochaeris radicata (Spotted cat's-ear), Docks, Sinapis arvensis (California rape). Looks well maintained, edges strimmed; low litter accumulation. No access issues or negative feedback; ideal site. Retain.	
Mayfair	Quite small areas were on show when The Mayfair was inspected suggesting that some residents took to cutting the grass which was left for rewilding. There is no point rewilding areas where people actively mow grass. Not recommended.	
New Lane Hill	Good variety of flowers. We have cut a channel for the gentleman in the corner who looks after his house frontage. Would benefit from wildflower seed and no complaints about grass begin left uncut. Only issue would be that there are services underground and it does seem to be dug up on a regular basis. Retain.	
Lansdowne Road	Spectacular array of flora in the bunds surrounding site. Mostly grassland behind it. There were some complaints about the scruffiness of the bunds and how sight lines to the road have been affected etc but the Highways Inspector found no problem. Regular cutting and collecting of the bunds may be difficult, but it is worth trying because of the variety of flowers and support from active residents who have added wildflower seeds to the bunding. Retain and enhance.	
Bran Close	Bran Close is a nice little site. Plenty of interest and diversity. Front of Blundell's Copse used to be left unmown in the past. Our problem is access because of the of the planters placed on the green to prevent traveller incursions. Recommended to be kept. No real feedback from residents.	
St Michael's Road green	Small site which would benefit greatly from wildflower sowing. Very little in the way of flora, just some Achillea millefolium (Milfoil). Retain.	
St Michael's Road/ Walnut Way green	Small site surrounded by bunds. The bunds provide the main area of flora with hardly any flowers in the grass behind. Nice spot for enhancement. There is interest in this site from Tilehurst Globe.	

Fircroft Close green at rear	Good potential site however, at present we don't have the correct machinery to cut and collect this large bank safely and the resource required is currently beyond the capacity of the service. It will be excluded from the current experiments but will be included if suitable resource and equipment can be found.	
Rodway Road	Rewilding was stopped early because of the bin men's needing to drag the bins down the banks to the lorry. Mow.	
Vale Crescent bank	Not possible to cut and collect this steep bank so return to regular mowing.	
Overdown Road opp. Overlanders End	Small site. Mostly grass. Easy to maintain. Retain.	
Overdown/ Oxford Road roundabout	Gateway location; suggest unique treatment of annual rotation and sowing with annual wildflower mix.	
Norcot Road roundabout	Hand mown by Gardens Team. Should be enhanced as easy to maintain.	
Norcot Road banks	No real value as a rewilding site and need to explore alternative planting regimes e.g. bulb planting. Site prone to litter accumulation and looked untidy when left long.	
Links Drive	Large thistles on bund were quite extraordinary. However, there was very little interest in the grass area behind this. There is some evidence of anti-social behaviour which would have been screened off by thistles. Large bunds would make cut and collect impossible as the tractor cannot safely traverse them. Not recommended; mow.	
Meadow Park Academy/ Church End Lane jn	High traffic area site with nearby school and 17 bus route. Wild flower seed.	
Portman Road (behind kneerail)	Large grassed area performed well in terms of flowering; would benefit from sowing wildflowers and provide a really high-profile rewilding site given its location. Not one complaint received and ties in nicely with Barnwood Close. Retain.	
Barnwood Close	Quite a lot of litter here but there has been a good display of flowers here throughout the year. Keep on Rewilding list but site would benefit from regular litter picking. Bunds will need strimming. There is access through Barnwood to main site on Portman, so suitable for the large mower and tractor.	
Rotherfield Way/ Southdown Road	Verge half way down performed well and valued by residents. The verge opposite the Southdown Road banks, which was not a popular location for rewilding for some residents, should be treated as an alternative rewilding site to the banks. This is in front of a woodland area and can easily be managed as part of the project. Recommended rewild and enhance.	

Buckingham Drive/ Peppard Road	Mostly knee high grass with channels cut through for pedestrian access. Mostly <i>Achillea millefolium</i> (Milfoil) and <i>Hypochaeris radicata</i> (Spotted cat's-ear) in small concentrations at either end of the area. Looks well cared for. Retain.	
Lower Henley Road banks	Long grass stems with large seed heads and little else. Not possible to cut and collect this steep bank so not one for the future, which is a shame, as several residents reported seeing a variety of insects.	
Emmer Green Pond	Lots and lots of complaints from the residents in the nearby flats, including verbal abuse of grass-cutting staff. However, the site is excellent for biodiversity because of the nearby pond and a wide range of wildflowers. Retain.	
Stuart Close	Nice secluded site which already had some plant diversification and interest. Popular with dog walkers and children. There was an early request to cut a section for children to play, which was done. In the end, there were complaints about the grass being cut at the end of the season, so the rewilding is well supported. Retain and enhance.	



Rewilding signage, 2020

From a maintenance point of view, the conclusion is that the experiment has been successful. Very few sites - almost exclusively involving steep banks or tight access - preclude cut-and-collect mowing. A build-up of litter was reported on a few sites, notably along major routes like the A33, Gillette Way and Portman Road, but these were litter picked before mowing.

In terms of appearance, all areas looked colourful in the spring, as expected. It was a particularly good season for buttercups, and most sites glowed yellow for many weeks.



Virginia Way, between Coronation Square and Florian Gardens, May 2020

Later in the season, the flowering of species other than grass was much less evident, with grass flowers and a few tough species like *Achillea millefolium* and *Hypochaeris radicata* dominating. The exceptions were sites like Lansdowne Road, where the bunds were seeded and there was a large variety of flowering species.

The response of residents was overwhelmingly positive. Around 115 responses were received, mainly through the dedicated inbox, of which about 20% were critical and the remainder enthusiastically supportive. Examples of these are below. There were also hundreds of 'likes' on the Twitter feed. It is impossible not to conclude that residents are receptive of the project and wish to see it continued.

Hi there. I just wanted to say I support this scheme 100%. It's a win win, from my point of view, more attractive because for me even longer grass that doesn't go brown so readily in the hot part of the year looks better, but also saves money. A total no brainer. Wildflowers do still take a bit of maintenance but nowhere near as much as continuous aggressive mowing that destroys everything, even the grass really if too short. I do not want to live in such a barren landscape and hate the waste. To be this is an all round intelligent solution. Thanks very much. Ian.

You asked us to let you know what we think of the rewilding scheme in Reading. I love it! I live on Rotherfield Way and walk past the rewilding area here every day. I think it looks great, as well as having a positive effect on the environment. I am always happy to see it as I pass by. I wholly support the scheme and would love to see it extended to wider areas. It makes me proud of Reading! Kate

I think this is not only a fabulous idea but it is essential. Its a win win situation. The environment benefits and so does the council in terms of financial gain. The only thing that I would like to see is more sowing of wild seeds to add to the diversity of flowers available to wildlife. This would also add to the beauty and make it more palatable to the people that are less keen on the visual aspect. I look forward to hopefully seeing an abundance of wild flowers on our verges. I know that in the Pottery estate, for example, some people do not like the 'over grown grass' look. I am sure that would change if they were looking out on a more colourful and pretty sight. I personally don't have an issue with it. Karen

I would like to thank you for what is being done on the 'rewilding' project. Since lockdown my husband and I have taken daily walks around Prospect Park and Southcote and have been delighted by the beautiful wild flowers and grasses that now grow in the verges and meadow areas. It is a joy to watch the different varieties of plants growing through the weeks and seeing all the insects, bees and birds that they attract. Please keep it going! Hilary and Mike

I just wanted to let you know that I have recently seen your rewilding posters on the banks of Lower Henley Road and I think this is a brilliant idea and well communicated. I'd love to see reading council let grass verges grow wherever it is safe to do so and also to encourage residents to provide wild areas in their gardens too. Well done on this really valuable initiative! Sophie

Resident of Bran close, Tilehurst. What flowers what butterflies, an old concrete post..Just another excuse not to cut the grass. The grass is a mess outside our private homes. We were never informed or had any letters regarding this change. Council tax has gone up yet again and now getting less! I've been down this road before, years ago regarding cutting the grass, now your at it again. Cut the grass please.

No systematic survey of biodiversity was carried out. Residents were asked on the website to report sightings, but only a few comments were received:

I know you asked for sightings of birds and butterflies. However I think this warrants a mention. I spotted a deer in Barnwood Close on Saturday 20 June at 8pm (video attached). Lovely to see but I worry about it getting injured on the busy surrounding roads. I have also been told there is a fox that visits regularly in the early hours. And I have seen large dragonflies in my garden this year, as well as on the nearby section of Oxford road. Angela

Awesome. I think it is great that you are Rewilding this town, I walked along Lower Henley Road in Caversham and enjoyed walking by the long grass hearing the crickets, I also saw some wild flowers coming in and a good amount of butterflies too, it is working! Calvin

I saw a grasshopper jump out of the grasses at the above location [Lower Henley Road] last week. Good to see the rewilding initiative! John

As noted earlier, inspections found that diversity of non-grass flowers declined over the season, except where specific seeding had been done. This suggests that overseeding with wildflowers may increase the display element of rewilded areas.

Before proposals for the next growing season are developed, this report sets out the rationale for a change to the management of rewilded sites over the next three years. This is based on advice received by Dr Phil Sterling, an ecologist and former grounds maintenance manager at Dorset County Council.

2. Ecology, grass and wildflowers

2.1 *Rationale*

Grass growth is governed by rainfall, soil fertility, sunlight and temperature. Higher amounts of all of these increases the rate of growth of grass.

Vigorous grass competes out other species. The most effective way to encourage wildflowers to flourish in grass is to reduce soil fertility. This is done by repeatedly cutting grass and removing the cuttings. The grass draws nutrients out of the soil, so, if it is cut and removed, nutrients are taken away and not returned to the soil.

Over successive seasons, the result is shorter grass and greater species diversity. Over time, it should be possible to reduce the cutting regime from 10 cuts annually to 2 or 3 cut-and-collect mowings each season, and the grass remains relatively short, because growth is suppressed. There are also more wildflowers, which are, in fact, an incidental by-product of the process.

More diverse plant species - grass and flowers - feed and provide cover for a wider range of insects. Habitat improvement is therefore a further by-product of several seasons of cut-and-collect mowing.

However, management regimes may as well include mowing regularly within 2m of a road, because research shows that pollinating insects tend not to use flowers in this belt (2019, *The Applied Ecologist*).

2.2 *Process*

- Timing: Cut early (Mar/Apr), mid-summer (Jul), and late (Sept/Oct) but this is a guide only; for example, if it looks horrible go and cut it.
- Area selection: Small areas have less wildlife value, so more extensive sites are better, but avoid areas with large amounts of street furniture where grass needs to be close-mown. In other words, where you can't do it, don't.
- Method: Cut and collect with ride-on machinery; it is too time-consuming to mow large areas by hand.
- Disposal: Deposit arisings in small heaps on local areas of the same land designation, for example, highway to highway (so as not to constitute waste). If this is not possible, then collect recycle. The need to deposit arisings will reduce over years. Waste will be contaminated with litter; it is better to hand pick litter before cutting.
- Increasing species: encourage (or top up with) perennial, native mixes - generally, don't go for high impact non-natives, except in locations where impact is more important than ecology. Aim for a succession of flowering times to maximise both visual and ecological effect.

In summary, we are therefore proposing that we change from an annual cut-and-collect on some rewilded sites to a three-times-a-season cut-and-collect in order to assess the effect on biodiversity and the vigour of both flowers and grass.

3. Phase 2 proposal

3.1 *Highways verges*

Arising from review of Phase 1 sites, it is proposed that

- Most rewilding sites should be retained as sites for biodiversity
- All of the banks should be returned to a regime of regular mowing, because of the difficulties associated with cut-and-collect mowing on a steep incline at the end of the season
- Some sites that were mown in 2020 have been identified for addition to the rewilding programme for the 2021 season. These include Wensley Road green, Cintra Avenue and parts of Milestone Way.

Advice was sought from the ecologist Dr Philip Sterling, who has pioneered adapting the ecological approach to amenity grass management for use on highways verges in Dorset and Devon. Following this, a new way of managing several sites should be trialled in 2021. These will be mown three times during the season. This will be done for at least three years, and then the effects on grass and flowers will be assessed. It will be necessary to explain what is being done on the website and via signage, or there will be criticism about cutting flowers down in their prime or about not allowing seed to set.

Several sites should be set aside for seeding with additional flowers. In order to allow germination and establishment, these areas should be mown only once, at the end of the season, for two or three years after sowing, and then they should be compared with the 3x-mowing unenhanced sites for the relative effectiveness for wildflower establishment.

Table 2 shows the revised list of Highways verges for rewilding, indicating which maintenance regime will apply: either mow three times each season, or overseed with native flowers and mow once at the end of the season.

Table 2: Confirmed list of verges with reduced mowing regime for rewilding purposes, including those for 'enhancement' with additional flower seeds

	No. of cuts	Enhancement
A33 both sides	3	
Basingstoke Road, Gillette	3	
Basingstoke Road, Hartland Rd to Aldi	3	
Swallowfield Drive	1	✓
Hexham Road	1	
Tilehurst Road/Liebenrood Road roundabout	1	✓
Circuit Lane/ Devil's Dip	3	
Dwyer Road/Burghfield Road	1	✓
New Lane Hill	1	✓
Lansdowne Crescent	1	
Bran Close	1	
St Michael's Road green	1	✓
St Michael's Road/Walnut Way green	3	
Overdown Road opposite Overlanders End	3	
Overdown Road/Oxford Road roundabout	1	
Norcot Road roundabout	3	
Meadow Park Academy/Church End Lane jn	3	
Portman Road (behind kneerail)	1	✓
Barnwood Close	1	✓
Rotherfield Way (large areas)	1	✓
Southdown Road adj. Marshland Square	3	
Marshland Square roundabout	1	✓
Peppard Road, Buckingham Drive	1	✓
Emmer Green Pond	1	✓
Stuart Close	1	✓

3.2 Parks

The Council currently manages over 40 hectares of parkland for biodiversity. Table 3 sets out the list of parks where there is already extensive conservation grassland.

Table 3: Sites of Conservation Grass in Reading Borough

	Area in hectares
Arthur Newbery Park	3.9
Balmore Walk	1.7
Bugs Bottom	9.2
Clayfield Copse	2.8
Coley Park Allotments	0.8
Comparts Plantation	1.2
Deans Farm	1.4
Fobney Island	1.5
Hills Meadow	2.1
Mapledurham Playing Fields	0.5
Mcllroy Park	4.2
Prospect Park	2.8
Prospect Park RSME	0.8
Rivermead (until August)	4.4
Southcote Linear Park	0.9
Waterloo Meadows	2.6
	41.1 ha

In addition, it is proposed to introduce more areas of unmown grass for reasons of improving biodiversity in public parks, particularly on the margins, where there will be more cover for wildlife.

The following criteria have been applied in drawing up the proposals

- Avoid areas that are used for recreation: sport, dog-walking, play, picnicking, etc.
- Create a balance, so that a variety of human experience is created within larger sites and across the Borough
- Select areas that are important for linking up wild zones to create wildlife corridors
- Avoid areas that are likely to become litter traps

It is proposed that the Council carry out an experiment in 2021 in parks along the same lines as the 2020 trial on highway verges. Table 4 lists those parks in which there is land suitable for a rewilding trial, that meets all criteria above. These areas will add around 5% to the area currently mown as conservation grass to allow the Council to test the response.

Table 4: Proposed new rewilding areas in parks

Park	Location	Area
Cintra Park	Zone 'outside' the perimeter path	0.2 ha
Coley Recreation Ground	Some of the bank to the west of the park	0.15 ha
Edenham Crescent	Strip along the railway line	0.05 ha
Emmer Green Rec. Ground	Area adjacent to the pavilion	0.03 ha
Kings Meadow	Southern perimeter (Napier Rd/Luscinia View)	0.2 ha
Kings Road Gardens	Strip on top of the bank	0.01 ha
Milestone Way	Selectively	0.25 ha
Palmer Park	Perimeter 'outside' the avenue SE corner to play area	0.22 ha
Prospect Park	Bank sloping towards Tilehurst Road	0.1 ha
Shinfield Recreation Ground	Southern half of the site	0.3 ha
South Whitley Rec. Ground	Selectively	0.25 ha
Whitley Wood Rec. Ground	Old tennis court area	0.24
		2.0 ha

The new trial sites in parks will be subjected to cut-and-collect mowing three times during the growing season, for the same ecological reasons as set out above, and for the additional reason of keeping sites from looking too untidy. As with the 2020 rewilding project, requests for feedback from parks users will be sought, and an assessment will be completed by Parks staff at the end of the season.

3.3 Publicity

The public information strategy is key. As with the highways verges project, the intentions and benefits need to be made clear.

- The proposed changes and the reasons for them will be posted on the Council website.
- Temporary, laminated signs will be erected on new areas to explain what the Council is trying to achieve.
- A press release will be drafted.
- Posts will be made on social media.
- As before, each of these will include an invitation to monitor species and report findings to the Council via a dedicated email account.

4. Flowers for beautification: town centre locations

4.1 *Classification and provenance of wildflowers*

When people imagine wildflower meadows, they usually think of native annuals - poppies, cornflowers, corn cockle and corn marigold - or biennials. like foxgloves and forget-me-nots. These all have large, colourful flowers. The entire life cycle of an annual plant from germination to seed-setting occurs in one growing season. For seeds to germinate each year, they typically require disturbed soil, so annual cultivation and topping up of seed is needed, with significant maintenance costs.

If an area is left uncultivated, other plants seed themselves in, outcompeting the annuals. These plants tend to persist over succeeding years, increasing their colonies by setting seed. Examples of perennial plants are bugle, campion, ragged robin, primroses, campanula and ox-eye daisies. With some exceptions, they tend to be less showy. To ensure diversity of perennial wildflowers, it is necessary to start by preparing the ground and sowing seed or laying wildflower turf.

Other well-loved perennials are spring bulbs, the most reliable of which include daffodils and crocuses, but others are wild garlic, fritillaries, and bluebells.

The colourful season for native wildflowers is relatively short. Flowering is followed by a 'brown season', when plants are setting seed. The way to prolong the flowering period beyond spring and early summer is to introduce non-native varieties. There are sharp differences of opinion about exotic plants. However, academic research is showing that, with some exceptions, insects require pollen and nectar and will collect from non-native sources where these are available.

4.2 *Wildflowers and public perception*

While most people say that they respond positively to a 'natural' look, location is important in influencing the response. Where 'wildness' is expected, people will tolerate an ecologically authentic meadow that only looks good for a few weeks followed by yellowing grass and brown seedheads.

In more urban settings, the reality is that many respond better when nature has been enhanced. Long-season interest, colour and good structure are vital if residents are going to embrace rewilding as part of the civic environment.

Particularly on high-profile sites, it is desirable to consider naturalistic but idealised meadow-like landscapes that establish relatively rapidly, thrive in normal conditions, but provide pleasure for a long period. This might involve excluding most grasses and introducing some non-natives.

On town centre roadsides, mixes need to be able to withstand salt pollution and dry conditions. Research shows that pollinating insects tend not to use flowers within 2m of a road, which further suggests that appearance on the roadside is more important than replicating 'natural' meadows.

4.3 Proposal for Reading and neighbourhood centres

The plan at the end of the document suggests areas of land in public ownership in and around Reading town centre that could be planted with wildflowers. Clearly, there is land in private ownership that might be considered by business partners for complementary flower schemes.

Other locations that could be treated in the same way are the main shopping areas in Tilehurst, Caversham and Whitley, where there is land for wildflower planting, as well as corridors into Reading, like the A33, Oxford Road, London Road and Henley Road.

4.3.1 IDR splitter beds - perennials

It is proposed that a long-flowering mix of both native and exotic, drought-tolerant, perennial wild-looking flowers be planted ringing the town centre to demonstrate in a highly visible way Reading's commitment to implementing the action plans attached to the Reading Climate Change Partnership Strategy. These could include a range of perennial plants, both native and exotic, as in the picture below. It is important that the mix does not require irrigation because of the health and safety implications of achieving this in the middle of an urban road.



A roadside mix in Coventry

4.3.2 Roundabouts - annuals

Given the high impact of annuals, it would be worth sowing at least one roundabout with a mix that includes a high proportion of annuals early on, like the one in Rotherham pictured below. This is a more expensive method of providing wildflowers, because of the ongoing establishment and maintenance requirements, but it should at least be considered for its significant public relations value.



A roadside mix in Rotherham

Alternatively, a mix with a higher proportion of perennials can still be effective as in this roundabout in Swindon.



A roadside mix in Swindon

The examples on these two pages are of mixes supplied by the Sheffield-based company, Pictorial Meadows.

4.3.3 Larger areas within commercial centres - perennials and annuals

In larger areas, it may be desirable to lay wildflower turf to ensure establishment. Wildflower turf generally incorporates a geotextile that suppresses undesirable weed seeds already in the soil from germinating, although there is no method that prevents the seeding in of other species over time. Turf will require irrigation, but, over larger areas, the early effect is less patchy.

A local company, Wildflower Turf, which pioneered commercial wildflower turf in the UK and supplied much of the stock for the London Olympics site has a variety of mixes, containing both native and naturalised exotics. The Wildflower Native Enriched mix, for example, contains 33 UK species and around 20 exotic species. The mix is a colourful, insect-friendly low maintenance product that will naturalise over time. It is salt-tolerant, weed-suppressing, grows to a maximum height of 76cm, has been designed to extend the flowering season with a variety of colour from April to October.



Native Enriched mix

4.3.4 Civic Offices

Consideration should be given to planting wildflowers as exemplar gardens around the Civic Offices both to improve biodiversity in the town centre and to demonstrate to residents what is achievable even in a relatively small space. This would have an educational purpose. To do this, it will be necessary to remove some of the existing planting around the Civic Offices, starting with the southeast corner adjacent to the front entrance. Over time, it may be possible to extend this. For example, the existence of trees along the eastern façade opposite The Oracle makes removal for alternative planting difficult, although it may be possible to develop a scheme here in the future.

4.3.5 Implementation

To implement a new project will take up to four weeks, depending on how much clearance needs to be done. Work should be done in March or April, or in September, although is obviously dependent on weather conditions.

Establishment requirements are:

- Clearance, which may involve removal of plants, roots and any rich top soil
- Raking and levelling
- Either seeding or the laying of turf

Maintenance requirements are:

- Irrigation until established
- Mowing as required (cut and collect)
- Topping up of seed, especially annuals
- Weeding

The scheme is partially self-perpetuating as the seed that is released each year is allowed to return to the soil. This reduces the need to reseed in the succeeding years, allowing the site to increase in terms of numbers and biodiversity - although no scheme entirely eliminates subsequent intervention to ensure persistence of flowering varieties.

4.4 Benefits

The main benefits of rewilding are biodiversity and carbon storage. Idealised flower planting in the town centre makes a smaller contribution to these objectives, but has other value:

- Visual amenity: improves the appearance of Reading town centre.
- Better air quality: reduces greenhouse gases both by reduced grass-cutting requirements and by absorbing CO₂ emissions from vehicles from the air.
- Health benefits: improves physical health through better air quality.
- Storm water: controls the run off of water from storms and heavy rain, reducing the rate of water released on the road systems.
- Education: demonstrates what is possible in urban environments.

4.5 Cost

It is very difficult to cost a general rather than a specific proposal. As a rule of thumb, we suggest £5,000 for the clearance and planting of a roundabout.



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READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	15th DECEMBER 2020	AGENDA ITEM:	
TITLE:	FOOD WASTE AND 140L BIN PROJECT - EARLY ADOPTERS AND PROJECT UPDATE.		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	ADELE BARNETT-WARD	PORTFOLIO:	NEIGHBOURHOODS AND COMMUNITIES
SERVICE:	ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	ANDY EDWARDS	TEL:	0118 937 3458
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report updates on the progress of the kerbside food waste collections in the 5 early adopter areas and on the main Phase 1 roll-out planned for February 1st 2021.
- 1.2 The original roll-out timetable was adversely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The original and revised timetables are shown below:

Original timetable

- Early adopter areas service (3,300) properties begins 6th July 2020.
- Phase 1 service to 59,000 properties to begin 1st October 2020.
- Phase 2 service to 14,000 high level flats to begin later in 2021 - once Phase 1 has been successfully implemented.

Revised timetable

- Early adopter areas service (3,300) properties began on the 5th October
- Phase 1 service to 59,000 properties due to begin 1st February 2021.
- Phase 2 service to 14,000 high level flats due to begin later in 2021 - once Phase 1 has been successfully implemented.

- 1.3 A total of 3300 early adopter properties received the new service from the 5th October. The early adopters project is critical to the success of the full roll out. The areas were chosen because they are operationally challenging, including property types such as low-level flats, student accommodation and houses of multiple occupancy (HMO's), as well as a control area. The experience gained and lessons learnt from the early adopters as well as the feedback from residents will be used to help shape and adapt our approach for the main roll out both operationally and in the communication messages which are used.
- 1.4 The second nationwide Covid 19 lockdown which ended on the 2nd December did not adversely affect the preparations for the main roll-out in February 2021 or the early adopters scheme. It did however mean that the Recycling and Enforcement team were not able to door knock or conduct face to face meetings with residents during this period but inspections, early adopter monitoring and enforcement continued.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That HNL Committee notes the progress made on the food waste project and the timetable for the full roll out of the service in 2021.**

3 POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The EU Waste Framework Directive sets a recycling and re-use target of 50% for waste materials from households to be achieved by 2020. This target has become UK law and Government has suggested it will remain so post-Brexit. In addition to this, in 2018 the EU adopted new targets for recycling. The requirement is to recycle or reuse 55% in 2025, 60% in 2030 and 65% in 2035. The Council considers the best way to achieve its ambitions is to put further increased effort in to achieve greater recycling, and being ambitious in the process. This project signals the Council's clear intent to do just that.
- 3.2 The re3 Strategy was adopted by the Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee, on behalf of Reading Borough Council, on 2nd July 2018. The re3 Strategy focuses on two principal themes of: (i) reducing the net cost of waste, and (ii) recycling 50% by 2020. The first theme recognises the need for waste, as for all services, to contribute to the delivery of savings. The second theme principally recognises the fundamental need to recycle more and quantifies it as per the relevant statutory target. The re3 Strategy prioritises the treatment of food waste because it is a waste management issue which has both direct and indirect financial outcomes for residents.
- 3.2 Policy Committee (26th September 2019) received a report setting out a way forward for the Household Waste service to achieve the ambition to increase recycling to 50% and to reduce the cost of waste. The Committee resolved to introduce a combined new waste service of alternate weekly collections with 140l residual bins and weekly food waste collection. The original timetable, agreed by Policy Committee, set out a go live date for a full roll out in October

2020 following an early adopter phase in June 2020. This timetable was revised as shown in section 1.2, due to the Covid-19 outbreak.

- 3.3 The predicted 11.5% increase in recycling from the current rate of 35% secures an estimated annual saving of £342k based on a successful early adopters' pilot in October 2020 and the full roll out of the service from February 2020. This saving includes the up-front capital costs of £1.5m to purchase new smaller 140 litre bins and the additional revenue costs of the new drivers and loading staff required to support the programme.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Project Overview

A project overview is shown in **Appendix 1** to this report.

4.2 Early Adopter Overview

The Early adopter areas are shown in **Appendix 1**.

Appendix 2 shows data collected before and since the early adopter (EA) roll-out including the number of customer contacts and complaints received.

In general, the roll-out of the early adopters has been a success with the tonnage of food waste far exceeding the predicted weight of 1kg/household/week. There have also been a number of learning outcomes which will be taken forward into the main roll out. There were some minor issues with bin deliveries being missed or delayed but considering an operation of this scale was new to the staff involved the number of complaints has been low.

The Council's call centre reported that call volumes were low and any contacts were generally positive about food waste recycling, but some concern has been expressed about the reduction in size of the grey bins to 140l and whether residents will cope. The logistics of the food waste collections will continue to be refined as will the numbers and sizes of food waste bins at certain properties.

80 residents have requested to date additional waste capacity because of the size of their family and have been issued with white waste sacks of which 59 applications have been approved.

Domestic waste collections from the 140l bins began in Northcote and Minster/Southcote in the week commencing 12th October, with Abbey, Caversham and Redlands the following week and data such as the amount of side waste left and over-flowing and contaminated recycling bins will be monitored and recorded as the new service beds in.

The on-line early adopter support request form is available on the website and a residents' feedback form was available from the 2nd November. All responses have been analysed and changes made to the main roll out communications to address the issues raised.

The Recycling and Enforcement team have been supporting the early adopter scheme and are currently focussing on:

- Monitoring the presentation of food waste bins and 140l bins in the 5 EA areas
- Data capture for the main roll-out
- Environmental enforcement.

The team accompanied the delivery crews in all the EA areas to answer questions, deal with any issues and to distribute information to residents. Each member of the team has been allocated an early adopter area and have been checking bin presentation and speaking to residents who are struggling to put the right material in the right bin as well as liaising with managing agents and landlords about excess waste and capacity issues.

4.2.1 Early Adopter food tonnages

Table 1 below shows the tonnages collected in each of the 5 early adopter areas in the first 6 weeks of the service. The target weight of food waste to be collected from each property per week was 1kg/household/week, this has been exceeded in every week to date. However, it is common for food waste tonnage to drop back as the service beds in as residents become aware of the volume of food they are recycling. Tonnages for weeks 1 to 6 are also contained in Table 1 in **Appendix 2**.

EA area	Target (tonnes)	Week 1 (5.10.20) Actual (tonnes)	Week 2 (12.10.20) Actual (tonnes)	Week 3 (19.10.20) Actual tonnes	Week 4 (26.10.20) Actual tonnes	Week 5 (02.11.20) Actual Tonnes	Week 6 (09.11.20) Actual Tonnes
Abbey	0.86	0.68	0.96	0.98	0.90	1.12	1.12
Caversham	0.64	2.40	1.96	1.84	1.82	2.00	2.30
Minster/Southcote	0.60	0.96	1.38	1.24	1.22	1.30	1.40
Norcot	0.58	1.74	1.76	1.66	1.82	1.82	1.84
Redlands	0.62	1.26	1.36	1.44	1.30	1.46	1.58
Total	3.30	7.04	7.42	7.16	7.06	7.70	8.24
Food waste yield (kg/hh/wk)	1.00	2.13	2.25	2.17	2.13	2.33	2.50

Table 1

4.3 Main Project update

The round scheduling and optimisation work for the main roll-out in February 2021 is on schedule and it is confirmed that all properties will receive their food waste collections on the same day as either their waste or recycling collections, but as expected most properties will see a change in collection day. The new recycling, waste and food rounds are currently being finalised

and the collection calendars for 2021/22 produced ready for posting out to all properties by Royal Mail in the w/c 7th December.

Our bin delivery contractor has confirmed that the delivery of food waste bins and caddies to properties will begin on the 4th January 2021, and the delivery of 140l bins will begin on the 1st February taking 8 weeks to complete. The food waste collection trucks have been delivered and the food waste bins and caddies and 140l bins will start to arrive in early December. Staff recruitment for the main roll-out is ongoing.

The project is supported by a communications plan which includes the following elements:

Printed information leaflets for all property types on delivery of the new bins.
Articles in the residents' newsletter in November.
Printed waste collection calendars posted with information to every property.
Updated livery for food waste collection and waste vehicles.
Digital screen content and use of bus interior screens.
Short 'how to' films on web and social media.
Direct resident e mails and social media promotion.
Use of apps such as Nextdoor.
Council buildings and notice boards.
Communication activity will increase ahead of the main roll-out launch in February.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The Council's has adopted a Strategic Framework (March 2020) which sets out the Council's key priorities including:

- To keep social care services running for the children and adults who need them;
- To support vulnerable and isolated people during the crisis;
- To support business and the economy, which will secure the long-term recovery of Reading.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

6.1 Full communication plans have been developed for both the early adopter and main roll out phases. Consultation advice has been sought from the appropriate stakeholders. This included liaison with the University, resident's groups, community groups, landlords and managing agents. Any lessons learnt regarding communication in the early adopter phase will be taken into account and the communication plan amended accordingly.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Council has duties under various UK and EU legislation to deliver waste collection and disposal services, principally the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the revised EU waste framework directive 2008.

Consultation advice has also been sought from the Corporate Legal team, and they have advised that there is no Statutory Duty to consult regarding the proposals.

- 7.2 Detailed work has been undertaken regarding enforcement powers and legislation to ensure that where needed, the Council is enforcing and taking action when regulations are not adhered to.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149 the Council 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 Council has reviewed the scope of the proposals as outlined within this report and considers that the proposals have no direct impact on any groups with protected characteristics. However, the service will meet with representatives to determine whether they have any concerns or issues regarding the proposals.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The proposal agreed at Policy Committee in September 2019 introduces a new food waste collection service, at the same time as replacing the current 240l residual wheeled bins with smaller 140l ones. It will achieve an increase in recycling estimated from the current 32% to 43%. In addition, it will reduce the amount of waste to landfill, and achieve a revenue saving estimated at £233k p.a. (this takes into account the cost of borrowing at corporate level - excluding cost of borrowing savings are £171k pa first part year and then £342k full year)

- 9.2 As part of the council capital programme for 2020/21 which was agreed by Full council at the end of February £1.489m of capital expenditure budget was agreed. Despite the delaying of the project, the majority of the planned capital expenditure will still be incurred in financial year 2020/21 as orders have already being placed with the suppliers and production has started.

- 9.3 The Medium-term Financial Strategy had £171k of savings expected in 2020/21 and a further £171k in 2021/22. The later than planned roll out will not achieve the 20/21 saving. It is anticipated that in 2021/22 the full saving of £342k will be fully delivered.
- 9.4 The net savings arising from this project is dependent on a reduction of waste to landfill, planned to be circa 1,300 tonnes per annum. The overall savings from the diversion of waste from landfill is circa £981k pa. Should a reduction in the scale of waste to land fill not be fully achieved there would be a consequence on the forecast savings budget. There is a risk that the fixed costs of the new service may not be fully covered by the savings achieved by diverting waste away from landfill if the take up isn't as predicted; for example, if only half of the predicted food waste tonnage was achieved the net cost of the service would move from a saving of £342k per annum to a potential cost of £148k.
- 9.6 The Council has negotiated no gate fees (for receipt of waste by our disposal contractor) for a time limited period (up to the end of March 2022) and if we do not roll out as early as planned the window to take advantage of this is reduced. Gate fees are however considered to be a minimal charge of circa £7k per annum.

10. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The separate collection of food waste at the kerbside and its treatment by anaerobic digestion will benefit the climate by reducing the amount of methane gas (a powerful greenhouse gas) emitted from landfill sites.
- 10.2 Food waste is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in the and globally. Significant investment in sustainable collection and disposal is therefore vital in order to respond to the Climate Crisis declared by the Council in February 2019 and to help achieve our target of a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Household Waste -The Way Forward - Policy Committee report (September 2019)
Policy Committee - MTFs reports - February 2018 and February 2019.
Household Waste - Implications Of Covid-19 Outbreak On The Food Waste And 140l Bins Project Timetable (July 2020)

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HOUSING NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE DECEMBER 2020

FOOD WASTE AND 140L BIN PROJECT UPDATE.

Appendix 1



Work Streams



01

Current Service



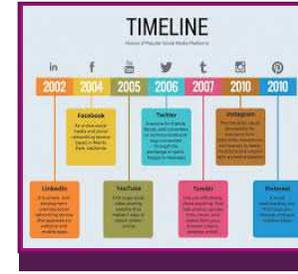
02

Future Service



03

Reasons for change



04

Timeline



05

Communications



06

Early Adopter Areas



➤ 1. Current Kerbside Service



240l Grey
Refuse Bin
emptied
fortnightly.
AWC



240l
Recycling Bin
emptied
fortnightly.
AWC



240l Green
Waste Bin
emptied
fortnightly-
chargeable
service



Recycling Box



2. Future Service



5l Kitchen caddy



140l Grey Refuse Bin
emptied fortnightly
AWC



Recycling Box



23l kerbside
food waste
caddy emptied
weekly.



240l Recycling
Bin emptied
fortnightly
AWC



240l Green waste
bin emptied
fortnightly –
chargeable service.

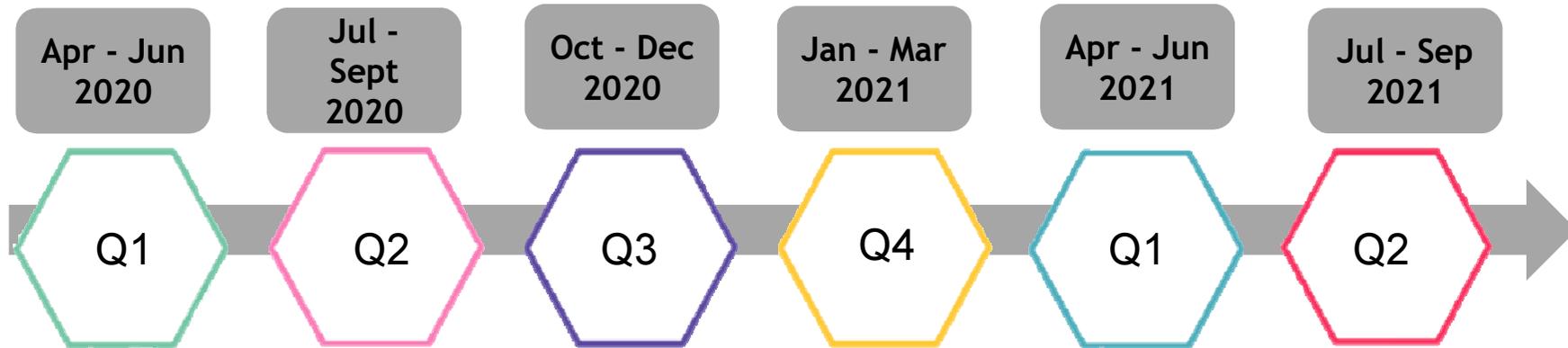


3. Reasons for Change

- Aim is to increase the Reading's current recycling rate to 50%
- 41% of current grey bin waste from houses and 30% from flats and HMO's is made up of food waste.
- 18% of the waste in grey bins is currently recyclable.
- Recycling disposal costs are £90-100 per tonne cheaper than disposal via landfill.
- Reading declared a Climate Emergency in February 2019
- Methane gas produced from food in landfill is 25% more damaging than carbon dioxide.



4. Phase 1 Timeline



Q1

Covid-19 lockdown.
Project re-appraisal 6 month delay suggested.
Recycling and Enforcement team redeployed to food waste deliveries.
Procurement and design work activity suspended.

Q2

6 month delay and revised project timetable agreed by Policy committee.
Early adopters project retained revised start date 5th October 2020. Main roll out 1st February 2021.
Planning work restarts and communications plan is revised and streamlined.

Q3

Early Adopters
Bin deliveries began 21.09.20, 140l bins delivered from 28.09.20
Food waste collections begin 5th October. 140l bins collected from 12th October.
Recycling and Enforcement Team working with residents, agents and landlords ahead of roll -out.

Q4

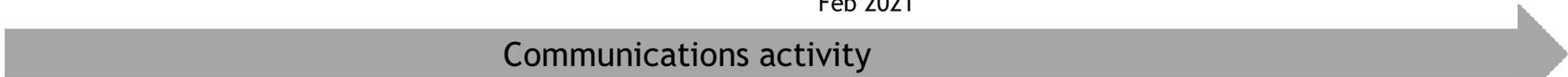
Main Roll-out
4th Jan-1st Feb food waste bins delivered to 59,000 properties.
1st Feb food waste collections begin. 140l bin swaps begin for an 8 week period.
New collection rounds introduced 1st Feb 2021

Q1

Main Roll-out
Bin delivery mop-ups and service queries being resolved.
Planning for first Phase 2 (high rise flats) food waste roll out

Q2

Start of roll out of Phase 2 food waste in High rise flats.



➤ 5. Food Waste Collection Vehicle



6. Communications

Printed information leaflets for all property types on delivery of the new bins.

Articles in the residents' newsletter in November.

Printed waste collection calendars posted with information to every property.

Updated livery for food waste collection and waste vehicles.

Digital screen content and use of bus interior screens.

Short 'how to' films on web and social media.

Direct resident e mails and social media promotion.

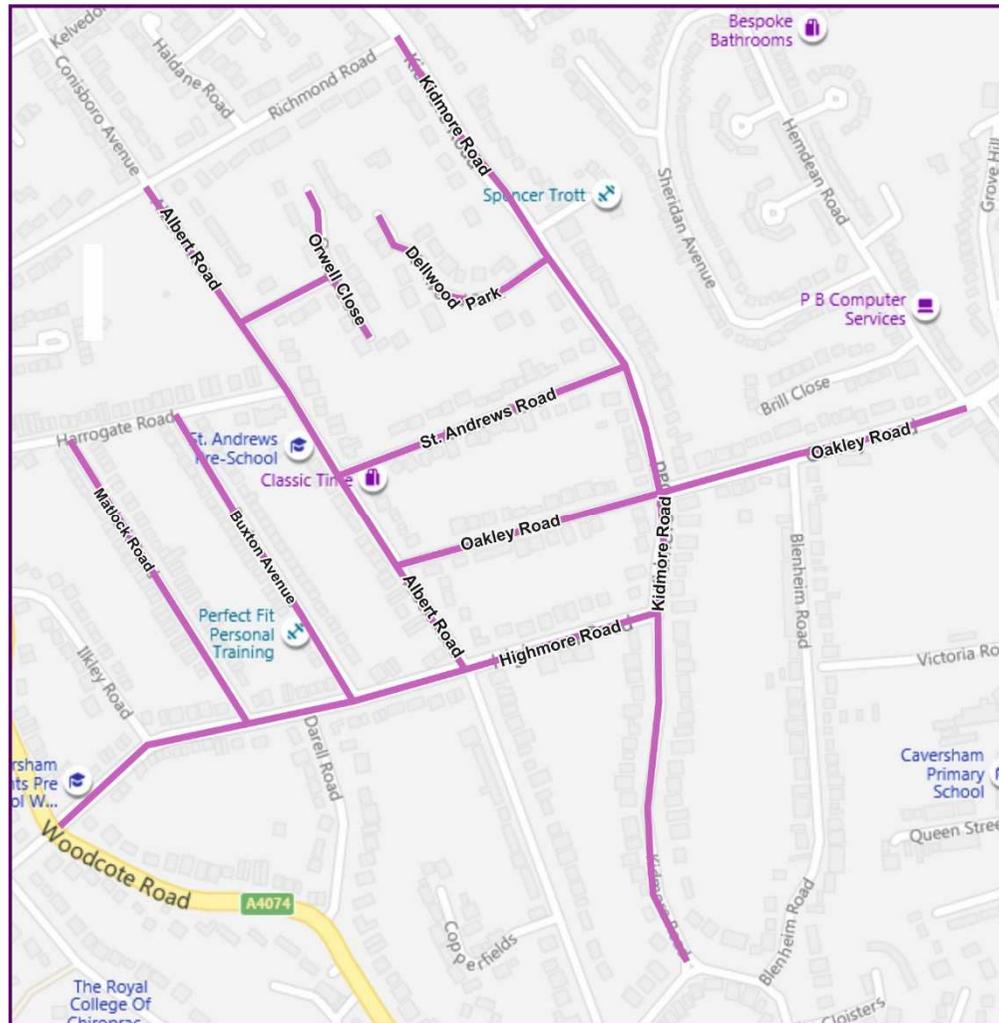
Use of apps such as Nextdoor.

Council buildings and notice boards.

Communication activity will increase ahead of the main roll-out launch in February.



7. Early Adopter areas 1. Thames Ward - Comparator area.



Early adopters Area 1 -Thames Ward comparator area.

Road Name	HMOS?	Any low level flats?		High Level Flats? (Not to be included in trial)
Highmoor Road	0			
Matlock Road	0			
Buxton Avenue	0			
Chelford Way	0			
Orwell Close	0			
St Andrews Road	0			
Dellwood Park	0	11-19 Dellwood Park		
Kidmore Road (Richmond to The Mount)	0			
Albert Road (Richmond to Highmoor)	0			
Oakley Road	0			
Blenheim Road	0			
Charlotte Close	0	Glendale House		



7.2. Early Adopters Area 2 - Abbey Ward

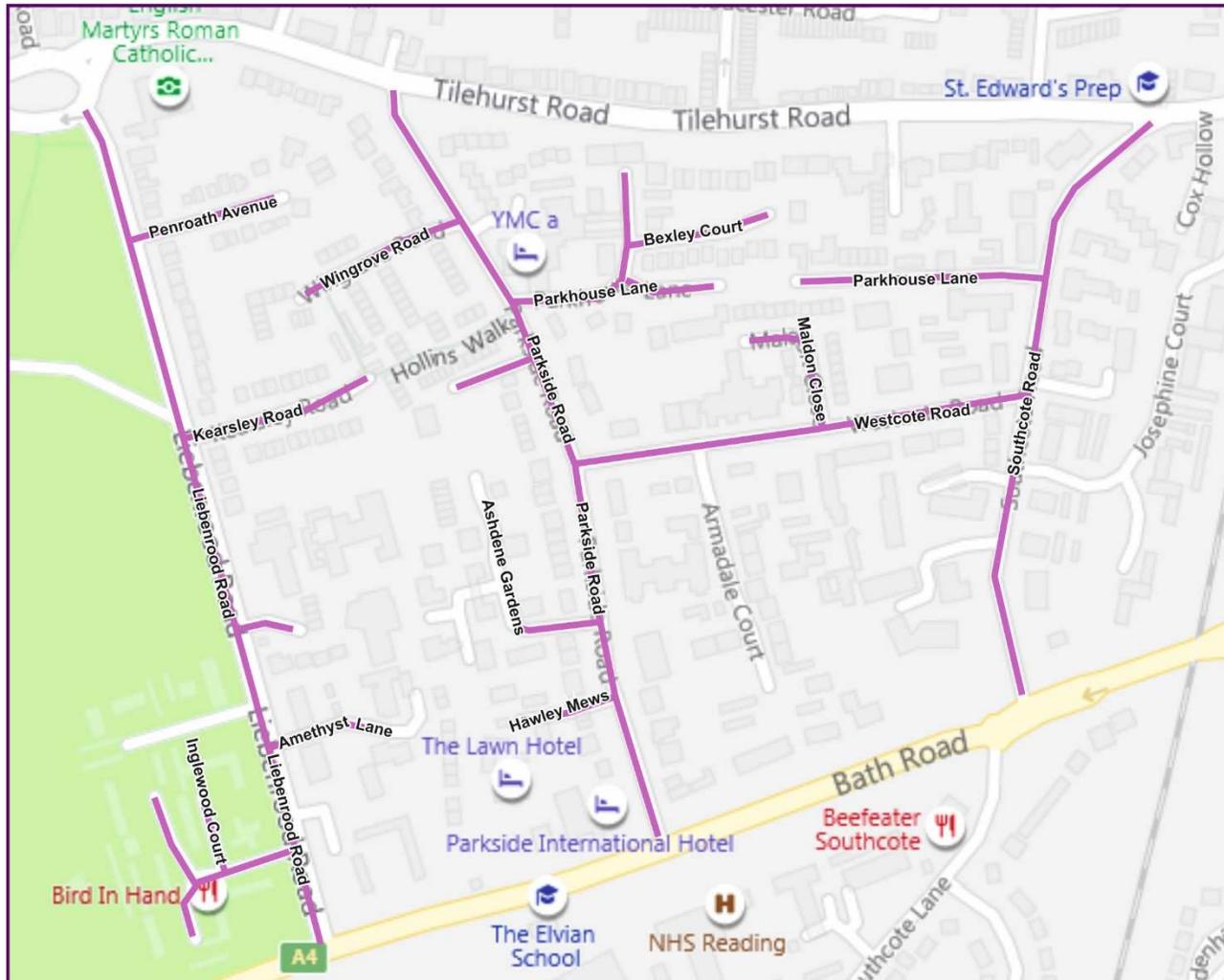


➤ Early Adopters Area 2 - Abbey Ward

Road Name	HMOS?	Any low level flats?	High Level Flats? (Not to be included in trial)
Baker Street (up to Russell Street)	6	Talbot house	
Howard Street	5		
Zinzan Street	5		
Carey Street	3		
Waylen Street	14		
Jesse Terrace	2	Collect Heritage Court from there (240 and 360's)	
Russell Street	4	Chancery Mews (15 flats) (240s), Epping Close - (5x1100), Seafield Court, Jessica House	
Body Road	1		
Anstey	3	Communal General Waste - collected weekly	
Marshall Close		Currently collected weekly (could change to fortnightly for trial)	



7.3. Early Adopters Area 3 - Minster Ward

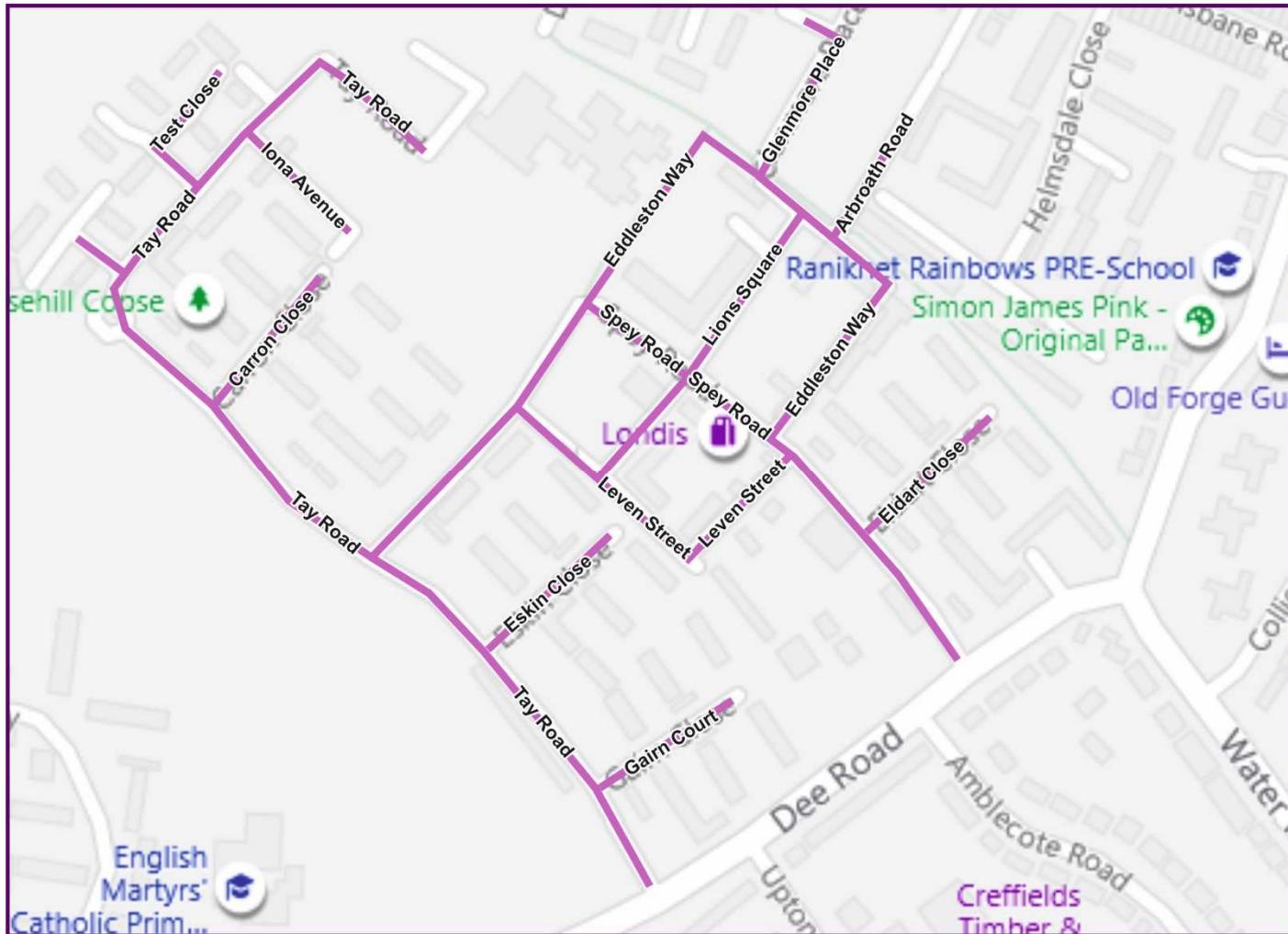


Early Adopters Area 3 - Minster Ward

Road Name	HMOS?	Any low level flats?	High Level Flats? (Not to be included in trial)
Ashdene Gardens	0		Blocks collected weekly - don't include them
Hawley Mews	0		
Wingrove Road	0	1 Block - 10 flats with 1100's	
Parkside Road	4	Victoria Mews	
Westcote Road	0	Pineridge Gardens, Dunleary/Wisdom Court	
Maldon Close	0		
Bexley Court	0	2 Blocks - 240's	
Southcote Road	0	Johannes court, Beacon court	
Parkhouse Lane	0		
Inglewood Court	0		
Hollins Walk	0		
Liebenrood Road	1	Communal 240s at 1-30	
Amethyst Lane	0		Tamar, Arun, Medway
Jenkins Close	0		
Kearsley Road	0		
Penroath Avenue	0		
Shireshead close	0		



7.4. Early Adopters Area 4 - Norcot Ward

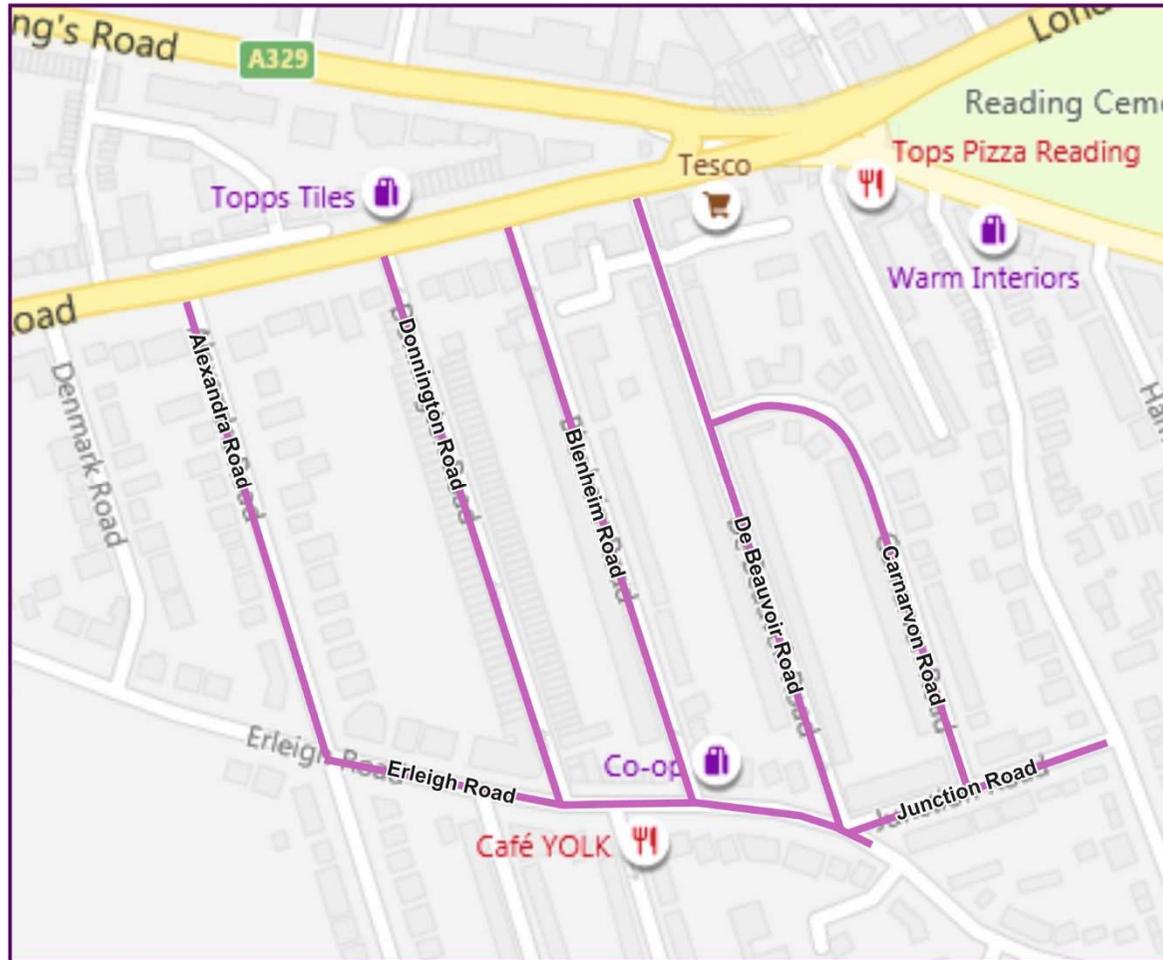


Early Adopters Area 4 - Norcot Ward

Road Name	HMOS?	Any low level flats?	High Level Flats? (Not to be included in trial)
Gairn Close	0		
Eskin Close	0		
Tay Road	0		Osprey House, 1 Tay Road
Carron Close	0		
Test Close	0		
Iona Avenue	0		
Leven Street	0		
Eddleston Way	0		Stronsay House, Frazer House
Rannoch Street	0		
Eldart Close	0		
Spey Road	0	Montague house (1100's)	Tobermary House, Montague House, Oak Tree House
Arbroath Road	0		
Glenmore Place	0		
Stour Close	0		



7.5. Early Adopters Area 5 - Redlands Ward



Early Adopters Area 5 - Redlands Ward

Road Name	HMOS?	Any low level flats?	High Level Flats? (Not to be included in trial)
Donnington Road	29		
Blenheim Road	39		
De Beauvoir Road	32		Granby Court, Vanbrugh Court
Carnarvon Road	8		
Junction Road	5		
Alexandra Road (London Road to Erleigh Road)	1		Appleton Court
Erleigh Road (Alexandra to Farrington/Junction)	14		
Farrington Court		6x240's	Properties 7-35 collected weekly



Any Questions?



Reading
Borough Council

Working better with you

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HNL Committee - December 2020 - APPENDIX 2

Food Waste and 140l bin project

Weekly Update 3 - Collection Weeks 1 - 6 (5th October to 13th November 2020)

1. Food waste collections.

Table 1 shows the tonnage of food waste collected in weeks 1 to 6 and the amount of food waste collected from each household in kg/household/week compared to target.

EA area	Target (tonnes)	Week 1 (5.10.20) Actual (tonnes)	Week 2 (12.10.20) Actual (tonnes)	Week 3 (19.10.20) Actual tonnes	Week 4 (26.10.20) Actual tonnes	Week 5 (02.11.20) Actual tonnes	Week 6 (09.11.20) Actual tonnes
Abbey	0.86	0.68	0.96	0.98	0.90	1.12	1.12
Caversham	0.64	2.40	1.96	1.84	1.82	2.00	2.30
Minster/Southcote	0.60	0.96	1.38	1.24	1.22	1.30	1.40
Norcot	0.58	1.74	1.76	1.66	1.82	1.82	1.84
Redlands	0.62	1.26	1.36	1.44	1.30	1.46	1.58
Total	3.30	7.04	7.42	7.16	7.06	7.70	8.24
Food waste yield (kg/hh/wk)	1.00	2.13	2.25	2.17	2.13	2.33	2.50

Table 1

1.1 Participation rates - Table 2 shows the participation rates for weeks 3-5.

EA area	Week 3 (19.10.20)	Week 4 (26.10.20)	Week 5 (02/11/20)	Week 6 (09/11/20)
Abbey	58	69	65	73
Caversham	84	85	84	90
Minster/Southcote	68	67	75	65
Norcot	87	88	74	75
Redlands	71	63	76	68
Average	74	74	75	74

Table 2

Participation rate is based on presentation of a food waste bin over a 3 week cycle. Bins are not necessarily presented every week by every household.

2. 140l domestic waste - collection issues

Table 3 shows the number of collection related issues recorded by collection crews for weeks 2-5 of the service for domestic bins ('no domestic collection' means these EA areas were scheduled for recycling that week.)

EA area	Week 2 (12.10.20)	Week 3 (19.10.20)	Week 4 (26.10.20)	Week 5 (02.11.20)	Week 6 (09.11.20)
Abbey	No domestic collection	52 excess waste, 6 not out, 2 contents stuck	No domestic collection	15 not out, 6 contents stuck, 50 excess waste	No domestic collection
Caversham	No domestic collection	No domestic collection	34 not out, 8 excess waste	No domestic collection	4 Bin not out
Minster/Southcote	30 not presented or wrong bin, 6 excess waste	No domestic collection	No data	No domestic collection	12 not out ; Excess waste 10 ; 3 contents stuck
Norcot	38 excess waste, 10 not presented	No domestic collection	No data	No domestic collection	12 not out, 5 contents stuck, 16

					excess waste, 2 wrong bin
Redlands	No domestic collection	38 excess waste, 1 contents stuck	No domestic collection	34 not out	No domestic collection

Table 3

3. Recycling collections - collection issues

Table 4 shows the number of collection related issues recorded by crews for week 2-5 of the new service for recycling bins.

EA area	Week 2 (12.10.20)	Week 3 (19.10.20)	Week 4 (26.10.20)	Week 5 (02.11.20)	Week 6 (09.11.20)
Abbey	18 not presented, 18 contaminated	No recycling collection	6 not out/no access, 40 contaminated	No recycling collection	50 not out ; 41 Contaminated
Caversham	38 not presented, 13 excess waste	19 not out, 1 wrong bin	No recycling collection	13 not out	No recycling collection
Minster/Southcote	No recycling collection	10 not out, 6 contaminated	No recycling collection	3 contaminated, 5 not out	No recycling collection
Norcot	No recycling collection	3 not out, 63 contaminated	No recycling collection	3 not out or blocked, 15 contaminated.	No recycling collection
Redlands	26 contaminated, 16 not presented.	No recycling collection	20 contaminated, 8 not out	No recycling collection	12 not out, 26 contaminated, 1 contents stuck, 2 wrong bin, 1 blocked access

Table 4

4. Customer Contacts

4.1 Early adopter contacts

Table 5 shows the number of enquiries and queries received in weeks 1-4 of the new service. (Week 6 data will be available next week).

Area	Week 1 (5.10.20)		Week 2 (12.10.20)		Week 3 (19.10.20)		Week 4 (26.10.20)		Week 5 (02.11.20)	
	Online queries	Via call centre and to officers	Online queries	Via call centre and to officers	Online queries	Via call centre and to officers	Online queries	Via call centre and to officers	Online queries	Via call centre and to officers
Abbey	10	19	0	5	0	3	1	3	2	2
Minster/Southcote	12	20	1	5	1	2	0	2	0	0
Redlands	7	15	3	4	1	1	0	1	1	2
Norcot	4	21	1	6	1	3	1	2	1	2
Caversham	15	29	5	7	0	1	3	1	0	2
Not in Early Adopters	4	4	1	0	0	1	3	1	1	0

Table 5

4.2. Social Media activity and contacts.

4.2.1 The Nextdoor App. This is a recent addition to the available social media channels and creates groups in wards where local information can be circulated in small areas. We are using it for the EA areas but it covers the ward rather than just the EA areas.

Area	Nextdoor App 2.10.20, Message: Collections start next week.		
	Subscribers	Post Reach	Comments
Abbey	825	509	2
Minster/Southcote	379	139	0
Redlands	126	55	0
Norcot	378	51	1
Caversham	234	91	4
Not in Early Adopters			

Table 6

4.2.2 Table 7 shows the social media messages sent out prior to and at the time of the launch of the new service. Reach being the total number of people who saw the content.

Date	Subject	Additional content	Facebook reach	Facebook engagement	Twitter impressions	Twitter engagements
22/09/2020	Binfographic	Image	4,090	552	3,169	139

23/09/2020	Food waste recycling press release	Image & link	3,968	551	2,267	88
27/09/2020	Food waste recycling press release	Image & link	1,450	46	1,951	67
30/09/2020	Food waste process - re3 film	Video	2,855	273	1,801	66
07/10/2020	Food waste truck livery	Video & link	1,418	107	2,554	141
15/10/2020	Recycle your electricals	Image & link	1,556	34	1,445	25
21/10/2020	Re3 recycling webinar	Image & link	2,041	65	1,834	32
26/10/2020	Garden waste collections	Image & link	1,001	16	1,863	54
31/10/2020	Recycle your pumpkins - inc. food waste bins	Image & link	1,808	109	2,088	58

Table 7

5. Customer Feedback

Table 8 shows the detailed comments received from residents in the 2 weeks before and to date.

EA Area	Road	Comment	Status
Abbey			
Caversham	Kidmore Rd	Says the recycling part of the leaflet is confusing as the icons have different coloured backgrounds. Thinks they should all have red coloured backgrounds.	Being considered for main roll out.
	Buxton Ave	advised they wouldn't be able to cope with the swop over, causing them distress	Resolved
Minster/Southcote	Parkside Rd	concerned about how she would manage 4 adults + 13 year old. has a green cone that she puts her food waste in.	Resolved
	Parkside Rd	Happy about food waste being introduced but uses a compost heap	Resolved
	Beacon Court	concerns about reduction of domestic bins. thinks its not enough and can lead to rats etc	Resolved
	Westcote Rd	concerned not enough bin left for the 8 flats and also only received 2 caddies for 8 properties	Resolved
	Northcourt - Parkhouse Lane	Doesn't feel the capacity provided was enough for 4 people, food bin was missed on the first collection	Resolved

	Penroath Ave	had two 240 l and 5 adults in the property. also concerned about foxes breaking the sacks	Resolved
	Penroath Ave	additional food waste container	Resolved
	Penroath Ave	Received no liners	Resolved
	Parkside Rd	informing us that the property is a hmo and given a 140 l bin	Resolved
	Parkside Rd	querying compostable packaging and wraps	Resolved
	Inglewood Ct	can cut flowers be put into the food waste bin	Resolved
Norcot	Gairn Close	'Before you send out to the whole of the town you need to give clearer instructions as to how receiving. plus not easy to speak to someone by phone, what if elderly person with no internet contact'	Resolved
	Unknown	Was unhappy that he knew the food waste scheme was starting on 5th October, but that residents had not been given a date when the black bins were going to be changed. Didn't know they were changing before 5th.	Resolved
Redlands	Blenheim Rd	Concerned about excess waste and bins not being pulled back in to properties after collection day. Also worried about student houses not recycling and we should consider enforcement.	Resolved

Table 8

6. Learning Outcomes

Table 9 shows the main learning outcomes to date.

Learning Outcome	Target change	Week added
1. Engage early with residents who will need extra capacity in order to reduce contacts and help organise deliveries more efficiently.	Main roll out comms, FAQ's and social media.	Pre - roll out
2. Ensure 140l bins are delivered on the same day that 240l bins are removed.	Training for delivery crews.	Delivery week
3. When delivering food bins and caddies leave at the property boundary ie. In the presentation place rather than deliver to the front door, as some residents are leaving full bins in that position rather than at the kerbside despite instructions.	Training for delivery crews.	Delivery week
4. Add in clearer comms in leaflets about bin presentation places.	Main roll out comms, FAQ's and social media.	Week 1
5. Deliver food waste bins, caddies and liners to flats within communal blocks if access can be gained.	Consider adding to pre- roll-out communications	Delivery week
6. Add FAQ to explain that food waste will be collected in a different vehicle and not in the large RCV truck.	FAQ	Week 2
7. Add FAQ that food waste bins may be collected at a different time of day to other waste bins and they should be presented by 6am as the other bins do.	FAQ	Week 4
8. Ensure residents know that they can request additional recycling bins and boxes free of charge if required.	All communications	Week 5 and 6

Table 9

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READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee		
DATE:	15 December 2020	AGENDA ITEM:	
TITLE:	Fire Safety in Tall Buildings		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR JOHN ENNIS	PORTFOLIO:	HOUSING
SERVICE:	REGULATORY SERVICES	WARDS:	ALL
LEAD OFFICER:	James Crosbie	TEL:	0118 9372222
JOB TITLE:	Acting Head of Planning and Regulatory Services	E-MAIL:	James.crosbie@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides an update on the Council's response following the Grenfell Tower fire in Kensington on 14th June 2017. This includes action taken in relation to the Authority's own housing stock, 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.

1.2 In summary the local authority has taken the following action post the Grenfell Tower incident:

- As reported to this committee in March 2019, the council instructed Fireskills, an independent fire safety specialist to audit tall buildings within the Housing Revenue Account. The audit went further than Government's guidance and included buildings below 18 metres in height. As a result of the audit an action plan was drawn up that is being managed to ensure works can be completed. With the lock down as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic the speed of delivery of these projects has been adversely affected but good progress is being made.
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between RBFRS and the 6 Berkshire councils was signed, to enable a partnership approach to inspections and enforcement.
- As a result of the MOU, a building safety programme was implemented, and joint work commenced in March 2018 between RBFRS and the council. This work involved joint fire safety inspections of 32 of the most high-risk residential buildings in the private sector over 18 metres. Inspections were completed on 1st August 2018 and work to meet fire safety standards was required where necessary.
- Four high rise residential buildings in the private sector were identified with Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) cladding which failed the required fire safety standards. Work has been completed on two of these buildings.

- The work on the third should complete in December and the final building now has planning permission for the proposed works.
- The Council has responded to the 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. This included properties in private sector, Council properties, hotels and student accommodation.
- There are approximately 97 high-rise residential buildings in Reading which are applicable to this request. Legislation under the Housing Act 2004 is being used to require this information from freeholders in the case of the private sector.
- There is regular communication and sharing of information between the Council and RBFRS, along with joint meetings with relevant stakeholders where required.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee note this update following the Grenfell Tower fire as detailed in this report.**

3. POLICY CONTEXT

The Grenfell Tower Fire

- 3.1 Grenfell Tower was a 24-storey, 67m high residential tower block in North Kensington built in 1970. The concrete structure's top 22 storeys consisted of 127 flats. The block was managed by Kensington and Chelsea Tenants' Management Organisation.
- 3.2 A major fire seriously damaged the building on 14 June 2017. The fire burned for about 60 hours until finally extinguished. More than 200 firefighters and 40 fire engines from stations all over London were involved in efforts to control the fire. At least 72 people were confirmed or presumed dead, according to the Metropolitan Police Service.
- 3.3 The fire remains under investigation and is the subject of a Public Inquiry which opened on 14th September 2017. The Inquiry suggests that external fire loading was partly responsible for the rapid-fire spread. The ACM cladding of the building has become the main focus of concern.
- 3.4 The cladding system which was fitted as part of an £8.4 million refurbishment completed in 2016 consisted of an Aluminium Composite Material which was effectively a sandwich of two sheets of aluminium foil covering a 3mm polyethylene core acting as a rain screen. The insulation was Celotex RS5000, which is an insulant that has subsequently been withdrawn from the market. This was all fixed to the original concrete façade of the building.
- 3.5 After Grenfell, seven large scale tests were undertaken by the Building Research Establishment (BRE) to understand what combination of ACM and insulation may or may not be safe to use as part of a wall system in high rise buildings, in line with current Building Regulations guidance. These results confirmed which categories of ACM and insulation passed the BS8414 test and enabled MHCLG to provide urgent advice to building owners.

- 3.6 MHCLG has since set up its 'Building Safety Programme' to provide guidance to building owners, councils and local fire brigades.
- 3.7 The fire at Grenfell Tower follows other significant incidents in social housing in recent years which have been widely reported in the Housing and national press:
- fire in Lakanal House, Camberwell on 3rd July 2009 (6 deaths)
 - fire at Shepherds Bush House on 18th October 2016 (no deaths)
 - fire at Samuel Garside House, Barking Riverside on 9 June 2019 (no deaths)
 - fire at Limehouse Lodge, Clapton on 16 September 2019 (no deaths)

There were marked similarities between the features of the Lakanal House fire and Grenfell Tower and nationally there remain calls for change, including to Building Regulations.

MHCLG data collection exercise on External Wall Systems (EWS) in high-rise residential buildings

- 3.8 Following on from the work carried out to ensure ACM cladding is removed from residential properties, buildings with other types of cladding systems are now being considered as part of the government's Building Safety Programme.
- 3.9 In July 2019 MHCLG required all local authorities to complete a data collection exercise to identify external wall materials on all high-rise residential buildings 18 metres and over within their area. This exercise covered social and private residential housing stock (except for housing association properties), hotels and student accommodation. There are 97 high-rise residential buildings in Reading which meet this criterion.
- 3.10 Local authorities were requested to use the DELTA platform for the data collection process and the original deadline was 31st March 2020. MHCLG reviewed this deadline to allow for delays related to COVID-19 and it was extended to 31st July 2020. On 22nd July this deadline was further extended to 31st October 2020. The MHCLG announced on 27th October that the portal on DELTA will remain open until October 2025 to allow for further records to be uploaded and amended.

4. Current Position

RBC Housing stock

- 4.1 Following the review by FireSkills, officers have been working towards delivering the recommendations within the action plan. The key actions taken to date are:
- 4.2 The new sprinkler system being installed in all the flats and communal areas in the three Coley Park (Wensley Road) high-rise blocks is nearing completion. Alongside this the new fire alarm system both internally in the flats and in the communal area have been installed and awaiting the completion of the water mains replacement before going live (the existing system is still in place and will be removed once the new one becomes active).

- 4.3 The upgrading of the domestic alarm systems to other properties, continues and is part of a three-year programme which is on track. However, there has been difficulties in gaining access to some flats and work is being undertaken to resolve this.
- 4.4 The removal and replacement of cladding on Coley high rise was programmed to coincide with the replacement of windows in 3-5 years, however, this has been bought forward to 2021/22. The replacement is not related to any identified fire risk, but the outcome of the Hackitt review and any changes in Government policy may influence the materials used as part of the replacement works.
- 4.5 The sprinkler system install to Lowfield Road and the Wates 3 Storey blocks is progressing. Due to the lock down as a result of the pandemic this work is not complete but is continuing to the new agreed programme and will be finished early next year
- 4.6 An inspection is due to take place by the new Tower team (RBFERS) and it is not anticipated that any major issues will be identified
- 4.7 Fire risk assessments have continued throughout the lock down period and two estates management officers have been employed. One of their key tasks is to inspect the properties and test smoke alarms, sprinklers and emergency lighting and other fire safety and health and safety compliance measure in line with our duties as responsible landlords.
- 4.8 In response to the latest guidance, the Local Authority New Build Programme has been designed to ensure fire safety is at the heart of the process. As a result, all new flats including the recently completed new build at Conwy Close has benefitted from upgraded fire doors and each flat will be completed with a sprinkler system, with an Autoquench system fitted in buggy and internal bin stores.

Cross Tenure Residential Buildings

- 4.9 A County-wide Steering group was convened by RBFERS with representatives of the six Unitary Authorities in Berkshire. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between RBFERS and the 6 Unitary Authorities was signed in 2018 with the purpose of strengthening the current draft Protocol for Fire Safety Enforcement and putting into place a joint plan of action with regards to the roles and responsibilities of each party.
- 4.10 A programme of joint work was agreed to facilitate sharing of learning, information and resources. A multi-disciplinary operational team comprising RBFERS and an Environmental Health Officer from the Council was formed with the remit of holistically reviewing the safety of high-rise residential blocks in Reading on a prioritised basis.
- 4.11 RBFERS built a risk profile for all high-rise residential premises across Berkshire which informed prioritisation for inspections. By using these calculated risk profiles, 32 of the highest risk residential buildings over 18 metres in Reading were jointly inspected between March and August 2018. Joint letters were sent out to notify all residents prior to the inspections and to offer home fire

safety checks by fire officers. In addition to the communal areas, at least 5% of flats were inspected for each residential high-rise block. RBFRS and the council followed up separately on the issues found under their respective enforcement legislation - The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and the Housing Act 2004.

The common deficiencies found in high rise blocks in Reading included:

- Compartmentation breaches
- Fire lifts not in operational use
- Fire doors in disrepair

- 4.12 All building owners are responsible for determining whether there is ACM on the outside of their high-rise residential building. In Reading there are four residential buildings over 18 metres which were identified as having ACM cladding which failed the required fire safety standard and is not of limited combustibility. The Council and RBFRS have worked with the relevant stakeholders of these buildings to ensure a long-term remediation plan were established.
- 4.13 **St. Lawrence House** (social housing accommodation). Work to remove and replace the ACM cladding was completed at the end of 2019. The ACM cladding remedial works on buildings owned by Local Authority and Housing Associations have been funded by the Government.
- 4.14 **Queen's Court** (student accommodation). Work to remove and replace the ACM cladding was completed in March 2020.
- 4.15 **Hanover House** (private residential accommodation). Interim measures are in place in accordance with the current MHCLG guidance and these are monitored regularly. The Alterations Notice served by RBFRS for closure of the car park located underneath the building is still in force. In May 2019 MHCLG announced the plan for the provision of funding for the removal and replacement of unsafe ACM cladding from privately owned high-rise residential buildings. Planning permission was agreed at the end of October 2020 and a Building Regulations application has been made.
- 4.16 **Crossway Point** (social housing accommodation). Work to remove and replace the ACM cladding was paused due to COVID-19. The construction company started back on site at the end of April 2020. Remediation work is expected to be finished in December 2020. The council and the fire service continue to work with the housing association to ensure correct measures are in place while the ACM cladding remains on the building.
- 4.17 in response to the MHCLG's request in July 2019 that all Local Authorities complete a data collection exercise to identify external wall materials on high-rise residential buildings 18 meters and over, the Council served over one hundred section 235 Notices under the Housing Act 2004 requiring this information from owners and management companies. 97 high rise residential buildings were identified as meeting this criterion.
- 4.18 To date the Council has received EWS information on 80 buildings which have all been uploaded to the Delta system. There are 17 buildings where EWS information is outstanding, and the delay in the main is due to owners waiting for external wall surveys to be carried out, which have been delayed for

reasons related to COVID-19. It is also important to note that even before the pandemic, some surveyors had 3-month waiting lists due to increased demand across the country following MHCLG's request.

- 4.19 The Council will continue to engage with the building owners and management companies to gather this information and upload it to the MHCLG's Delta portal.
- 4.20 The council and RBFRS continue to have regular communication to discuss progress with the Building Safety Programme and individual properties.

5 Options Proposed

- 5.1 The Council and RBFRS will continue to work with ACM and other high-risk building owners. On completion of this work stream the focus will shift to identify and work on other priority areas
- 5.2 Communications with stakeholders on the high-rise residential buildings with ACM will continue. The priority will be to secure remediation of the cladding where required as quickly as possible.
- 5.3 The council will continue its efforts to obtain external wall systems details of all applicable buildings in response to the request from MHCLG
- 5.4 The council will keep updated with the latest Government guidance and take action where appropriate. This includes any new changes derived from recommendations in the final Hackitt review.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 6.1 This report supports the following objectives in the corporate plan:
 - Improving access to decent housing to meet local needs
 - Protecting and enhancing the lives of vulnerable adults and children.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 Not relevant to this report.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL & CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Any re-cladding works carried out to buildings will need to comply with Building Regulation Standards including those set out in Part L
- 8.2 Energy efficiency standards in Council Housing are generally considered to be good with an average SAP rating of 74. Future investment in the stock has been planned over the 30 year through our asset management plan. With the Council's commitment to Zero Carbon by 2030, further work is being undertaken to assess where investment in energy efficiency can best be delivered. This will be a law of diminishing returns, as many of the large gains have already been made and much smaller future gains will require significant capital investment.

- 8.3 Three key areas of investment in the coming years will include the removal of gas boilers and the use of fossil fuels to help achieve our Zero Carbon Goals; replacing these with alternative forms of heating such as Air Source, Ground Source and Quantum. In addition to heating system external wall insulation will be required to either replace existing systems or will be required to improve the energy efficiency of properties with narrow or no cavity walls. These systems will be carefully chosen using non-combustible materials that are aesthetically pleasing, offer value for money and are easy to maintain. The third key element will be the replacement of our double glaze windows with Triple glazed windows. We will actively seek environmentally friendly solutions that bind carbon and provide the most economical solution for our tenants.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are several important pieces of legislation which impact on fire safety within dwellings, principally:

- Building Regulations 2010 Part B.
- Housing Act 2004.
- The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

In addition, the Local Government Association (LGA) published guidance in 2012 'Fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats.

- 9.2 The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (the FSO) came into force in October 2006. It does not apply to individual flats but does apply to the common parts of flats such as stairwells, a plant room or caretaker room, shared facilities and lobbies. Guidance on the FSO and its requirements has been issued in a series of guides. Blocks of flats are included, among many other types of residential premises, in the HM Government guide 'Fire safety risk assessment: sleeping accommodation' published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The FSO imposes duties on the 'responsible person' who has control of the premises - usually a company or organisation and usually the freeholder or landlord. Responsibilities also apply in respect of anyone who has a contract or responsibility for maintenance, repairs or for the safety of premises. The FSO is normally enforced by the fire and rescue authority.
- 9.3 The FSO requires that suitable and sufficient fire risk assessments (FRAs) are carried out - this forms the foundation for the fire safety measures required in a block of flats. The fire and rescue authority will review the FRA at the time they audit a building. Further detail is provided above in this report. An FRA will result in an action plan detailing managerial and physical measures with prioritisation commensurate with the risk. LGA guidance suggests that a low risk, low rise block might need an FRA to be completed every 4 years and reviewed every two years. For blocks with higher risk and over four storeys in height a new FRA every 3 years and an annual review would be more appropriate.
- 9.4 Material alterations to existing blocks of flats, including alterations to individual flats, are controlled under the Building Regulations 2010, and need to be approved by a building control body otherwise an offence is committed. Even if the block satisfied earlier legislation, proposed alterations must be considered in the light of the current Building Regulations; it is not enough to

carry out alterations on the basis of the earlier legislation. In practice, any proposals to carry out alterations including to fire alarm systems, means of escape, smoke control arrangements and structural alterations, should be submitted to ensure compliance with regulations.

- 9.5 The Housing Act 2004 makes requirements regarding the condition of a broad spectrum of housing including both individual flats within a block and the common parts of a block. Local authorities are the enforcing authority for this legislation. Assessment of conditions is carried out using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) - where 'category 1' (more serious) hazards are identified the local authority has a duty to take some form of enforcement action. Under the Housing Act 2004, the housing authority must inspect properties if they become aware of significant fire hazards. Housing authorities have powers of entry for this purpose. The housing authority may make requirements for improvements in fire precautions. In the event of serious risk, the housing authority has the power to prohibit or take emergency remedial action.
- 9.6 There is overlap between the Housing Act and FSO. The Housing Act covers flats and common parts whilst the FSO covers common parts. The safety of common parts can sometimes rely on fire safety measures within flats which is an added complexity.
- 9.7 On 16 May 2018, *Building a Safer Future, Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety: Final Report* by Dame Judith Hackitt was published. The report identified that the current system of building regulations and fire safety was not fit for purpose and that a culture change was required to support the delivery of buildings that are safe
- 9.8 The report set out 53 recommendations to establish a new regulatory framework. The framework will be based around a series of interdependent, mutually reinforcing changes where one new measure drives another. This reflects the reality of many high-rise buildings which operate as a complex intertwined system.
- 9.9 The government published an implementation plan in December 2018 that provided an approach to delivering the recommendations in Hackitt's Review. This plan sets out the intended programme of work to deliver fundamental reform to the system that will ensure that residents are safe, and feel safe, in their homes.
- 9.10 As part of this plan, changes to legislation are being made which includes the recent introduction of the Fire Safety Bill to Parliament and the publication of the draft Building Safety Bill. Amendments have also already been made to the Building Regulations and the associated guidance (Approved Documents).

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The total anticipated expenditure on fire safety works in the Council Housing stock is £6.5m of which £2.4m has been spent to date with the majority of the remaining £3.1m spend to replace the cladding on the 15 storey blocks which are expected to be completed in 2021/22.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Building a Safer Future, Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety: Final Report -

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/707798/Building_a_Safer_Future_-_print.pdf

Building a Safer Future An Implementation Plan -

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/781707/BSP_-_implementation_programme.pdf

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