

**HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 6 JULY  
2021**

**Present:** Councillor Davies (Chair);

Councillors Debs Absolom, Barnett-Ward, Emberson, Hoskin, Leng (Vice-Chair), Manghnani, McGonigle, Mitchell, Mpofu-Coles, O'Connell, Rowland, Rynn, R Singh, Sokale and J Williams

**Apologies:** Councillor Hacker

**1. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**Resolved -**

That pursuant to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), members of the press and public be excluded during consideration of item 2 below as it was likely that there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs specified in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to that Act.

**2. LOCAL AUTHORITY NEW BUILD PROGRAMME PHASE 4 - SPEND APPROVAL**

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing detailed information on additional sites which were at the feasibility stage to support the public report on the Local Authority New Build Programme Phase 4 (Minute 8 below refers). The information was presented in a confidential report as details of the sites could not be made public until the final appraisal and funding bid had been completed.

**Resolved -**

**That the site information set out in the report be taken into account when considering the public report on 'Local Authority New Build Programme Phase 4 - Spend Approval'.**

(Exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3).

**3. MINUTES OF THE HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 10 MARCH 2021**

The Minutes of the meeting of 10 March 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

**4. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES**

The Minutes of the following meeting were submitted:

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Community Safety Partnership - 22 April 2021.

**5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS**

<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
Lin Godfrey	Christchurch Meadows Ditch	Cllr Rowland
Councillor McGonigle	Excessive Noise from Neighbours	Cllr Barnett-Ward

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

**6. LOCAL AUTHORITY NEW BUILD PROGRAMME PHASE 4 - SPEND APPROVAL**

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which gave an update on the current Local Authority New Build (LANB) programme, which had to date delivered 174 local authority homes, with schemes in progress to deliver another 307 homes by 2024.

The report detailed proposals and funding arrangements for the next phase of the programme (phase 4). The report sought spend approval for a budget of £1.4m to start delivery of the next phase of the programme during the financial year 2021/22, funded through a combination of HRA borrowing; Right to Buy receipts; S106 receipts and Homes England Grant where appropriate, and stated that the existing Capital Programme would be reprofiled with £1.4m moving from 2023/24 to 2021/22. This change would be reflected in the July 2021 Budget Monitoring Outturn report to Policy Committee.

The report also set out an intention to request spend and budget approval for an additional £30.6m to continue the delivery of Phase 4 of the Local Authority New Build and Acquisitions Programme from 2022/23, as part of the budget approval within the 2022/23 Medium Term Financial Strategy process.

The report sought authority for the Assistant Director of Housing and Communities in consultation with the Lead Member for Housing, the Leader of the Council, the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services and the Director of Finance (as appropriate) to:

- agree which sites to progress, following engagement with relevant ward councillors;
- to tender for and enter into contracts with the winning bidders in respect of multi-disciplinary/consultancy services and works to deliver the schemes, subject to the further spend approval and budget being approved and;
- continue to approve the purchase of existing properties from the open market limited to a maximum purchase price of £500k.

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**Resolved -**

- (1) That the spend of up to £1.4m on phase 4 during the financial year 2021/22 be approved and the required reprofiling of the budget currently within the existing Capital Programme for Phase 4 of the LANB programme (£1.4m) from 2023/24 to 2021/22 be noted;**
- (2) That the intention to request spend and budget approval for an additional £30.6m to continue the delivery of Phase 4 of the Local Authority New Build and Acquisitions Programme from 2022/23, in parallel to the budget approval within the 2022/23 Medium Term Financial Strategy process be noted;**
- (3) That the Assistant Director of Housing and Communities in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing, the Leader of the Council, the Director of Legal and Democratic Services and the Director of Finance be granted authority to agree which sites are suitable to progress within the spend approval and restrictions set out in the report;**
- (4) That the Assistant Director of Housing and Communities in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing, the Leader of the Council, the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services and the Director of Finance be granted authority to: (a) tender; and (b) enter into contracts in connection with the Phase 4 LANB programme with the winning bidders in respect of multi-disciplinary/consultancy services and works to deliver the housing schemes as set out in the report;**
- (5) That the Assistant Director of Housing and Communities in consultation with the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services and the Director of Finance, be granted authority to approve the purchase of existing properties from the open market for the purpose of providing affordable housing, with a maximum limit of £500,000 per single unit.**

**7. GLYPHOSATE - UPDATE ON ITS USE AND POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES**

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which gave an update on the current use of Glyphosate as a means of weed control in Reading, the regulatory and legal status of Glyphosate use, alternatives to Glyphosate and benchmarking with other local authorities.

The report explained that Glyphosate was a widely available, non-selective, non-residual translocated herbicide which killed actively growing plants but would not stop new weeds from growing, which was licensed for use until December 2022. It had been used by Reading Borough Council to control all types of weeds as it provided a cost effective and efficient means of control and helped the Council to comply with its statutory duty to “keep specified land clear of litter and refuse”. However, there were serious concerns about the potential harmful effects of glyphosate on human health, particularly its

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potential as a carcinogen. As a result; a growing number of local authorities had reviewed or had stopped its use altogether in favour of alternative methods of weed control.

The Council had to consider the scale of Glyphosate use, the likely risks arising from its use, the potential to limit the reliance on the use of Glyphosate products, the ability to find a suitable alternative product to prepare for the future, whilst balancing the legal requirement for weed control on public areas, public perception and protection require weed control to be carried out.

The report also set out the alternatives available, which included thermal, acetic acid, fatty acids, essential oils, manual removal and Flazasulphuron, together with the financial implications of each option. The report recommended that the Council trial various alternatives in a range of street types and parks during the 2022 growing season, with further report on the results being submitted to the Committee in Autumn 2022.

**Resolved -**

- (1) That Glyphosate use be continued in order to control weed growth but that its use be minimised until the Council was able to find acceptable substitutes;**
- (2) That alternative methods of weed control be trialled in the 2022 growing season with a view to reducing Glyphosate use and creating an integrated weed control strategy;**
- (3) That a report on the results of the trial be submitted to the Committee in November 2022 with a set of recommended actions;**
- (4) That a trial community opt-out scheme from Glyphosate application be prepared and expressions of interest sought.**

### **8. HOUSEHOLD WASTE - UPDATE ON THE INTRODUCTION OF THE KERBSIDE FOOD WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE AND THE CHANGE TO 140L RESIDUAL WASTE BINS.**

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which provided an update on the main roll out of the kerbside food waste collection service and change to 140 litre residual waste bins, and set out further details for Phase 2 of the roll out.

The report explained that since the main roll out had started over 2552 tonnes of food waste had been collected, an average of 2.7kg per household per week, although it was expected that this would reduce as households recognised the need to reduce food waste. The recycling level had increased to 52% over the same period, meeting the Council's 50% target set in September 2019 (Policy Committee, 26 September 2019, minute 31 refers).

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The report also set out the timetable for the roll out of the food waste collection service to residents living in low and high-rise flats. Each household would receive an internal caddy and caddy liners, with the appropriate number of 240l communal food waste bins provided in the bin storage areas. The communications plan had taken into account lessons learned during the main roll out and would reflect the differences in the service for residents of flats. Phase 2 would also be split into two phases, to allow for the additional support that would be needed and for any changes required after Phase 2a to be incorporated into Phase 2b. The Council's Recycling and Enforcement officers would be used to support the residents during these phases.

### **Resolved:**

- (1) That the progress of Phase 1 to date be noted;
- (2) That the proposed Phase 2 roll out timetable be noted;
- (3) That a further update report including the results of the Phase 2 roll out be submitted to future meeting of the Committee.

### **9. RBC APPROACH TO DELIVERING LOW CARBON HOUSING**

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report presenting a paper "Low Carbon Homes - Key Issues and Challenges" which was attached to the report at Appendix 1. The paper summarised current activity and proposals to reduce emissions from the Council's housing stock, highlighted the scale and nature of the challenges associated with meeting the 'net zero by 2030' target for housing; and proposed development of two Low Carbon Housing Action Plans (one for RBC housing stock and one for the private sector) as part of the Council's response to these challenges.

The report stated that domestic energy use contributed to circa 40% of Reading's carbon footprint and explained that most housing in Reading did not meet the standards required to meet both local and nation "net zero" standards, although the Council's own housing did perform significantly better than the national average. Local policies were in place to ensure that new housing did not add unduly to Reading's carbon footprint but the biggest challenges were around retrofitting both public and private housing stock, fuel poverty and uncertainty around future Government funding streams.

The report proposed that officers draw up two low carbon action plans, one each for the private sector and RBC housing stock, to provide a detailed roadmap for the future, including the need to resource this area to achieve the targets. The final actions plans would be submitted to the Committee for approval by March 2022.

### **Resolved:**

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- (1) That the significance of housing in delivering the ambition of a net zero carbon Reading by 2030, and the significant challenges associated with delivering this ambition set out in the paper at Appendix 1 be noted;**
- (2) That the need to realign priorities and resources in the short and medium term to more effectively address the challenge of housing retrofit in Reading, and the steps being taken in this regard as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be noted;**
- (3) That Low Carbon Action Plans be developed for (i) RBC housing stock and (ii) private sector housing as proposed in Appendix 1 to the report be supported and submitted to the Committee at its meeting on 10 March 2022.**

**10. THE ELECTRICAL SAFETY STANDARDS IN THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR (ENGLAND) REGULATION 2020**

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that set out the provisions of The Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) Regulations 2020 ("the ESS Regulations") which came into force on 1 June 2020 and the Tenants Fees Act 2019 which came into force on 1 June 2019 for new tenancies and was subsequently extended to cover all tenancies from 1 June 2020.

The report explained that these measures alongside the Council's existing enforcement powers would assist in tackling criminal landlords and agents and would contribute to improving housing standards in the private rented sector and included the power to impose financial penalties where necessary. The report asked the Committee to delegate authority for officers to carry out these functions. The report also stated that the Housing Standards Enforcement Policy had been updated to reflect these new enforcement powers and the charging process for financial penalties and a copy was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That the Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services, in consultation with the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services and the Assistant Director of Finance be granted delegated authority to enforce the requirements of the Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) Regulations 2020 and the Tenants Fee Act 2019;**
- (2) That the Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services, in consultation with the Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services, be granted authority to discharge the Council's duties and powers under the Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) Regulations 2020 and the Tenants Fee Act 2019 along with subsequent Regulations and Orders as well as policies and procedures relating to both pieces of legislation;**

- (3) That the revenue arising from financial penalties issued under the Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) Regulations 2020 (schedule 2) and the Tenants Fees Act 2019 (Schedule 3) be reinvested into the Regulatory Services - Private Sector Housing Team.

## 11. READING LIBRARIES: FUTURE STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which outlined the proposed strategic themes to guide the future direction of the Council's library services upon which consultation with the public would take place. The following documents were appended to the report:

Appendix 1: Draft Library Strategic Principles 2022-27;  
Appendix 2: Summary background data underlying strategy;  
Appendix 3: Equality Impact Assessment relating to home service change.

The report explained that officers had reviewed the library service, informed by the data held by the service with a particular focus on maximising the benefits to Reading, and in light of the new Corporate plan, in order to produce five key strategic priorities as follows:

- Supporting recovery from Covid-19;
- Helping Children and Young People;
- Improving Digital Inclusion;
- Supporting improvement in Health, Wellbeing and Literacy;
- Providing access to quality cultural experiences,

The review and proposed strategic priorities had been informed by patterns of library use, use as a percentage of population in different areas of Reading and how this mapped to areas of deprivation, similarities and differences in profiles of the ages of those using the service and where ICT users within libraries were coming from. The Strategy aimed to ensure that the library service was forward-looking, innovative and provided an excellent experience for everyone, as well as contributing as much as possible to the overall corporate priorities for Reading. The report added that the proposed consultation was on the strategic themes, rather than any specific proposals. The consultation would also inform any potential changes to Central Library, as well as informing future delivery of the service.

### Resolved:

- (1) That consultation be undertaken on the proposed strategic themes as set out in Appendix 1 in order to inform the Library Strategy and future service offer, including at any reconfigured Reading Central Library and Home Visiting Service, as set out in the report;

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- (2) That the consultation approach be endorsed and a six-week consultation commence during August 2021, and a further report submitted to Committee in November 2021 setting out the outcome of the consultation exercise together with a proposed Library Strategy 2022-27, informed by such consultation.

### 12. ACCEPTANCE OF CULTURE RECOVERY AND HERITAGE GRANTS

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report advising the Committee of the award of a round two Arts Council England (ACE) culture recovery fund and leisure recovery fund, totalling £527,000.

The report explained that there had been three separate successful bids, as follows:

- in January 2021 Arts Council England announced a second round of Culture Recovery Funding to provide grants to support cultural organisations as they transitioned back to a viable and sustainable operating model during April-June 2021. The council had submitted a bid for up to £487,000 to round two of the culture recovery fund to support the reopening of The Hexagon, South Street and Reading Museum and in March 2021 the Council was notified that it had been successful with its bid for the full amount.
- In June 2020, the Council had submitted an Expression of Interest to Historic England for a grant to their Covid-19 Emergency Heritage at Risk Response Fund to repairs some of the Grade II listed chest tombs in St Laurence's Churchyard. A round 2 application was submitted in November and in January 2021 the Council was notified that it had been successful with its bid of £25,000.
- In February 2021 the Council had submitted an application to Arts Council England under the project grant funding, for £15,000 to support specific artistic and cultural activities to the celebrate the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Reading Abbey at Water fest. in May 2021 the council was informed it had been successful with its bid.

The report further explained that these organisations had provided the Council with limited windows within which to accept the grants, and that the Council had accepted the grants within the grant offer acceptance period.

#### Resolved:

- (1) That the successful applications and acceptance of Arts Council England's culture recovery fund grant of £487,000, Historic England's Covid-19 Emergency Heritage at Risk Response Fund grant of £25,000 and Arts Council England's project grant fund of £15,000 by the Executive Director for Environment, Neighbourhoods and Economic Growth be noted;
- (2) That the Executive Director for Environment, Neighbourhoods and Economic Growth, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Culture,

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Heritage & Recreation, be granted authority to allocate the grant funding of £487,000 from the Arts Council England's culture recovery fund to support The Hexagon, South Street and Reading Museum as they transitioned back to a viable and sustainable operating model;

- (3) That the Executive Director for Environment, Neighbourhoods and Economic Growth, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage & Recreation, be granted authority to allocate the grant fund of £25,000 from Historic England's Covid-19 Emergency Heritage at Risk Response Fund for the repairs and conservation of six of the listed chest tombs within St Laurence's Churchyard;
- (4) That the Executive Director for Environment, Neighbourhoods and Economic Growth, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage & Recreation be granted authority to allocate the grant fund of £15,000 from Arts Council England's project grant funding to support agreed specific cultural activities for the celebration of the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Reading Abbey at Water Fest on the 19 June 2021.

### 13. READING'S CULTURE EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that provided the Committee with an update on the achievements of Reading's Cultural Education Partnership (CEP) 2016-2019, shared the CEP's 2020-2024 Draft Strategy and Action Plan, and set out the key areas of priority. The *Draft Cultural Education Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2024* was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that the CEP aimed to develop a collaborative, sustainable infrastructure that enabled opportunities for every child and young person in Reading to aspire, achieve, influence and participate in quality arts and culture. The CEP was a partnership made up of local cultural organisations, including NPOs, key strategic partners and supported by Artswork, an Arts Council appointed organisation, and the Culture Development Officer. The work of the CEP had focused on children and young people aged 0-19 and on vulnerable young people up to the age of 25.

The report set out the achievements against targets set in the 2016-2019 action plan as summarised below:

- Reading Cultural Education Partnership had supported 1444 children and young people to gain Arts Awards, almost doubling the target of 750. Arts Award was a range of unique qualifications up to A Level equivalent that supported anyone aged up to 25 to grow as artists and arts leaders, inspiring them to connect with and take part in the wider arts world through taking challenges in an art form - from fashion to digital art, pottery to poetry.

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- The CEP had focused delivery on areas of deprivation as identified in the 2011 Census. The Partnership reached 265,532 children and young people and engaged with 94% of the schools within Reading. Seventeen of those schools (26% of schools in Reading) had registered for Artsmark and 10 now regularly engaged with a Schools' Connect programme run by Jelly.
- The CEP strategy and action plan had allowed local arts and culture organisations to leverage £97,700 of funding to help deliver against targets and continue to fund their work with children and young people.
- The CEP had facilitated partnership working and collaboration in a competitive landscape. Through dialogues and visibility of each other's work they were able to avoid flooding the market with similar offerings or trying to engage the same school. This structure had also allowed for best practice sharing opportunities.

The report stated that the structure of the Partnership had been a success for those who engaged with it and further definition around this structure had been included in the updated strategy and action plan to allow for further development of the partnership. The updated strategy and action plan had been delayed by a change in facilitators, Covid 19 and the launch of the new Arts Council England *Let's Create* strategy.

### Resolved:

- (1) That the achievements of the Cultural Education Partnership to date be noted;
- (2) That the draft Action Plan and Strategy for 2020-2024 be noted;
- (3) That the Assistant Director for Culture in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage & Recreation be granted authority to finalise the Action Plan.

### 14. READING MUSEUM FORWARD PLAN

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that sought approval for the Reading Museum Forward Plan 2020-2025 which was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that the regular review of the Forward Plan was both good practice and a key requirement of the Museum Accreditation Scheme, under which Reading Museum had **Full Accreditation status (Accredited No. 978) from the Arts Council England (ACE)**. **Museums participating in the Scheme had to demonstrate effective forward planning approved by their governing body.** Museums in the Scheme were periodically invited to provide evidence that they continued to comply with the Accreditation Standard through a returns process. **Adoption of the Forward Plan and its submission with the return was a key piece of evidence required by the Scheme.**

The report set out the key achievements since the last plan had been agreed, which included:

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- Reading Museum *had been awarded Full Accreditation status* in October 2017;
- In April 2018 Reading Museum and The Museum of English Rural Life, as Museums Partnership Reading (MPR), had been awarded £1.25m from ACE National Portfolio 2018-2023;
- Over 20,000 people had attended the reopening of Reading Abbey Quarter in June 2018 after successful delivery of the £3.15m Reading Abbey Revealed project - conservation, interpretation and community engagement led by the museum team and supported by National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and Historic England;
- September 2018 had marked the successful move and reopening of the popular Victorian Schoolroom at the restored Abbey Gateway, over 15,000 school children had visited the Museum in 2018-19;
- Investing in Volunteers status had been re-awarded in February 2019;
- Museum on Wheels - The museum's hands-on outreach programme had reached 22,608 people across the Borough in 2018-19;
- Official opening of the final part of the new Story of Reading Gallery and Welcome Gallery in May 2019, followed by the new Museum Shop in August 2019;
- Awarded 'Best use of Heritage in Placemaking' for the Reading Abbey Revealed project- Planning Awards 2020. The judges had been particularly impressed with the use of community participation in consultations to ensure a broad spectrum of people could participate and enjoy a new 'sense of place' within the Abbey Quarter;
- The online exhibition *Enigma of Arrival: The Politics and Poetics of Caribbean Migration to Britain*, partnership with Barbados Museum and the University of the West Indies had been launched in June 2020. This critically acclaimed project had featured in ACE's national round-up, and received a virtual visit from the Faith Minister, Lord Greenhalgh (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government);
- Voted 'Best Family Museum' by users of the Little Ankle Biters website for Berks, Bucks and Oxon in July 2020.

The report also stated that the new Museum Forward Plan had the following key themes:

- Work in partnership, particularly with the Museum Partnership Reading, to actively engage Reading's diverse communities with our collections and services;
- Provide learning and training opportunities that inspired children, young people and teachers;
- Champion pride in Reading's heritage through promotion of the Abbey Quarter and improved access to collections, especially at the new off-site store and digitally;
- Maximise opportunities to generate environmentally sustainable income and fundraising by working with partners and RBC colleagues.

**Resolved:**

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- (1) That the Reading Museum Forward Plan 2020-2025 including the service's statement of purpose and key aims, set out in Appendix 1 attached to the report, be approved;**
- (2) That the Forward Plan by Reading Museum to ensure it met with the Accreditation standard for UK museums be adopted and submitted with the Museum's next Accreditation return;**
- (3) That the achievements that the Museum had delivered to date be noted.**

(The meeting closed at 8.42 pm)