

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

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2 March 2022

Your contact is: **Julie Quarmby - Committee Services (julie.quarmby@reading.gov.uk)**

NOTICE OF MEETING - HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE 10 MARCH 2022

A meeting of the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee will be held on Thursday, 10 March 2022 at 6.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading. 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 AND LEISURE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 10 NOVEMBER 2021 | | 5 - 14 |
| 3. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES | | 15 - 18 |
| Minutes of the Community Safety Partnership meeting held on 11 November 2021. | | |
| 4. PETITIONS | | |
| Petitions submitted pursuant to Standing Order 36 in relation to matters falling within the Committee's Powers & Duties which have been received by Head of Legal & Democratic Services no later than four clear working days before the meeting. | | |

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5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

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

6. DECISION BOOK REFERENCES

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

7. EVALUATION OF READING FESTIVAL 2021

A presentation by Festival Republic.

8. RENT WITH CONFIDENCE SCHEME

A presentation giving an update on the Council's Rent With Confidence scheme.

9. READING PLACE OF CULTURE PROJECT EVALUATION

19 - 30

A report setting out the successes of the Reading, Place of Culture project, proposing, seeking agreement for the proposed Action Plan and authority for the Assistant Director for Culture, in consultation with the Lead Member for Culture, Heritage and Recreation, to incorporate the actions within existing or emerging delivery plans.

10. LOW CARBON HOUSING ACTION PLANS

31 - 48

A report presenting Low Carbon Housing Action Plans for RBC housing stock and private sector housing for endorsement.

11. HOUSING UPDATE AND PROGRAMME OF WORKS TO COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK 2022-23

49 - 68

This report highlights key achievements of the Housing Service over the past financial year and sets out the work programme for the Council's housing stock for the next financial year.

12. ALLOTMENTS SELF-MANAGEMENT PLAN

69 - 92

A report updating Members of the Committee on the progress towards establishing self-management as an option for managing the Council's 20 allotment sites.

13. UPDATE ON RE-WILDING

93 - 114

A report updating members on the results of extending the re-wilding experiment and on the recommended next steps contained in the draft updated Wildflower Plan.

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- Present:** Councillor Davies (Chair);
Councillors Barnett-Ward, Emberson, Hacker, Hoskin, Leng,
Manghnani, McGonigle, Mitchell, Mpofo-Coles, O'Connell, Rowland,
Rynn, R Singh, Sokale and J Williams.
- Apologies:** Councillor Debs Absolom.

14. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of 6 July 2021 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to it being noted that Councillor Sokale had attended remotely.

15. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

No Minutes of other bodies were submitted.

16. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

| <u>Questioner</u> | <u>Subject</u> | <u>Reply</u> |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| Councillor White | Insulating Homes in Reading | Cllr Emberson |

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

17. UPDATE ON THE OPERATION OF LEISURE FACILITIES BY GREENWICH LEISURE LIMITED AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE NATIONAL LEISURE RECOVERY FUND

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing an update on the award and commencement of the new leisure contract, informing the Committee of the award of funding from the National Leisure Recovery Fund (NLRF) in the sum of £160,772 to support the reopening of the leisure sector post-COVID-19 and of the Council's application for £1.5m from Sport England Strategic Facilities Fund.

The report explained that, further to Minute 62 of the Policy Committee meeting held on 20 January 2020, Greenwich Leisure Ltd had been awarded a 25-year design, build, operate and maintain contract for Boroughwide leisure facilities.

Paul Shearman and Jamie Coleshill of GLL gave a presentation outlining service provision and contract delivery. The presentation covered the following areas:

- Capital Investment in Reading's leisure facilities;
- Timetable for the works to be carried out;
- Plans detailing the works that would be carried out at each site;
- Details of the recovery progress post Covid-19, which was better than the national average;
- The next phase;
- Energy and environmental improvements and links to the BerkshiRe Active Healthy Me programme.

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The report also explained that, in December 2020, Sport England had launched the NLRF to support publicly owned leisure facilities through the Covid-19 crisis and applications had been accepted from local authorities in England who had outsourced their leisure centre provision to external operators. The Council had submitted a bid for NLRF funding of £149,000 in respect of Rivermead Leisure Centre and had been awarded a total of £160,772 comprising the full bid amount, plus an additional £10,230 grant funding and a £1,542 monitoring and evaluation grant. The Council had accepted the NLRF grant on Sport England's standard terms and conditions on 9 March 2021.

The report further stated that, in July 2021, the Council had applied to Sport England for further £1.5million from its Strategic Facilities Fund to support the new leisure developments at both Rivermead and Palmer Park. The Council was awaiting the decision from Sport England in respect of its bid submission.

Resolved -

- (1) That GLL be thanked for their presentation in respect of para 4.1.1 of the report;**
- (2) That the award and commencement of the new leisure contract to Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) on 1 July 2021 for a term of 25 years be noted;**
- (3) That the successful application and acceptance of Sport England's National Leisure Recovery Fund (NLRF) grant of £160,772 to support the reopening of the Rivermead Leisure Centre post Covid-19 lockdowns be noted;**
- (4) That Executive Director for Environment, Neighbourhoods and Economic Growth, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Health Wellbeing and Sport, allocate funding of £160,772 from NLRF grant award to GLL, the operator of Rivermead Leisure Centre on behalf of the Council;**
- (5) That the submission of the funding application to Sport England for £1.5m contribution to the construction cost of the new leisure facilities at Rivermead and Palmer Park be noted;**
- (6) That the Executive Director for Environment, Neighbourhoods and Economic Growth, in consultation with the Assistant Director for Legal & Democratic Services, the Director of Finance and the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport, be authorised to:**
 - (i) accept an award of funding from Sport England's Strategic Facilities Fund, subject to acceptable grant terms and conditions;**
 - (ii) enter into the related grant agreement with Sport England; and**
 - (iii) be legally empowered to act on behalf of the Council for all purposes connected with the grant agreement, including the**

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authority to spend this money in line with the grant funding terms.

18. READING RENT WITH CONFIDENCE SCHEME

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which provided an update on the Reading Rent with Confidence Scheme and the new website - www.rrwc.org.uk. The report explained that the purpose of the scheme was to accredit properties and their landlords, and to encourage landlords to work with the Council to provide good quality accommodation to its tenants in the private rented sector along with good management services.

The report stated that the Reading Rent with Confidence Scheme formed part of the Housing Charter that had been launched in 2016 and aimed to give tenants in the private rented sector greater confidence in the properties they rented, raise standards and enable landlords to market good properties to those tenants. The Council had submitted a successful bid to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to create a stand-alone website, which was interactive and simplified the accreditation process, and 12 animated videos to inform tenants about the safety standards they could expect in a privately-rented home. The website and the Reading Rent With Confidence Scheme would be launched early in 2022 and a further report would be submitted to the Committee.

Resolved -

- (1) That the report be noted;
- (2) That an update report be submitted to the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee meeting to be held on 10 March 2022.

19. THE CHARTER FOR SOCIAL HOUSING RESIDENTS - SOCIAL HOUSING WHITE PAPER

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which informed the Committee of the details of the Social Housing White Paper and the work that the Council was taking in response to the Paper. The following documents were appended to the report:

Appendix 1 - The Proposed Tenant Satisfaction Measures;

Appendix 2 - Current Proposed Reactive and Proactive Inspections.

The report set out seven commitments that Social Housing tenants could expect from their landlords at paragraph 4.2 and explained that the main aims of the White Paper were to ensure that tenants were treated with respect, listened to about their concerns and a fairer and safer system was established for all those living in social housing. The report also contained a table which set out the expectations listed in each of the commitments in the White Paper, and the current position in terms of additional legislative requirements and any Reading Borough Council responses where possible.

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Resolved: That the details of the Social Housing White Paper and the current position in terms of implementation be noted.

20. BUILDING SAFETY AND FIRE SAFETY NEW LEGISLATION

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing an update on the new Fire Safety Act 2021 and the Building Safety Bill. The report set out the main aspects of the legislation, the implications for Social Landlords and actions the Housing Service was taking in preparation for the implementation.

The report explained that the Safety Act 2021 amended the Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order 2005 and clarified that measures the responsible person or duty holder for multi-occupied (two or more sets of domestic properties) residential buildings must manage and reduce the risk of fire.

The report also explained that the Building Safety Bill 2020 would put in place an enhanced safety framework for high rise residential buildings including the introduction of a Building Safety Regulator. The new building safety regime would apply to high-rise residential buildings of 18 metres and above or more than six storeys (whichever was reached first).

The Housing Service's response to the legislation, which included reviewing current fire risk assessments and identifying the new properties that would require a fire risk assessment by virtue of having two or more sets of domestic properties in one building, was set out in the report.

Resolved: That the implications of the Fire Safety Act 2021 and the Building Safety Bill and the actions that the Housing Service was taking in preparation for their implementation be noted.

21. HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME REVIEW

Further to Minute 16 of the meeting held on 21 March 2021, the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which detailed Reading Borough Council's requirement to review its Allocations Scheme, including national and local drivers for change, the outcome of a consultation on the proposed changes, the subsequent recommended amendments made to the scheme and the timetable for their proposed implementation. The report explained that there had been 684 responses to the eight-week consultation exercise, which had been used to inform the proposed changes to the Scheme. The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1 Summary of consultation findings;
- Appendix 2 Allocations Scheme;
- Appendix 3 Equality Impact assessment.

The report set out the main proposed changes to the Scheme as follows:

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- Reading Borough Council tenants who wished to move would be awarded a level of priority even where their circumstances did not attract a Reasonable Preference priority, as outlined in the draft Allocations Scheme.
- An exception would be provided to the three-year residency criteria that was required to join the Housing Register, which would allow key workers supporting those that were providing essential services in Reading to have access to key worker accommodation in the town. It was proposed to ensure greater priority for this group through the creation of a quota queue, letting a number of properties each year.
- Applicants who had previously been evicted due to serious, threatening or violent behaviours which had not been addressed would not qualify for the Reading Borough Council housing register for a minimum period of five years and this period might be increased for up to 10 years on reasonable consideration of all the relevant facts.
- The number of priority bands to be reduced from six to five, made up of priority bands 1-4 and a further band where applications did not attract any priority for housing, reflecting the current scheme.
- The creation of a separate Adapted Housing Register for those applicants that required property adaptations.

The report proposed a phased implementation of the new scheme to allow for the changes to be implemented in the most effective way. Throughout 2022 the Housing Service would be implementing a new Housing IT system and it was proposed that different elements of the scheme be introduced in line with the implementation milestones.

Resolved:

- (1) That the findings from the Allocations Scheme Consultation be noted;
- (2) That the proposed changes to the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme as informed by the consultation be approved and the revised Allocation Scheme including the relevant changes be adopted;
- (3) That the influencing factors relating to implementation be noted and the timetable for delivery of the new scheme be agreed.

22. READING LIBRARIES: FUTURE STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2022-2025

Further to Minute 11 of the meeting held on 6 July 2021, the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which summarised the responses to recent libraries consultation on vision and strategy, proposed the adoption of key strategic priorities for the library service and the development of a strategy and delivery plan for Reading Libraries. The following documents were appended to the report:

- Appendix 1: Detailed findings from Consultation August - September 2021;
- Appendix 2: Library Consultation Survey Results in full;
- Appendix 3: Home Library Survey Results in full;
- Appendix 4: Equality Impact Assessment for Library Strategy 2022-2025.

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The report explained that officers had used the results of the consultation to identify five strategic priorities for the Library Service for 2022 to 2025:

- Supporting our communities as we recovered from the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Helping Children and Young People;
- Improving access to online services;
- Supporting improvement in Health, Wellbeing and Literacy;
- Bringing arts, culture and heritage into library spaces.

The report stated that the most regularly used services were book lending, rhymetime, e-books and the Summer Reading Challenge for children. Most service users wanted more online resources, computer coding clubs, spaces to create and use new technologies and community language and culture collections to be developed in the future. Overall the consultation showed strong agreement for the proposed strategic themes, with a particularly large number of additional comments focusing on the importance of the children's side of the library service. Officers would use that data provided by the consultation responses to inform the development of the new Library Delivery Plan.

Resolved:

- (1) That the outcome of the consultation activity be noted;
- (2) That the strategic priorities for the library service be adopted as follows:
 - Supporting our communities as we recovered from the Covid-19 pandemic;
 - Helping Children and Young People;
 - Improving access to online services;
 - Supporting improvement in Health, Wellbeing and Literacy;
 - Bringing arts, culture and heritage into library spaces;
- (3) That officers be authorised to develop a delivery plan for the library service, which was based upon and took into consideration the strategic priorities for the library service.

23. ENHANCED GRAFFITI REMOVAL PROJECT

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which gave an update on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding available in 2021/22 and a proposal to implement an enhanced graffiti removal policy to tackle graffiti not included within the current Graffiti Removal Policy. The report also sought approval to proceed with the proposed Enhanced Graffiti Removal Policy and to fully commit the available CIL funding to improve the Town's appearance. The following documents were appended to the report:

- Appendix 1: Current & Enhanced Graffiti Removal Policy;
- Appendix 2: Proposed list of Enhanced Additional Graffiti sites;
- Appendix 3: Financial Implications Report;
- Appendix 4: Street Art Advisory Panel.

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The report explained that the Council proposed that the available CIL funding be used to operate under the current policy guidelines - i.e. gain appropriate permissions to remove graffiti from private property but to increase the size of the free to remove to area from 1m² to 2m². This would allow for the removal of a maximum of 502 additional pieces of graffiti up to 2m², or multiples thereof to remove any reported graffiti over this size. These removals would then be recorded on the Love Clean Reading App. The Council would also make available 20 Community Removal Kits for allocation to local community groups who showed an interest to use on low level graffiti in their local area. These kits would include the necessary tools and safe chemicals needed to clean off the graffiti.

The report also explained that, following the visit of Banksy to Reading earlier this year, a strong desire from the community had been noted to keep valued street art, should it fit within the policy as set out above. Appendix 4 to the report set out a proposal to establish a Street Art Advisory Panel to consider and advise on how street art in Reading could be managed and how the definition of graffiti/street art could be updated to better support and inform artists.

Resolved:

- (1) That the current position on Graffiti Boroughwide and the available Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding in 2021/22 be noted;
- (2) That the Enhanced Graffiti Removal Policy set out in Appendices 1 & 2 of the report be approved;
- (3) That the immediate commencement of the Enhanced Graffiti Removal Policy approved;
- (4) That a Street Art Advisory Panel as set out in Appendix 4 to the report be set up.

24. ALLOTMENTS SELF MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Further to Minute 7 of the meeting held on 15 December 2020, the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that an update on the progress towards establishing self-management as an option for the Council's allotment sites. The report set out a summary of the progress made against the Allotments Action Plan, which had been attached at Appendix A, as follows:

Potential self-management groups: Since the publication of the consultation report, the Parks Team had provided active support and advice to groups or active individuals.

Site clearance and improvement: The Parks Team had made significant progress in clearing and levelling overgrown and abandoned plots.

Allotment Project Officer: A fixed term Project Officer had started work on 1 October 2021 to lead all aspects of the introduction of self-management in allotments and develop further the Allotments Plan.

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The report proposed that all elements of the Action Plan be progressed and that the completed allotment plan be submitted to the March 2022 meeting of the Committee for approval prior to implementation from 1 June 2022.

Resolved:

- (1) That the report be noted;**
- (2) That the Self-Management Allotment Plan be submitted to the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee meeting to be held on 10 March 2022;**
- (3) That self-management of allotments be introduced as an option from 1 June 2022.**

25. PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY 2036

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which presented an assessment of the current provision of sports pitches within the Borough and identified what the anticipated future demand in terms of quality and quantity of pitches would be by 2036 using Football Association methodology. The report identified a long-term level of provision for the Council to work towards.

The report explained that variation in demand would be experienced throughout the 15-year period, with changing age and gender mixes playing requiring a different mix and number of pitch sizes. Demand would be accommodated through regular reviews and amendments of the provision of pitches, moving towards the long term identified provision. The proposals in this strategy did not commit the Council or its partners to the funding, provision or management of sites, but the recommended actions would be used as a guide for investment, including via the Community Infrastructure Levy, other developers' contributions, and national governing body of sport funding. The level of provision and proposed action plan were identified in the following documents which were attached to the report:

Appendix 1 - Pitch provision 2020/21;

Appendix 2 - Recommended Site Action Plans 2019-2036.

The Committee considered key issues relating to the provision, allocation, maintenance and management of playing pitches, including:

- Variation in pitch quality across provider sectors;
- Need for consistent maintenance of pitches especially with regard to drainage and flooding;
- There would need to be a balance between the need for all-weather pitches and any negative environmental impact that they might have;
- Car parking at many sites was limited meaning that users would have to park in surrounding roads, thereby having an impact on local residents.
- Existing pitches were not necessarily located in the optimum places for usage by local communities, although the majority of sites were well-located in respect of public transport, often sited adjacent to key bus routes and stops.
- The effect on clubs as there would be a need to move clubs 'home' locations to meet the proposed 2036 pitch provision model. The re-allocation of pitches

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would be required to ensure adequate provision was maintained. The development of facilities would be dependent on available funding and changing demand over the years leading to 2036. Many clubs were also responsible for bookings of their own pitches.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Council endeavour to provide sufficient sports pitches, subject to available funding, to accommodate the predicted demand up to 2036 for Football, Cricket, Rugby, Hockey, Lacrosse, Gaelic Football and Australian Rules Football as identified in Table 8 and Table 9 of the report;**
- (2) That the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) laid out within the report be adopted, including the updated site action plan in Appendix 2, which was based upon research undertaken by sports provision consultants 4Global in 2019;**
- (3) That the action plan in Appendix 2 be reviewed every three years, including consultation with pitch users, to reflect changing demands through to 2036.**

(The meeting opened at 6.32pm and closed at 9.42pm).

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Agenda Item 3

COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP EXECUTIVE GROUP - 11 NOVEMBER 2021

Present:

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Steve Raffield | Thames Valley Police (Chair) |
| Cllr Jason Brock | Leader, RBC |
| Cllr Tony Page | Deputy Leader, RBC |
| Cllr Adele Barnett-Ward | Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities |
| Cllr Raj Singh | Observer, RBC |
| Jo Middlemass | Community Safety and Enablement Manager, RBC |
| Andrew Penrith | Thames Valley Police |
| Aaron Cheung | Thames Valley Police |
| Jeremy Oldroyd | Thames Valley Police, Victim Reduction Unit (VRU) |
| Zelda Wolfe | Assistant Director of Housing & Communities, RBC |
| Catherine Marriott | Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner |
| Vicky Rhodes | Director of Early Help, Brighter Futures for Children |
| Zoe Hanim | Reading Channel Panel, RBC |
| Joanne Anderson | Neighbourhood Initiatives Team Manager, RBC |
| Becky Pollard | Consultant, RBC |
| Kathryn Warner | PACT |
| Jaqueline Markie | Reading Magistrates? |
| Julie Quarmby | Committee Services, RBC |

Apologies:

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Seona Douglas | Executive Director of Social Care and Health, RBC |
| Deborah Glassbrook | Director of Children's Services Brighter Futures for Children |
| Nicola Bell | Manager, Willow Project |
| Carly Dagg | Reading Magistrates |
| Giles Allchurch | Youth Offender Service, BFFC |
| Natausha Van Vliet | PACT |
| Donna Gray | Safeguarding Children, Brighter Futures for Children |
| Gina Carpenter | Service Manager (Early Help, CATs), BFFC |

1. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 April 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

2. COMMUNITY SAFETY FUND

Jo Middlemass, RBC, gave a presentation on the Community Safety Fund allocation from the Police & Crime Commissioner for the period 2022-2015, which detailed the historical background to the grant and its allocation between the Thames Valley Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) and explained that a new formula for funding had been introduced which would reduce the funding for Reading CSP over the next three years:

| 2021-22 | 2022-23 | 2023-24 | 2014-25 |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| £453,128 | £373,411 | £293,694 | £213,977 |

The presentation also covered the new Police & Crime Commissioner's priorities and intention to continue to approve funding based on spend proposals being in line with the PCC's new Police & Criminal Justice Plan, and the current CSP priorities. The presentation set out key issues for the CSP including the need to review how the funding would be allocated moving forward and the requirement under the partnership's Terms of Reference to review future allocations every

November, which could provide an opportunity to consider aligning the allocations to the CSP priorities. The current CSP Plan was due to end in 2022 so a new plan would be written following the completion of a new Strategic Assessment. In the meantime, the budget would remain the same for the first six months of 2022-23, until the new Plan had been agreed to allow sufficient time for planning.

AGREED:

- (1) That Jo Middlemass submit a report setting out a review of the current allocations and recommendations for future allocations to the CSP meeting to be held on 3 February 2022, following completion of the CSP Strategic Assessment and draft three-year CSP Plan;
- (2) That the Chair of the CSP write to the service leads/commissioners for the four areas in receipt of the current funding to advise that a review was to be undertaken;
- (3) The CSP budget and allocations remain as is for the first six months of the financial year 2022-23.

3. COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT PROPOSALS

Jo Middlemass reported that there had not been a robust assessment of the strategic aims of the CSP for several years and that the changes to funding would provide a good opportunity to revisit the aims. The assessment would look at all of the crime and disorder elements in Reading, including total numbers, number per population, types, unseen and unrecorded crimes alongside health data and information provided by support services. This data would then be used to identify the most appropriate methods to reduce crime and disorder. The Partnership noted that the assessment would need both hard and soft data, including qualitative data from sources such as the Community Safety Survey, Thames Valley Police and Crimestoppers, to ensure that the priorities and aims were up to date.

AGREED: That the position be noted.

4. SERIOUS VIOLENCE

Jo Middlemass gave a presentation on the Serious Crime Duty, which was being introduced as part of the Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Bill 2021. The Duty included a number of measures aimed at protecting the public by giving the police the tools needed to tackle crime and disorder, and by addressing the root causes of serious violent crime using multi agency approaches to prevention.

The presentation covered how the Duty was expected to work in practice, funding, the roles of the Violence Reduction Units and Community Safety Partnerships and the timescales. Jo explained that the Reading CSP had already started to take action, including:

- Establishment of a Serious Violence Steering Group (SVSG);
- The Terms of Reference to be signed off and membership finalised for the SVSG;
- Support would be provided by Reading Borough Council's Community Partnerships Service. The Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit had provided £40k to the nine place-based partnerships, including Reading to support preparation for the duty;
- Reading was using this funding to complement Safer Streets funding and provide a post to support the CSP with delivery of these areas of work;
- It was suggested that this be included within the CSP's overarching Strategic Needs Assessment, rather than having a separate assessment;

- The One Reading Partnership had begun work through its workstreams which would support these activities;
- A number of initiatives had been funded by the VRU, including Hospital Navigators.

AGREED:

- That the commissioning of the Strategic Needs assessment be supported;
- That the Serious Violence Steering Group report into the Community Safety Partnership Executive Group;
- That the Community Safety Partnership Chair write to all partners asking for the support for the Steering Group and to request their input into the Strategic Needs Assessment;
- That the strategy and plan be signed off by the Community Safety Partnership;
- That a bi-annual report be submitted to the Community Safety Partnership, which would set out progress of the plan.

5. DOMESTIC HOMICIDE REVIEW

Jo Middlemass reported that she had been informed that there would be a need for a domestic homicide review. She noted that there was no CSP funding to pay for an independent Chair for the review, and that she would be speaking to other CSP's about how they funded reviews.

AGREED: That the position be noted.

6. PREVENT UPDATE

Further to Minute 6 of the meeting held on 22 April 2021, Zoe Hanim, Prevent Lead and Chair of Reading Channel Panel, gave a presentation introducing the Draft Prevent Action Plan which set out key points, including:

- Prevent governance in Reading, including details of the partners involved in the Reading Prevent Management Group;
- Counter terrorism local profile and risk assessment;
- The four Community Cohesion indicators: English language proficiency, economic inactivity, residential segregation and migration levels;
- Community insight;
- The Reading Prevent Action Plan including the objectives, actions to achieve the objectives, timescales and key dates and responsible officers.

The CSP noted that the further work that was being undertaken on community engagement generally would be useful in helping the Prevent agenda to become part of broader Safeguarding. The CSP also noted that there was a need for careful communications to engage people in lower-risk areas and that there was no additional funding available for this.

AGREED:

- (1) That the presentation be noted;
- (2) That the Action Plan for the coming year be agreed and that it be monitored via the Community Safety Partnership.

7. EXTRA FAMILIAL HARM STRATEGY

Vicky Rhodes, Brighter Futures for Children, gave a presentation on the Extra Familial Harm Strategy which was linked to the One Reading Adolescent Risk Strategic Group, reporting into the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership. The Strategy set out the types of harm: Child Sexual Exploitation, Criminal Exploitation, Missing Children, Gang Affiliation, County Lines and Serious Youth Violence and the actions that would be taken to address these.

Vicky explained that local data had been collected from various sources, including listening to young people themselves. The current number of young people at risk, while small, was growing steadily, with the greatest area of risk being drug related. There was also a disproportionate number of young people with SEND or ECHP. The Strategy aimed to identify young people at risk earlier, using a consistent approach. The Strategy set out the priority areas and the ways in which the partnership agencies would need to work in order to achieve the three aims of Predict, Prevent and Divert. The presentation also set out the next steps to be taken to progress the Strategy including finalising the actions plan, setting up the relevant workstreams, developing a Young Person's version and seeking endorsement from the CSP.

The Group discussed the presentation and raised the following points:

- It was important to capture the voice of the child, especially as many of those at risk were reluctant to engage with services;
- A recent project to help pupils with speech and language difficulties had proved successful not only for the pupils involved but for the whole school community as the levels of disruption had decreased, and this model could be helpful in Reading;
- The Choices Programme, where Y5 to Y8 students could use story book characters to practice making decisions on behalf of a third person could also be used in Reading Schools.

AGREED:

- (1) That the Strategy be endorsed;
- (2) That updates be submitted to the Community Safety Partnership.

8. SAFER STREETS UPDATE

AGREED: That Jo Middlemass circulate the update, and that any questions be directed to her.

9. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Future meetings for 2021/22 would take place on:

3 February 2022

21 April 2022

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

(The meeting commenced at 9.30 am and closed at 12.03 pm)

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

| | | | |
|-------------------------|---|-------------------|--|
| TO: | HOUSING NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE | | |
| DATE: | 10 MARCH 2022 | | |
| TITLE: | READING, PLACE OF CULTURE EVALUATION REPORT | | |
| LEAD COUNCILLOR: | CLLR ROWLAND | PORTFOLIO: | CULTURE HERITAGE AND RECREATION |
| SERVICE: | CULTURE | WARDS: | ALL |
| LEAD OFFICER: | ZSUZSI LINDSAY | TEL: | 07773 193 215 |
| JOB TITLE: | CULTURAL PLACEMAKING OFFICER | E-MAIL: | Zsuzsi.lindsay@reading.gov.uk |

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Reading's Great Place Scheme - 'Reading, Place of Culture' -was jointly led and delivered by Reading Borough Council, Reading UK Community Interest Company (CIC) and the University of Reading.
- 1.2 Running from 2018 to 2020 (and extending into 2021 because of Covid), it aimed to foster a culture of collaboration across sectors.
- 1.3 The Great Place Scheme was a collaboration between Arts Council England, Historic England and the Heritage Lottery - and Reading was one of 16 areas to be awarded 'Great Places' status in England.
- 1.4 The Programme included almost 500 events and reached a total audience of over 43,000 people, despite delivery being heavily affected by the Covid 19 pandemic in the last year. It was delivered through four key strands: The Festivals Strand, The Cultural Commissioning Programme, The Research Programme and The Culture and Business Engagement Strand.
- 1.5 The report assesses the findings in five key areas, and presents some conclusions and recommended legacy action that have been used to create an action plan that can be found in section 5 of this document. These findings include:
 - Developing strategic partnerships explores how arts, culture and heritage are represented in Reading at a strategic level.
 - Increasing arts, culture and heritage engagement looks at the targeting of new audiences and barriers to engagement.
 - Changing pride and perceptions of Reading's cultural offer addresses how the Programme developed a sense of belonging among Reading's communities.
 - Strengthening the arts, culture and heritage sector considers the ways in which the Programme helped develop the sector.
 - Creating evidence, tools and models to show the value of culture demonstrates how research was central to Reading, Place of Culture and its legacy.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1 To note the successes of the Reading, Place of Culture project (Great Places Funding) set out in paragraph section 4

2.2 To agree the action plan set out in section 4.9 and to delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Culture in consultation with the Lead Member for Culture, Heritage and Recreation to incorporate the actions within existing or emerging delivery plans.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 Reading was awarded £558,400 through the Great Places Scheme for delivery of outcomes from 2017 to 2021 of the Reading, Place of Culture project (RPoC). The project aimed to foster a culture of collaboration across sectors - where caring for, and engaging, people is achieved in partnership between the public, private and voluntary sectors, and specifically targeting health and mental wellbeing and employment outcomes. In doing this, the Programme would enable Reading to enhance its cultural offer, drive economic growth, and improve the quality of life for people in Reading.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Current Position

4.2 **The Festivals Strand:** This strand was initially delivered through Reading Thames Festival a programme of events developed to celebrate Reading's waterways. It built on its successful debut in 2017 with two years of autumn Programme delivery in 2018 and 2019.

Successes and Outcomes:

- Celebrated Reading's unique identity, encouraged community engagement and presented new works of performing arts, design, literature, moving image, visual arts and popular culture.
- Following a review in 2019, the decision was taken to support Reading's existing festival offer rather than simply run one Festival. This led to the set up of the Reading Festivals Group (now Reading Independent Festivals Forum or RIFF), 17 existing festival organisations in Reading.
- The Reading Culture Live website developed in response to Covid 19. Funding and collating online activities and events with the local arts sector.
- Conducted research was done on the impacts of Covid 19 on the Reading Arts, Culture and Heritage (ACH) sector, and funding was allocated to develop the RIFF.

4.3 **The Cultural Commissioning Programme:** The Programme encouraged local organisations to develop cross-sector partnerships to engage communities in the most deprived areas of Reading in arts, culture and/or heritage programmes. It aimed to demonstrate the ability of culture to deliver key social outcomes, (including Health and Wellbeing, Employment, Social Inclusion) in two ways:

1. Making public service budget holders more aware of the potential for ACH organisations to deliver cultural activities that met their strategic priorities.
2. Enabling the ACH and voluntary sectors to better engage with these public sector services.

Below are two case studies that demonstrate how this was achieved:

CASE STUDY 1: Action Media: Untold Stories

Partners: Starting Point, Real Time and ToolShed.

Participants: Young people who are (or who are at risk of becoming) NEET - not in education, employment or training - and/or neurodiverse.

What happened:

Work experience within a creative industry - creative workshops, work placements, documentary production. Partnership working with ToolShed. Online learning.

Successes and outcomes:

- Real-world work experience for participants helped increase workplace readiness - they learnt new skills and used existing strengths in new ways
- Easier for participants to get the experience and evidence to undertake the accreditation in a non-formal way
- Enabled participants to reflect on their growth and develop a sense of achievement on a regular basis
- Opportunity to learn from peers led to growth in confidence, levels of motivation and work-ready skills

CASE STUDY 2: Life Stories

Partners: Age UK Berkshire and the Museum of English Rural Life.

Participants: Older lonely and socially isolated residents.

What happened:

Share stories in groups, and one-to-one, using photos, art, music, crafts etc. Used as a way of furthering engagement.

Covid 19 context meant adapting by running a small virtual group, one-to-one activity and moving workshops online.

Successes and outcomes:

- Taking part has increased the quality of discussions the participants are having with family and friends
- Demonstrated strong communication links among the partners based on underlying shared values on approaches and techniques
- Staff and volunteer upskilling

4.4 The Research Strand: This University of Reading led on this strand, setting up the Whitley Researchers and co-producing the research. It aimed to create a way to engage the whole community, but particularly geared towards the needs of Reading's diverse communities.

Success and Outcomes:

- Engaged and involved communities in conducting their own research.
- Piloted innovative ways of exploring local resident's lived experiences of culture and heritage, as well as understanding their views on health and wellbeing.
- The research informed the cultural commissioning, festival programmes and evaluation frameworks.
- Developed a 'Young Researchers' team at John Madejski Academy and other local schools. They created visual methods and interactive community events to explore young people's ideas around art, heritage and place.

4.5 The Culture and Business Engagement Strand: This strand aimed to further develop the relationships between the business community and cultural organisations to support key economic development aims and delivery of Reading's long-term 2050 Vision.

Success and Outcome:

- The winter 'Twilight Trail' started in 2020 to support community and business engagement and to responsibly drive footfall to the town centre. It will return in 2021 to support economic recovery and engagement with arts organisations.

4.6 Reach and Engagement

The reach and engagement of the project broadly reflects Reading's population which at the 2011 census which was 75% White British or White Other. The audience and participants were mainly adults aged between 20 and 50, although the proportion of children will be inaccurate due to difficulties in collecting data from children. This reflects the intentions of the programme in focusing on Reading but also changing perceptions more widely.

Successes and Outcomes:

- 25,000 People were reached through the live events programme.
- 18,796 people were reached online.
- Audiences were 57% female, 41% male.
- Half the audience were White British, with another 28% white other and just under 10% each of Black or Black British, or Asian or Asian British ethnicity.
- As can be seen from the map below most audience members came from Reading, but with wider reach into the surrounding counties. This reflects the aim of the programme to focus on Reading but change perceptions of the town more widely.



4.7 Overall Outcomes and Successes of the Project: Despite the logistical, social and economic impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic - which has seriously affected delivery of every Strand of the programme - there have been outcomes across five different theme areas:

- **Developing strategic partnerships:** Programme partners have strengthened their commitment and knowledge of how to build partnerships in ACH. Strong partnerships have formed and are already showing their value. An effective approach to including local voice in commissioning has been modelled.
- **Increasing arts, culture and heritage engagement:** A high-quality cultural offer for the town has been produced, shared and promoted. Extensive research has identified barriers to engagement and how to overcome them, which has fed into action plans and strategies. Communities are better connected to cultural organisations, institutions and service providers in Reading, and empowered to better shape social outcomes.
- **Increasing pride and perceptions of Reading's offer:** Extensive research and trialling of approaches has highlighted the potential for changing perceptions of Reading's ACH offer among local businesses and visitors. This can be built on through partnerships developed through the Programme.
- **Strengthening the arts, culture and heritage sector:** The sector has gained skills, networks and confidence in engaging with non-arts commissioning, as well as developing lasting partnerships between ACH and non-arts organisations which will continue.
- **Creating evidence, tools and models to show the value of culture:** The Programme has developed skills, models, tools and evidence of the value of ACH in delivering on broad agendas, creating buy-in from many sectors for ACH approaches and partnerships.

- **The benefits of cross partner and cross-project working:** It is particularly notable how the outcomes of each Strand interrelate. The greatest benefit comes when the delivery and aims of more than one Strand, or more than one partner, come together. The Programme experience has given the partners more confidence and inspiration for new partnerships and projects and has developed wider cross-sector partnerships. These build on the local arts, culture and heritage offer as a driver for placemaking and social impacts in Reading.

4.8 Project Legacy and Learnings: The learnings from this project will be fed into a culture and heritage action plan to ensure that they are not lost and can be used to inspire future partnership projects and commissions.

- **Involving the whole community:** A large amount of the value has arisen from the involvement of both smaller arts, culture and heritage organisations and organisations working in health, social care and training. Alongside core project partners and larger ACH bodies, these smaller and non-ACH sector organisations are crucial partners for the future delivery of a strategic approach to culture in the town.
- **Listening, adapting and building in diverse views from the start:** The projects and activities which had most traction in reaching diverse audiences, or in sustaining delivery through the pandemic, were built on solid foundations of shared trust, respect and listening. Coupled with reflection and evaluation, this will develop lasting partnerships for delivery and change.
- **The value of a research-led approach to planning and strategy:** As well as supporting evaluation and consultation, the work of the Whitley Researchers within the Programme has highlighted how research can be used in planning and effecting change.
- **Time and support to shift approaches and attitudes:** Despite the huge value of the new models of co-commissioning, co-delivery and evaluating impact to the sector, it shouldn't be forgotten how much time this takes. This is hard to resource in a normal project cycle. Funding and advice will be needed to ensure that the whole ACH sector is able to implement the extensive learning from the project.
- **Information sharing is a necessity:** Research has shown a need for improved information sharing. This could be organisations networking and sharing plans to facilitate co-programming; making sure audiences know what's on and are aware of the value and relevance of the offer; sharing successes and good practice; and facilitating greater engagement. This should include individuals and organisations knowing what opportunities are available - such as commissioning and funding pots - as well as how they can get involved.
- **A town-wide approach would create clarity:** The most useful way to frame 'Reading, Place of Culture' is as a catalyst for wider change. This recognises the wider agendas and pressures - understanding the aim is to be putting processes in place for change rather than achieving all the changes desired. There is also a need for a clear strategy for culture for Reading, one that is an integral part of the wider placemaking, economic growth, environmental, health and social needs of the town.

4.9 Options Proposed

Reading, Place of Culture has clearly had a lasting impact on Reading, with legacy likely to remain and impact development of the sector for several years. This is an important point for the Programme, as with commitment to embedding learning and continuing the elements which work, there is potential for a step change in how Reading perceives itself and is

perceived as a Place of Culture. Below is the proposed Action Plan based on Reading Place of Culture Legacy Outcomes.

| Theme | Action | Priority | Timeline |
|----------------------------|--|---------------|---------------------------|
| Strong strategic legacy | 1. We will collaborate with a range of strategically aligned sectors and organisations to shape the future 3 year delivery plan 2022-25 for Reading's Culture and Heritage Strategy. As part of this development we will restructure the Culture and Heritage networks, partnerships and panels, and listen to the local voices that they represent. | High | 2022/23 |
| | 2. We will continue the commitment to partnerships, particularly ensuring these include sectors responsible for delivering against health and wellbeing and social inclusion outcomes. These social outcomes will be embedded across all culture projects and events within RBC and standard evaluation will be fixed to measure success against these outcomes. | High | 2022/23 |
| | 3. We will include community voices in cultural commissioning and consultation – building on what has been achieved – and publicise the work already done to build more confidence around community involvement. | High | 2022/23 |
| | 4. We will work with partners to better understand the barriers to engagement in ACH and identify actions to overcome them through Culture Networks, Groups and Partnerships. | High | 2022/23 |
| Legacy delivery approaches | 5. Promote Reading as a place where culture is valued as part of the overall place marketing, particularly by capitalising on the power of the Reading Festivals Group and the festivals 'brand' and ensuring that culture has a place at 'the table' when borough wide strategies are developed. | High | 2022/23 |
| | 6. We will share information and promote networks across all communities through a variety of channels including social media, What's On Reading and other one-stop information sources. | Medium | 2022/23 |
| | 7. Subject to funding, develop an ongoing programme of co-commissioning of cultural projects to deliver social impact. Partner with funders and strategic delivery partners from non-ACH sectors to deliver on multiple priorities. Move beyond current partners into new communities and groups. | High | Subject to funding |

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|---------------|---------------------------|
| | 8. Further publicise and share learning locally and nationally – for example, through conferences, workshops, accessible case studies and 'how-to' guides – to further support Reading's placemaking agenda. | Medium | 2022/23 |
| Legacy of research and learning | 9. Build requirements to evidence impact into all future cultural commissioning to build further on the legacy and continue the learning process. | High | Subject to funding |
| | 10. Subject to funding, commission further research on the value of the sector in the town – for example an economic impact or a social return on investment study –to broaden potential interest and the range of funders for ACH. Ideally working with the Whitley Researchers to develop this research. | Low | Subject to funding |

4.10 Other Options Considered

Now the project has concluded one option is to continue working in the way we have since the funding started, however this risks the legacy of the project not being embedded and further development of the sector and how it can contribute to wider agenda not happening in a planned or sustained way.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The purpose of this section is to ensure that proposals contained in reports support the Council's vision and Corporate Plan priorities:

Reading Borough Council's vision is:

To help Reading realise its potential - and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success.

5.2 How the project contributed to the Corporate Plan Themes:

Healthy environment

- N/A

Thriving Communities

- This project researched the barriers to engagement in arts and culture that our diverse communities face these will be carried across to inform future culture projects.
- Captured the voice of underrepresented members of the community and built commissions around their needs.
- Delivered projects with social inclusion and employment outcomes.
- Reached diverse communities' representative of the makeup of Reading as of the 2011 Census.
- Invested funding in the voluntary and community sectors to deliver against strategic targets.
- Prioritised the needs of the most marginalised and vulnerable groups of our community.
- Developed projects around the effects of the pandemic, specifically health and mental wellbeing outcomes.

Inclusive economy

- The continuation of many of these projects has led to further training and development opportunities for SEND and NEET young people.
- Develop legacy actions from Reading: Place of Culture project and produce financially sustainable delivery plan.
- Work with strategic leaders of Reading's creative industries to Shape the future 3 year delivery plan 2022-25 for Reading's Culture and Heritage Strategy to align with the funding approach of ACE/HLF/HE and the council's cultural placemaking ambitions and incorporate legacy actions from Reading, Place of Culture⁴. Covid Response and Recovery

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no environmental or climate implications arising from this report. However it is worth noting for future projects that sustainability is now a prominent theme in most funders' funding criteria. This will become an important thread to include in future outcomes and ensure that it is embedded into the deliverables of any culture project.

- 6.2 In addition page 35 R13 of the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy states ‘Plastics: Zero waste and circular festivals’ as an action with the associated target ‘All of Reading’s festivals to have a statement or page describing their approach to sustainability on their website’. This will form part of the Reading Independent Festivals Forum Action Plan.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 The key priorities have been developed through research led by local arts and community organisations, as well as the Reading University. This research was collated and analysed by MBA Associates.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 *Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—*
- *eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;*
 - *advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;*
 - *foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.*
- 8.2 *The recommendations arising from this report will not have a differential impact on: racial groups; gender; people with disabilities; people of a particular sexual orientation; people due to their age; people due to their religious belief; and the Armed Forces community.*

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 No legal implications arise from the recommendations in this report.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 No financial implications arise from the recommendations in this report. Future developments in this area would be subject to funding approval.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 There are no background papers for this report.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TEMPLATE

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

1. Revenue Implications

Use this Table in the report or as an Appendix to set out the revenue implications:

| | 2021/22 £000 | 2022/23 £000 | 2023/24 £000 |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Employee costs (see note1) | | | |
| Other running costs | | | |
| Capital financings costs | | | |
| Expenditure | | | |
| Income from: | | | |
| Fees and charges (see note2) | | | |
| Grant funding (specify) | | | |
| Other income | | | |
| Total Income | | | |
| Net Cost(+)/saving (-) | | | |

The net cost of the proposal can be funded from (specify service and approved cost centre budget).

Note 1: Specifying any one off early retirement and redundancy costs. With regard to early retirement costs set out capitalised pension cost and pay back period in a separate paragraph.

Note 2: In a separate table/appendix set out detailed fees and charges proposals and sensitivity analysis.

2. Capital Implications

| Capital Programme reference from budget book: page line | 2021/22 £000 | 2022/23 £000 | 2023/24 £000 |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Proposed Capital Expenditure | | | |
| Funded by | | | |
| Grant (specify) | | | |
| Section 106 (specify) | | | |
| Other services | | | |
| Capital Receipts/Borrowing | | | |
| Total Funding | | | |

Note: where more than one option /proposal is being made it may be easier to set out the above information in an Appendix.

3. Value for Money (VFM)

Given the continuing need to demonstrate VFM please include evidence that the proposal offers VFM (e.g benchmarking data)

4. Risk Assessment.

Include relevant comments around any key financial risks associated with the proposal(s)

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

| | | | |
|-------------------------|--|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| TO: | HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS & LEISURE COMMITTEE | | |
| DATE: | 10 MARCH 2022 | | |
| TITLE: | LOW CARBON HOUSING ACTION PLANS | | |
| LEAD COUNCILLOR: | CLLR EMBERSON | PORTFOLIO: | HOUSING |
| SERVICE: | HOUSING & COMMUNITIES | WARDS: | ALL |
| LEAD OFFICER: | ZELDA WOLFLE | TEL: | 0118 937 2285 |
| JOB TITLE: | ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF HOUSING & COMMUNITIES | E-MAIL: | zelda.wolfle@reading.gov.uk |

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 In July 2021 a report was presented to HNL Committee entitled ‘Low Carbon Homes - Key Issues and Challenges’ which set out details of the scale of the challenge to reduce emissions from Reading’s housing stock in line with the ‘net zero by 2030’ ambition set out in the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy. The report proposed the development of Low Carbon Housing Action Plans for (i) RBC housing stock and (ii) private sector housing to be brought back to HNL by March 2022. This report therefore presents these action plans for endorsement by the Committee.

- 1.2 One of the most important contribution Reading Borough Council can make to reducing domestic carbon emissions, which make up almost 40% of Reading’s total, is to improve the energy efficiency of its own housing stock. This is because (i) it is a significant source of emissions in its own right (the Council owns about 10% of the housing stock in Reading) (ii) it can stimulate local supply chains and skills (iii) it has a role to lead by example, demonstrating to other property owners in social and private sectors how emissions from housing can be reduced. The Council’s influence over, and the resources it has available to devote to, improvement of its own housing are significantly greater than it can devote to the private sector, and this is reflected in the relative scope of the Action Plans. Reading’s climate emergency declaration made clear that additional powers and resources would be needed from Government to enable the achievement of net zero by 2030, and private sector retrofit remains one of the key policy areas where this remains the case.

- 1.3 Appendices to this report are as follows (i) Appendix 1: Low Carbon Housing Action Plan for RBC housing (ii) Appendix 2: Low Carbon Housing Action Plan for private sector.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the contents of Appendix 1 (Low Carbon Housing Action Plan for RBC housing) and Appendix 2 (Low Carbon Housing Action Plan for private sector) and endorse both Action Plans.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 With domestic emissions accounting for almost 40% of Reading's total carbon footprint, reducing emissions from the housing sector has been identified as a key strategic priority in meeting both national and local 'net zero' ambitions. The Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25 (endorsed by Policy Committee in November 2020) commits to the goal of a 'net zero Reading by 2030' and identifies (i) housing retrofit and (ii) building new homes to zero carbon standards as key priorities. RBC's Housing Strategy 2020-25 (endorsed by Policy Committee in September 2020) aligns with the Climate Emergency Strategy.
- 3.2 Most housing in Reading does not meet the standards required to support the net zero by 2030 ambition, although RBC's own housing performs significantly better than the national average, with an average EPC rating of 'C' compared to the national average of 'D', and an average Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) energy efficiency rating of 74, higher than the national average for all housing of 65 and for social housing of 69.
- 3.3 Policies are in place via the Reading Local Plan to ensure that new housing does not add unduly to Reading's 'carbon footprint', and RBC is leading by example with high standards in its own new housing designs. However, the challenges of retrofitting Reading's existing housing stock (both RBC housing and non-RBC housing) are significant and currently beyond local means to resource. Fuel poverty remains a key concern and a growing one in view of anticipated increases in energy prices in 2022.
- 3.3 The Reading Climate Emergency Strategy and the Council's Housing Strategy set out the high-level commitment to develop housing retrofit across Reading, and the Action Plans proposed in this report take forward this commitment in more detail.

4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 **Current Position:** the Housing Strategy makes a strong commitment to the headline aims and actions set out in the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25 and the Action Plans in this report elaborate on these.
- 4.2 **Options Proposed:** a number of initiatives are already underway which are moving Reading in the right direction. The challenge is to increase the scale and impact of these initiatives in line with the 'net zero by 2030' ambition. The proposed Low Carbon Housing Action Plans for both RBC housing stock and for the private sector will therefore supplement the Council's Housing Strategy 2020-25 and provide a more detailed road map for the Council's activity in this important policy area. Funding a programme of the scale required remains the key challenge but by combining our own resources with grant funding we can begin to scale up existing efforts.
- 4.3 **Other Options Considered:** the alternative would be to not produce these action plans, but this would be unlikely to provide the detail and direction for the Council's efforts to reduce emissions from housing in Reading

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The recommendations in this report align with Corporate Plan priorities as follows:
- **Healthy Environment:** reducing emissions from housing is an essential element in delivering corporate plan commitments to a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.
 - **Thriving Communities:** good quality, affordable and sustainable housing is an integral part of a thriving community, and the report illustrates how action in this area can contribute to this aim.

- Inclusive Economy: there are significant economic opportunities arising from the activity required to reduce emissions from the housing sector in Reading which are outlined in the report.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 One of the main purposes of the action plans is to have a positive impact on the Environment and Climate, both locally and in a wider context. The positive impact would be achieved through the reduction of carbon produced in heating, lighting, maintaining and redeveloping the Council's housing stock. Increasing insulation levels, controlling ventilation, and decarbonising the heating of the stock are all the intended outcomes of the programmes outlined in the report to reduce energy consumption as a whole and to cut out, as much as possible, creating of carbon in the running of the stock.
- 6.2 The aim regarding other reduction of environmental impacts will be to: reduce the number of vehicle journeys required to maintain the stock; to enable and encourage the use of low carbon vehicles for necessary journeys, both through the Council's own fleet and provision of vehicle charging points, allowing tenants to choose low carbon vehicles.
- 6.3 In addition, we are working with suppliers and contractors to reduce carbon emissions at all levels within the supply chain. We are looking for ways to cut waste and other damaging practices, such as single-use plastics. We are promoting the use of materials from sustainable or recycled sources and improving the incidence of recycling at the end of life. We are aiming to embed carbon within buildings with the increased use of sustainable timber where this is not detrimental to lifespan and would not considerably increase maintenance requirements.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 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". The Housing Strategy and the Climate Emergency Strategy were both the subject of consultation. The outcomes of these consultations have informed this Report and the development of the proposed Low Carbon Housing Action Plans.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 It is not considered that the decision will have a differential impact on: racial groups; gender; people with disabilities; people of a particular sexual orientation; people due to their age; people due to their religious belief and therefore no Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is relevant to the decision. That said, efforts to address fuel poverty, which are described in the report, should generally have positive equalities impacts given the relationship between fuel poverty, disadvantage and some groups with protected characteristics.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The main legal implications arising from this report relate to the Council's regulatory functions with respect to private sector housing. These arise primarily in relation to the enforcement of the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards for private landlords.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Considerable investment has taken place to enable RBC housing stock to be relatively energy efficient compared to the national average, the investment required to bring

it up to a standard compatible with the 'net zero by 2030' target would still be very significant. In broad terms it is estimated that a total investment of c£210m would be required to achieve the maximum potential carbon reduction currently available for RBC's housing stock. Although it is not possible to put exact values on what can be achieved at this stage, the £210m investment was calculated by applying as many measures as are currently readily available. The result of energy efficiency improvements in terms of banding, depends in many ways as to what the starting point is.

- 10.2 While there may be future opportunities to attract grant, at present government schemes are targeted at raising the EPC rating of properties to band 'C'. As this is already the average for RBC properties, the Council's ability to benefit from these schemes is limited.
- 10.3 Approximately £60m is already built in to the 30-year Asset Management Plan as expenditure up until 2030 (e.g. for window replacements or central heating upgrades already identified as required prior to 2030 which form part of enhancing energy efficiency standards). This still means, however, that meeting the 'net zero by 2030' target for RBC housing stock would require an additional investment of c£21m per year over and above the average £16m total annual budget currently identified for the entire maintenance and refurbishment budget. The cost of achieving 'net zero by 2030' is therefore beyond the means of the Council alone, and this remains an area where the need for additional support from Government will remain paramount.
- 10.4 The financial implications arising from the proposed Low Carbon Housing Action Plans which are the subject of this report are factored into the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan. It is difficult to identify precisely the total expenditure which will contribute to carbon reduction from RBC housing stock within this, as it is spread across many budget lines for both capital and revenue expenditure, and many fabric improvements will have the effect of reducing energy use and/or emissions even if that is not their primary purpose. However, by identifying major retrofit projects within the current HRA business plan, we can say with confidence that the Council will be committing a minimum of £34 million over the period 2022-2027 to furthering the objectives set out in these Action Plans.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 There are none.

APPENDIX 1:

LOW CARBON HOUSING ACTION PLAN FOR RBC HOUSING & PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING

1. BACKGROUND

The Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25 and the Council's Housing Strategy 2020-25 both identify housing retrofit as a key priority in realising the Climate Emergency Strategy's vision for a 'net zero carbon, resilient Reading by 2030'. In July 2021 the Council committed to the development of Low Carbon Housing Action Plans for the Council's housing stock, and for the private sector respectively. These Action Plan take forward that commitment in relation to the Council's housing stock, which represents about 10% of the total housing stock for Reading, and private sector housing.

The Council has a long-track record of investment in the fabric of its housing stock which has improved energy efficiency. The Council also has a more recent track record of building new housing to high energy standards, so the Action Plan builds on this by setting out key actions to be taken between now and the end of the period covered by the Climate Emergency and Housing Strategies (2025).

2. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES

The Low Carbon Housing Action Plans seek to take forward three related objectives:

- A reduction in carbon emissions
- A reduction in fuel poverty
- An improvement in security of energy supply

To give an example of how these objectives relate to each other, by investing in energy efficiency in RBC housing we can tackle fuel poverty by reducing the amount of energy tenants are paying for whilst improving security of supply and reducing emissions in the process. Not all interventions will address all three objectives at the same time but if we can identify actions which do address all three the case for investment will be strengthened.

3. FORMAT OF THE ACTION PLANS

The Action Plans identify action at a reasonably high level, much of which sits within the remit of the Housing & Communities Service. Further detail on how these actions will be taken forward will therefore be included in the annual Housing & Communities Service Plan and the Annual Programme of Works which is reported to HNL Committee each year. The structure of the Action Plans is informed by the headings identified in the UK Green Building Council's 'Retrofit Playbook' which has been used by other local authorities to shape their approach to this policy area. However, the Low Carbon Action Plan for RBC Housing covers new build homes as well as retrofit so there is not a direct read across to the Playbook headings. The Playbook does, however, present a menu of options for local authorities to consider, and this has been instructive in developing the Action Plan.

The Action Plans therefore sets out

- (i) Principles which will inform the Council's approach in relation to:
 - New build (RBC housing and private sector housing)
 - Existing housing (RBC housing and private sector housing)
- (ii) A table summarising the actions comprising:

- The key policy area within which the actions sit
- Summary of the specific action
- Details of teams/officers responsible for delivering the action
- Approximate timescale for delivery of the action

4. PRINCIPLES INFORMING THE ACTION PLANS

4.1 RBC new build

RBC has sought to set an example for new housing in the Borough by adopting high standards in its own developments and applying Passivhaus principles, as exemplified by the principles adopted for the Wensley Road development in Coley, namely:

- All dwellings designed to Passivhaus principles, achieving space heating consumption of less than 15 kWh/m²/per year (a key requirement for Passivhaus design)
- A communal wet distribution heating network for space heating and hot water provision to dwellings, supplied from a central air source heat pump (ASHP);
- Individual ASHPs serving space heating and hot water to each townhouse;
- Solar PV panels on house and apartment block rooftops for renewable electricity;
- The intention to achieve the zero-carbon homes policy via on-site measures rather than relying on carbon offsetting payments to reduce emissions to zero.

Key design themes for RBC new-build include:

- Locking in carbon as part of the design process
- Maximum levels of insulation and triple-glazing as standard
- Properties to be designed with 'heat sinks' to retain embedded heat
- Minimise air leakage through design
- Deployment of Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR) accompanied by education of tenants on its necessity and appropriate use
- Increased deployment of solar PV
- Explore use of battery storage technology
- Explore thermo-solar options and the ability to link existing heating/hot water systems
- Application of passivhaus principles
- EV charging to be incorporated

4.2 RBC retrofit

The Council recognises that refurbishment rather than replacement of existing, good quality homes provides an opportunity to make vast savings in terms of embodied carbon of new construction materials. This is particularly true for a large, well-constructed residential development such as the existing homes in Wensley Road, where it is viable to improve the buildings fabric to meet and exceed modern standards. The proposed refurbishment of the existing homes is intended to address resource efficiency, environmental protection and to facilitate and encourage sustainable behaviours for residents. The key elements can be summarised as:

- A fabric first approach to the building envelope, aspiring to achieve Enerphit standards for thermal performance, combined with the installation of Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR) systems to improve internal air quality and ventilation
- An holistic approach to improving the environment for existing residents leading to a positive impact on mental health and personal wellbeing
- Encouraging and supporting residents to improve recycling habits by providing new user-friendly refuse, recycling and food waste facilities

- Providing enhanced external landscape with increased biodiversity value, creating a key link with existing rich natural habitats in the surrounding area
- Making effective use of resources by re-using materials on-site where possible, reducing waste and specifying materials with low embodied carbon, minimising waste and reducing material transportation
- Supporting active travel through increased provision of safe, secure and easily accessible cycle storage, combined with improved connections to the green travel network provided as part of Phase 1 works

The above principles illustrate how the Council is taking an holistic approach to housing retrofit which considers its context as well as the fabric of the building. That said, a number of actions have already been taken in the housing retrofit area and these principles will continue to inform our approach:

- All RBC housing refurbishment projects to have a key goal of being as energy efficient as possible, cutting our carbon footprint and reducing waste
- Alternative forms of heating to be investigated and tested with a view to replacement of the existing gas central heating programme, including trials of alternative technologies
- The cost:benefit equation for installing Triple Glazed windows in place of the existing double-glazing programme, including prospective trial installations, to be reviewed
- Loft information data to be reviewed with a view to targeting the remaining properties which have less than 300mm
- Electrically heated properties which have cavity walls to be reviewed with a view to establishing the effectiveness of the insulation - any that is not up to current standards will be stripped and renewed using grant funding where possible
- Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR) to be examined and installed as an alternative to extract fans
- Programme of upgrading insulation to Cross Wall properties to continue
- Increased use of solar panels on the existing stock to be investigated to supplement the 457 Council homes which were equipped with solar in 2014-15

In addition, in terms of the wider supply chain, the Council is:

- Encouraging trades to recycle, specifically using scrap metal bins when stripping out old fittings and heating systems
- Working with suppliers to reduce single use plastic products and ensuring that materials supplied meet low carbon standards
- Encouraging suppliers and contractors to increase energy efficiency and reduce carbon usage through increased weighting of these elements within specifications and tender evaluation
- Working with trades to reduce the number of trips to and from stores and therefore reduce fuel usage
- Encouraging tenants to purchase energy from renewable energy suppliers

4.3 Private sector new build

The Reading Local Plan (Policy H5) sets out the key principles which the Council will apply to new housing in Reading (including its own developments), and specifically the 'zero carbon homes' policy which applies to all major new build (more than 10 dwellings). This policy requires that:

- where homes are not designed to be carbon neutral, this will mean as a minimum a 35% improvement in the dwelling emission rate over the 2013 Building Regulations plus a contribution of £1,800 per tonne towards carbon offsetting within Reading (calculated as £60 per tonne over a 30 year period).

- Where it is proposed to meet the zero carbon homes requirement in another way, clear evidence should be provided to demonstrate how it will be achieved at planning application stage.
- Zero carbon homes is an achievable standard that, until recently, was intended to be a national requirement in the Building Regulations.
- All other housing should be built to a level equivalent to the emissions requirement of former Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4, which is a 19% improvement in the dwelling emission rate over the target emission rate, as defined in the 2013 Building Regulations.
- Where the 19% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions cannot be achieved on site, an offset may be possible through planning contributions.

Implementation of this policy via the development control process will therefore be a key part of the Council's approach to reducing emissions from new housing in Reading.

4.4 Private sector retrofit

The Council's influence over, and the resources it has available to devote to, improvement of its own housing are significantly greater than it can devote to the private sector, and this is reflected in the relative scope of the Action Plans. Reading's climate emergency declaration made clear that additional powers and resources would be needed from Government to enable the achievement of net zero by 2030, and private sector retrofit remains one of the key policy areas where this remains the case. Nonetheless, the Action Plan identifies areas where the Council can support efforts to encourage and/or require landlords and private homeowners to reduce emissions.

4.5 KEY RISKS TO & CONSTRAINTS ON ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

A number of significant risks and constraints will need to be taken into account in delivery of the Action Plans and how they are reflected in Service Plans. Key among these are:

- **Finance:** after a government acted to remove various social and environmental 'policy costs' from domestic energy bills in 2013, leading to significant reductions in funding to support domestic energy efficiency, installation of energy saving measures in UK homes such as loft insulation and cavity wall insulations fell dramatically, and has yet to recover. Various phases of the Green Homes Grant have offered more funding for retrofit measures, but it is widely acknowledged this is not yet at the scale required to rise to the challenge of the Government's target of net zero by 2050, let alone Reading's more ambitious goal of net zero by 2030. A particular challenge for Reading is that Government funding is currently targeted at bringing UK housing up to EPC band 'C' but the vast majority of RBC Housing is already 'C'. This severely restricts our eligibility to access grant support for our own housing.
- **Staff capacity:** with high demands on staff time and tight constraints on revenue funding, identifying the staff capacity required to take forward housing retrofit projects has been challenging. A new post of Low Carbon Housing Project Manager is in the process of being created which will provide additional resource to drive forward the Action Plan, though responsibility for doing so will still be a shared responsibility across the services identified in the Action Plans, led by the Housing & Communities Service.
- **Cost of electrical heating relative to gas:** at present, and in the context of extreme energy price volatility, electrical heating is likely to be more expensive than gas, at least in the short-term, unless other energy efficiency measures are taken to reduce overall demand for energy. While we expect this to change over time as government has indicated a desire to close and ultimately reverse the price differential, in the short-term there may be a conflict in some properties between electrification of heating and reducing heating costs/tackling fuel poverty. Priority may therefore have to be given to

energy saving measures which offer a 'no regret' option in the context of high and volatile energy prices.

- **Hard-to-treat properties:** as suggested above, the operating costs of electrical heating systems such as heat pumps can be reduced by improving insulation, improving air tightness, installing MVHR and installing PV to offset running costs. However, some properties will not be suitable for some or all of these approaches which may reduce scope for their application.
- **Key meters:** the use of key meters is widespread in social housing and energy providers tend to charge more for this facility. Moreover, key meters may not work effectively with some of the more energy efficient systems being contemplated as they require longer periods drawing energy at a low level, and generate spikes in power use when self-cleansing.
- **Communal heating systems:** these may be required for some blocks, which could require RBC to become registered as an energy supplier, creating an increased need to manage energy centrally and recharge tenants individually.

| LOW CARBON HOUSING ACTION PLAN (RBC HOUSING) | | | |
|--|--|----------------------|---|
| ACTION AREA (as per heading in UK Green Building Council 'retrofit playbook') | SPECIFIC ACTION | TIMESCALE | LEAD SERVICE/TEAM/OFFICER |
| New build | Embed principles set out in 4.1 in all RBC new build | Immediate/ongoing | Property & Assets/Daryn Inston - as 'agent'; Housing & Communities/Zelda Wolfle - as 'client' |
| Stocktake | Investigate measures of actual carbon emissions from RBC housing (as opposed to EPC/SAP ratings) | Q4 2022 | H&C/Trevor Wooldridge, Climate Change & Sustainability/Ben Burfoot |
| Pilots/case studies | Install 40 Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHPs) in first block Granville Road | Complete | H&C/Mike Carpenter |
| | Installation of a further 40 ASHP's at Granville Road in block 42 | 2022 | H&C/Mike Carpenter |
| | Installation of Ground Source Heat Pumps at Granville Road in block 28 - procurement to be undertaken with a view to commencement late in 2022 | 2022 | H&C/Mike Carpenter |
| | Study performance of ASHPs and Ground Source Heat Pumps installed and apply lessons learnt. | Underway and ongoing | H&C/Mike Carpenter |
| | Remaining 8 story block at Granville Road to be trialled with Quantum Storage Heaters | 2022 | H&C/Mike Carpenter |

| LOW CARBON HOUSING ACTION PLAN (RBC HOUSING) | | | |
|--|---|--|------------------------------------|
| Skills and capacity | Recruit Low Carbon Housing officer to co-ordinate retrofit efforts | March 2022 | Housing & Communities/Zelda Wolfle |
| | Support local training and supply chain development (e.g. by building social value requirements into third-contracts) | 2022 and ongoing | Housing & Communities/Zelda Wolfle |
| | Appoint an energy efficiency consultant to provide thermal modelling expertise and make recommendations on where efficiencies can be made | Investigation of suitable companies underway | H&C/Mike Carpenter |
| Existing and new technology | Top up loft insulation to 300mm across the stock wherever possible | Underway and ongoing | H&C/Mike Carpenter |
| | Continue programme of upgrading insulation to Cross Wall properties - Works to be tendered and commenced at Bamburgh Close | 2022 | H&C/Mike Carpenter |
| | Recommission and maintain biomass boiler at Cedar Court | 2022-2023 | H&C/Mike Carpenter |
| | Investigate and trial alternative forms of heating to gas boilers | Underway and ongoing | H&C/Mike Carpenter |
| | Continue to install Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR) instead of extract fans. Includes feasibility options with different property types. | Underway and ongoing | H&C/Mike Carpenter |
| | Use only 'A' rated condensing appliances when replacing older, less efficient boilers | Underway and ongoing | H&C/Mike Carpenter |
| | Trial alternatives to gas boilers - Air Source, Ground Source and Quantum Storage Heaters | Underway | H&C/Mike Carpenter |
| | Integrate successful technologies after trials into future boiler replacement programme | 2023-2025 | H&C/Mike Carpenter |
| Upgrade external insulation to walls and roofs when existing systems are due for replacement | Underway and ongoing | H&C/Mike Carpenter | |

LOW CARBON HOUSING ACTION PLAN (RBC HOUSING)

| | | | |
|---------------|--|---|---|
| | <p>Identify options to increase insulation levels on ‘hard to insulate’ properties</p> <p>Research ‘smart’ systems which may monitor and control systems to minimise emissions</p> <p>Continue window replacement programme</p> <p>Trial triple-glazed timber framed windows</p> <p>Review plans to replace electric storage heaters with gas central heating</p> <p>Review flat roof properties with a view to providing additional insulation retrofit or as part of flat roof replacements</p> <p>Seek more efficient, thicker insulation products for external wall insulation</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> <p>2022 -2023</p> <p>Underway and ongoing</p> <p>Underway and ongoing</p> <p>2022-2023</p> <p>Underway and ongoing</p> <p>Investigations and trials underway</p> | <p>H&C/Mike Carpenter</p> |
| <p>Policy</p> | <p>Report on progress via Climate Emergency Strategy annual report</p> <p>Report on progress with Action Plans via HNL</p> <p>Apply Local Plan zero carbon homes policy to planning applications</p> | <p>Annual and ongoing</p> <p>Annual and ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> | <p>Climate Change & Sustainability/Peter Moore</p> <p>H&C/Mike Carpenter, PTPP/ James Crosbie, CC&S/Peter Moore</p> <p>PTPP/ James Crosbie</p> |

| LOW CARBON HOUSING ACTION PLAN (RBC HOUSING) | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | Ensured Action Plan actions are fully embedded in annual HRA Business Plan Review | Annual Review | Housing & Communities/Zelda Wolfle |
| Finance and incentives | Ensure adequate resource for implementation in annual HRA Business Plan Review Identify and pursue additional grant funding opportunities | Annual Review Underway and ongoing | Housing & Communities/Zelda Wolfle H&C/Mike Carpenter |
| Engagement with Householders | Continue education programme for tenants to advise on managing home energy use Work with energy providers to allow tenants to better understand how to manage their energy consumption via e.g. smart meters and other monitoring devices | Ongoing Ongoing | H&C/Mike Carpenter H&C/Mike Carpenter |
| Making the case for investment | Investigate scope for new solar PV programme for RBC Housing (focusing on blocks) Review cost-benefit for triple-glazing in place of existing double-glazing programme Review all electrically heated properties with cavity walls and upgrade insulation where possible | 2022 Underway 2022-2025 | H&C/Mike Carpenter; Sustainability/Ben Burfoot H&C/Mike Carpenter H&C/Mike Carpenter |
| Supply chain | Encourage (and where possible through contracts, required) trades to recycle old fittings and heating systems Work with contractors to reduce single use plastic products Increase weighting of energy efficiency and carbon reduction criteria within tender specification/evaluation Work with the trades to reduce number of vehicular movements and therefore fuel Review general product holding with our Stored Provider and the materials specified on all refurbishment works to use most environmentally friendly, low carbon materials wherever possible | On-going On-going On-going Ongoing Ongoing | H&C/Mike Carpenter H&C/Mike Carpenter H&C/Mike Carpenter H&C/Mike Carpenter H&C/Mike Carpenter |

| | | | |
|---|---|---------|--------------------|
| LOW CARBON HOUSING ACTION PLAN (RBC HOUSING) | | | |
| | Develop in house skills to carry out retrofit works including specialist trades. Train internal PAS surveyor(s) | Ongoing | H&C/Mike Carpenter |

LOW CARBON HOUSING ACTION PLAN (PRIVATE SECTOR)

| ACTION AREA (informed by 'retrofit playbook') | SPECIFIC ACTION | TIMESCALE | LEAD SERVICE/OFFICER |
|--|--|--|---|
| Fuel poverty | <p>Maintain 'Winter Watch' service</p> <p>Promote 'Draughtbusters' scheme</p> <p>Promote general energy savings advice to households</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> <p>2022</p> <p>2022</p> | <p>H&C/Richard Lewis (supported by Public Health)</p> <p>H&C/Low Carbon Housing Project Manager; Comms support</p> <p>H&C/Low Carbon Housing Project Manager; Comms support</p> |
| Regulation | <p>Undertake Housing, Health & safety Rating Inspections as part of proactive and reactive inspection programmes (primarily in the private rented sector) to minimise the impact of fuel poverty.</p> <p>Where development is being delivered, ensure compliance with the energy efficiency standards as set out in the Building Regulations</p> | Ongoing | PTPP/Yasmin Ahmad |
| Stock Condition | Complete and publish Stock Condition Survey to help inform retrofit planning | Q3 2022 | PTPP/Yasmin Ahmad |
| Pilots/case studies | Working with landlords and/or Empty Home owners, identify case studies which demonstrate how retrofitting can be effectively delivered in Reading's housing stock. | Q4 2022 | PTPP/Yasmin Ahmad |

| | | | |
|------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Skills | Work with training providers and colleges and skills programmes to develop skills for hard to treat insulation, PAS surveyors, heat pumps, ventilation. Create local jobs through social value clauses in contracts. | 2022 to 2025 | Greater South East Energy Hub RBC |
| Technology | Work with University of Reading on research and innovation in retrofit to inform retrofit planning | Ongoing | H&C/Low Carbon Housing Project Manager |
| Policy | Report on progress via Climate Emergency Strategy annual report Report on progress with Action Plans via HNL Apply Local Plan zero carbon homes policy to planning applications Enforce Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards to ensure that the private rented sector meets the latest enforceable standards | Annual and ongoing Annual and ongoing Ongoing Ongoing | Climate Change & Sustainability/Peter Moore H&C/Low Carbon Housing Project Manager PTPP/Julie Williams PTPP/Yasmin Ahmad |
| Finance & Incentives | Promote opportunities for households in Reading to access government grants Promote uptake of Boiler Upgrade Scheme (heat pumps) | Ongoing | H&C/Low Carbon Housing Project Manager; Comms support |
| Engagement with Householders | Promote retrofit opportunities to 'willing and able to pay' | Ongoing | H&C/Low Carbon Housing Project Manager; Comms support |
| Tenure type | Proactive advice to landlords to improve energy efficiency Promote energy efficiency via the 'Reading Rent With Confidence' scheme | Ongoing Ongoing | PTPP/James Crosbie |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|--|
| LA sources of finance | <p>Work with managing agents for Greater South East Energy Hub LAD2 and LAD3 projects to identify retrofit pipeline and maximise potential for projects to benefit Reading</p> <p>Revisit scope for ECO scheme in Reading</p> <p>Ring-fence offset funding under zero carbon homes policy to housing retrofit projects</p> <p>Explore opportunities for adjoining private residents to ‘buy-in’ to large scale solutions/installations at same contract rates for RBC housing contract work</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Q3 2022</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> | <p>H&C/Low Carbon Housing Project Manager</p> <p>H&C/Low Carbon Housing Project Manager</p> <p>PTPP/Yasmin Ahmad</p> <p>H&C/Mike Carpenter</p> |
| Making the case for investment | <p>Explore potential for additional community solar programmes with Reading Community Energy Society.</p> <p>Investigate collective Power Purchase Agreement to sell excess solar to grid as green electricity.</p> | 2022 | CC&S/Ben Burfoot |
| Retrofit Design | Establish standards for climate-conscious retrofit | 2022 to 2025 | RBC working with UoR, Warmworks, SECBE |

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READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

| | | | |
|-------------------------|---|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| TO: | HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS & LEISURE COMMITTEE | | |
| DATE: | 10th MARCH 2022 | AGENDA ITEM: | |
| TITLE: | HOUSING UPDATE AND PROGRAMME OF WORKS TO COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK 2022/2023 | | |
| LEAD COUNCILLOR: | CLLR ELLIE EMBERSON | PORTFOLIO: | HOUSING |
| SERVICE: | HOUSING | WARDS: | ALL |
| LEAD OFFICER: | ZELDA WOLFLE | TEL: | 0118 937 2285 |
| JOB TITLE: | ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF HOUSING & COMMUNITIES | E-MAIL: | Zelda.wolfle@reading.gov.uk |

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

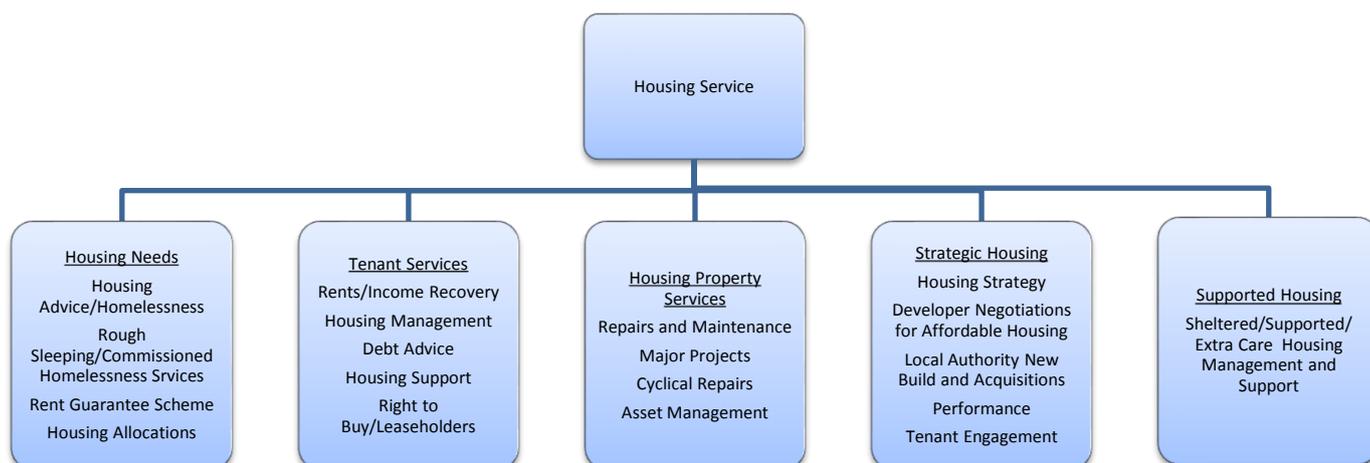
- 1.1 The Council' Housing Strategy was adopted by Policy Committee in September 2020. The vision for the strategy is "For all our residents to have the opportunity to live in a good quality sustainable home they can afford within a thriving neighbourhood." Key to this is the supply of accommodation, the quality of accommodation and neighbourhoods and support to residents.
- 1.2 This report highlights key achievements of the Housing Service over the past financial year in line with this vision and sets out the work programme for the Council's housing stock for the next financial year. The Council's work programme continues to have a key focus on low carbon initiatives and £34 million has been invested over the next 5 years to drive sustainability improvements in the stock thereby increasing energy efficiency and tackling fuel poverty for our tenants.
- 1.3 Appendix 1 - Works to Housing Stock 22/23 Housing Revenue Account (HRA)
Appendix 2 - Works to Housing Stock 22/23 General Fund
Appendix 3 - Works to Housing Stock By Ward 22/23

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee note the key achievements of the Housing Service in the past financial year and the planned programme of works to Council Housing stock for 2022/23.
- 2.2 That Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee delegate authority to the Assistant Director of Housing & Communities in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing to: (a) tender; and (b) enter into all necessary contracts for individual schemes within the 22/23 work programme as set out in Appendix 1 and 2 of this report subject to sufficient funding being available in the approved Budget to meet the cost of the schemes.

3. HOUSING SERVICE RESPONSIBILITIES

- 3.1 The Housing Service comprises of Housing Needs, Tenant Services, Housing Property Services, Strategic Housing and Supported Housing. The service works closely with the Anti-Social Behaviour Team to deal with issues arising within Council estate neighbourhoods and with the Property Development Team to deliver the Council’s local authority new build programme.



- 3.2 Due to the continuation of the pandemic, the last year has presented challenges for the service as it has for services across the Council and for residents. Business as usual is a huge task in itself. Despite this, the teams have adapted their working processes and continued to maintain services for residents and to ensure that the most vulnerable are taken care of.

4. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2021/22

- 4.1 The challenges this year have manifested themselves in different ways; the impact of covid related illness amongst staff and contractors, lack of building supplies and materials and spiralling costs to name a few. The Housing Service were at the heart of the response to the tragic event at Rowe Court just before Christmas. The Housing Service supported the response

on the day and continues to do so in the aftermath, providing accommodation, support and reassurance to many of the affected residents.

4.2 The service has achieved a great deal this year under difficult circumstances and a few of the key achievements are listed below;

- No homeless children had to spend Christmas in shared Bed and Breakfast as we maintained the position where no homeless families were placed in shared Bed and Breakfast accommodation for the 4th year running.
- A new campaign to prevent homelessness was launched ‘Click Before You Evict’¹ to encourage landlords to engage with the service rather than evicting their tenants. This consisted of web resources which were developed to provide information and advice to both landlords and tenants to prevent homelessness. The service has not seen the increase in homeless households that was expected since the ban on evictions was lifted and it is a testament to the campaign and the work of the homelessness teams in continuing to prevent homelessness. This year so far 418 households have been provided with assistance to prevent them from becoming homeless
- The Housing Service won the Council’s Team Award in the Team Reading People’s Choice Awards in National Customer Services Week for the wholesale response to rough sleeping during the pandemic which included:
 - *Arranging emergency accommodation, and regular support for over 260 individual people)*
 - *Delivering hot meals on a daily basis*
 - *Provision of move on accommodation*
 - *Ambition and innovation in the delivery of a refurbished property to create a unique women’s accommodation project and beginning the development of 40 modular homes)*
 - *Successfully bidding for over to £2 million from MHCLG to provide long term support to customers who have been found rough sleeping*
 - *A great example of individual teams across the service working together efficiently and going above and beyond to provide this marginalised group of customers with significant help and support at a time of crisis and for the longer term.*

The teams were described as **‘outstanding, demonstrating all of our TEAM Reading values and met the criteria in all four categories of working together across services; driving efficiency; demonstrating ambition, and making a huge difference to our customers’**.

- Delivery of 40 modular homes for people with a history of rough sleeping incorporating 24/7 intensive support on site provided by our commissioned service St Mungos. The homes have been welcomed by new residents who moved in during November with one stating: **‘Every Borough should have a project like this I am like a kid at Christmas, this is the start of my life’**
- A new Housing Allocations Scheme was adopted to help build more sustainable communities by providing more priority to Council tenants, increasing opportunities for key workers, and creating a housing register specifically for people with a disability to better match them with appropriate housing. The scheme will be implemented later this year.

¹ <https://www.reading.gov.uk/housing/private-renting/landlord-advice/click-before-you-evict/>

- Continued support and debt advice to our tenants ensured that we maintained top quartile rent collection levels of over 97.7 % despite the increasing financial pressure on our residents as a result of the pandemic. Additional support was put in place for residents with the launch of the ‘Money Matters’² campaign and newly developed webpages providing advice, information and assistance to people struggling financially
- Installation of the Council’s first domestic air source heat pumps, 40 were installed in properties in Granville Road Southcote
- The refurbishment of 12 properties in Kentwood to reduce carbon emissions and improve energy efficiency. The properties benefitted from the installation of new external wall insulation and render, triple glazed windows and mechanical ventilation with heat recovery systems.
- The Local Authority New Build Programme delivered 4 new homes in George Street and 18 new homes and a Community Centre in Lyndhurst Road, all built to the Council’s standards for low carbon homes
- The service won Homebuilder of the Year (16,000 or under) in the National UK Housing Awards. The Council was recognised by the judges for its ambition, commitment to sustainability and strong team working. The judges stated:’ ***Reading were clear winners for this award, with the council’s development plans ticking all boxes for the judges. Not only does it have ambitious development goals for the next five years, it is clear about how they will do this sustainably, and while engaging with and including the communities where the homes are being built.***
- The Council’s Local Authority New Build programme goes from strength to strength with the following properties currently in the pipeline to complete over the next 4 years

| Scheme Name | Ward | Number of Homes |
|--|-----------|-----------------|
| Arthur Hill Pool Site | Park | 15 |
| North Street | Abbey | 41 |
| Wensley Road | Minster | 46 |
| Battle Street | Abbey | 64 |
| Hexham Road | Redlands | 30 |
| Amethyst lane | Southcote | 38 (outline) |
| Dwyer Road | Southcote | 30 (outline) |
| 5 small sites (ex- garage sites and scrubland) | Various | 8 |

5.0 PROGRAMME OF WORKS 2022/223

- 5.1 Housing Property Services manages the planned maintenance, cyclical repairs and void works to approximately 5,662 Council homes.
- 5.2 The service has a responsibility to ensure that the housing stock is well maintained in accordance with the Decent Homes Standard and that Council homes are safe and healthy places to live.

² <https://www.reading.gov.uk/housing/money-matters/>

- 5.3 In addition the service continues to have a strong focus on improving the thermal efficiency of homes in line with the Council's Climate Change ambitions ensuring homes can be heated efficiently and cost effectively, thus reducing their carbon footprint and reducing fuel poverty. £34 million has been invested in low carbon initiatives over the next 5 years with an Action Plan for both Council and private sector homes.
- 5.4 Beyond bricks and mortar the service also works to improve the wider environment on housing estates to meet the needs and aspirations of both the Council and our tenants.
- 5.5 Repairs and maintenance of the stock are delivered predominantly by an in-house workforce. Some works are sub-contracted using measured term contracts to allow for fluctuations in volumes, specialist work or where it is more cost effective to do so.
- 5.6 Appendix 1 provides details of the programmes of work and associated budgets for the Councils HRA Housing Stock 2022/2023. Appendix 2 provides details of the works to the General Fund Housing Stock 2022/2023. Appendix 3 gives a breakdown of the programmes of work by ward

6. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 6.1 The programme of works to Council Homes contributes to:
- **A Healthy Environment** by retrofitting existing homes with low carbon initiatives to improve thermal efficiency and ultimately contribute to Reading becoming a carbon neutral town by 2030
 - **Thriving Communities** by introducing thermal efficiency measures to reduce fuel poverty and enable those living in Council homes to have an equal chance to thrive
 - **Inclusive Economy** by seeking to let contracts for major projects to contractors who provide a level of social value to the town including opportunities for education, skills and training
- 6.2 Full details of the Council's [Corporate Plan](#) are available on the website and include information on the projects which will deliver these priorities.
- 6.3 In line with TEAM Reading values the programme of works to Council homes makes a difference to our residents by:
- Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable; and
 - Providing homes for those in most need.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 On the 26th of February 2019 the Council declared a Climate Emergency and resolved to act to accelerate a carbon neutral Reading to 2030. Reading Climate Change Partnership's Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25 and the new RBC corporate Carbon Plan 2020-25 were adopted in November 2020.
- 7.2 The programme of works to Council homes looks to improve the energy efficiency and the insulation of properties wherever possible including:
- Improving window replacements from double to triple glazing.
 - Investigating and trialling of low carbon and alternative heating systems, the results of which will help to shape the approach to retrofitting homes to reduce carbon emissions
 - Replacing external fabric of buildings including external wall insulation

➤ Installing mechanical ventilation with heat recovery systems

- 7.3 The average SAP rating, measure of energy efficiency, of the Council's housing stock is currently 74.14 placing Reading in the top quartile when compared to our peer group.
- 7.4 Our local authority new build programmes play a key role in achieving net zero carbon. The application of the fabric first approach of Passivhaus reduces greenhouse gas emissions and will deliver significant long-term energy savings to the tenants. The low running costs and higher quality building mean that costs are significantly reduced over the life of the building for the occupiers.
- 7.5 The use of sustainable material plays an important role in the design. This combined with the high quality of building physics achieved through insulation, thermal bridge-free design and airtightness ensures that the sustainable benefits of Passivhaus principles will last.

8. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 8.1 The Housing Service has an engagement approach that enables consultation with tenants on a range of issues and through different means including, surveys, focus groups, a tenant scrutiny panel and formal consultation, the results of which drive service improvement. Tenant involvement and feedback has driven changes to specifications on kitchens, bathrooms and flooring.
- 8.2 With all repairs and maintenance, we look to provide an efficient value for money service and recognise this can only be achieved by engaging with tenants, this is crucial when it comes to getting it right first time. Wherever possible tenants are given choices in the use of materials and colours.
- 8.3 When upgrading kitchens there is a design process, the customer is involved to ensure the layout and space allows for white goods. Within the range of kitchen units, worktops and tiles the tenant is offered choice of colour.
- 8.4 When upgrading our Crosswall properties we will consult with residents regarding the elevational treatment of the structure.
- 8.5 On our larger refurbishment schemes tenants are invited to evaluate the tender submissions.

9. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 There is no requirement for an Equality Impact Assessment for the purposes of this report

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The 2006 Decent Homes Standard is a government-set standard for council housing. The standard describes a Decent Home as one that is fit to live in, in a reasonable state of repair, having reasonably modern facilities and services, and being insulated to a reasonable standard and weatherproof. The standard was updated in 2006 to include the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).
- 10.2 In addition, work outlined in this report is covered by the following legislation:
- Landlord & Tenant Act 1985
 - Housing Act 2004

- Secure Tenants of Local Housing Authorities (Right to Repair) Regulations 1994
- Defective Premises Act 1972
- Commonhold & Leasehold Reform Act 2002
- Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Building Regulations Act 1984
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, Sections 2, 3 and 4
- Equality Act 2010
- HCA - The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England from April 2012

10.3 Within this legal framework, programmes are aimed at ensuring the quality of accommodation, maintaining the 2006 Decent Homes Standard (or standards of design and quality that applied when the home was built if higher than the Decent Homes Standard) and providing a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service that meets applicable statutory requirements that provide for the health and safety of the occupants in their homes.

10.4 Works contracts worth £4,733,252 (Works Threshold) or more must be advertised in the UK's e-notification service Find a Tender and then tendered or be procured via a framework agreement which itself has already been advertised in OJEU or Find a Tender (as applicable) and undergone a tender process. The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (as amended) does not require a Find a Tender advertised tendering process in the case of below Works Threshold contracts. Such contracts must be awarded in line with the Council's Standing Orders.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The budget for the works programme 2022-23 is £22,633,000 (plus £258,000 General fund) and is funded through the Housing Revenue Account. The budget is set as part of the Council's annual budget setting programme and agreed by full Council in February 2022. An investment of £34 million of the Housing Revenue Account budget over the next 5 years will be focused on upgrading existing homes and delivering low carbon improvements, £7 million of which will be spent this year.

11.2 The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) deals with council housing finance. The main income is housing rent, and all expenditure related to council housing is charged to this account. The Housing Revenue Account is 'ring-fenced' (separate) from other Council activity (this is accounted for through the 'General Fund' account).

11.3 The Council regularly updates and revises assumptions in a 30-year business plan for the HRA. This includes a comprehensive 30-year programme for replacing major components of homes (roofs, windows/doors, kitchens, bathrooms etc.) and maintaining them to Decent Homes standards.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None applicable.

WORKS TO HOUSING STOCK 2022-2023 (HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT)

£'000

| | | |
|----------------------------|---|---------------|
| 1 | Responsive Repairs | 2,550 |
| 2 | Voids (Minor Works) | 890 |
| Planned Programmes | | |
| 3 | Estate Maintenance | 100 |
| 4 | Gas Servicing and domestic legionella checks | 308 |
| 5 | Heating Non-Gas Servicing | 45 |
| 6 | Essential Cyclical | 325 |
| 7 | Pensioner Decorations | 110 |
| 8 | Common Areas | 160 |
| 9 | Electrical Checks | 70 |
| 10 | Sprinkler System Servicing | 85 |
| 11 | Fire Safety | 100 |
| 12 | External Repairs and Decorations | 1,100 |
| Major Capital Works | | |
| 13 | Voids (Major Works) | 823 |
| 14 | Special adaptations | 600 |
| 15 | Communal Flooring | 100 |
| 16 | Structural work | 400 |
| 17 | Roofs - Traditional Pitched | 100 |
| 18 | Rewiring | 307 |
| 19 | Windows and Doors | 850 |
| 20 | Central Heating and Boilers | 1,000 |
| 21 | Granville Rd Heat Pumps | 1,100 |
| 22 | Kitchens & Bathrooms | 2,100 |
| 23 | Door Entry Systems | 160 |
| 24 | Asbestos | 400 |
| 25 | Decent Neighbourhoods Works | 325 |
| 26 | Kentwood Improvements | 1,450 |
| 27 | Crosswall Blocks | 1,040 |
| 28 | Coley High Rise, External Fabric/Windows and Roof | 5,100 |
| 29 | Ian Mikardo Way | 150 |
| 30 | Lifts | 400 |
| 31 | Major Repairs | 360 |
| 32 | Feasibility | 25 |
| TOTAL | | 22,633 |

RESPONSIVE REPAIRS

1. Responsive Repairs £2,550,000

The Repairs service is responsive and a customer driven service. Spend in recent years has been consistently £2.3M. In our 30-year plan we are investing heavily in planned programmes and replacement components.

In 2017/18 new and integrated computer information gave us strong analytical tools to better understand repair costs.

Repairs are delivered predominantly by an in-house workforce. Factors that influence service costs include:

- Standardisation of parts. We benefit from the legacy of earlier generations who standardised components from the 1940's onwards and have continued this process
- Control of high cost jobs and the development of new programmes of work to redirect investment to planned work
- A range of competitively priced and recently tendered planned programmes
- Batched gutter cleaning works to reduce use of scaffolding costs
- New types of scaffold and harnessing
- Improved Health and safety provision fuelled by legislation change and by an enhanced risk awareness following the Grenfell fire.
- Repairs analysis and understanding costs broken down by trade job type, material and property type
- Improved specification and more building items to maintain (such as more showers or more alarms and heat recovery ventilation)
- Feedback from surveys driving improvements
- Extended guarantees on boilers.

Benchmarking our costs against other social providers (with similar size and stock), repair costs have been kept comparatively low, allowing us to focus on planned works and improvements. Investing sensibly in planned and replacement programmes over many years has enabled us to continue to keep costs low however the cost of labour and materials has started to rise in the last year.

Responsive repairs are undertaken in all Wards across the Borough as required.

2. VOIDS (Minor and Major Works) £1,713,000

The cost between tenancies to repair homes to an approved standard and then re-let these homes is met from this budget. This budget has remained steady at £1.25m for a number of years. In November 2019 we undertook a pilot, increasing the scope of works on all voids in the month. Where required we included decoration and the provision of floor coverings, the additional works varied between dwellings, some required no extra works. The additional works introduced as a pilot in 2019 have now been incorporated into our Voids Standard.

Our aim is to keep a good balance between expenditure, re-let times and the re-let standards.

Works to Void dwellings are undertaken in all Wards across the Borough as and when they become void.

PLANNED PROGRAMMES

3. Estate Maintenance £100,000

A housing management-controlled budget to attend to day-to-day estate management issues and repair needs on our estates. This is typically used to improve parking, manage trees, provide dog bins, manage landscaping and paths that do not form part of the Highway.

Estate Management covers all Wards across the Borough as required.

4. Gas Servicing £308,000

A landlord is legally required to make every reasonable effort to carry out gas checks every 12 months and at change of tenancy to all landlord owned gas appliances/ properties with gas meters. The number of gas services required each year increases with new builds added to the stock. We are normally 100% compliant with the gas safety regulations in our efforts to carry out this annual service.

Gas servicing is undertaken in all dwellings that have a gas supply, there are in the region of 5,000 dwellings across the Borough, works will be undertaken in all wards.

5. Heating Non-Gas Servicing £45,000

We have as part of our carbon reduction works replaced some heating systems with Air Source Heat pumps. The first Block at Granville Road has been completed and the second Block is well underway. The servicing costs of Heat pumps is considerably more than that of a gas central heating system, we anticipate this will decrease in time as they become the norm rather than the exception. This is a budget that will increase in the future with more heat pumps being installed as part of our carbon reduction works, however, it will be offset in part as we reduce the number of gas systems within dwellings.

In the main this relates to the servicing of the Air Source Heat Pumps, part of our Carbon reduction plan and is in the Southcote Ward.

6. Essential Cyclical Inspections £325,000

This budget has increased by £30,000 and covers work in the following areas:

- Basic Lift maintenance and safety certification
- Warden Call system maintenance
- Fire alarms, Dry risers
- Fire extinguisher maintenance
- Checks and modest repairs to door entry systems
- Burglar alarms
- Communal lights maintenance
- Communal TV Aerials maintenance
- CCTV

Essential Cyclical Inspections are undertaken in all Wards across the Borough as required.

7. Pensioner Decorations **£110,000**

This is a three-year cyclical programme. The town is divided into three geographic areas, and the budget is usually around £110,000 each year. Given the works are for those tenants that are most vulnerable understandably the take up in recent years has been poor.

This year, 2022/23, the areas of the town covered by this programme of works includes Woodley, Norcot, Katesgrove, Minster, Redlands, Whitley and Kentwood Wards. Work is carried out by outside contractors.

To be eligible, customers must be of pensionable age or receive a disability benefit and have no resource to an able-bodied person who can do the work for them. The service is only provided where the condition of the existing decoration is poor. Tenants receive a pre-work visit to ensure eligibility and discuss choices in colour and finishes.

8. Common Areas **£160,000**

A seven-year cyclical programme is set, whilst maintaining additional budget for highly trafficked or vandalised areas in exceptional cases.

This year's work is at Tilehurst, Norcot, Katesgrove and Whitley wards in the main.

9. Periodic Electrical Checks **£70,000**

Historically, an electrical check was carried out every ten years or at a change of tenancy. Best practice, reviewed at national level, recommends checks should be made every 5 years, Over the last couple of years, we have tried to increase our inspections to comply with best practice, unfortunately, Covid and Isolation have affected the contractors resourcing and access to our dwellings. Progress has been slower than anticipated, however, we will this year continue in our effort to achieve best practice by year end. We are currently procuring additional contractors to ensure we meet this target

We use the data collected from the electrical checks to determine the rewiring programme and use the data to set programmes to upgrade and renew smoke detectors.

Periodic Electrical Checks are undertaken in all Wards across the Borough as required.

10. Sprinkler System Servicing **£85,000**

The design of our new build flats at Conwy and Bevan Close incorporate Sprinkler Systems as part of the fire safety measures. We have also fitted Sprinkler Systems within our Wates Flats and the High-Rise Flats at Coley to improve fire safety. To ensure the systems remain operational these systems require an annual service.

Works are at Coley High Rise, Minster Ward and the new build at Conwy and Bevan Close in the Tilehurst Ward. The Sprinkler systems in our Wates dwelling are in a number of Wards across the Borough.

11. Fire Safety **£100,000**

Depending on the risk associated with the Building type Fire Risk Assessments are required to ensure the buildings meet the current standards. High risk buildings are inspected annually, these are the High-Rise Blocks at Coley and Granville Road. Buildings identified as having a lower risk require an assessment every 3-4 years.

Work will be undertaken in all Wards across the Borough.

12. External Repairs and Decoration £1,100,000

Typically, this includes a repair package, looking at the outside fabric of the homes and carrying out suitable improvements or repairs to:

- Roofs, Down pipes and gutters and vent pipes
- Brickwork
- Windows and doors
- Porches, Sheds
- Repairs to kitchens

An external Painting programme follows the repair works. Painting is subject to weather conditions and stops during the winter period.

Work is carried out on a rolling 7-year cycle.

This year's work will be primarily in Abbey, Caversham, Katesgrove, Minster, Norcot and Tilehurst Wards.

MAJOR / CAPITAL REPAIRS

13. Major Voids

See Item 2 above

14. Special Adaptations £600,000

The purpose of this budget is to provide adaptations to properties in order to improve living conditions for customers with disability or mobility needs. The budget is spent on a range of measures from installation of stair lifts, hand rails or ramps to through the floor lifts. The greatest need for spend in this area is for the installation of level access showers.

Policies and specification changes we have adopted in relation to general council stock, offering showers above baths and standard showers, mean standard bathroom costs will increase, but such is demand, special adaptation costs are unlikely to reduce. We currently have 6,926 homes, this includes 1264 PFI properties managed on our behalf, of which approximately 693 have adapted level access showers, a surprisingly large number which shows how increasingly well adapted our stock has become. Whilst this points to high future maintenance costs it also suggests that there is a better match of adapted stock to meet customer need.

This area of work is very reactive and will therefore be across all Wards within the Borough.

15. Communal Flooring **£100,000**

£70,000 of the budget is earmarked to provide new flooring, replacing badly damaged flooring or concrete finished floors. This investment is a response to customer feedback from a tenant survey which highlighted the appearance of communal areas as an area of concern for customers.

16. Structural Works **£400,000**

The purpose of this budget is to address the one-off structural issues arising through the year where works are required over and above that of responsive repairs; generally, these are isolated cases of failed DPC, underpinning of the structure and fire damaged properties.

This area of work is very reactive and will therefore be across all Wards within the Borough.

17. Roofs - Traditional Pitched **£100,000**

This budget is primarily for the roof renewal at Block 33-41b Caversham Road, an inspection in August 2021 identified the roof as in need of replacement. This is a 4-storey block containing 15 dwellings. Reactive repairs have been undertaken recently, addressing a number of leaks.

The roof renewal at Block 33-41b Caversham Road is in the Abbey Ward of the Borough.

18. Rewires **£307,000**

Condition rather than age is setting the rewiring budget. The need for full rewires has decreased. The focus has switched to upgrading systems. Rewires tend to be partial, focusing on circuit board replacement and socket upgrades. Selection for these upgrades is on the recommendation of the electric's team (following electrical checks) rather than from general building surveys.

Electric checks are done either as planned checks or checks at change of tenancy. We are increasing our annual number of inspections, moving from every 10 years to every 5 years in line with best practice. Although the numbers of inspections will increase the resulting repairs should decrease as the period between inspections is reduced, going forward the budget should therefore remain at a similar level.

This area of work is very reactive and will therefore be across all Wards within the Borough.

19. Window and Doors Replacements **(windows £750,000) (doors £100,000)**

Doors -half of all carpentry repair costs relate to doors. 2021 continues an extensive door replacement programme, looking at 150 doors. Each door is individually surveyed. Investment has already shown a fall in carpentry repairs.

Windows - most windows were replaced from 1986 onwards, replacing comparatively few before 1991 but then the numbers increased. In 1992 we started replacing windows in houses rather than flats. Windows are a key element in the Decent Homes Standard with a lifecycle of 30 years; going forward this budget will increase to reflect the growing need for window renewal. Generally, our dwellings have double glazed units, this year and moving forward we

are proposing to renew existing windows with triple glazed units to increase the energy efficiency of the properties thereby reducing carbon. Every effort will be made to ensure this work is undertaken on a just in time basis. Initially our programme will concentrate on the Stacked Windows Blocks, this also forms a part of our fire protection works.

This year's window renewal is in Peppard, Minster, Redlands, Whitley and Southcote Wards.

20. Central Heating and Boilers £1,000,000

High investment in past years has made a considerable saving in repair costs and improvement in energy efficiency. We have negotiated extended parts and labour guarantees of 10 years on new boilers.

The replacement of boilers is fixed on a 15-year plan and full systems every 30 to 40 years.

The Council is committed to zero carbon with a target of 2030, in order to achieve this there is a need to look at alternative heating for our dwellings, we need to phase out our gas boilers over time and look to provide alternatives such as air/ground source heating. In some instances, we will need to replace systems with an electrical heating system, Quantum heaters, although more expensive to provide initially there are no annual servicing costs.

This is based on a 15-year lifecycle and will be across all Wards within the Borough

21. Granville Road Heat Pumps £1,000,100

The installation of Air Source Heat Pumps at the first of the High-Rise Blocks at Granville Road has been completed and the second block is now underway. This coming year we will be starting works on the 3rd Block, the heating for this block will be a Ground Source Heat Pump. This will give us a useful comparison, air source to ground source regarding the heating efficiency, servicing cost and future maintenance costs, this will better inform our carbon reduction strategy.

The heat pump installations will be in Southcote Ward.

22. Kitchens and Bathrooms £2,100,000

Kitchens and bathrooms will be replaced across all areas of the borough based strictly on the condition of existing facilities (and their age).

New kitchens take account of the size and range of tenant's 'white goods' and are individually designed to accommodate these (space permitting). The kitchen specification uses thicker carcasses, hinges that open doors 180 degrees, metal draw runners and are designed to last using a modern look that we hope will stay in vogue whilst offering good tenant choice. All taps for kitchens and bathrooms are lever taps, these permit easier use for tenants who suffer with hand mobility. Some improvements in the specification result in increased responsive repair costs. We aim to strike a responsible balance between modernisation and cost.

A revised specification introduced last year includes the full decoration of all Kitchen and Bathroom upgrades.

Going forward the budget has been smoothed to reflect the required spend over a 30-year period and will remain at this level, this will ensure we continue to meet the Decent Homes Standard.

This is based on a 20-year lifecycle for kitchens and 30 years for bathrooms, on a worst first basis and will be across all Wards within the Borough

23. Door Entry Systems **£160,000**

This budget is generally split between upgrades or replacement of older door entry systems and new installations where a door entry system would be advantageous. Addresses are not pre decided.

The programme responds to systems that become inoperable and a repair to the system isn't an option. The programme will cover all Wards across the Borough.

24. Asbestos **£400,000**

Asbestos surveys are required before many programmes of work can take place. We survey the whole property not just the area of the work and the intention is to have data for every property and not be reliant on cloned information.

As a landlord we are required to manage the Asbestos within our Stock. We manage asbestos by periodic inspection based on risk, the risk is determined by the type of asbestos, it's condition and the likely disturbance. Periodic inspections are ongoing and apply to all dwelling constructed prior to the year 2000, properties constructed after this date will not have included any asbestos containing materials within the specification.

Our programme of asbestos surveys account for £200,000 of this budget

The remainder of the budget is for the removal of asbestos where required to facilitate improvement works or where the asbestos survey recommends removal of the asbestos rather than its management.

This work is reactive and dependant on other programmes of work it will cover all Wards across the Borough.

25. Decent Neighbourhood Works **£325,000**

We are developing our knowledge for all blocks and communal areas through surveys. We continue to pick up on the stock needs of drying areas and paths, lighting and landscape and boundaries. Within communal areas, we look at entry doors, door closers, matt wells, stairs and balustrades, finishes, stores security and refuse disposal.

Tenants choice funding has been amalgamated with this fund into one programme of work with the aim of improving the built environment of Council estates.

Works will cover all Wards across the Borough.

26. Kentwood Improvements **£1,450,000**

The improvement works at homes in Kentwood are continuing this year following the successful completion of our pilot. The works include structural repairs, improved external insulation and render together with triple glazing. Where required the heating will be replaced with Air Source Heat Pumps and Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR) systems.

All the measures in this scheme contribute to our carbon reduction strategy and are based on a fabric first approach.

27. Crosswall Blocks **£1,040,000**

The Crosswall construction consists of load bearing party walls and a lightweight infill construction to the front and rear elevations. Constructed in the late 1960's these properties are amongst the poorest of all our stock in terms of energy efficiency, in many cases the external walls are tile hung with no additional insulation.

The works proposed are the modernisation of the external walls to our low rise Crosswall properties. Initially selecting two blocks, the works will consist of a reconstruction of the infill front and rear elevations that will incorporate replacement triple glazed windows. These properties will not only be insulated to a high standard the opportunity exists to refresh the tired appearance of the properties with new look low maintenance materials.

The scheme will include alternative heating, the proposal for the initial blocks at Bamburgh Close includes Ground Source Heat Pumps.

In total we have in the region of 70 two and three storey Crosswall blocks. In the main the three-story blocks were insulated about 12 years ago, the windows of these blocks need replacement going forward, however, the two-story blocks are predominantly as built and will need significantly more work.

This year's Crosswall blocks to benefit from these major improvements are in the Redlands Ward.

28. Wensley Road Estate Flats, External Fabric/Windows and Roofing **£5,100,000**

The proposals for the three blocks of flats at Wensley Road estate include a number of measures in line with the Councils Zero Carbon Strategy, the major elements included within the scheme are the replacement of the external insulation together with triple glazed windows and a new waste management system.

A more efficient insulation and triple glazed windows will significantly improve the thermal efficiency of the dwellings. The works to the three blocks will be phased over three years with an estimated overall cost of £11,200,000 and are tied in with the wider improvements and development of new build homes on the estate.

The Coley High Rise blocks are in the Minster Ward of the Borough.

29. Ian Mikardo Way **£150,000**

A number of dwellings have been identified as having Tentest ceiling boards. Although there have been no issues with this type of ceiling it doesn't give the same level of fire protection as plasterboard. This budget is for the replacement of the identified ceilings with plasterboard.

This work is primarily in the Caversham Ward of the Borough.

30. Lifts **£400,000**

An extensive survey of lifts was made in 2017 to provide better long-term investment planning. A four-year programme of just over £1m has been identified. This year we focus

on lift refurbishments of 28 Granville Road (Cedar Tree House) lift B, 34 Granville Road (Chestnut Tree House) lift B and 38 Granville Road (Oak Tree House) lift B.

31. Major Repairs **£360,000**

Major repairs are batched together for increased efficiencies. Work includes a variety of projects such as replacing fencing, flooring, damp treatments etc.

Works tend to be reactive in nature and will cover all Wards across the Borough.

32. Feasibility **£25,000**

£25,000 earmarked to design remodelling/ development projects.

Appendix 2

£258,000 WORKS TO HOUSING STOCK 2022-2023 (GENERAL FUND) (Programmes of work funded from the General Fund)

£'000

| | | |
|---|----------------------------|-----|
| 1 | Garage Repairs | 50 |
| 2 | Garage Planned maintenance | 40 |
| 3 | Temporary Accommodation | 168 |

1. Responsive Garage Repairs **£50,000**

This budget is for the provision of day-to-day repairs to the 1060 garages.

2. Planned Maintenance to Garages **£40,000**

Garage maintenance is done on a seven-year cycle of planned maintenance to reasonably maintained sites to ensure garages are kept up to standard

The business case for this budget is simple, to keep garage sites in a lettable condition to maintain the revenue stream whilst maintaining our asset and the appearance of estates. Over the last decade investment in garages has much improved the appearance of estates and removed areas of neglect

Numbers of garages have fallen in recent years as sites are redeveloped or land included in regeneration projects (such as at Dee Park). Where a site is designated for redevelopment within the next five years, we do not carry out planned maintenance.

3. Temporary Accommodation **£168,000**

A budget is used for the repair and maintenance of temporary accommodation properties. In recent years we have decreased the budget as repair costs have fallen following the refurbishment of Jimmy Green Court and 2 Wensley Road flats in recent years.

Appendix 3

**WORKS TO HOUSING STOCK BY WARD
2022-2023**

| | Work Items | Planned/ Demand led | Ward(s) |
|----------------------------|--|------------------------|---|
| 1 | Responsive Repairs | Demand led | All Wards |
| 2 | Voids (includes £400k Capital work) | Demand led | Various |
| Planned Programmes | | | |
| 3 | Estate Maintenance | Demand led | Various |
| 4 | Gas Servicing and domestic legionella checks | Planned | All Wards |
| 5 | Heating Non-Gas Servicing | Planned | Southcote Ward |
| 6 | Essential Cyclical | Planned | Various |
| 7 | Pensioner Decorations | Planned | Whitley, Redlands, Kentwood, Katesgrove, Minster, Norcot and Woodley |
| 8 | Common Areas | Planned | Tilehurst, Norcot, Katesgrove and Whitley |
| 9 | Electrical Checks | Planned | Various |
| 10 | Sprinkler System Servicing | Planned | Minster, Tilehurst, and the Wates Flats in various wards across the Borough |
| 11 | Fire Safety | Planned | Various |
| 12 | External Repairs and Decorations | Planned | Abbey, Caversham, Katesgrove, Minster, Norcot and Tilehurst |
| Major Capital Works | | | |
| 13 | Voids (Major Works) | Demand led | Various |
| 14 | Special adaptations | Demand led | Various |
| 15 | Communal Flooring | Demand led | Various |
| 16 | Structural work | Demand led | Various |
| 17 | Roofs - Traditional Pitched | Planned/Demand led | Abbey Ward |
| 18 | Rewiring | Demand led | Various |
| 19 | Windows and Doors | Planned | Peppard, Minster, Redlands, Southcote and Whitley Wards (Windows) |
| 20 | Central Heating and Boilers | Planned | Various |
| 21 | Granville Road Heat Pumps | Planned | Southcote Ward |
| 22 | Kitchens & Bathrooms | Demand led | Various |
| 23 | Door Entry Systems | Demand led | Various |
| 24 | Asbestos | Demand led | Various |

| | | | |
|----|---|------------|-----------|
| 25 | Decent Neighbourhoods Works | Planned | Various |
| 26 | Kentwood Improvements | Planned | Kentwood |
| 27 | Crosswall Blocks | Planned | Redlands |
| 28 | Coley High Rise, External Fabric/Windows and Roof | Planned | Minster |
| 29 | Ian Mikardo Way Ceilings | Planned | Caversham |
| 30 | Lifts | Demand led | Various |
| 31 | Major Repairs | Demand led | Various |
| 32 | Feasibility/Contingencies | N/A | N/A |

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

| | | | |
|-------------------------|--|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| TO: | HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE | | |
| DATE: | 10 TH MARCH 2022 | | |
| TITLE: | ALLOTMENTS SELF MANAGEMENT UPDATE | | |
| LEAD COUNCILLOR: | KAREN ROWLAND | PORTFOLIO: | CULTURE, HERITAGE AND RECREATION |
| SERVICE: | ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES | WARDS: | BOROUGHWIDE |
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To update Members of the Committee on the progress towards establishing self-management as an option for managing the Council's 20 allotment sites.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Members note the progress of the Allotments Action Plan and Allotments Self-Management Plan, note further work required to develop greater levels of self-management across all Council allotment sites

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 local residents 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 2021- 2022 'Investing in 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 PROPOSAL

4.1 Current Position:

- 4.1.1 Reading Borough Council manages 20 allotment sites, consisting of 1,338 workable plots, and covering 41.5 ha of land. 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.
- 4.1.2 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 set out in the December 2021 reports and in this paper support the delivery of this.
- 4.1.3 However, the Council is conscious that significant rent increases may impact adversely 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.
- 4.1.4 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. There are very successful community-managed allotments sites all over the country, and interest in how this might work in Reading is growing.
- 4.1.5 This interest dovetails with the Council's need to streamline its use of resources at exactly the time that it faces a sharp increase in demand for allotments. This demand is fuelled by a renewed interest in healthy living and outdoor pursuits during the Covid pandemic.
- 4.1.6 A number of actions were agreed by the HNL Committee at its meeting in December 2020 that are captured in the Allotments Action Plan, an updated version of which is shown in Appendix A. Project implementation has increased since the temporary appointment of an Allotment Project Officer in October 2021. Progress and further action is being split into three Plans, Self-Management, Site Maintenance, and Tenancy Management. The Plans overlap and inter-relate but are split to provide a clearer picture to specific stakeholders of activity that is relevant to them. The Self-Management Plan can be found at Appendix B while the other plans will be compiled by Spring 2022.

4.2 SELF-MANAGEMENT PLAN

- 4.2.1 Appendix B sets out the Service's view of the achievements made by allotment site tenants working with the Council towards self-management. There is a positive correlation between sites' progress to self-management and the Council's focus on 'whole-site overhauls' that take in major site maintenance,

identification of abandoned plots, contacting absentee tenants, and site meetings to discuss the benefits of self-management to the tenants and to their overall site. In November 2020 there were eight sites either showing an interest in the notion of self-management or actively carrying out some self-management functions. By January 2022, this number had increased to 14 through the pro-active work of the Allotment Project Officer and the willingness of the allotment tenants to consider a greater involvement in the management of allotment sites.

4.2.2 Appendix B also sets out activities that count as acts of self-management that each site is either currently carrying out or is expressing interest in doing. The first step a site group must take is to collate its own tenant contact list and enhance their on-site communication. The next step for the site is to appoint a Council Liaison Rep through whom communication flows.

4.2.3 Sites presently actively engaging in this process are:

- Ardler Road
- Ashampstead
- Circuit Lane
- Emmer Green
- George Street*
- Goddards Farm*
- Henley Road
- Lower Southcote
- Meadway*
- Mockbeggars*
- Newcastle Road*
- Oakley Road*
- Scours Lane*
- Waterloo Meadows*.

Sites marked * are the most advanced. Appendix B sets out three case studies from Goddards Farm, Scours Lane and Newcastle Road, which are sites that are advancing well. On the remaining six sites, promotion of self-management has either yet to begin or efforts to promote have not gained traction. Initial meetings and fresh efforts to engage are planned for these sites by Spring 2022.

4.2.4 Tenants and their groups on sites showing keenness for self-management have noted and appreciated the Council's tighter focus and coordination of site maintenance and tenancy management work. Some have commented that the Council's approach has helped to persuade sceptical tenants to join in the development of their allotment communities.

4.2.5 All sites involved describe their approach to the idea of self-management as needing to take baby steps, trying out lower-level tasks to see if the group works well together. Some have said they have found that success has bred success and they are developing interest in trying more challenging aspect of self-management.

4.3 SITE MAINTENANCE PLAN

- 4.3.1 The need for site overhauls was identified by tenants in the 2020 consultation as being a condition of them considering adoption of self-management. Work to deliver the necessary improvements to sites that initially expressed an interest in self-management commenced in January 2021. Site clearance, improvements to paths, fencing repairs and other infrastructural work was carried out at Ardler Road, Victoria Road, Oakley Road and Balmore, creating over 20 new plots for letting, and started at George Street.
- 4.3.2 Since October 2021, complete site overhauls (to vacant plots, boundaries, access, security) have been completed at George Street, Newcastle Road, Goddards Farm and Meadway, and have yielded an additional 43 plots to be made available for letting. Programmed next are Mockbeggars, Scours Lane, Circuit Lane, Emmer Green, and Lower Southcote. Major one-off maintenance works are planned or being programmed at Waterloo Meadows and Henley Road. Reactive site maintenance at other sites continues. Most major groundworks occur over the winter months when the Grounds Maintenance teams have sufficient capacity.

4.4 TENANCY MANAGEMENT PLAN - To be drafted

- 4.4.1 “Sorting out the un-tended and vacants plots” is the most common priority request that tenants give the Council. After site maintenance, as described above, tenants ask that attention be given to tenancy management issues, which they identify is a pre-condition of their appetite for self-management.
- 4.4.2 The appointment of an Allotments Project Officer has provided capacity to identify absentee or non-compliant tenants. This has freed up plots to let and helps make the groundworks effort more cost-effective. At George Street, Goddards Farm and Meadway, fifteen absentee tenants surrendered their plots after correspondence from the Council. Furthermore, groups said that the process of tackling anti-social or nuisance tenants needed to be dealt with by the landlord. On other sites, the Council has been involved in either mediation, arbitration, or enforcement of tenancy conditions with seven tenants since October 2021.
- 4.4.3 Some aspects of ‘Tenancy Management’ have or are being adopted by sites which notify the Council of outgoing or absentee tenants, problem plots and their tenants. Other activities include showing prospective tenants around and explaining the sign-up process, sharing better practice in site waste management, taking on clearance of vacated plots, and organising work parties. Volunteers have carried out practical and administrative tasks on behalf of the Council on several sites including Goddards Farm, Scours Lane and Newcastle Road, thus freeing up the Allotment Project Officer to focus on other sites.
- 4.4.4 The headline self-management task that falls under ‘Tenancy Management’ is the trialling and uptake of ‘Local Lettings’. Tenant groups that want to manage their own waiting list can do so on entering a Data Sharing Agreement with the Council and on condition that participants consent to the sharing of their details with the tenant group. Five sites have expressed an interest in trialling Local Lettings. The Council maintains responsibility for letting tenancies and for billing but is relieved of the practicalities of arranging offers and viewings.

- 4.4.5 The initial Allotment Action Plan states the need for a review of rents, charges and discounts to be completed by June 2022. However, the need properly to consult on proposals is essential and will require longer to complete. Case law relating to Section 10(1) Allotments Act 1950 (the ‘reasonability’ of rent levels) suggests that in considering rent increases, “*representations made by or on behalf of tenants should be listened to*”. A formal consultation on rent levels is therefore required. The Council will also be consulting on other matters, as per the Allotment Action Plan, Appendix A. Combining the findings from these consultations with the emerging benefits derived from self-management action presents an opportunity to set Reading’s allotments on a robust financial and organisational footing for the 21st Century.
- 4.4.6 Further tasks have been identified as needing to fall under the Tenancy Management Plan. These include reviewing and updating the Tenancy Agreement Conditions, considering how to cover the cost of disposal of site waste, setting up a structure for charging outgoing tenants for the cost of clearing abandoned, neglected plots, and agreeing to an enforcement process for tenants in serious breach of tenancy.
- 4.4.7 Also within the proposed Tenancy Management Plan are the need to overhaul databases to allow better communication; improved billing systems; reviewing all waiting lists; redrafting all site plans (plot sizes, plot numbering, lifespan of site infrastructure); and a review of the tenure and usage of Council sheds on sites.

4.5 Next Steps

- 4.5.1 It is proposed that all elements of the Allotment Action Plan are progressed, that the Site Maintenance and Tenancy Management Plans, and the necessary consultation proposals are drawn up in consultation and be brought to a future HNL Committee meeting.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 Reading Borough Council’s vision is:

To help Reading realise its potential - and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success.

- 5.2 The proposals contained in this report contribute to the Corporate Plan priorities as follows:

- Creating a healthy environment.
Allotments provide residents with an opportunity to produce food locally and to reduce food miles. Access to nature in urban settings contributes to improved mental and physical health and a healthy lifestyle.
- Creating thriving communities
Allotment gardening offers benefits to all residents, that help to ameliorate the lack of social capital embodied by loneliness and enables citizens to contribute to society, especially beyond retirement as part of like-minded communities with a shared goal and shared achievements.
- Creating an inclusive economy.

Allotment gardening offers informal learning opportunities for users of all ages. Allotment grown produce can be sold and offers a cheap source of healthy food to residents.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The Council has made commitments relating to climate change and the UK Government declared a Climate Change emergency in 2019. As a result, a high-level assessment has been undertaken on the switch from Council management to self-management of statutory allotments on carbon emissions.

- Energy Use - No known impacts.
- Waste Generation - Residents will be encouraged to compost more arisings and dispose of non-compostable items themselves. Management groups will monitor materials brought onto site which will reduce the frequency of fly-tipping. These factors will result in less waste being generated and removed from sites by the Council. Work to identify the savings in avoided land-fill and composting disposal charges will take place over the next 6 months.
- Transport - As maintenance is gradually taken over by tenants self management groups this will result in fewer journeys to allotments for Council vehicles.

It has also been assessed whether the decision will improve resilience to climate change impacts.

- Heatwaves - No known impacts
- Drought - No known impacts
- Flooding - No known impacts
- High Winds/Storms - No known impacts
- Disruption to Supply Chains - No known impacts

The overall rating assigned to this decision is a low positive one.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 The foundation for this report is the 2020 Allotment Consultation Report and is updated through ongoing dialogue with existing and emerging allotment committees and societies.

7.2 Two documents were enclosed in this year's billing letters. First was an outline of progress on uptake of self-management and second was a shortened and clearer version of the tenancy agreement conditions, as requested by those seen on site visits.

7.3 A short survey of the nine Site Liaison Reps have reported that the Council's efforts to promote notions and uptake of joint-/self-management since October 2021 have brought more curiosity and meaningful involvement of their fellow tenants in the issue of self-management.

7.4 The Allotment Project Officer reports a mixed reception among tenants met on initial site visits but continues to find genuine appreciation that the Council is taking the trouble to listen to and act on their opinions.

7.5 Levels of positive feedback and support for self-management have been observed by officers on sites where Council presence and input is greatest. Feedback,

positive and negative, is received by Parks Service staff working on site and via email and telephone.

- 7.6 A key adaptation to the Council's approach has been to work up the whole site approach with tenants in advance of carrying out any tasks. This adaptation arose because tenants asked for it.

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 project as outlined within this report and considers that the proposals have no direct impact on any groups with protected characteristics.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 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.

- 10.2 Where available, bids will be made for funding in order to make improvements to infrastructure are identified in this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 HNL Report 15 December 2020 "Allotment Consultation Report"

- 11.2 HNL Report 10th November 2021. "Allotments Self-Management"

- 11.2 Appendix A - Allotment Action Plan 2022

- 11.3 Appendix B - Allotment Self-Management Plan and Case Studies

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TEMPLATE

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

1. Revenue Implications

Use this Table in the report or as an Appendix to set out the revenue implications:

| | 2021/22 £000 | 2022/23 £000 | 2023/24 £000 |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Employee costs (see note1) | | -15 | |
| Other running costs | | -10 | |
| Capital financings costs | | | |
| Expenditure | | -25 | |
| Income from: | | | |
| Fees and charges (see note2) | | -1 | |
| Grant funding (specify) | | | |
| Other income | | | |
| Total Income | | -1 | |
| Net Cost(+)/saving (-) | | -26 | |

The net cost of the proposal can be funded from (specify service and approved cost centre budget).

Note 1: Specifying any one-off early retirement and redundancy costs. With regard to early retirement costs set out capitalised pension cost and pay-back period in a separate paragraph.

Note 2: In a separate table/appendix set out detailed fees and charges proposals and sensitivity analysis.

2. Capital Implications

| Capital Programme reference from budget book: page line | 2021/22 £000 | 2022/23 £000 | 2023/24 £000 |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Proposed Capital Expenditure | | | |
| Funded by | | | |
| Grant (specify) | | | |
| Section 106 (specify) | | | |
| Other services | | | |
| Capital Receipts/Borrowing | | | |
| Total Funding | | | |

Note: where more than one option /proposal is being made it may be easier to set out the above information in an Appendix.

3. Value for Money (VFM)

The proposal is intended to reduce costs whilst continuing to provide allotments to residents. This model of allotment management is common and reduces the Council's input and costs.

4. Risk Assessment.

There is a risk that insufficient allotment sites will successfully move to self-management thus reducing the intended saving.

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Appendix A. HNL Committee March 2022. Allotments Action Plan - Update (22nd February 2022)

| | ACTION | NOTES | DATE | METHOD | STATUS |
|---------|---|------------------------|---|----------------------|---|
| | Targets arising from 2020 Plan | | Reported at HNL Committee November 2021 | | |
| 1 | Publish 2020 Consultation results & report | All tenants | Nov 2020 | Email. Website | Completed |
| 2 | 7 Sites to be engaged in a level of joint-/self-management | | End Mar 2021 | Officer engagement | 8 sites of 20 engaged by end August 2021 |
| 3 | Site Audits of Pilot Sites | | To Feb 2021 | GM Supervisor | Completed March 2021 |
| 4 | Winter Clean-Up for Pilot Sites | | To March 2021 | GM Teams | Completed July 2021 |
| 5 | Winter Works to Other Sites | | To March 2021 | GM Teams | Completed March 2021 |
| 6 | Appoint Allotment Project Officer | 6-month post | October 2021 | Secondment | Extension agreed |
| 7 | HNL Progress update report & Lead Councillor Briefings | | November 2021 | Written report | Complete & ongoing at each LCB |
| Page 79 | Overhaul Allotment webpage | With Site Liaison Reps | Feb 2022 | In-house | Currently in design with Web Team |
| 9 | Set Rent Levels for 2022, issue invoices and self-management newsletter | Inflation only | Dec 2022 | Electronic invoicing | Completed. Rents agreed, invoiced, but not electronically |
| 10 | Site engagement in self-mgt dialogue Site surveys & agreed site works plans, Mail-outs, site meetings, ongoing dialogue | | Ongoing | See Appendices A & B | Working with/on 14 of 20 sites. Mail-outs/site meetings 12 sites. |
| | Targets developed since HNL Nov 2021 | | | | |
| 12 | HNL March 2022 Update Report | | March 2022 | Written report | Completed |
| 13 | Engage with the 6 sites that have not had initial site meetings or that are identified as needing a renewed engagement push. | | To April 2022 | | Critical task. Project workload to date has limited site coverage. 1 site meeting booked, 5 being set up. |
| 14 | Identify Site Liaison Reps and run SLR Sounding Board. Host first SLR Meeting with National Allotment Society (NAS) | ID as many as possible | ASAP Summer 2022 | Site meetings | 13 SLRs on board, 9 on Site Liaison Rep Sounding Board. See Table 5, Appendix B |

| | | | | | |
|----|---|-------------------------------|---|--|--|
| 15 | Self-Management Information Sources | | Continual | Site Reps, website, from NAS | Promoted site meetings, circulated in Site Liaison Rep email group. |
| 16 | Promote National Allotment Society (NAS) membership to support formation of AllotSocs. | | Continual | Share NAS mission & contact details with SLRs and Steering Groups. | Info shared with 14 sites. 2 sites approached NAS directly for guidance |
| 17 | Reviews of -Tenancy Agreement Conditions - Rents and Discounts - Site waste recycling & waste collection, and charges for clearance of abandoned plots. -Data handling, billing, etc -Site plans (plot numbers, sizes, infrastructure) -On-site buildings | | All December 2021 to Spring 2022 | Internal & benchmarking | Initial discussions on Tenancy conditions, waste plans, site plans, on-site buildings. Outline modelling and benchmarking of rent & discount levels. |
| 18 | Consultation Drafts of a. Self-Management Plan. b. Site Maintenance Works Programme, and c. Tenancy Management Plan | | Spring 2022 | Written plans for consultation | a. Completed b. Live c. To do |
| 19 | Approve Consultation Plan for ... -Rent Review & Tenancy Agreement Review -Waste management & recycling proposals. -Consult on proposals regarding joint-/self-mgt | Statutory Desirable Essential | Summer 2022 | Internal via LCB & HNL | These plans form the basis of the Draft Allotment Strategy 2023 |
| 20 | Consultation Phase Consult Analysis of feedback across all themes Update/Proposal report to HNL as Allotment Strategy 2023 Implement approved changes | | Summer 2022 Autumn 2022 Autumn 2022 Late Autumn 2023 All by December 2022 | Using consultation plan used in 2020 with increased traffic directed via website | |
| 21 | Joint-/Self-Management in place on sites | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|----|--|---|------------------------------------|--|--|
| | -All sites investigating options at any level -Sites with elected committees -Sites with AllotSocs -Sites proposing fully devolved management | | Detailed in Appendix B | Delivered through Self-Management Plan. Appendix B | |
| 22 | SITE MAINTENANCE | Planned Winter Works Reactive works | Annual Oct-March As arising | Site Maintenance Plan | Programme Winter works over 2 winters, dealing with minor works and reactive works in summer months or as required. |
| 23 | Policy and procedure for TENANCY MANAGEMENT 'ACTION' | Tackling tenants in breach of tenancy conditions. | January 2023 | Written policy agreed with Legal Services | Handle problem tenants with existing method till 2023, then apply new procedure in light of agreed new Tenancy Agreement Conditions. |

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Appendix B - ALLOTMENT SELF-MANAGEMENT PLAN & CASE STUDIES

1. The National Allotment Society (NSALG) identifies three levels of allotment self-management, though they recognise there are different degrees within and between the levels. In August 2020, just three Reading Borough Council allotment sites carried out any form of Level 1 self-management activities.

1.1 Table 1 below illustrates the characteristics of self-management, the Council's proposed targets, and our assessed position as of February 2022.

| Table 1. Levels of Self-Management. Characteristics & current activity on sites |
|---|
| <p>Level 1 Informal Self-Management</p> <p>A Site Liaison Representative (SLR) acts as conduit for site matters and consultations (on capital expenditure, absentee tenants, etc) with plotholders and the Council.</p> <p>The Site Rep/Allotment Society/plot-holders informally take on minor maintenance works.</p> <p>The Site Rep/AllotSoc promotes good gardening and sustainable use of plots on the site, they may administer the waiting list.</p> <p>The AllotSoc has neither financial responsibilities nor written management agreement.</p> <p>The Council aims to help all 20 sites that wish to pursue self-management to reach Level 1 by Autumn 2022</p> <p>Sites with some characteristics of Level 1 self-management in February 2022 are Bulmershe, Emmer Green, Goddards Farm, Henley Road, Lower Southcote (Brunel Road), Meadway, Mockbeggars, Newcastle Road, Oakley Road, Scours Lane, Waterloo Meadows, eleven in all</p> |
| <p>Level 2 Formal Self-Management</p> <p>AllotSoc accepts formal responsibility for duties including managing the waiting list, plot allocation and supporting new tenants, and rent collection on behalf of the Council.</p> <p>AllotSoc has some powers to raise funds and manage their budget (inc. finance allocated by the landlord), arrange routine maintenance, and take responsibility for water bills.</p> <p>Financial agreements release a proportion of rental income for the site's own self-management plan, leaving the Council to carry out major works and undertake all legal formalities.</p> <p>A written devolved management agreement or license between the AllotSoc and the Council is held. This model requires a formal constitution to establish responsibilities and obligations it will also require a bank account and proper system of cash control and management.</p> <p>The Council aims to help at least 9 sites to carry out some or all falling within Level 2 by Autumn 2022, 12 sites by Spring 2023, and all or as many sites as possible by Winter 2023.</p> <p>Sites with some characteristics of Level 2 self-management in February 2022 are Bulmershe, Goddards Farm, Meadway, Mockbeggars, Newcastle Road, Oakley Road, Scours Lane, Waterloo Meadows, i.e., nine sites.</p> |

Level 3 Fully Devolved Self-Management

The AllotSoc leases the site from the council, arranges tenancy agreements, collects rents and reinvests revenue (which it manages) on maintenance, repair, and capital items.

Depending upon the term of the lease, plot-holders may become AllotSoc tenants and not tenants of the Council.

The Council retains defined oversight and strategic functions.

A written devolved management agreement is agreed between the AllotSoc and the Council. It sets out respective rights and responsibilities. The terms of the lease usually involve agreement on the level of Council investment needed to make the site fit for handover to the AllotSoc.

The Council plans to have one site negotiating Level 3 terms of lease by Winter 2022; one site fully devolved by Winter 2023; and 5 sites where fully devolved-self-management is in the pipeline by Winter 2023.

There are currently no sites operating with Level 3 self-management characteristics in February 2022.

2. ALLOTMENT SELF-MANAGEMENT AIMS.

2.1 The Council would welcome, but does not expect, all sites reaching Level 3 (Fully Devolved Self-Management) by winter 2023. The Council recognises that the decision to take on and pace of movement toward self-management depends at least in part on the Council's own level of input to the agenda and on the characteristics of each site. Our targets are therefore incremental as set out in Table 2 below

| DATE | SELF-MANAGEMENT TARGETS |
|-------------|--|
| Spring 2022 | Site Liaison Reps are in place on all 20 sites . 13 of the 20 SLRs are already proving an effective communication channel and are helping each other through the SLR email group. |
| Summer 2022 | Inaugural Reading Allotment SLR Meeting – To launch consultation on Reading Allotments Strategy 2023 (including Self-Management Plan, Site Maintenance Plan, and Tenancy Management Plan). To scope potential Reading Federation of AllotSocs . |
| Autumn 2022 | Level 1 activities are being worked towards or carried out on all 20 sites , of which Level 2 activities are operational OR being developed AND elected Site Committees/AllotSocs are in place on 9 sites . Level 3 or Fully Devolved Self-Management is being developed on 1 site . |
| Winter 2022 | Level 2 activities and an elected Site Committee/AllotSoc on 9 sites . Level 3 proposals being worked on at 3 or more sites . Level 3 negotiation on terms of lease underway on 1 site (aspirational). Reading Federation of AllotSocs formed , comprising at least 15 sites. (aspirational) |
| Spring 2023 | Level 2 activities AND an elected Site Committee/AllotSoc on 12 sites . |
| Winter 2023 | Level 2 activities AND elected Committee/AllotSoc on all or as many sites as possible . Level 3 Fully devolved Self-Management in place on 1 site. |

Level 3 being worked toward on **5 sites**.

3. HOW WE PROMOTE AND SUPPORT SELF-MANAGEMENT

3.1 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. Tenant interest in self-management has also been precipitated by meetings with the Allotments Project Officer. Allotments tenants are therefore approaching self-management in different ways.

3.2 While there are very successful community-managed allotments sites all over the country, the Council will not impose a self-management model, opting rather to help sites find the level of self-management with which they are comfortable. The 2020 consultation triggered genuine interest and action in self-management on eight sites. While some then pushed on with their own plans, others lost impetus. The agenda was re-energised in October 2021 through the appointment of the Project Officer, and a reboot of project planning to increase engagement and awareness of self-management potential to the sites.

3.3 Our programme of ‘whole-site overhauls’ has been highly effective in motivating more sites to adopt more roles that are taking them further toward new levels of autonomy. The table below sets out our approach. The Milestones in the Table 3 below demonstrate how we are cultivating interest and energy on sites.

| Table 3. Process for Promotion & Support of Self-Management | | |
|--|---|--|
| STEPS CURRENTLY BEING TAKEN TO PROMOTE SELF-MANAGEMENT ON SITES | | |
| 1 | RBC collates tenant contact details | Seemingly straight-forward but hampered by own database and recording limitations; by outgoing tenants not informing Council they have given up the plot; by faulty site maps. Mitigation. We will review our own data systems. We are drawing up accurate plot maps with site volunteers. |
| 2 | The site collates their own contact list and social media. | Sites starting this in October are hampered by low winter attendance rates of tenants; perceived dangers of GDPR; and lack of volunteers. Mitigation. Meeting turn-out will improve during the summer months. Drawing on advice of the Council’s Information Governance Officer and of the National Allotment Society Regional Rep, sites are learning how to comply with GDPR requirements. |
| 3 | Site meeting 1. Between interested plot-holders and APO. A tenant volunteers or is nominated to be the (acting Site Liaison Rep.) | To identify site problems, request for works, and assess appetite and infrastructure needed to start the self-management journey. May also include site walk to mark vacant/untended plots. APO explains and justifies Council’s aspirations; shares ideas about how to develop self-management; collects all site concerns needing action to help site move toward self-management. Discuss site specific, but non-allotment concerns. Discuss siteworks volunteer work-parties; social events; trading posts; allotment coppicing. APO asks site to draw up its own plans for the site (including maintenance, management, biodiversity, recycling, and social events) |
| MILESTONE. | | |

Engagement, exchange of ideas, recognition of mutual benefits of self-management are developing, leading to mutual trust. Improved confidence in plot lay-out and tenant details provides the foundation for the site group/SLR to be confident they can communicate with a wide base. The Site Liaison Rep and the APO handle enquiries/concerns and so reduce numbers of calls to Streetscene Team.

Willing tenants become active collaborators in the agenda, sharing their hopes and expectations with the wider tenant group more effectively than the Streetscene Team can.

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| 4 | Streetscene Team preparation for whole site overhaul. | Assess feasibility of and schedule works requested; cleanse site waiting list; trace/contact absentee tenants; agree plan with the group; start works. Offer tenancies to those on cleansed waiting list, asking that they be involved in the site's self-management ambitions. |
| 5 | Site Meeting 2. Assessing works. Improving confidence in tenant lists. Local Lettings process. | Fine-tuning and trouble-shooting ongoing works; set up communal recycling bays; advise meeting to form an unelected working group that will take the site toward an elected committee/AllotSoc. Site group informs RBC of plots where they have no tenant contact details. APO advises of first self-management activity, Local Lettings, and of GDPR compliance process required. Council helps with GDPR, inc. template Data Sharing Agreement and Local Lettings procedure. Expand on themes in point 3 above. |
| 6 | Site Group improves its own information. | Site Group has gathered more tenants' contact details through their own efforts and through Parks Team directing tenants to the group. |
| 7 | Joint lettings day | New tenants attend sign-up day agreed and run by site volunteers. Site group show new tenants around, share contact details and pass info to the Council. |

MILESTONE.

A clean site, fully let, with new tenants introduced to and linked in with the site group. The site group has better coverage of tenants for communication purposes. The site may have submitted their own site plans/programmes. Fewer tenants are sceptical of the Council's plans and more tenants are more receptive to and engaged in the self-management agenda.

The site group grows in confidence as more tenants are actively collaborate in the plan, and some are beginning to act as directors of their own site's plans for self-management or of their own on-site projects. Sites arrange meetings with the National Allotment Society Regional Rep, using this relationship to develop their plans rather than solely relying on Council input.

STEPS YET TO BE TAKEN TO PROMOTE SELF-MANAGEMENT ON SITES

| | | |
|----|----------------------------------|--|
| 9 | Initial and second site meetings | Six sites have had no initial site meeting. Two are awaiting their second site meeting. |
| 10 | Whole site overhauls | Completed on six sites, partially carried out on four, works programmed for this or next winter on six, and has not yet been agreed on four sites. |
| 11 | Site Liaison Reps | To be identified on ten sites. All 20 then linked up as SLR Group. |
| 12 | Lock/key exchange days. | Underpins Local Lettings and helpful for sites trying to identify who their tenants are. Essential step in taking control of unlawful access |

| | | |
|----|---|--|
| | Site group becomes gatekeeper. | and fly-tipping on sites. Completed on one site, programmed for six sites in summer 2022. |
| 13 | Assess site waste & increase on-site recycling. | SLRs and Streetscene Team to assess baseline waste generation; Streetscene to install communal composting bays. |
| 14 | Local Lettings | As many sites as possible adopting GDPR-compliant Local Lettings. |
| 15 | AllotSocs established | In partnership with National Allotment Society, assist sites to adopt a model constitution for an AllotSoc and elect AllotSoc committees. |
| 16 | Devolved management agreement | Template agreements provided to sites with committees/AllotSocs for negotiation. To include division of responsibility between AllotSoc and the Council on matters of Site Maintenance and Tenancy Management. |

3.4 Crucial to uptake of self-management is helping the site to identify 10% of their tenant base who are or might become willing to work together for the benefit of other tenants, their site, and the service. To achieve site autonomy, tenants are encouraged from being passive recipients of events, to being active collaborators in the self-management drive, through to becoming directors of their own affairs and resources, This shift in mindset on one site in Reading is illustrated in Table 4 below.

| Table 4. From Passive, through Collaborative toward Self-Directing Attitudes in Allotment Self-Management | |
|--|--|
| 2020 Consultation | Mostly passive recipients . 5 tenants express interest in self-management and 6 in site maintenance. One tenant is directing some affairs on site. Active collaboration in self-management does not arise because, “we needed more support from the Council”. |
| October 2021 | Site Meeting. Five tenants express interest in active collaboration , two as Site Liaison Reps. Streetscene Team starts whole-site planning with tenants. |
| November 2021 | Whole-site overhaul underway. Site Meeting. 16 tenants, some of whom were passive recipients , express interest in active collaboration . 4 tenants assume some site responsibilities. Tenants agree to form a working group to work towards electing a Committee and forming an AllotSoc. |
| January 2022 | New tenant sign-up day run by the working group. Some new tenants volunteer to assist the working group. Group asks to run Local Lettings. % of tenants that are passive recipients dropped, active collaborators increased, and the few wanting to be directors of their own site affairs get closer to their aspiration. |
| February 2022 | Site Meeting. Working Group invites NAS Regional Rep to meeting to advise on steps to become formal AllotSoc. Streetscene Team arrange for data sharing to allow working group to manage waiting list and let plots on behalf of RBC. This one activity sees some passive recipients become active collaborators who are best placed to sell the notion of self-management to the wider site. |

REFLECTION ON SITE PROGRESS Though labour-intensive, success in the above example illustrates increased levels of **active collaboration**. Failure to engage productively with tenants reinforces scepticism and passive recipience that prevent the site from becoming **directors of their own affairs** and taking on the challenge of self-management.

4. CASE STUDIES.

4.1 Newcastle Road. Redlands Ward.

16 tenants at a site meeting during the 2020 Consultation showed passion for their site and an “expressed keenness to be involved in self-management” among several tenants. Newcastle Road showed good potential to adopt self-management because of existing on-site communication and tenants were taking responsibility to some practical works, such as covering abandoned plots.

In October 2021, the group said they had wanted to investigate self-management further, but had “*drifted, as we were getting little help from the Council*”. However, they had increased their on-site communication and a small group had begun to take more active roles in identifying absentee tenants. They formed the Newcastle Road Allotment Group (NRAG) and agreed a plan of action with the Project Officer. The Council addressed these priorities, to replace the site padlock and keys; to clear and let a problem plot; and to improve fencing to the Cintra Park boundary.

NRAG ran a key-exchange day at which they invited all tenants to share their contact details and join the NRAG; straightened up plot boundaries; cut back an overgrown boundary hedge. NRAG has collated their own tenant list and plot map. These have helped the Council to correct their own records. The Council has also been involved in a tenant-relations issue identified by NRAG.

NRAG are keen to take an active role in letting plots and want to explore self-management further. They have written to say that the Council’s recent efforts have, “*Definitely increased interest in joint management*”, To push on further, they have said need “*ongoing liaison with the Project Officer*” and, “*RBC to work with the NRA to arrange joint-management*”.

Newcastle Road’s 2020 keenness in self-management is increasing because they recognise its benefits, because they have been building on their existing social infrastructure, and because the Council has demonstrated commitment by carrying out site works agreed with the group and has been providing support through the Project Officer.

4.2 Goddards Farm. Whitley ward.

Feedback from the 2020 Consultation indicated the site “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”.

In October 2021, one tenant called Streetscene Team for an urgent meeting. He explained that no progress had been made as tenants saw no value in long-term planning because they had assumed the Council would sell the site for developers. Ironically, it was this perceived threat of redevelopment that sparked this tenant’s wish to act now and save their site. In a 1-to-1 meeting, the tenant explained what he does to tend to the site, what his frustrations are and asked how to go about looking after their own site. He then called a site meeting where tenants and the Project Officer discussed site problems and opportunities, agreed to a site works plan, and explored how to become an allotment society.

The Streetscene Team ran a whole-site overhaul that brought 13 untended plots back into use; created a further 11 new plots; improved site security and access; and works to boundaries. At the next site meeting, the group shared each other’s contact details and agreed to act as a

working group with the aim of “deciding how to become an allotment society”. The group has offered to tend plots for those who have not been well. Volunteers numbered the vacant plots and ran a sign-up day for 20 new tenants. The group feels that on site waste generation is so undesirable that they are starting communal composting bays and intend to act as a zero-waste site. Tenants have expressed an interest in using the vacant Horticulture Shed on site for their AllotSoc business and to start a new Trading Post from.

In working together, the tenants feel they are better equipped to stand-up for their site and to ensure that redevelopment of residential property on Hartland Road will not be to their own detriment. The group identified issues beyond their control that the Council will act on, such as domestic waste being thrown onto the site from neighbouring houses.

The group want to push further towards self-management and have asked for the following from the Council to help them,

- Facilitation of meetings and input from the Council - continuing at least until July/August
- Support to set up an appropriate structure for self-management, with advice and guidance on insurance etc.
- Access to the ‘communal shed’, repair of its guttering, and improvement of the parking spaces
- Council helps to contact tenants who are not yet engaged in this process
- Support to liaise with other allotment sites
- Access to specialist equipment/resources from time to time to keep the site in good order
- Communication on any planning matters that affect our use of the site

From a standing start four months ago, Goddards Farm are now not only expressing keenness in self-management, but they are also investigating it and are trialling aspects of it themselves.

4.3 Scours Lane. Kentwood ward.

Since their strong and organised input to the 2020 Consultation, Scours Lane have been in the vanguard of self-management. They continued to work together and communicated regularly with the Council about their site concerns. By October 2021, their Council Liaison Rep was working closely with the Council, identifying vacant or soon to be vacant plots and greeting prospective tenants.

The newly formed Scours Lane Allotment Group has elected ‘Lane Reps’, formed a Committee, held two productive committee meetings, agreed a site works plan with the Council, improved site waste composting, produced an FAQ sheet for tenants, installed a site notice board, and polled tenants about changing the site padlock. The group identified an unused and overgrown area as having potential to locate starter beds and coordinated a volunteer group to clear the ground in advance of the Council removing heavy waste and setting aside topsoil for the starter beds. The Project Officer has sourced timber for the beds that will be built by volunteers.

Scours Lane are keen to take on local lettings and to help raise awareness of tenancy conditions on behalf of the Council. The recent site-overhaul has seen the Streetscene Team clear and prepare 20+ plots for letting by the group. In advance of works, volunteers are salvaging usable material and clearing vacant plots. A key exchange day will be run by the group.

Scours Lane’s interest in self-management and achievements to date are commendable in-kind contributions that benefit the site and the Council. Their achievements are even more impressive given the large size of the site and the number of ploholders.

5. APPETITE FOR AND PROGRESS TOWARD SELF-MANAGEMENT BY SITE

5.1 Table 5 below assesses enthusiasm and achievement in self-management by site. Self-management progress since October 2021 is based on whether a site has a nominated Site Liaison Rep, has on-site communications in place, has a working group or elected committee active on site. It also includes the subjective opinion of how a site's action feels according to the Allotment Project Officer. Note that there remain six sites where the engagement process has not yet started.

| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H |
|-----------------|---|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---|---|----------------------------|---|
| | 2020 Interest in Self-Mgt? % of replies | 2020 Interest in Site-Maint? % of replies | 2020 Social Media on site | Feb-22 Social media on site | 2020 Steering Group or Committee on site? | Feb-22 Steering Group or Committee on site? | Feb - 22 Site Liaison Rep? | Self-mgt appetite & progress since Oct 2021 to Feb 2022 |
| ARDLER ROAD | 100% of 1 | 100% of 1 | N | N | N | TBA | Y | Not required at present |
| ASHAMPSTEAD RD | 50% of 2 | 50% of 2 | N | Y | N | N | Y | Not required at present |
| BALMORE | 80% of 5 | 80% of 5 | Not known | Y | N | N | Y | 1 st meeting March |
| BULMERSHE | 45% of 29 | 62% of 29 | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | To be assessed March |
| CAVERSHAM COURT | 13% of 8 | 75% of 8 | Not known | Not known | Not known | N | Y | To be assessed March |
| CIRCUIT LANE | 33% of 6 | 67% of 6 | N | Y | N | TBA | N | Slightly positive |
| COLEY | 56% of 9 | 78% of 9 | Not known | Not known | N | N | N | To be assessed March |
| EMMER GREEN | 20% of 15 | 27% of 15 | N | Y | N | N | Y | Positive |
| GEORGE STREET | 33% of 3 | 100% of 3 | Y | Y | N | TBA | Y | Positive |
| GODDARDS FARM | 50% of 10 | 60% of 10 | N | Y | N | Y | Y | V Positive |
| HENLEY ROAD | 45% of 20 | 40% of 20 | N | Y | N | TBA | Y | Positive |
| LOWER SOUTHCOTE | 78% of 9 | 67% of 9 | N | Y | N | TBA | Y | Positive |
| MEADWAY | 25% of 4 | 75% of 4 | Not known | Y | N | Y | Y | Positive |
| MOCKBEGGARS | 50% of 4 | 100% of 4 | Y | Y | TBA | Y | Y | V Positive |
| NEWCASTLE ROAD | 100% of 7 | 86% of 7 | Y | Y | TBA | Y | Y | V Positive |
| OAKLEY ROAD | 63% of 8 | 75% of 8 | Not known | Y | N | Y | Y | Positive |
| OAK TREE ROAD | 53% of 17 | 65% of 17 | Y* | Y* | N | N | N | To be assessed April |
| SCOURS LANE | 62% of 29 | 66% of 29 | Y | Y | TBA | Y | Y | V Positive |

| | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---|---|---|---------------------------------|
| VICTORIA ROAD | 33% of 3 | 100% of 3 | Not known | Not known | N | N | N | To be assessed April |
| WATERLOO MEADOWS | 29% of 7 | 71% of 7 | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | V Positive |

Key & Notes to Table 5.

Columns A, B, C, E. Statistics from 2020 Allotment Self-Management Consultation.

Column D. Where “Social media on site” aims to provide coverage for whole site, shaded green. If shaded orange or red, social media is being used among different clusters of plot holders on a site without any ‘whole site’ coverage.

Columns E and F. Fully formed Committees exist at Scours Lane and Waterloo Meadows. On other sites shaded green, a steering group is working toward committee status. It is not yet known whether sites shaded orange have working steering groups. The East Reading Horticultural Association (ERHA) runs a Trading Shed on Bulmershe allotments. The ERHA committee carries out some Level 1 self-management activities but there is currently no committee dedicated solely to the interests of Bulmershe allotments. The committee of Caversham Allotment Gardens & Horticultural Association runs a Trading shed on Henley Road allotments, but does not act on behalf of the allotment site itself.

Column H. Sites shaded green are engaged and actively investigating what levels of self-management would work for them and whether to form an Allotment Society. Of those shaded orange Ardler Road (8 plots) said they are too small to consider self-management, Ashampstead Road have said they look after their site already, but do now have a Site Liaison Rep, or are awaiting an initial meeting or need a different approach to engagement.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

| | | | |
|-------------------------|---|---------------------|---|
| TO: | HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE | | |
| DATE: | 10 MARCH 2022 | AGENDA ITEM: | |
| TITLE: | REWILDING AND THE WILDFLOWER PLAN. INCREASING BIODIVERSITY ON HIGHWAY VERGES AND OTHER PUBLIC LAND | | |
| 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 previously mown grassland. This project is aimed at dealing with two different aspects of the climate emergency: carbon sequestration and increasing biodiversity.
- 1.2 As part of the Council’s response to the climate change emergency declared in February 2018, an experimental rewilding project commenced in spring 2020 on a number of larger highway verges, which were left un-cut during the growing season, allowing wildflower species to grow and seed. Site conditions were assessed in the autumn, together with an analysis of feedback from residents, and the Wildflower Plan was prepared.
- 1.3 During its first year, the initiative did not apply to parks, although historically at least 40 hectares of parkland has been managed as conservation grassland. The Wildflower Plan proposed the inclusion of additional areas of parks in the rewilding project.

- 1.4 The rewilding project has now been underway for two seasons. This report gives further details of the operational changes involved in the project, updates members on the results of extending the experiment and on the recommended next steps contained in the draft updated Wildflower Plan.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Members note the report and the progress of the Re-wilding experimental project in 2021.
- 2.2 That the committee endorse the recommendations of the Wildflower Plan appended to this report.

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 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, an initiative directly supported by the rewilding project.
- 3.3 At the same time, the Council was consulting on the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), which 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 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 and along parks boundaries:
- The creation of new wildlife rich habitats
 - Reversal of the decline in Reading’s biodiversity
 - Greater value placed on Reading’s biodiversity by its residents

4. THE PROPOSAL

The background: Year 1

- 4.1 The experimental rewilding project began in March 2020 and the following was monitored over the course of the first year:

- 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.

4.2 The review, presented to HNL in autumn 2020, found the programme to be largely successful:

- 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 only a limited number of sites, and this was removed prior to cutting.
- Residents' responses were overwhelmingly positive. Around 150 responses were received, mainly through the dedicated inbox, of which over 80% were enthusiastically supportive.
- Of the nearly 20% of more critical comments, almost all were in favour of close-mown grass. Many of these applied to mowing grass on large banks. As a result, banks were returned to regular mowing in 2021.

The current situation: Year 2

4.4 Following recommendations in the Wildflower Plan, the following changes were made in 2021

- Some sites were sown with locally sourced wildflowers and cut only at the end of the season to allow establishment.
- Additional marginal rewilding (changing the mowing regime around parks boundaries and margins) was trialled at twelve locations in parks, adding around 2ha (5%) to the current area, 41 hectares, of conservation grassland already managed by the Council.
- The Council agreed to work 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 town'.

4.5 An assessment of the Year 2 programme is included in the revised Wildflower Plan attached in the Appendix. However, monitoring carried out over the course of the year indicates that:

- There was public support for marginal rewilding in parks.
- There was no noticeable improvement in species diversity from sowing wildflower seed on poorer sites.

It is too early to assess the effectiveness of the BID-funded 'enhanced' schemes in Reading, because the flower-rich turf was laid only in the autumn. This will be assessed over the extended flowering season from spring to autumn 2022.

- 4.6 The planned change from an annual cut-and-collect to a three-times-a-season cut-and-collect on those sites with less diversity of flora did not take place because of difficulty in securing the right machinery. A bid has been made to purchase small cut-and-collect mowing equipment to enable this to start in 2022.
- 4.7 One result of the rewilding project has been the spontaneous involvement of residents in the creation of local wild areas. Feedback from residents was a key aim of the 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. However, local involvement has extended beyond this to volunteers arranging their own neighbourhood rewilding.
- A group of volunteers have started the Newtown Community Garden on open land owned by Housing between Cumberland and Amity Roads. The purpose is to create and maintain a sustainable re-wilding area for locals to get involved in and enjoy. The group canvassed local residents and received overwhelming support for their plans, which include planting bulbs, wildflowers and fruiting shrubs; rainwater harvesting; keeping the area free of litter; installing and maintaining seating and a noticeboard; and regular low-key events related to art and gardening. A key focus is to invite people living alone to participate or simply to sit on the bench with a cup of tea.
 - The Friends of Waterloo Meadows have been interested for a long time in improving the biodiversity of the riverside site, and encouraging wildflowers predates the rewilding project. In 2021, the Friends of Waterloo Meadows and CROW (Conserve Reading on Wednesdays) worked together to extend the wildflower scrapes. Using funding donated by SUSTRANS for seed, volunteers have created several large areas of wildflowers, most near to the main path, going through the Meadows. The results in the middle of summer were spectacular.



- Enquiries about starting other local rewilding have been received from residents on Woodcote Way and Chiltern Road.

Next steps

- 4.5 The appended Wildflower Plan recommends the continuation of the current programme on highways verges and in parks. It also recommends looking at the margins of allotments sites for future rewilding. Not only do allotments sites offer so far untapped potential for biodiversity enhancement, but there are unambiguous synergies between habitat for pollinators and the presence of pollinators for growing fruit and vegetables.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 Improving the quality and diversity of wilder places in Reading supports a number of Corporate Plan aims including:

- Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe
- Promoting great education, leisure and cultural opportunities for people in 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. Response was actively encouraged, and hundreds of emails were received into a dedicated Rewilding inbox.

6.2 The response of residents was overwhelmingly positive. Around 150 responses have been received over the first two years of the project, mainly through the dedicated inbox, of which about 20% are critical and the remainder enthusiastically supportive. Examples of these are below. There have also been 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 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

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 for £76,000 to fund the additional cut and collect machinery required for the project, as this will be more cost-effective over time than repeatedly hiring in machinery. This proposal has scheme but not yet spend approval.

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 contribute to climate change targets by dealing with two different aspects of the climate emergency: carbon sequestration and enhancing biodiversity.

10.2 Rewilding responds 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 None for this report. The Wildflower Plan is appended.

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



**WILDFLOWER PLAN 2.0
FEBRUARY 2022**

| Version | Author | Review date | Completed by |
|---------|--------|------------------|--------------|
| 1.0 | CJ | 31 October 2021 | |
| 2.0 | CJ | 28 February 2023 | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |



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. In 2021 rewilding of larger verges continued.
4. In 12 parks, 2ha of land was added to the 40ha of conservation grassland already maintained for biodiversity. These were mainly on the edges of parks to create corridors for fauna. The change attracted no comment.
5. The Council had planned, on some sites, to change the maintenance regime from an annual cut-and-collect to a 3x aseason cut-and-collect in order to assess the effect on biodiversity and the vigour of both flowers and grass. In the event, problems with securing the right machinery meant that this did not happen, and the change will be initiated in 2022, if machinery can be secured.
6. A few sites were sown with locally sourced native perennial wildflowers and cut only at the end of the season to allow establishment in an attempt to increase diversity. No particular enhancement was observed.
7. The Council continued the public information and consultation started in 2020.
8. 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 around the town centre, meadow-like landscapes that include more colour for a longer period are being funded by the Business Improvement Districts. This will raise the profile of the rewilding initiatives and contribute to refocusing perceptions of Reading as a 'green/wild city'. The performance of the 'meadowscape' planting (autumn 2021) will be assessed in the next review.
9. Given the high demand on the Council's parks for recreational activities, it is not possible to continue to rewild larger and larger sections of public parks. It is therefore proposed that allotments sites be surveyed with the object of creating wildflower - or naturally rewilded - areas on the margins. There are obvious synergies between creating habitat for pollinators and growing fruit and vegetables. There will be resource implications attached to changing management regimes here.
10. Local involvement has extended beyond support for the Council's project to volunteers' arranging their own neighbourhood rewilding. The Climate Change Partnership is as much about education as implementation, and it is hoped that one result of the rewilding project will be involvement of more residents in the creation of local wild areas.

1. Introduction

Rewilding means restoring, reclaiming and protecting natural habitats and native species, and involves, amongst other things, the encouragement of wildflowers to grow on areas of previously mown grassland. The Council's Wildflower Plan guides the rewilding programme with the specific aim of dealing with two different aspects of the climate emergency: carbon sequestration and increasing biodiversity.

In 2018 the Council declared a climate emergency, and started working with partners in business, voluntary and education sectors to assess 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 published its Biodiversity Action Plan, which focuses on promoting natural solutions to climate challenges, setting out priorities 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 Council is aware that leaving long grass on the highway will also attract complaints.

Grassland is important in combatting climate change. It 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).

As part of the Council's response to the climate change emergency, an experimental rewilding project commenced in spring 2020 on a number of larger highways verges, which were left un-cut during the growing season, allowing wildflower species to grow and seed. Site conditions were assessed in the autumn, together with an analysis of feedback from residents, and the first Wildflower Plan was prepared.

in its first year, the initiative did not apply to parks, although historically at least 40 ha of parkland has been managed as conservation grassland. The first Wildflower Plan proposed the inclusion of additional areas of parks in the rewilding project.

This second Plan assesses progress and proposes the extension of the project to include other areas of public land.

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 time, it should be possible to reduce the cutting regime from 2 or 3 cut-and-collect mowings each season to annual cuts, 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, within 2m of a road grass may as well be mown regularly to keep it short and tidy, because research shows that pollinating insects tend not to use flowers in this belt (2019, *The Applied Ecologist*).

2.2 Process

On rewilded sites that are naturally species-rich or which have been managed as conservation grassland for a long period, an annual cut-and-collect mowing regime will be followed. Mowing will occur after seed has set and fallen. Where possible, mowings will be left on site to preserve insect eggs and larvae. Elsewhere:

- 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 and recycle. The need to deposit arisings will reduce over years.
- Increasing species: encourage (or top up with) perennial, native. Aim for a succession of flowering times to maximise both visual and ecological value.

For the reasons explained above, the Council's rewilding programme includes both sites that are mown annually and some rewilded sites that are managed on 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. Review of the project

3.1 *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 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 them for the quality and variety of grasses and other plants, and encouraging 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 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.

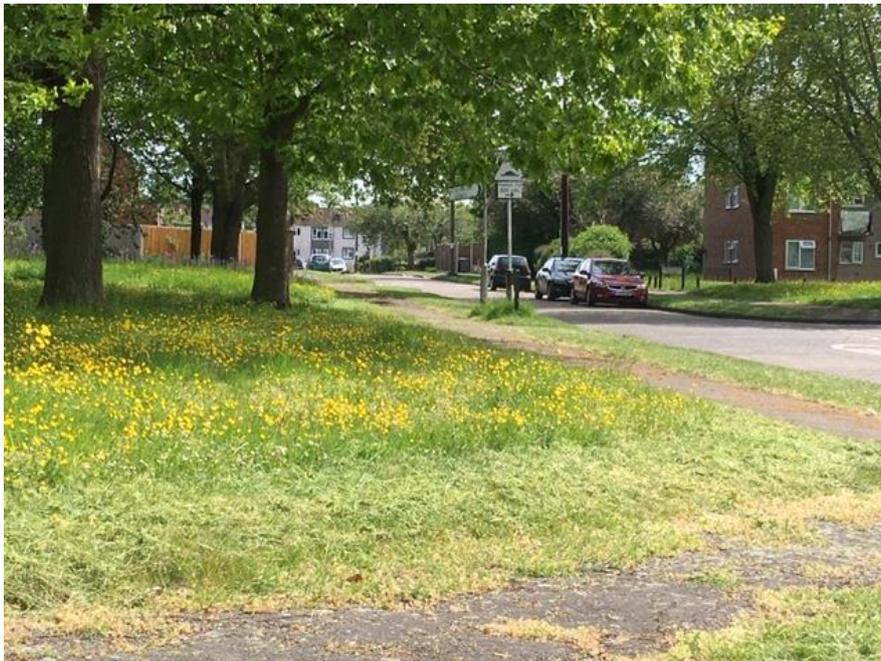
The assessment of the success or otherwise of the experiment had four aspects:

- 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. From a maintenance point of view, the conclusion was that the experiment had 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. 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.



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

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. It was impossible not to conclude that residents are receptive of the project and wished to see it continued.

3.2 Rewilding Project Phase 2: Highways

Arising from review of Phase 1 sites, it was 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
- Mowing three times during the season on some sites would start

Several sites were set aside for seeding with additional flowers. In order to allow germination and establishment, these areas would 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 1 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 1: 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 | ✓ |

In the event, problems with securing the right machinery meant that the system of mowing three times during the season did not happen. This will be deferred to 2022, if machinery can be secured. All sites were therefore mown and arisings collected at the end of the season only.

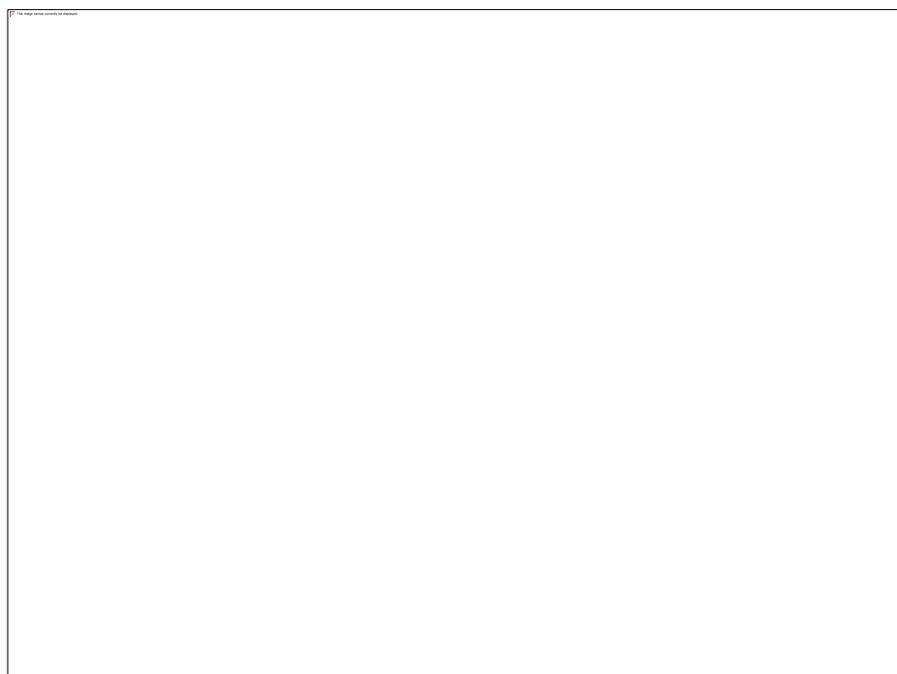
Some sites were overseeded with a native perennial mix, but, without a survey, it is not possible to assess whether this increased diversity. There was no appreciable visual difference arising from sowing seed.

3.3 Rewilding Project Phase 2: Parks

The Council has historically managed over 40 hectares of parkland for biodiversity. These locations are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: 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 |
| Mclloy 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 |



Bugs Bottom, May 2021

As part of the Rewilding Project, more areas of unmown grass for reasons of improving biodiversity were introduced in public parks, particularly on the margins, to provide more cover for wildlife. The following criteria were applied:

- Avoid areas that are used for recreation: sport, dog-walking, play, etc.

- Create a balance, so that a variety of human experience is created within larger sites and across the Borough
- Select areas that link up wild zones to create wildlife corridors
- Avoid areas that are likely to become litter traps

Table 3 lists those parks in which there was land suitable for the rewilding trial that meets all criteria below.

Table 3: 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 |

These areas will add 5% to the area currently mown as conservation grass to allow the Council to test the response.

It was proposed that the Council carry out an experiment in 2021 in parks along the same lines as the 2020 trial on highway verges. As with the 2020 rewilding project, requests for feedback from parks users was sought and monitored.

In fact, the changes in parks attracted virtually no comment. As a result, these sites will now remain as permanent conservation grassland.

4. Next steps

4.1 Additional land for rewilding

The Council has set a modest target for adding to the area set aside for rewilding. With public parkland intensively used for a range of other, primarily recreational, purposes, it is not possible to set aside large areas of parks for conservation grass.

It is therefore proposed that allotments sites be surveyed with the object of creating wildflower - or naturally rewilded - areas on the margins of allotments sites. There are obvious synergies between creating habitat for pollinators and growing fruit and vegetables. There will, however, be a resource implication because of the requirement to mow at least annually and remove arisings. For this reason, progress can be made only as resources become available or as tenants can be persuaded to carry out the annual cutting.

4.2 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 continue to be posted on the Council website.
- Where appropriate, temporary, laminated signs will be erected on new areas to explain what the Council is trying to achieve.
- Regular press releases 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.

5. Wildflowers for beautification: town centre locations

5.1 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 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.

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.

5.2 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.

5.3 *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 enhanced 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.

5.3.1 *IDR splitter beds - perennials*

In version 1 of the Wildflower Plan, it was proposed that long-flowering mixes of native and exotic, drought-tolerant, perennial wild-looking flowers were planted ringing the town centre.

In autumn 2021, two different turf mixes of 'meadow' plants were laid in the planters around the town centre, outside Reading Station and in the planters attached to 'Welcome to Reading' signs. These were funded by the Business Improvement Districts, and are intended to demonstrate in a highly visible way Reading's commitment to implementing the action plans attached to the Reading Climate Change Partnership Strategy.

The performance of this wildflower turf will be assessed during the growing and flowering season of 2022.

5.3.2 *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.

5.3.3 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. 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.

5.3.5 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.

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.

5.4 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.

6. Encouraging private rewilding

6.1 Introduction

The Climate Change Partnership is as much about education as implementation. The Council's aspiration to inspire residents to rewild even small patches of private land as well as to encourage appreciation for what is being done on public land has been evident in the media campaign that has accompanied the Rewilding Project: signage, website information, social media posts and podcasts.

The overwhelmingly positive response that has been received to the initiative suggests that the Council's commitment to rewilding is an effective partnership with its residents.

6.2 Local initiatives

At the same time, local involvement has extended beyond support for the Council's project to volunteers' arranging their own neighbourhood rewilding. Here are two examples:

A group of volunteers has started the **Newtown Community Garden** on open land owned by Housing between Cumberland and Amity Roads. The purpose is to create and maintain a sustainable rewilding area for locals to get involved in and enjoy. The group canvassed local residents and received overwhelming support for their plans, which include planting bulbs, wildflowers and fruiting shrubs; rainwater harvesting; keeping the area free of litter; installing and maintaining seating and a noticeboard; and regular low-key events related to art and gardening. A key focus is to invite people living alone to participate or simply to sit on the bench with a cup of tea.

At **Waterloo Meadows**, the Friends of Waterloo Meadows and CROW (Conserve Reading on Wednesdays) worked together to extend the wildflower scrapes. Using funding donated by Sustrans for seed, volunteers have created several large areas of wildflowers, most near to the main path, going through the Meadows. The results in the middle of summer were spectacular.



Waterloo Meadows, summer 2021