

**STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES - 20 NOVEMBER 2024**

**Present:** Councillors Cross (Chair), Hornsby-Smith (Vice-Chair), Ballsdon, Ennis, Griffith, Juthani, Keeping, Lanzoni, McCann, McElroy, McGrother, O'Connell and Stevens.

**In attendance:** Councillor Magon (remotely via Teams).

**Apologies:** Councillors Goss, Leng and Rowland.

**11. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**12. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Minutes of meetings of the Traffic Management Sub-Committee held on 13 June 2024 and 11 September 2024 were received.

**13. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES**

The Minutes of the following meetings were received:

- Joint Waste Disposal Board on 13 June 2024 and 19 September 2024.
- Reading Climate Change Partnership Board on 18 January 2024, 18 April 2024 and 18 July 2024.

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

A question on the following matter was asked in accordance with Standing Order 36.

<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Subject</b>
Councillor McElroy	Local freeze on the bus fare cap in Reading.

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

**15. ADOPTION OF THE CHRISTCHURCH CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL**

Further to Minute 25 of the meeting held on 13 March 2024, the Committee considered a report that recommended the adoption of a final version of the Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal covering the area of Christchurch within Redlands and Katesgrove wards, following the completion of a public consultation. The following documents were appended to the report:

## STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 20 NOVEMBER 2024

- Appendix 1 - Equality Impact Assessment
- Appendix 2 - Statement of Consultation on the Draft Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal
- Appendix 3 - Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal (adoption version)

The Appraisal had been carried out as a community project led by the Reading Conservation Areas Advisory Committee (CAAC) with assistance from Council planning officers and interested local community representatives. At the meeting held on 13 March 2024 the Committee had agreed for a public consultation to be carried out on a draft version of the Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal to replace the previous Appraisal which dated from 2010.

The Appraisal recommended that a number of boundary changes be made to significantly extend the conservation area to include properties on Whitley Street, Basingstoke Road, Milman Road, Glebe Road, Christchurch Gardens, Christchurch Road and Cintra Avenue. The consultation had taken place between 5 April and 31 May 2024 and a total of 14 responses had been received. The main points arising following the consultation process were summarised in the report. A summary of each consultation response was provided in the Statement of Consultation (attached at Appendix 2) which also highlighted the changes that had been made to the Appraisal following the consultation process.

The report explained should the Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal be adopted it would result in the recommended extensions to the conservation area being confirmed. This would have implications for the operation of planning powers in the area and would alter the permitted development rights that would apply. The Appraisal would also become a material consideration in the determination of planning applications in the area.

At the invitation of the Chair, Evelyn Williams, Chair of the Reading CAAC, gave a presentation on the work that had been carried out by the CAAC to conduct the Appraisal review and to prepare the Appraisal document.

Following a discussion of the item the Committee thanked Evelyn Williams and other volunteer members of the CAAC for the work they had done on the Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal.

### **Resolved –**

- (1) That the responses received during the consultation on the Draft Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal, as attached at Appendix 2, be noted;**
- (2) That the Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal, as attached at Appendix 3, be adopted.**

### **16. PROJECT SKYWAY**

The Committee received a presentation from the Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection on the Council's involvement as a stakeholder with Project Skyway, a

## **STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 20 NOVEMBER 2024**

collaborative partnership project funded by a £15 million bid to Innovate UK and led by Reading based company Altitude Angel to create the UK's first "drone superhighway". A copy of the presentation slides had been circulated with the agenda.

The Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection explained that participation in the project had allowed the Council to be involved with the introduction of a new piece of technology from the start and had afforded the opportunity to understand and influence how that new technology and associated infrastructure might impact the town, residents and the Council itself. The Council's involvement also helped to give it and the public a voice in shaping how the industry worked and interacted with local government and with the public. At the same time the Council was also able to provide support as a partner to a Reading based local business thereby supporting economic growth in the town.

The presentation outlined the project's vision to enable drones to safely share the skies with all other aviation, even when out of sight of the pilot, thereby unlocking the societal and commercial benefits of drones. The Committee heard that the project had been designed to expand what drones could do by allowing them to fly long distances without the pilot maintaining visual line of sight. Project Skyway was a "drone superhighway" and utilised masts on the ground equipped with sensors. Masts were placed along the route to track drones and to monitor airspace to allow the drones to fly safely alongside other air traffic. It was noted that the erection of masts would potentially have implications in terms of planning but that, where possible, mast infrastructure would utilise existing masts and structures.

The Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection explained that the Council had worked together with Connected Places Catapult to support public engagement and had helped to facilitate access to residents. A public engagement exercise had connected a broad range of stakeholders to identify potential users and their requirements and to assess public perspectives. Approximately 20 Reading residents had participated in focus group sessions that looked at positive use cases and the societal, environmental and economic growth benefits of drones. The focus groups also looked at the potential negatives such as the impact on wildlife, noise and visual amenity, sustainability and energy use, local jobs, infrastructure (i.e the erection of more masts), safety and privacy.

The focus group sessions had also asked participants to identify who they thought would be responsible for addressing issues arising from the introduction of drone technology. Participants said that local authorities would need to play an enforcement type role in regulating the use of drones in areas such as preventing environmental harm (e.g. addressing noise and visual pollution), enforcement of unauthorised drone usage and privacy. The focus groups recognised that the regulation of the industry would require the involvement of government agencies, as well as the industry itself, and would require further development and thought in terms of establishing how regulations would be put into place and which agencies would be responsible for them.

The focus group sessions looked how best to engage with public and covered a range of topics that included: current drone regulations; the specific usage and purposes of the Skyway drone highway (including its route, volume of traffic and hours of operation);

## STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 20 NOVEMBER 2024

provided a balanced view of drone use cases (that included exploring the public sector and commercial usage of drones); looked at the issue of transparency and accountability, and considered the importance of sharing environmental research relating to drone use (for example investigating the impact drone usage could have on wildlife). The sessions recommended that that the drone industry should build trust by collaborating with the public and with local authorities.

The Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection explained that the project had been granted a six-month extension to enable further testing and collaboration with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). During that period live testing had continued to gather the data needed in order to demonstrate safety and to progress the project through the CAA's certification and award processes. Subject to the outcome of CAA's safety and commercial viability approval processes, it was anticipated that a trial period of flights would commence in the spring of 2025 with commercial operations to follow in the winter of 2025.

The Committee discussed the content of the presentation and asked several questions. Some of the points discussed included:

- That drone technology had many benefits to the public sector - for example drones were already being used by the Police to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour and by the Council to survey buildings and areas affected by flooding;
- That it was important not to conflate the commercial ambitions of Project Skyway with the wider benefits of drones.
- That there were concerns about the noise and general disturbance caused by drones flying overhead.
- That it was not clear how noise and pollution would be affected as the scale of drone operations increased.
- That there were legitimate concerns relating to the safety of objects being transported overhead.
- That there were concerns regarding the superhighway's proximity to a number of locally sensitive sites.
- That there were legitimate concerns regarding drones intruding on people's privacy.
- That there were concerns relating to the impact of drones on pets, livestock and wildlife.
- That, whilst it was recognised that residents' concerns had been identified and discussed during the public engagement exercises, had those concerns been addressed to the satisfaction of the people who had raised them?

In response to some of the points raised by the Committee the Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection advised that, for safety reasons, the route proposed by Project Skyway avoided built-up urban areas, and so the impact in terms of general safety and noise nuisance at this stage of the project was anticipated to be minimal. He noted however that further research was required to establish the impact on wildlife and that this research would need to continue whilst the technology was being developed. In relation to privacy concerns, the Assistant Director noted that, for Project Skyway, the public needed to be educated in terms of being aware that the drones did not carry

## STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 20 NOVEMBER 2024

cameras on them and that the cameras and sensors located on masts pointed at the horizon and not down or into people's property. The Assistant Director noted that if the project launched commercially further public communication and engagement would be needed to ensure that the wider public were kept informed. The Assistant Director also noted that the Council had been involved in a separate piece of research by the University of Reading regarding the impacts of drones on people as well as the involvement of local authorities in regulating drone usage.

**Resolved – That presentation on Project Skyway be noted.**

### 17. CLIMATE ADAPTATION FRAMEWORK

The Committee considered a report on the production and approval of the Climate Change Adaptation Framework for the Council. A copy of the Climate Change Adaptation Framework was appended at Appendix 1. A copy of the Reading Climate Risk Assessment spreadsheet was attached to the report at Appendix 2.

The report set out the global context concerning climate change and global warming and explained the worsening impacts, risks and costs, both nationally and internationally, that included environmental events such as floods, heatwaves, storms and wildfires. The report explained that the UK faced warmer and wetter winters, hotter and drier summers, and would be susceptible to more frequent and extreme weather events and that this would continue to be the case for the foreseeable future. The report explained that climate change would have a significant impact on the economy and that the most vulnerable in society would be the most exposed to its risks as they had the least resources available to them to allow them to adapt. The report explained that the Council, its partners and the wider community needed to plan for and adapt to the effects of climate change and that the Climate Change Adaptation Framework had been developed to allow the Council and the communities it served to become more resilient to its impacts.

The report explained that the Council had long recognised the need to adapt to climate change and that this had been outlined in the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25, the vision statement of which was to achieve a "net zero, *resilient* Reading by 2030". The report explained that, whilst the Climate Emergency Strategy did identify and plan to manage climate risks, it was more focused on climate mitigations (reducing emissions) than on climate adaptation (preparing for the impacts) and that it did not address climate adaptation comprehensively enough from the perspective of the Council's own services and responsibilities. Therefore, there was still a need for the Council to develop a more bespoke climate adaptation framework.

The report explained that the Climate Change Adaptation Framework had been prepared to fill the gap that had been identified in terms of giving the Council a clear framework to build on the foundations that had been laid in the Climate Emergency Strategy by setting out in more detail the key risks, issues and objectives for the Council to pursue to make itself, and the communities it served, more resilient to the impacts of climate change. It also provided a framework within which individual Council services could develop their approach to managing climate risk as they became more climate risk aware.

## **STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 20 NOVEMBER 2024**

The structure of the proposed Climate Change Adaptation Framework was set out in the report which stated that it was important to understand that climate adaptation was a process not an event, and that dynamic assessment of climate related risk would be required to continually update the response of individual services and the Council as a whole. Hence the approach had been to develop a framework which could evolve over time and be updated in real time. The outputs from which could then be fully integrated into the Council's risk management corporate/service planning and performance management frameworks, rather than sitting in a separate plan which attempted to capture every possible action but, which would quickly become dated.

The report proposed that, as a first step, the Committee should endorse the proposed Adaptation Framework (attached at Appendix 1 to the report). Following this, individual Council services would need to apply the principles, objectives and risks identified in the Framework to their own contexts, thereby enabling the Framework to be developed more fully. As work progressed, and given the wide-ranging nature of climate risk, the report proposed that the Adaptation Framework should also be considered by other Committees and be adopted as Council policy.

### **Resolved –**

- (1) That the proposed Climate Change Adaptation Framework for Reading Borough Council included at Appendix 1 be approved;**
- (2) That it be noted that work needed to be done by all services to identify specific actions to make services and communities more resilient to climate impacts, within the context of the Climate Adaptation Framework;**
- (3) That the Climate Adaptation Framework be considered by other relevant Committees prior to submission to Policy Committee for adoption as Council policy.**

### **18. ANNUAL REPORTS FOR 2023/24 ON (I) THE READING CLIMATE EMERGENCY STRATEGY 2020-25 AND (II) CORPORATE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS**

The Committee received a report presenting two Annual Reports for 2023/24 on key elements of Reading's response to the Climate Emergency.

The 2023/24 Annual Report on the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25 was attached to the report at Appendix 1. The report had been prepared by the Reading Climate Change Partnership (RCCP) and reflected the activity by a range of partners across Reading, not just the Council. The headline message from the report was that, in common with the rest of the UK, emissions for 2022 (the latest year for which data was available) had fallen compared to 2021. This followed an increase in emissions in the year after the pandemic. The long-term trend remained positive with Borough emissions having fallen 54% since 2005. This represented a further reduction on the 51% reduction reported in 2021. The report stated that Reading had seen the 12<sup>th</sup> largest reduction in emissions out of 374 UK local authority areas. Reading's per capita emissions also remained the lowest in Berkshire. The report also explained that the pace of emissions reduction would need to

## **STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 20 NOVEMBER 2024**

increase significantly to get back on track to achieve the Strategy target of 'net zero by 2030'. A summary of the key conclusions drawn from the Annual Report 2023/24 on the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy were set out in section 3 of the report.

The 2023/24 Annual Report on the Council's corporate greenhouse gas emissions was attached to the report at Appendix 2. The report tracked the progress made towards the implementation of the Council's Carbon Plan and the targets within it. The headline conclusion of the Annual Report was that the Council's carbon footprint for the 2023/24 business year had been cut by 72.7% since 2008-09. This represented a slight increase in emissions from 2022/23 and meant that the Council's emissions had risen by 1.2% against the baseline. The slight rise in emissions put the Council above its benchmark target of meeting an 85% cut in corporate emissions by 2025. As had been concluded in the previous year, which had seen modest reductions, further action and investment would be needed to achieve the 85% target, and to make progress towards the ultimate target of becoming a net zero organisation by 2030. The report noted that some factors affecting emissions, in particular the increase in the carbon intensity of electricity, were beyond the Council's control. A summary of the key conclusions drawn from the Annual Report 2023/24 on the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy were set out in section 4 of the report.

### **Resolved –**

- (1) That the progress in reducing Reading Borough's carbon emissions, which had fallen by 54% since 2005 be noted;**
- (2) That the progress in reducing Reading Borough Council's corporate emissions, which had fallen by 72.7% since 2008/09 be noted;**
- (3) That it be noted that, while progress was being made, the Council and other partners needed to increase the pace of emissions reduction to meet the targets for a net zero Reading, and a net zero Council, by 2030.**

### **19. STRATEGIC TRANSPORT SCHEMES UPDATE**

The Committee received a report that updated on the progress that had been made towards the delivery of the programme of strategic transport schemes in Reading. The programme included major enhancements to public transport and active travel facilities and was aimed at encouraging more healthy lifestyles, helping to address the Climate Emergency and improve air quality in the borough. The current programme included the following schemes and initiatives:

- Bus Service Improvement Plan Programme (BSIP)
- South Reading Bus Rapid Transit
- Reading West Station Upgrade
- Tilehurst Station Upgrade
- Shinfield Road Active Travel Scheme
- Bath Road Active Travel Scheme
- School Streets Programme
- Active Travel Behavioural Change Programme

**STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES - 20 NOVEMBER 2024**

Updates for each of the schemes listed above were set out in the report. Each strategic transport scheme had been aligned with the Council's Local Transport Plan (LTP), the Reading Transport Strategy 2040, with the delivery of each individual scheme playing a key part in achieving the overall vision and objectives of the LTP.

At the meeting the Strategic Transport Manager also updated on the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) fund scheme and on the £4.7m of funding that had been secured for the provision of 24 electric buses. The Committee heard that work had started to install charging infrastructure at the bus depot which was expected to be completed by spring 2025 and that electric buses were expected to start to run in summer 2025. Updates on the ZEBRA fund scheme would be included in future Strategic Transport Scheme Update reports.

**Resolved - That the progress made on delivery of the current programme of strategic transport schemes, as summarised in the report, be noted.**

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.44 pm)