

**READING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**POLICY COMMITTEE**

**17 FEBRUARY 2020**

**PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 1**

Richard Stainthorp to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

**Local Transport Plan**

Now that the Council has published the results of last year's transport consultation will the Lead Councillor please comment on how these help the preparation of the draft Local Transport Plan?

**REPLY** by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport):

I thank Mr Stainthorp for his question.

We received a significant level of interest in our consultation last summer to inform development of Reading's new transport strategy; with around 750 people directly engaged through events and 3,000 individual responses received from residents, businesses, stakeholders and local interest groups on how they would go about tackling our future transport challenges.

The consultation had a particular focus on congestion, poor air quality and meeting our target to create a carbon neutral Reading by 2030. This is very much in the context of the many thousands of extra homes which will be built in and around Reading over the coming years.

Results from the consultation demonstrate significant support for the focus of the new strategy being on promoting sustainable forms of transport, with over 90% of respondents supporting our proposed five core themes of connecting people and places, supporting healthy lifestyles, creating a clean and green Reading, enabling inclusive growth and embracing smart solutions.

In addition, we received overwhelming levels of support for improving public transport services, creating a joined-up and safe cycle network and restricting vehicles from sensitive areas or at peak times, and strong support for implementing a charging scheme to reduce the number of private vehicles on the road.

This feedback has been invaluable in helping to shape development of the future transport plan for Reading, which will set our strategy to 2036 and beyond. The new strategy will be underpinned by the main themes emerging from the consultation, showing how we will go about reducing our reliance on the private car by dramatically improving public transport, walking and cycling options and achieving our net zero carbon target by 2030.

I would like to once again thank everyone who took part in the consultation last year, and to engage with the statutory consultation on the draft strategy which will be launched next month.

This will give the residents of Reading, and those many thousands who travel in to and out of the Borough for work, shopping and leisure activities, the opportunity to review our proposed plans and options in much greater detail. We will then review the feedback to inform the final strategy which we hope to adopt by the end of this year.

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### PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 2

Richard Stainthorp to ask the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities:

#### Recycling and Enforcement Team

Could the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities provide an update on the progress of the new recycling and enforcement team?

**REPLY** by Councillor James (Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities):

Thank you for your question Mr. Stainthorp. Environmental crime is a blight on society and whilst it is a minority of the population that feel it is acceptable to litter, fly-tip and manage their domestic waste poorly, their actions have significant adverse impacts on the local environment and the quality of life for everyone who lives and works in Reading. The Recycling and Enforcement Team was established in November 2019 with two main aims:

1. To increase Reading's recycling rate to 50% by supporting the introduction of the new domestic food waste and 140l bin collection service in Autumn 2020
2. To establish a robust environmental crime enforcement service for the Borough.

The team of four Officers and their Team Leader completed their environmental enforcement training in December 2019 and the following is a summary of their activities since then:

1. Recycling - the team identified areas from crew reports where contamination of recycling bins is an issue and have conducted door knocking visits over a 6 week period in 13 areas from November 2019 to February 2020. Officers inspected bins over 3 recycling collections (a 6 week period) and issued information to properties with incorrect items in their bin. The full results are being collated but collection crews have reported a reduction in contamination in the areas visited.
2. Enforcement - the team has also been investigating reports of fly tipping, and Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN's) have been issued to offenders, either for littering or fly tipping, depending on the scale of the offence. At present around £6000 of fixed penalties have been paid. In cases of non-payment evidence is collated and is passed to

our Legal Department resulting in prosecution action with court dates in March, April and May 2020.

3. The team are also focussing on the enforcement of the commercial waste duty of care and are visiting businesses to discuss the waste arrangements, and to ensure they have a trade waste contract in place. As there are over 3000 businesses in Reading this work is being rolled out in phases approach across the Borough. Contraventions can result in a £300 penalty notice and the team is actively pursuing 11 at present.
4. Reading Adopt Your Street (RAYs) - The team now runs the RAYs initiative and liaises with over 200 individuals and a wide range of businesses, schools and community groups providing litter picking equipment and waste sacks to facilitate regular clean ups. 10 Companies have recently joined the scheme with staff members carrying out clean ups in the vicinity of their offices.

The team will also coordinate the Council's participation in Keep Britain Tidy's Spring Clean, which is in the early planning stages.

5. Oxford Road Waste - the team were tasked with improving the presentation of waste along the Oxford Road and additional residential bins have been provided which has reduced the amount of bagged waste being left along the road. In addition to this, businesses have received a letter explaining the responsibility of having a trade waste contract in place and the team will monitor compliance and take the necessary enforcement action against offenders.
6. Schools and Universities - officers have presented recycling assemblies in seven schools since January and the feedback has been positive with many children stating that they love the participation aspect of the assembly. Two of the schools have also requested a second assembly later in the year to tie in with a term topic and the team will be expanding the initiative in the future.

The team is setting up student focus groups at Reading University to promote recycling awareness as part of the roll out of the food waste service and will be working to develop a student door knocking and education programme later in the year.

7. Food Waste and 140l bins - the team are supporting the introduction of food waste collection and 140l bins by carrying out survey work which means the Council can deliver the right bin capacity to houses and flats in October. They will also be deeply involved in the project by providing educational support to residents and carrying out bin audits for residents who may require help with the changes.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 3

Richard Stainthorp to ask the Lead Councillor for Education:

Teacher starting salary

Could the Lead Councillor for Education update us on what impact the promised increase in increased teacher starting salaries has had on Reading schools?

REPLY by Councillor Pearce (Lead Councillor for Education):

Thanks for the question. We are always delighted for any additional funding for schools and education. The Government has accepted that we are facing a crisis in teacher recruitment and retention with less teachers joining the profession and more leaving (particularly in the first years of their career). This has not been helped by a decade of falling real wages, increases in workload and scrutiny as well as schools receiving less money year on year. We know the difference that teachers make to our children so ensuring an effective supply of teachers is critical.

So far, we are aware that the government intends to increase the starting salary for teachers to £30,000 by 2022. Given the date of implementation it is too early to determine the impact on Reading schools. However, there are a range of options being put forward to increase teachers' pay from 2020 which are still subject to consultation.

Whilst welcoming a starting salary of £30k, we are concerned that without further additional funding we may see an erosion of differentials which may impact on the overall retention of staff. The majority of staff in schools are obviously not in their first year, so without further detail, this looks like experienced teachers are again being forgotten by this Government. Without fairer increases across all pay grades, it is likely that any increase in recruitment will be offset by a fall in retention.

Moreover, we remain concerned that the additional costs of pensions could 'eat into' additional funding, leaving schools to 'self fund' any pay increase as the Government has not committed to fully funding these.

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

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### COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation:

#### Will the Council double Reading's tree cover?

Trees help tackle the climate emergency by absorbing carbon dioxide from the air and locking it up in their trunks, branches and leaves. They also have many health and wellbeing benefits. Doubling tree cover across the UK could draw down 50 million tonnes of carbon dioxide annually, which is around 10% of current UK emissions. What is the tree cover in each ward in Reading and will the Council commit to doubling tree cover across the town?

REPLY by Councillor Rowland (Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation):

The Council recognises the vital role that trees play in responding to the climate emergency, both in terms of mitigating the effects of climate change, and adapting to such change, which is now inevitable. Trees are also essential for maintaining and increasing biodiversity, mitigating air quality issues, keeping urban centre temperatures in check and improving the character and enjoyment of the town.

Since the last Tree Strategy was adopted in 2010, the Council has planted around 2,000 trees on Council land, and generally plants two trees for every one tree felled. The proportion of the area of Reading Borough which is covered by tree canopy is currently 18%, higher than the UK average for towns and cities of 16% (Forest Research, 2018). However, tackling the climate emergency will require us to go further and we will ensure that our trees play their part.

The existing tree canopy cover in each ward, as assessed using the i-Tree Canopy assessment tool, is as follows:

Abbey	11.6%
Battle	6.7%
Caversham	15.8%
Church	22.8%
Katesgrove	10.4%
Kentwood	27.9%
Mapledurham	32.2%
Minster	19.7%
Norcot	18.9%
Park	17.7%
Peppard	23.6%
Redlands	16.7%
Southcote	22.1%

Thames	27.0%
Tilehurst	21.1%
Whitley	8.0%

A new Tree Strategy to replace the current 2010 strategy is in preparation, and a version for public consultation will be brought to Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee on 11th March and to the Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on 16th March. This will include clear and realistic targets for increasing both the number of trees planted and overall canopy cover, as well as targets for those wards with the lowest cover. The Council is proposing a doubling of its capital budget for tree planting over the next three years from 2020 to 2023 to help us achieve these aims which should be welcome news to us all.

Reading is a heavily urbanised Borough and the land on which to plant additional trees is limited. Much of Reading lies in the hands of private owners which we have no control over except in the case of new development. As well as the significant proportion of the Borough which is built up, some of the undeveloped parts of Reading where tree cover is limited, such as the flood meadows along the Thames and Kennet are important habitats in their own right, however clearly tree planting is not likely to be appropriate in those habitats. Much of the land which the Council owns or manages already has tree cover, and, whilst the Tree Strategy will push strongly towards increasing tree cover on that land, there are limitations on available land. Therefore, achieving a "doubling of" tree cover, to 36%, is simply not realistic given both the built-up geography of Reading and the amount of land which the Council is able to directly influence.

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

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### COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 2

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Corporate and Consumer Services:

#### Microsoft Office upgrade problems

I understand that a recent Microsoft Office upgrade to a large number of council employees' computers has caused massive problems with machines running very slowly resulting in many wasted hours watching the hour glass. Can the Lead Councillor confirm how many users have been impacted negatively by this problem and what is being done to resolve it?

REPLY by Councillor Emberson (Lead Councillor for Corporate and Consumer Services):

Following a successful pilot, rollout of upgrading to Office 365 started in mid-December 2019 and has been completed to around 2,000 devices so far.

Once we had introduced the software to around two thirds of the organisation, we started to see significant numbers of service desk calls relating to Office 365, totalling 265. This matter has been the subject of intense action and escalation with our suppliers. The calls included four types of performance issue. These issues and our response so far are:

1. Slow start-up times caused by the unnecessary automatic loading of software. We sent communications to all staff explaining how to prevent this.
2. Our two oldest types of laptop performing poorly. We immediately halted rollout to these and have prioritised affected users for early upgrade to higher specification devices as part of the Windows 10 rollout planned to start later this month.
3. Slow internet browsing speeds. An upgraded Internet connection was installed on 1 February 2020.
4. Poor Outlook response times, occasionally resulting in users exiting the application without emails having been sent. This issue has been investigated and remedial actions, including clean-up of affected PCs and the migration of email archive data - which is a known cause of performance issues - to the Office 365 cloud, are in progress.

As a result of these actions, the number of open incidents relating to performance had reduced to 21 on 13 February.

In addition to the above actions, our supplier Northgate has now brought in a specialist technical architect whose objective is to ensure that the root cause of the issues is fully understood, so that any remaining incidents can be closed and any reoccurrence prevented.

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### COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 3

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

#### Council inaction on Green Road tennis courts

Back in 2015, the old tennis courts land at Green Road was earmarked by the Council as land for recreation and was added to the comprehensive review of open space/playing fields at the time. Its use as recreation space was to offset some of the loss of part of the playing fields. It has been empty and nothing has been done since then to convert the land into something that the local community can use. Green Councillors would like to see it in use as soon as possible for sport or recreation. Can the Lead Councillor please update us on what sporting use has been decided on for this land and when people will be able to start playing?

**REPLY** by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport):

I refer Cllr White to my response of 20<sup>th</sup> January, copied below.

In terms of future sporting arrangements he should obviously address any questions to the relevant Lead Member.

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Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

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**REPLY** by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport):

I thank Cllr White for his question.

The Council's Policy Committee made a decision on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2015 to put this land back into use as recreational open-space in order to compensate for the expansion of Alfred Sutton Primary School from a two to a three form entry school and the DfE development of Maiden Erlegh School. A further financial contribution of £45k was secured via a planning agreement to improve the quality of the pitch.

While the pitch improvements were completed last year, the works to resurface the former tennis courts were postponed given the need to consider the most suitable plan for the whole playing field site should the Hamilton Centre become the new home of Phoenix College.

The expansion of the Hamilton Centre is now subject to a planning application 191634 which awaits determination. In order to minimise the off-site inconvenience to local residents from these works it is proposed to use the former tennis courts site as a site compound until the end of the contract. At the moment the works are anticipated running until autumn 2021 after which the compound will be removed and re-instatement works completed.