

AGENDA ITEM 5

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

1. Helen Palmer to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

Royal Berkshire Hospital - Environmental Policy

I put a question to the Council's Policy Committee on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2019 regarding the Royal Berkshire Hospital and its lack of both an environmental policy and a sustainability management team.

My question was answered by Councillor Tony Page. In a verbal response to my supplementary question, Councillor Page told me that I could be assured an environmental policy would be in place within a year. We are 7 months into that year. How is the policy progressing?

**REPLY** by Councillor Page Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

I thank Ms Palmer for her question.

Officers have contacted the Royal Berkshire Hospital (RBH) to obtain an update. They have been advised that while the RBH does not have a specific environmental policy, their environmental responsibilities, aims and objectives are included within a number of their strategies and annual/operational plans, including their Estate Strategy, which was published in Autumn 2018, with four over-arching themes, one of which is sustainability. I understand that Ms Palmer has had direct correspondence with RBH on these matters who may have provided further details.

I am further advised that the Hospital also has a green travel and transport plan, which is currently being updated. RBC officers are working with colleagues at the Hospital to explore a range of opportunities to enhance sustainable transport options for both staff and visitors to the Hospital, in line with our wider aspirations for a step change in the provision of sustainable transport provision in the town.

These exploratory discussions are at an initial stage, but we have been encouraged with the level of engagement from the Hospital to date. Their strategy around care closer to home and the use of digital technology and telemedicine technology is designed to reduce patient and staff journeys and thereby reduce the associated carbon footprint.

Electronic patient records are in place across much of their service and this has gone a long way to reducing the carbon footprint associated with paper. Hospital staff also advise that they are progressing with measures to reduce carbon emissions, currently installing LED lighting and solar film on two of their buildings and undertaking master-planning for future development.

Ms Palmer may be aware that the NHS nationally recently made a commitment to become 'net zero carbon' ahead of 2050. Reading Borough Council has no power to compel individual NHS facilities to adopt the more ambitious 2030 target, but we are working with RBH and other parts of the NHS in Reading in the spirit of our Climate Emergency Declaration.

**2. Alice Mpofo-Coles to ask the Lead Councillor for Education:**

**School Exclusions**

Can the lead Councillor for Education please update us on what impact the money the new Government promised for Education has had on schools here in Reading (February Council) and how that is going to impact reduce the number of 'excluded children/young people' in schools which is increasing ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Pearce Lead Councillor for Education.

The 'new' money for schools will not impact on their budgets until the next financial year (1 April for maintained schools and 1 September for Academies) so it is too early to predict what the outcome of increased funding will be. It is worth noting here that despite the Conservative party website proudly saying "We're increasing School funding"- the DfE finally admitted last month that funding for schools was down since 2010, education spending has also fallen as a percentage of GDP. So yes, funding is going up but only in comparison to the cuts the Tories have already inflicted, per pupil funding will not return to 2010 levels seen under Labour. You could of course just speak to any Governor, Head teacher or teacher to get the reality of school funding and realise the hardships schools have suffered at the hands of uncaring Tory school cuts.

Moreover, there is no correlation between the amount of funding a school receives and the level of exclusions. On the issue of exclusions, as reported to ACE in the Autumn, between the academic year 2015/16 and academic year 2017/2018 the number of fixed term exclusions has decreased significantly (nearly halved). Between 2015/16 and 2017/18 the rate of fixed term exclusions in Reading secondary schools decreased compared to an increase in England. The rate of fixed term exclusions for 18/19 in Reading secondary schools is now below the England average.

Working in partnership with schools, to influence their behaviour and inclusion policies has been very successful. We have shared training on Therapeutic Thinking with schools and colleges including nursery, primary, secondary, and special and higher education settings (such as Reading College). We have also provided briefings for Reading University's teacher trainees and all internal teams who support schools. We have attracted interest in this trauma informed approach from a number of neighbouring authorities. Brighter Futures are part of a national steering group for this approach where we are represented by our School Improvement Partner, Alice Boon.

51 schools have committed to the programme - out of 59 schools in Reading. We have trained over 120 senior tutors in schools and BFFC. We have also had a commitment from six schools to act as System Leaders, tasked with providing support and sharing innovation as part of our school to school approach.

Our figures show the investment schools have made both in securing excellent education outcomes and bucking the national trend on exclusions. We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved, including our children and young people and their families for all their hard work.

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

**Recycling Rates**

Could the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities provide an update on the recycling rate over the last year and details of what is taking place to improve it ?

**REPLY** by Councillor James Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities.

I thank Mr. Stainthorp for his question. The recycling rate in Reading in 2018/19 was 32% compared to the national average of 46%. There has been encouraging upwards movement in the recycling rate over the first 3 quarters of this year and the rate for Quarter 3 is 36.4%. This increase can be attributed to a number of factors but most notably an increase in recycling of materials, particularly wood, at the Household Waste Recycling Centre in Island Road.

The Council is committed to improving its recycling rate and is taking the following actions aimed at increasing the recycling rate by a further 11%:

1. Introducing a weekly kerbside food waste collection service to 72,000 properties in the Borough in 2 phases starting in October 2020. To support and encourage residents to recycle, the existing 240l grey refuse bins will be replaced with 140l bins which will be collected at the same alternate weekly frequency as now. The Council will continue to offer residents free recycling bins to cover their requirements.

2. The Council has also invested in a team of 5 Recycling and Enforcement Officers who will be carrying out a wide range of educational activities with residents, Universities, schools and community groups. The team will also address contamination of recycling bins, support the roll out of the new food waste collection service. In addition to carrying out environmental enforcement of fly-tipping and littering as well as monitoring and enforcing business waste compliance.

3. These initiatives will be supported by a comprehensive communication campaign in the run up to the food waste service roll out using multiple media channels including social media, information and FAQ's on the Council website, newsletters and direct mailing to residents.

4. The Council will also continue to work with its partners, Wokingham and Bracknell Councils in the re3 waste disposal partnership through the Joint Waste Disposal Board and with its contractor to explore innovations and additional ways to increase the amount of waste recycled at the kerbside and at its 2 Household Waste Recycling Centres.

**4. Richard Stainthorp to ask the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities: Food Waste Recycling Plan**

Could the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities offer some insight into the progress of the food waste recycling plan ?

**REPLY** by Councillor James Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities.

The food waste project plan is progressing on programme, with the guidance and support of a Cross Party Member Task and Finish Group. The planned start date for Phase 1 of the service is October 2020 when 59,000 properties will receive a weekly food waste collection and have their refuse bins replaced. Phase 2 will come forward in 2021 and will see the service delivered to 13,000 large blocks of flats.

In order to trial the new service and to gather information about customer experience in various types of properties ahead of the main Phase 1 roll out, 5 Early Adopter areas of approximately 600 properties each will receive the new service from July this year and information will be sent out to those included in these areas in the near future.

The new 140l bins, 23l food waste bins, 5l kitchen caddies and caddy liners have been ordered as have the 6 new food waste vehicles and the bin delivery contractor has been appointed. A recruitment drive is underway to find the 18 new staff we need to collect the waste. With regards to the technical aspects of the project, a boroughwide bin audit has been completed and the round scheduling work for the new service is underway.

A team of 5 Recycling and Enforcement Officers was established in November 2019. The team has been concentrating their efforts on carrying out fly-tipping and littering enforcement activity, have issued over 100 Fixed Penalty Notices to date and are pursuing 3 potential prosecutions. They have also been targeting areas where contamination of recycling bins has been highlighted by collection crew data and carrying out door knocking and educational activity directly with residents. The teams focus will begin to shift in the next few weeks as they support the roll out of the food waste Early Adopter areas. The changes to the waste service will be supported by a comprehensive multi-channel communications campaign which will aim to raise awareness not only of the environmental benefits of the food waste collection service and recycling but also how the new service will work in practice and the timetable for the roll out.

5. Richard Stainthorp to ask the Lead Councillor for Education:  
School Capacity

Can the Lead Councillor for Education update me on what steps have been taken to increase school capacity in the area to accommodate increasing pupil numbers ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Pearce Lead Councillor for Education.

Reading Borough Council has been very active in ensuring our children have school places, particularly in good and outstanding schools. According to the latest figures available from the DfE Reading created over 4,000 additional primary places from 2009/10 to 2018/19 thanks to our ambitious and successful primary expansion programme, and nearly 3,000 (2,876) places in secondary schools. The latest addition to our primary family will be Green Park School in South Reading, which will be opening its doors to students in September this year. In the primary sector, over 12,000 places are in school graded as good or outstanding.

Our forecasts show that the primary aged population is now declining whilst the secondary population continues to increase - partly as a result of increasing numbers of pupils choosing to remain in Reading at secondary level. To deal with the increasing demand for secondary school places, Brighter Futures for Children and RBC are working in partnership with the DfE and Maiden Erlegh Trust to build and deliver a new 8 forms of entry secondary school - River Academy - with a likely opening date of September 2023. The school will have a 300 place sixth form with a particular focus on vocational skills as part of our strategy to reduce the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training.

In addition, as part of our commitment to children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, we are working with Wokingham to build a 150 place school for pupils with SEMH and autism needs. The Minister will announce the sponsor for this school later in the Spring.

Reading was commended by Lord Agnew on its accurate pupil place forecasting in the Autumn of last year. We remain committed to providing the very best schools and school places to meet the demands for education in Reading.

**6. Stuart Kinton to ask the Leader of the Council:  
Climate Emergency**

Has the Chief Executive written to local MPs, the Prime Minister and to relevant government departments asking for new legislation and financial support ? In 26th February 2019's emergency declaration the Council "instructs" him to do so. I note that Wokingham Borough Council have committed £50 million over the next 3 years to help reach it's carbon neutral by 2030 goal.

**REPLY** by Councillor Brock Leader of the Council.

I thank Mr Kinton for his question. The Chief Executive will be writing to local MPs, the Prime Minister and relevant government departments when the emerging Reading Climate Emergency Strategy is finalised, as this will provide a clearer indication of those areas where new legislation and financial support from government is needed. The strategy is scheduled to be published for consultation in March 2020 with a view to being finalised in May.

I note the investment figures cited for Wokingham Borough Council but would urge caution in making comparisons as local authorities define 'low carbon' projects in different ways. For its part, Reading Borough Council has made a significant financial commitment to projects which will directly contribute to our 'net zero' ambitions to the tune of around £34 million over the first 2 full financial years since the climate emergency declaration in February 2019. Further details of this investment are set out in the papers being presented to Council this evening.

**7. Michael Sage to ask the Leader of the Council:  
Climate Emergency - Lobbying and Cooperation**

Reading Borough Council declared a Climate Emergency on 26th February 2019. What has RBC done or is doing in conjunction with other Councils and via the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) to exchange ideas, best practices and to collaborate ? What has RBC done or is doing to lobby government either by itself or through the NALC to bring about the necessary changes in legislation in order to achieve a carbon neutral Reading by 2030 and to provide input to COP26 ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Brock Leader of the Council.

I thank Mr Sage for his question. Council officers and Councillors maintain regular dialogue on the climate emergency with other Councils at a variety of levels. As well as bi-lateral contacts on a wide range of issues, the Council engages with other local authorities through umbrella bodies such as the Local Government Association and the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE), especially via the APSE Energy Group, of which the Council is a member. Council officers regularly attend conferences, workshops and meetings organised by these bodies to exchange best practice and contribute to consultations and campaigns designed to influence government policy in ways which support a positive response to the climate emergency. These bodies employ professional staff to work on such policy and are therefore better placed to influence central government on behalf of local government than we are as an individual council, hence our seeking to exert collective influence through them. I would point out to Mr Sage that the NALC is an umbrella body for parish councils and that Reading is not a parish council.

The Council has also been supporting the Reading Climate Change Partnership in developing a new Reading Climate Emergency Strategy, which is scheduled to be published for public consultation in March 2020. The action identified within this will provide a clearer idea of

where Government policy changes and new resources are likely to be needed, giving us a more robust basis on which to target future lobbying efforts. One of our local MPs, Alok Sharma, has recently been appointed to preside over the COP26 talks in Glasgow later this year, an appointment which we hope - but perhaps do not fully expect - will help ensure that Reading's voice is heard in this context and at the highest levels of government.

With reference to the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) mentioned in the question, this is the national body representing neighbourhood, community, village, parish and town councils - as a unitary borough, Reading's contacts with fellow 'upper tier' local authorities tend to be through the bodies referred to above rather than through the good offices of NALC.

8. Andrew Hornsby-Smith to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

**Carbon Neutral by 2030**

Given that you are now one year on from declaring the Council's intention to be carbon neutral by 2030, can the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport identify what steps have been taken in the last year and how is the budget that is being set out tonight reflective of how the Council's financial commitment to addressing this challenge?

**REPLY** by Councillor Page Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

I thank Mr Hornsby-Smith for his question.

The Council has followed up the climate emergency declaration with a significant programme of action which has included:

Capital investment of over £15 million in projects designed to reduce carbon emissions in the financial year 2019/20 (the first full financial year since declaration) and a further commitment of almost £19 million to the same ends in the financial year 2020/21;

Enshrining 'zero carbon' standards for new housing development in the Reading Local Plan, adopted in November 2019;

Establishing a Climate Action Programme Board to drive forward the ambition to become a net zero carbon Council by 2030;

Supporting the Reading Climate Change Partnership in developing a new Reading Climate Emergency Strategy, due to be published for public consultation in March 2020, to work towards the goal of a net zero carbon Reading by 2030.

Further details of the Council's plans for investment in projects, which will contribute towards the goal of a net zero carbon Reading by 2030, are included in the special report being presented to Council tonight alongside the main budget proposals.

9. Andrew Hornsby-Smith to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation:  
**Chestnut Walk**

Given the current climate emergency and the fact that every tree counts in tackling this emergency, can the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation explain how the Council has justified the removal and replacement of the trees along Chestnut Walk? And can

she further detail how the removal and subsequent replacement of those trees will be a net positive for the environment ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Rowland Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation.

Regular inspections of the trees at Chestnut Walk have, over the past decade, showed progressive deterioration and advancing defects including bleeding canker, cavities and fungal brackets that forced the felling of several trees. However, the 2019 report which the Council released publicly, advised another 4 needed to be felled immediately and that most of the remaining trees had rapidly advancing disease. The report then examined the options with the remainder of the trees and cited that the best option was for felling and replanting, as the remaining diseased trees were going to continue to deteriorate and be a potential safety risk. Our insurers confirmed that we needed to heed those instructions, or we would have to face closing the walkway.

The choice of replacing the avenue with the “honorary native” sweet chestnuts enabled retaining the “Chestnut Walk” name, which, given its heritage importance within the Scheduled Monument site was seen to be “the proper interpretation of the value of the heritage asset”. Recreating the original allée of trees that the Victorians had originally created could only be achieved by replanting all of the trees at the same time minimizing the need for extensive archaeological works to be carried out.

The loss of large trees clearly has environmental implications. However, it is not a simple causal link between tree removal and loss of environmental value. Whilst prized as an ornamental tree, the Horse Chestnuts in their diseased state hold less benefits in their overall attractiveness to insects and other wildlife than replacing them with a native grown species. The new “honorary native” Sweet Chestnut trees have positives for the environment with enhanced benefits for wildlife in terms of providing pollen and nectar for insects, especially bees, and food for micro-moths.

There is much complex science that weighs the environmental value of more vigorous younger trees to larger, declining older trees in terms of reducing carbon within our atmosphere. However, the disease-compromised horse chestnuts had reduced photosynthetic rates caused by pathogens, and were unlikely, even with heavy pollarding, to have the energy to produce a manageable, vibrant canopy. Thus, the ability of the older trees to continue to sequester significant volumes of carbon or filter particulates was increasingly restricted, all of which are key environmental considerations with their location near a busy roadway. Under these conditions and with their advanced age, their carbon sequestration value was compromised, and the planting of vigorous young trees is likely over the next hundred years to provide a greater environmental benefit in terms of additional carbon sequestration and particulate filtration than the older Horse Chestnuts would be able to achieve any longer.

Finally, seventeen Horse Chestnuts are being removed from Chestnut Walk (7 from this avenue having been felled previously) and 14 new trees will be planted to replace them. The trees will be appropriately spaced to allow them to achieve their natural canopy spread, unlike the existing trees. Additionally, the Council has committed to planting another 11 trees at other sites to compensate for the reduction in numbers planted in Chestnut Walk, and we will be liaising with interested parties to decide the site and species to be planted.

The loss and replacement of the avenue of trees on Chestnut Walk has brought into sharp focus the challenges of tree management in urban settings and how that can be best balanced with our climate emergency. Although it was not an easy decision, we are confident that given all of the factors at play, it was, sadly, the correct one to have made.

**10. Amjad Tarar to ask the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities:  
Improving Recycling Rates**

I am in approval of Reading Borough Council's attempt to improve recycling rates with new food waste bins and a reduced grey bin capacity size. However, can the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities advise us what will be happening with all of the larger old bins that are being exchanged out for the new smaller bins ? Will they be recycled themselves or will they just contribute to more waste in landfills ?

**REPLY** by Councillor James Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities.

Thank you for your question Mr. Tarar. The grey 240l bins that are being collected as part of swap to 140l bins will be taken to a secure compound where their condition will be assessed by the delivery contractor. Any bins in good condition will be refurbished and re-used in other local authority areas.

Bins in poor condition will have their wheels and axles removed for re-use and the body of the bins will be chipped at an off-site location and the plastic used to manufacture new bins.

None of the bins, wheels or axles will be landfilled, they will be re-used or recycled.

**11. Amjad Tarar to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:  
Major Developments in Reading**

There seem to be a lot of major developments being planned in Reading currently. Can the lead member for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport advise us how new major developments within Reading are answering our climate emergency, in terms of required building standards and green allocations on sites ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Page Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

I thank Mr Tarar for his question.

Current and future planning applications will be assessed under the new Reading Borough Local Plan, adopted in November 2019. This document contains a range of policies that are intended to secure strong environmental standards on all new developments.

Relevant policies within the Local Plan include:

- Sustainability standards for new development have been made significantly more rigorous, and this is detailed in policies CC2, CC3, CC4 and H5. This includes a requirement that developments of ten or more dwellings must meet 'zero carbon homes' standards and that decentralised energy provision is secured for development of 20 dwellings or more. A Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document was adopted in December 2019 to add more detail on how these standards will be applied. These standards place Reading at the forefront of reducing the impact of new development on climate change.
- Suitable waste minimisation and storage is considered under policy CC5.
- Provision of on-site open space is required for developments of more than one hectare in the centre as set out in policy CR3.

- New tree planting is expected as part of new developments under policy EN14.
- Development in all locations is expected to provide for a net gain in biodiversity wherever possible under policy EN12. Where development would be located on a defined green link, opportunities to enhance this link must be secured.
- Where major development sites are specifically identified in the Local Plan, there are often relevant site-specific requirements related to the location of a new open space or the need for a wildlife buffer along a watercourse.

These are just some of the Local Plan policies that support the delivery of sustainable building in the Borough. The plan itself is based on ‘sustainable’ development supporting the delivery of the right new homes and employment to meet our needs whilst protecting and enhancing the environment.

12. WITHDRAWN

13. Stuart Kinton to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:  
Carbon Neutral by 2030

I welcome Peter Moore into the newly created role of Head of Climate Strategy, this is a really positive step forward. It is clear that a lot of work will be required if Reading Borough Council is to achieve its’ goal of carbon neutral by 2030. When will the Council be increasing the number of staff solely committed to addressing this goal ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Page Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

I thank Mr Kinton for this question.

As the officer’s report sets out, following the declaration of a climate emergency, the Council created a special revenue budget of £250,000 which has enabled the creation of the new post of Head of Climate Strategy (a 2-year fixed-term appointment) and associated operational budget. The appointment of a Head of Climate Strategy has created capacity at senior level with access to decision-makers across the organisation.

In addition, the Council has maintained its 2019/20 Sustainability budget of c.£230,000 in the budget for 2020/21 which will:

- enable a review and implementation of the Council’s Carbon Plan,
- continue to deliver energy efficiency and renewable energy projects on the Council’s land and buildings, and
- provide advice to internal and external partners on reducing emissions.

While it is likely that the Team will seek further resources in 2020/21 as we ‘tool up’ to deliver larger capital programmes, the key point is however to ensure that all staff, not just officers in the Sustainability Team, have the necessary skills, and adopt the required behaviours, to contribute towards the net zero ambition.

Achieving a carbon neutral goal by 2030 cannot just be the responsibility of one team or even the Borough Council alone; the objective must be shared by all including those in national Government.

14. Roger Lightfoot to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport:  
Leisure Facilities Contract

The contract for the Leisure facilities has been awarded to Better/GLL.

As yet we have yet to see any detailed specifications for the various facilities. Given that these sort of contracts usually specify down to the last door handle what is allowed for in the contract, can you reassure me that the contractor will not be able to charge extortionate amounts for, say, a change in door handle design or even more major changes ?

Please reassure me that people with mobility issues have been considered (e.g. stairs/ramps [not just ladders] in to all the pools).

What are the arrangements and fees for remuneration to the contractor for tasks which are not specified in the contract, but which could only reasonably be undertaken by the contractor ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Hoskin Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport.

Thank you for your question.

The contract arrangement is a design, build, operate and manage (DBOM) contract. This means that the operation of the centres including running and maintenance costs would be covered by the operator and with no requirements for additional remuneration from the Council over and above the agreed management fee. As is the norm in these contract arrangements, the council as the landlord maintains responsibility for only the structure of the building including any latent defect.

In terms of service provision, the contract is outcome focused based on delivering health and wellbeing outcomes within a high quality environment. Achieving these outcomes are the responsibility of GLL with the Council performing a client role to scrutinise performance. No additional costs or remuneration will be required from the council to achieve the performance required by the contract.

The nature of a DBOM contract means that scenario presented in the question is unlikely to occur.

As part of the report taken to Policy Committee in January 2020, Appendix A set out extracts from the facilities and service specifications. The buildings are not yet at the detailed design stage. However, the fee is a fixed cost, so both GLL and the council need to work within this figure.

Ensuring access for all is incredibly important to both the Council and GLL. The new centres will be built to modern accessibility standards with an aim to create an inclusive swimming and fitness environment for people with mobility issues as well as long-term health conditions, disabilities and rehabilitation needs.

There are plans to include specialised submersible pool pod lifts to support customers who need extra help to access the pools in a safe, dignified and discrete manner, rather than traditional hoists.

The new centres will offer accessible activities such as sensory swim sessions and free disability helper access. The centres will provide accessible changing and toilets - including fully accessible Changing Places.

There will be further consultation this year with the Council's Access and Disabilities Working Group and Older People Working Group during the development of more detailed plans for the centres to ensure all needs are met.

15. Peter Burt to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport:  
Free Swimming

Will over 60 year olds continue to get free swimming at Reading Borough's pools under the new Sport and Leisure contract arrangements, and will other concessions previously offered by Reading Sport and Leisure for less well off and less able members of the community be maintained under the new contract ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Hoskin Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport.

One of the primary aims of the provision of new, vastly improved leisure facilities and our partnership with GLL is to increase participation and physical activity amongst Reading residents currently least likely to use our facilities. Reducing health inequalities, whereby the least well off in our town tend to suffer much more ill-health and die younger than the more prosperous, is a priority for the council and our public health funding investment in leisure services will seek to address that. How that funding will be used to support programmes is still being worked up.

The Your Reading Passport (YRP) scheme, which currently includes free access to off peak swimming to people over 60 years of age, will cease when the new contract with GLL starts.

GLL have been tasked with increasing the number of people participating in physical exercise from priority groups. Older people, people living with disability and people with health conditions are among those identified as priority groups.

To achieve this GLL have opted to make significant improvements to facilities and provide a number of targeted activities within their programme.

This includes:

- a 'Reading Resident's Card' that will give up to 30 per cent discount from activity charges and up to 50 per cent discount for concessions.
- Free weekly targeted sessions on a range of activities for concessionary users
- Provision of a comprehensive concessionary pricing structure

Other initiatives aimed at older people include expanding the 60+ activities and clubs across all leisure centres in Reading, providing more walking sports, and developing new activities with Age UK and the University of the 3rd Age.

For people living with disability and health conditions, there are plans to deliver exercise referral, falls prevention, cardiac and cancer rehabilitation activities as well as accessible activities such as sensory swim sessions, free disability helper access and fully accessible Changing Places in the new centres.

16. Peter Burt to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport:  
Sports and Leisure Forum

Now that the new Sport and Leisure contract is in place, will you arrange for a meeting of a Sports and Leisure Forum for all users of the Borough's sporting facilities to take place at as early as practicable a date ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Hoskin Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport.

Can I thank Mr Burt for his question.

Whilst the decision to award the contract was taken on 20 January 2020, the contract does not commence until Spring 2020. This is when our leisure partner Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL) will start operating Reading's leisure services on the Council's behalf. Once the contract has started, GLL will set up a biannual user forum, which will involve a broad range of users, as per the service specification.

I also plan to set up a wider Reading sports forum. It needs to be explored how far this will overlap with the leisure services user forum and, of course, the involvement of sports groups will be fundamental in determining what form it will take.

17. Roger Lightfoot to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport:  
New Swimming Pools

Please can you tell me when you anticipate planning applications to be submitted for the proposed new swimming pools at Rivermead and East Reading, and please can you advise who will be submitting the applications - Reading Borough Council or GLL ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Hoskin Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport.

May I thank Mr Lightfoot for his question.

The Council's planners have had an initial pre application meeting with GLL to discuss the detailed planning applications required for the new and extended leisure centres at Rivermead and Palmer Park. All parties are aware of this Council's ambitions to commence work in December and the expectation is that planning applications will be submitted in the Summer. GLL will be the applicants for both planning applications. Summer. GLL will be the applicants for both planning applications.

18. John Booth to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:  
Climate Emergency - Local Investment

Reading Friends of the Earth note that Reading's 'Pathway to Zero Carbon 2030' (slide-set used by Ben Burfoot at 'Planning for a Low Carbon Economy' meeting in April 2019) estimated required investment at £3.5 billion.

The Council's report to this meeting at Item 12 says that "in the first 2 full financial years following the declaration of a climate emergency, combined capital expenditure of c. £34 million will be contributing directly to the Council's net zero carbon ambitions". We note that much of this expenditure relates to the transport sector which is only responsible for around 20% of emissions.

We appreciate that it will take time for expenditure to be ramped up as schemes are developed. What can be done to increase investment from government, Council, businesses and public to address the challenge of reaching £3.5 billion by 2030 ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Page Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

I thank Mr Booth for his question. The investment made by the Council in the two years following the climate emergency declaration in February 2019 represents a very significant commitment of Council resources. We fully anticipate making further investment to this end as we work towards the goal of a net zero carbon Reading by 2030. As was made clear in the climate emergency declaration, however, Reading will need additional powers and funding from central government to meet this timescale.

Clearly, the estimated investment of £3.5 billion cannot be met from Council resources alone (in 2019/20, for example, the Council's entire net revenue budget was c£134 million and its capital budget was c£114 million). We will, however, be working with and through the representative bodies of local government to lobby central government with a view to ensuring that the additional investment required is forthcoming. The emerging Reading Climate Emergency Strategy, which is due to be published for public consultation in March, will set out further ideas to encourage businesses and residents to make the investment necessary to support the transition to a net zero carbon Reading.