

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE		
DATE:	16 MARCH 2020	AGENDA ITEM:	15
TITLE:	READING TRANSPORT STRATEGY 2036 - DRAFT FOR STATUTORY CONSULTATION		
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides an update on development of the new Local Transport Plan (known as the 'Reading Transport Strategy 2036'), following the initial public consultation held last summer. The report seeks authority to undertake statutory consultation on the draft strategy and sets out the proposed consultation programme.

Appendix A - Reading Transport Strategy 2036 - Draft for Public Consultation

Appendix B - Reading Transport Strategy 2036 - Summary of Visioning Consultation Responses

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 To note progress on the development of the draft Reading Transport Strategy 2036, including the public consultation undertaken last summer.
- 2.2 To approve the draft Reading Transport Strategy 2036 (Annex A) for public consultation, commencing on Monday 23rd March 2020.
- 2.3 To grant the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport, authority to make further amendments to the draft strategy prior to consultation in response to

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 All Local Transport Authorities are required to produce a Local Transport Plan (LTP) under the Transport Act 2000, as amended by the Local Transport Act 2008. Our current LTP for the period 2011-26 was adopted by Full Council in March 2011, however the majority of schemes within the current strategy have been delivered or are in the process of being delivered, therefore a new strategy will put the Council in the best possible position to secure external investment in Reading.
- 3.2 The new transport strategy will be a key element of delivering the Reading 2050 Vision and responding to the Climate Emergency declared by the Council in February 2019 to help achieve our target of a carbon neutral Reading by 2030. The transport strategy has been aligned with other Council strategies including the new Local Plan and draft Climate Emergency Strategy which is currently the subject of its own consultation. Transport is a vital element of achieving wider Council policy objectives relating to air quality, climate change, equality for all, health and wellbeing, productivity and congestion, and enabling sustainable economic growth and housing delivery. The new transport strategy is heavily focused on addressing these wider challenges through a package of solutions to both provide realistic sustainable alternatives to the private car, alongside measures to manage demand for travelling during peak times.
- 3.3 A number of sub-strategies will be developed to provide more detailed implementation plans for key areas of the overarching strategy. These will cover areas such as cycling and walking, road safety, sustainable travel to school and a Boroughwide Car Parking and Air Quality Management Strategy, as agreed within the Council's current Medium-Term Financial Strategy. All sub-strategies will be developed to align with and help deliver the overarching transport strategy for Reading.

4. THE PROPOSAL

Initial Consultation

- 4.1 An initial visioning consultation on the principles to underpin development of the new transport strategy was undertaken from 29th July to Friday 20th September 2019. The consultation was heavily promoted, including a range of events for residents and key stakeholders, and resulted in 2,881 online survey responses and 18 detailed responses from members of the public and organisations. In addition, feedback was received from over 750 people who were directly engaged through events undertaken during the consultation.
- 4.2 The overriding theme from the feedback received from the consultation was significant support for investment in sustainable transport in Reading, to provide realistic alternatives to the private car. This included support for radical policies including re-allocating road space for the use of sustainable modes and for implementation of a charging scheme to restrict the use of vehicles in sensitive areas.

4.3 A selection of the headline feedback received from the consultation is set out below:

- 90% of respondents agreed with the five main themes for the new strategy as set out below:
 - Connecting people and places
 - Supporting healthy lifestyles
 - Creating a clean and green Reading
 - Enabling inclusive growth
 - Embracing smart solutions
- 93% thought making public transport journeys faster and more reliable would be effective;
- 83% said a comprehensive park and ride network would be effective to reduce the number of cars on the road;
- 92% thought better connected walking and cycling routes would be effective and 75% supported the reallocation of road space for sustainable modes of transport;
- 90% said dedicated car free spaces would be effective to increase active travel;
- 78% felt limiting cars from sensitive areas (around schools and the town centre) would improve safety, alongside air quality and health benefits for residents;
- 76% said initiatives where roads are free of cars for a limited time would improve safety, air quality and public health;
- 86% thought better facilities would increase the uptake of zero emission vehicles (e.g. electric vehicle charging points); and
- Around 60% said a charging scheme would be effective in reducing the number of private vehicles on the road.

4.4 Further feedback from the consultation has been published on the Council's website and is set out in Appendix B to this report.

Statutory Consultation

4.5 The draft Reading Transport Strategy 2036 (provided at Appendix A) has been prepared to reflect the key themes of feedback received from the consultation. The draft strategy sets out an ambitious vision for transport in Reading, demonstrating how transport options in Reading will be developed to 2036 and beyond to help achieve our wider Council objectives for the town including the Reading 2050 Vision and responding to the Climate Emergency. The strategy includes the key themes which were overwhelmingly supported in the initial consultation, alongside a range of radical policies to set the guiding principles for developing the town's transport network.

4.6 An ambitious programme of schemes and initiatives is set out to implement each element of the overall strategy, including options to improve air quality and manage congestion through demand management schemes such as a Clean Air Zone. The schemes section includes a commitment to work with key

stakeholders to delivery each element of the overall strategy, including working with Wokingham Borough Council to address the issues of air quality, congestion and carbon emissions in East Reading by reviewing the range of options which were considered at the time of the East Reading MRT planning application in 2018.

- 4.7 It is a statutory requirement to undertake a 12-week consultation on the draft transport strategy. This consultation is proposed to commence on Monday 23rd March with a dedicated webpage, including public survey, and a press launch. The consultation will include the draft Reading Transport Strategy 2036 and associated Integrated Impact Assessment reports, alongside consultations relating to two sub-strategies to the main strategy itself, the draft Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and an initial information gathering exercise for the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Authority to undertake consultations on these sub-strategies has previously been granted through Committee approval. The consultation will run for 12 weeks and close on Sunday 14th June 2020.
- 4.8 The Integrated Impact Assessment report assesses the overall strategy (including the vision, objectives, policies and schemes) in relation to its environmental, equality and health impacts. The two documents have been developed in parallel through an iterative process to ensure feedback from the initial IIA assessments has been used to develop the main strategy. The overall focus of the transport strategy is on promoting sustainable modes of travel and the key objectives relate directly to improving the environment, promoting healthy lifestyles and inclusivity. This overall focus combined with the IIA approach has ensured that these key areas are fully integrated within the strategy and the positive benefits resulting from delivery of the strategy will be maximised.
- 4.9 Key promotional activities to be undertaken as part of the consultation will include:
- Press launch and press release.
 - Consultation webpage, including survey.
 - Social media campaign.
 - Advertising on digital screens, such as those in Council buildings, on buses and outside the railway station.
 - Three public drop-in events.
 - Presentations to local user and interest groups.
 - Meetings with key stakeholders including local authorities.
 - Article in the school travel newsletter issued to all schools in the Borough.
- 4.10 There are a number of statutory consultees we will engage through the consultation, including:
- Transport operators;
 - Neighbouring local authorities;
 - Natural England;
 - Environment Agency; and
 - English Heritage.

- 4.11 In addition, we will ensure information regarding the consultation is disseminated to key partners and stakeholders including community groups, the Local Enterprise Partnership and local businesses, and local education establishments and healthcare providers.
- 4.12 Following completion of the consultation, the feedback received will be reviewed and the draft strategy will be updated accordingly. It is proposed the final strategy will be submitted for adoption by the Council in November 2020.
- 4.13 It should be noted the transport strategy consultation will run in parallel to the consultation on the new Climate Emergency Strategy which commenced on 13th March. The transport strategy has been developed in parallel with the Climate Change strategy, particularly the transport theme, to ensure consistency between the two strategies and to ensure the delivery of each strategy supports the overarching objectives of both strategies.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 Delivery of a new transport strategy would help to deliver all of the following Corporate Plan Service Priorities:
- Securing the economic success of Reading and provision of job opportunities.
 - Ensuring access to decent housing to meet local needs.
 - To protect and enhance the lives of vulnerable adults and children.
 - Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe.
 - Ensuring that there are good education, leisure and cultural opportunities for people in Reading.
 - Ensuring the Council is fit for the future.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 Initial consultation on the key principles helping to shape the new strategy was undertaken in summer 2019. The consultation resulted in over 3,000 responses, including over 2,800 online and 750 face-to-face discussions at a range of public drop-in sessions, meetings, workshops, etc.
- 6.2 The statutory consultation will build on significant consultation events and activities undertaken as part of the visioning consultation that helped inform the draft strategy. It is proposed that the consultation is launched with a press release which will form the basis of promotional messages circulated to existing contacts, networks, user groups and social media platforms as well as promotional messages displayed on-screens located in Council buildings and on-board buses. Consultation activities, as set out in section 4 of this report, will include three public drop-in events and meetings with key stakeholders and local user groups.
- 6.3 People who wish to provide feedback on the draft strategy will be encouraged to do so via an online survey hosted on the Council website.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Local Transport Plan is a statutory requirement as set out in the Transport Act 2000, as amended by the Local Transport Act 2008. The Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Impact Assessment and Health Impact Assessment, considered in the overarching Integrated Impact Assessment, is also a statutory requirement.
- 7.2 By producing a new transport strategy in line with Government guidance the Council will be fulfilling its statutory duty to keep the strategy under review.
- 7.3 It should be noted that the statutory consultation will coincide with the pre-election period. Legal advice considers the consultation to be normal Council business due to the work undertaken to date and the envisaged timescales, however restrictions around promotional activities will be in place during the period up to Local Elections.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 In addition to the Human Rights Act 1998 the Council is required to comply with the Equalities Act 2010. Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 requires the Council to 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 An Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA), which incorporates an Equality Impact Assessment, has been undertaken as part of the development of the new strategy and will be published as part of the statutory consultation.
- 8.3 In addition to equality, the IIA also considers the health and environmental implications of the proposed policies and outlined schemes and considers that appropriate mitigation measures have been incorporated into the strategy in order to minimise the impact of the proposals. The overall vision and key objectives of the strategy relate directly to improving the environment, promoting healthy lifestyles and inclusivity; therefore the benefits resulting from delivery of the strategy in these key areas is reflected in the IIA assessment.
- 8.4 Sub-strategies and schemes outlined in the draft strategy will be subject to further Equality Impact Assessments as they are developed.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL & CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Transport is the biggest greenhouse gas emitting sector in the UK accounting for around 27% of total carbon emissions. As set out in the draft Climate Emergency Strategy this figure is lower in Reading with transport accounting for around 20% of carbon emissions, however significant investment in sustainable transport solutions is vital in order to respond to the Climate Emergency declared by the Council in February 2019 and to help achieve our target of a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.

- 9.2 The draft transport strategy, which has been developed in parallel to the emerging Climate Emergency Strategy, responds to this challenge and is focused on five themes. These themes all encourage a step-change in transport infrastructure and services and a shift towards sustainable and clean modes of transport as attractive alternatives to private vehicles. This builds on the considerable success of increasing the number of walking, cycling and public transport trips into Reading town centre to 80% as part of the delivery of previous Local Transport Plans.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The development of the draft transport strategy has been funded by existing transport budgets.
- 10.2 The development and delivery of schemes set out in the draft strategy will be subject to future funding being identified and/or secured, such as grants issued by Central Government, Thames Valley Berkshire LEP and private sector contributions secured through the planning process.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Local Transport Plan 3: Strategy 2011-2026, Council, 29 March 2011
- 11.2 New Local Transport Plan & Borough-Wide Car Parking and Air Quality Strategy, Policy Committee, 16 July 2018
- 11.3 Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan - Draft for Consultation, Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee, 20 November 2019
- 11.4 Rights of Way Improvement Plan - Update Report, Traffic Management Sub-Committee, 9 January 2020