

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

20 JULY 2020

### PETITION NO. 1

Petition from Catherine Whipple:

#### Improve clean air and road safety on Crescent Road

We want our children to breathe clean air and walk on safe streets. We therefore support the brief daily closure of Crescent Road during the school run from September 2020.

Crescent Road is a busy and at times dangerously crowded road, with three schools, narrow pavements and fast traffic. There have been several accidents in recent years.

We therefore wish the council to support our road closure scheme at drop off and pick up times by September 2020. The closures would be brief - perhaps 40 minutes long - but effective. They would let children walk to school, free of fear. They would improve air quality for everyone.

The Transport Secretary has committed support to walking and cycling to school through the introduction of School Streets. Crescent Road, with three schools and the capacity for over two thousand pupils, is a perfect candidate.

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

I thank Ms Whipple for her submission of the petition asking Reading Council to support a school streets initiative on Crescent Road.

This morning I emailed Ms Whipple a full copy of the Hackney School Streets Tool Kit which is regarded as the most definitive manual on this subject. This is a practical toolkit to guide transport practitioners and schools in developing School Street schemes in their communities. It provides best practice from existing and proposed schemes across England and Scotland, including London Boroughs of Hackney and Camden, Solihull and Edinburgh. It is based on the experiences of teachers, pupils, parents and school travel professionals. It has been designed to provide a step-by-step guide through the process, which can also be tailored to a school's individual circumstances.

The Hackney Tool Kit makes it clear that School Streets is a very localised initiative applied to the immediate area around a suitable school or schools. It is an initiative that should be led by schools, whilst being supported by the Council subject to a number of conditions being met.

Officers in our Transport Section are working on a guide to assist schools in what they need to demonstrate in order to ensure the successful management of a school street. This also sits within the context of our Local Transport Plan policies to encourage more walking and cycling to schools. Brighter Futures

for Schools is keen to help in this process and to promote knowledge of School Streets and will also be engaging with any interested schools.

Implementation, even on a trial basis, will be subject to local support and there will be conditions about the types of street that could be eligible (for example, avoiding closures on key emergency service routes or public transport routes).

I would stress that an early pre-requisite is support being demonstrated for closing the road by those directly affected in the locality, as well as an initial assessment of the possible impact on neighbouring streets of any diverted traffic.

As Ms Whipple rightly reminds us Crescent Road has three schools, and we would need support from all three and the commitment to manage School Streets and the associated road closure(s).

Prior to the COVID outbreak we had hoped to have reached the stage of a trial by now, but any trials have not been possible. Clearly schools have been significantly affected by COVID and that remains the case. Although some children are now back at school the issues and problems that we typically experienced around schools prior to COVID do not exist now. Whilst we expect schools to be fully open in September the impact of COVID is still likely to be felt and priorities for schools may have changed.

We are open to expressions of interest from schools wishing to operate and manage school streets and will take this petition as an initial expression of local interest. To the best of my knowledge none of the local schools has yet to formally endorse support for creating a school street on Crescent Road.

Lastly I would advise Ms Whipple that, regrettably, none of the Active Travel funding received most recently from the Government can be spent on the implementation of School Streets as the grant is fettered to promoting social distancing by improving walking and cycling.

PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 1

Tom Lake to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport:

Health & Wellbeing Board

We are in the middle of a health and wellbeing crisis and yet our Health and Wellbeing Board is not meeting.

The role of the Health and Wellbeing Board is to take an overview of the whole health and wellbeing of Reading, going far beyond the activities of Reading Borough Council, and to do this in public view.

Problems which are often dealt with at Health and Wellbeing Board are of particular significance at present - safeguarding, mental health, children's welfare, support of care homes, safety of routine medical care - as well as matters specific to the crisis such as preparation for control of outbreaks and communication with the public on their precautions and necessary behaviour.

Such matters can be discussed privately, but they are sometimes understood better when prepared for public discussion.

Will the Council look at re-establishing meetings of the Health and Wellbeing Board in short order?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport):

When the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the UK in March 2020 Reading Borough Council had to take swift action in relation to all committee meetings that usually take place. All such meetings needed to be temporarily suspended and appropriate delegation and governance structures that exist for emergency response were immediately instigated.

All staff needed to focus upon ensuring that the service continued to run safely during this time, and with high levels of COVID19 being reported, some staff were re-designated to focus on the Pandemic as we needed to work to keep the staff and public safe with potential shortages anticipated.

During the peak of the pandemic actions to preserve the health and wellbeing for Reading's residents have been at the forefront of the local response which the Council has played a significant part in alongside a range of partner organisations.

I agree with Mr Lake that the time is right now to re-institute public meetings regarding the health and well being of local residents in relation to both the direct and in-direct affects of the Pandemic. That is why we are establishing a new partnership board- called the Reading Outbreak Engagement Board- to be the forum where issues relating to COVID-19 and its impact on the residents of Reading can be fully discussed and understood. This board will also provide important local leadership on actions to control local outbreaks in Reading. We look forward to announcing the arrangements for this board in the very near future.

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**PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 2**

Els de Mets to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport:

**Funding of a Pedestrian Crossing on Upper Redlands Road**

We are campaigning for a safe pedestrian crossing facility on Upper Redlands Road to serve pedestrian movements to/from St Joseph's College, University of Reading and other destinations. The scheme was included in the 'Traffic Management Measures - CIL Funded Schemes' but currently remains unfunded. The government announced earlier this year a £2 billion package to create a new era for cycling and walking and more recently launched a £250m active travel fund. Can the Lead Councillor update us what steps the Council is taking to use these funds to deliver the crossing on Upper Redlands Road

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

I thank Ms de Mets for her question.

This pedestrian crossing remains on the list of traffic management measures for future funding opportunities, and was confirmed most recently at the Traffic Management Sub-Committee (TMSC) on 5<sup>th</sup> March.

I attach a copy of the table presented to that meeting which contains further details, and also explains some of the complexities that would need to be addressed before a crossing could be implemented. Designing, consulting upon and implementing such a scheme could take between 12 - 18 months for the reasons referenced in the table.

The CIL monies collected by the Council, including the 20% element for local schemes, are for a range of measures that will not always include transport measures. No formal decision has been taken to commit any of the 20% local element of CIL to this scheme.

However, through the TMSC we will continue to consider any funding for measures identified on the list. By it being on this list it has a level of priority for when funding does come available.

I should also make it clear that the first tranche of active travel funding we have received from the Government does not extend to permanent pedestrian crossings, as the money is stipulated for temporary measures to help with social distancing and encourage active travel in the form of more walking and cycling.

The guidance about spending the second tranche of Active Travel funding follows similar requirements of the first round, so it is unlikely the terms and conditions will allow us to use the funding for a crossing here.

Line No.	Ward	Type of Request / Proposal	Street	Location	Details	Officer Comments
79	Redlands	Pedestrian Crossing	Upper Redlands Road	Near to St Josephs College and at junction with Alexandra Road.	Request received for improved pedestrian crossing facilities to the east of Alexandra Road. Suggestion made for turning the speed cushions into a full-width raised crossing (with imprinting on top), although a controlled crossing is preferred. Also requested improvements at the junction with Alexandra Road to improve the crossing for pedestrians and to reduce the carriageway with the intention of reducing vehicle speeds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>General:</b> Fundraising has raised some private local funding contribution for developing the proposal. An uncontrolled crossing will be significantly less costly, compared with a controlled crossing (e.g. zebra or traffic signals), as it will not require electrical connections. The footway widths will also be a consideration, should any beacons/posts need to be installed for a controlled facility. Footway build-outs could be costly, particularly if utility apparatus or Highway drainage is affected.</li> <li>• <b>Casualty Data:</b> One slight accident in the latest 3 year period (up to April 2018) to the east of Alexandra Road. One pedestrian casualty but speeding not a contributing factor.</li> <li>• <b>Benefits/Impact:</b> Improved pedestrian crossing facility, but consideration needs to be made to the impact on emergency service and public transport vehicles, should a full-width raised crossing be installed. Potential reductions in vehicle speeds, depending on the measures to be implemented.</li> <li>• <b>Anticipated Costs:</b> Medium (uncontrolled) to very high (signalised).</li> <li>• <b>Recommended Action:</b> Retain.</li> </ul>

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### COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor Duveen to ask the Leader of the Council:

#### Audit of Accounts

The never-ending saga of the 2016-17 accounts has reached a new level as the Reading Chronicle reported that the costs of preparing these accounts had somehow mushroomed from the £600k given by the Leader of the Council in reply to my question to full Council last February, to something closer to £1m. Can he give any assurance that this is the final figure and that there are no further surprises? Could he give estimates for the costs of the subsequent 2017-18 and 2018-19 accounts and an indication of whether these are likely to be finally presented on time?

REPLY by Councillor Brock (Leader of the Council):

The 2016/17 Accounts were signed off in July 2019, with the cost of Auditing these accounts being unchanged at £708,938, £600k above the scale fee of £108,938 as was reported in the full council meeting which took place on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2020. This figure can be confirmed as the final figure for the 2016/17 Accounts.

The final cost of auditing the 17/18 accounts is yet to be confirmed. The fee, when confirmed, will be subject to approval by the PSAA Ltd. EY indicated in May 2020 that their fee was likely to be at least £400,000 above the scale fee, partly due to issues in place in 2016/17 which were being addressed during 2017/18.

It is not yet possible to give an estimate of Audit costs for 2018/19 as the costs relating to this unstarted Audit will be influenced by the findings of the 2017/18 Audit.

The draft 2018/19 Accounts are complete and were handed over to the Auditors in mid-February 2020. This audit is scheduled to start in August 2020 following completion of the 2017/18 audit.

Officers are currently fully engaged in completing the 2019/20 accounts and will be completed and handed over to EY in August 2020 and available for public inspection shortly thereafter. It is to be noted that MHCLG have extended the accounts preparation timetables for 2019/20 in recognition of the unprecedented circumstances being faced. This will enable the Council's 2020/21 accounts to be closed in line with statutory timelines.

COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 2

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport:

Covid-19, racism and inequality

Following publication of the Public Health England report, which disturbingly said that factors such as racism and social inequality may have contributed to increased risks of black, Asian and minority communities catching and dying from Covid-19, what additional action is the council taking?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport):

The Public Health England report you refer to has indeed highlighted that people from BAME communities carry increased risks from COVID-19. The reasons for this are varied and not all are completely understood yet. You are absolutely right that the twin evils of racism and inequality have contributed. On the medical side, we know that people from BAME groups have a higher prevalence of risk factors for COVID-19 such as obesity and diabetes. On the social side; the type of occupational roles more commonly performed by those in BAME groups and the level of socio-economic deprivation experienced are also likely to be factors that have increased the risk. Clearly these factors overlap and are interconnected. We should also note that our BAME communities in Reading are not simply one homogenous group and the report you mention does describe how the risks from COVID-19 vary between different ethnic groups.

Addressing inequality has been a central priority of this council for many years and the impacts of Covid-19 highlight the need for us to redouble our work in this area and look for further areas where we can take action. The report you mention makes recommendations for action and we are committed to taking these forward here in Reading. This work will sit within the newly formed social inclusion group, chaired by the Assistant Director of Communities and Housing, supported by a multi-disciplinary group and under the leadership of our Executive Director for Adult Care and Health Services.

Within this work stream we are ensuring that effective culturally competent communication is developed, produced and shared in the most appropriate way to specific targeted communities. We have also commissioned work to produce inclusive infographic communication tools to support the national test and trace programme. The Reading Outbreak Control plan has identified BAME and faith groups as a priority population group locally and provides the framework to ensure action is taken to prevent outbreak within these groupings. Finally, to ensure all members of our local community- including BAME groups- can have their voice heard and be part of Reading's COVID-19 planning, we are setting up a Local Outbreak Engagement Board for Reading and we look forward to the first meeting of this board in the near future. That Board will be considering a report on the impact of Covid-19 on BAME groups in Reading and what actions we can take as a town to address this unfair and deadly inequality.

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### COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 3

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

#### Crescent Road road safety improvements

Recent school developments on Crescent Road in East Reading (Maiden Erlegh and Alfred Sutton) took in developer contributions of over £150,000 for transport improvements to mitigate the impact on the local community and infrastructure. Can the Lead Councillor tell us how much of that money has been spent already, what it has been spent on and how much of it was spent on improving transport and road safety on Crescent Road itself?

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

I thank Cllr White for his question.

The two developments mentioned equated to a total contribution of £151,769, and the spend associated with these contributions is as follows:

#### Maiden Erlegh 2 (planning application 150594) £64,250

As identified within the SEPT Committee report dated 21st November 2018 in relation to National Cycle Network 422 scheme, £50,000 was allocated and will be spent as part of the delivery of that scheme.

Network Management have been planning an upgrade to the London Road crossing by Liverpool Road with the remaining £14,250 which complies with the fettering of the Agreement. However to date this has not been able to be undertaken.

It should be noted that a proportion of the contribution has already been spent given that a complete controller failure occurred recently during lockdown and required replacement. I had separate correspondence with Cllr White about this failure, as he was complaining about the length of time taken to complete the repair. Network Management are still waiting for the invoicing of that work to see how much funding remains.

#### Alfred Sutton expansion (planning application 140968) £87,519

The contribution from the school has been spent on the 20mph speed limit and the resident parking scheme within the area. Network Management have confirmed that, as the resident parking scheme is still being implemented, a final balance is not available at present.



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**COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 4**

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

**Improving road safety on Upper Redlands road**

Almost two years ago a petition was handed in for a crossing to improve road safety on Upper Redlands Road. This scheme has support from local parents, the university and the community. Can the Lead Councillor update me on when the Council will be making a decision on how to allocate the next round of Community Infrastructure Levy money and how long it would take to survey, design and build a zebra crossing on Upper Redlands Road if this scheme was prioritised?

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

I thank Cllr White for his question, which is answered in my earlier reply to Public Question 2 from Ms de Mets.

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### COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 5

Councillor R Singh to ask the Lead Councillor for Communities and Neighbourhoods:

#### Litter Bins and Bottle Banks

Residents are reporting persistent issues with overflowing litter bins in our parks and roads across Reading and increased incidents of bottle banks being used as rubbish dumps. One of the residents in my ward told me he fears for his family's health and safety because of all the litter around the area.

Does the Council recognise the problem and do you think increasing the frequency of emptying the existing litter bins and bottle banks will remedy the situation?

**REPLY** by Councillor Barnett-Ward (Lead Councillor for Communities and Neighbourhoods):

Thank you for your question. Since the Covid 19 outbreak, we have seen an increase in the amount of recyclable and non-recyclable waste being left at our Bring Bank sites, in our street litter bins and in the amount of waste being left in our parks. For example, the amount of glass being recycled via Bring Banks has risen 37% since the lockdown. Since 23<sup>rd</sup> March Covid 19 related staff absence has at times reached 20% due to self-isolation, shielding and redeployment and increased waste volumes have added to pressure on staff during these unprecedented times. Our Officers have been working hard to keep all our parks open to provide essential facilities for recreation and exercise over the past few months and one consequence of the increased use of parks we have experienced is an increase in litter resulting in over-flowing bins at some sites.

Cleansing staff have been doing their utmost to cope with these increased volumes and additional resource will be made available to empty bins more frequently over the summer holiday period. We are also planning to install additional litter bins to help with capacity at particular problem spots.

With regard to glass Bring Banks, we have already increased the emptying frequency at a number of sites which have been experiencing overflows and this will continue until further notice.

Unfortunately, a small number of residents have chosen to fly-tip waste at Bring Bank sites, especially during lockdown, despite our domestic waste crews collecting extra side waste. Reading tends to suffer from low level fly tipping rather than the large accumulations seen in some rural areas, and our Bring Banks and on-street litter bins have been used by those who chose not to manage their waste responsibly.

The Council's five Recycling and Enforcement Officers who investigate these environmental crimes have now returned to their usual work following a period

of redeployment as part of the Covid 19 response and recovery. They are once again issuing penalty notices and putting together cases for the prosecution of fly-tippers. The team is now deploying CCTV cameras at bring bank sites where fly-tipping has occurred and 10 penalty notices have been issued to residents caught fly-tipping and littering on the cameras over the past 4 weeks.

Fly-tipping and littering in our streets and parks impacts everyone's experience of being out and about in Reading. As many more of us than usual will be having a Reading 'Staycation' this year and enjoying everything our town has to offer it is important that everyone acts considerately. If the nearest litter bin is full then residents need to keep hold of their rubbish until they find one with space, taking it home if need be. We will be reiterating this message through our Communications team social media channels. I will also take this opportunity to remind residents that barbecues are not allowed in any of Reading's parks. Issues with full Bring Banks, litter and fly-tipping can be reported using the Love Clean Reading App or at [www.reading.gov.uk](http://www.reading.gov.uk)

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### COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 6

Councillor McGonigle to ask the Lead Councillor for Communities and Neighbourhoods:

#### Litter in Parks

In Palmer Park and others around Reading waste and litter has increased substantially during the lockdown. Does the council know by how much waste thrown away in parks has increased? What plans does the council have to tackle this problem so our parks are usable by young, old and everyone in between over the summer?

**REPLY** by Councillor Barnett-Ward (Lead Councillor for Communities and Neighbourhoods):

Thank you for your question. I would refer you to my answer to Councillor Singh's question. It is not possible to accurately quantify the amount of waste collected from parks as it is mixed with other bagged waste collected by crews from street litter bins and other general cleansing operations. It is however beyond doubt that the volumes have increased significantly as the use of the parks has increased significantly since the Covid 19 outbreak.

Cleansing staff have been working hard to cope with these increased volumes and additional staff resource will be made available to empty bins more frequently over the summer holiday period. We also plan to install a number of additional litter bins at particular problem spots.

On behalf of Reading's residents, the council is asking everyone to please manage their rubbish responsibly and not leave it by a bin which is already full. As you are now aware, the council is putting measures in place to keep on top of what is expected to be unusually high demand for waste disposal in our parks this summer, but we as individuals also need to do our part. Each of us has a responsibility to dispose of rubbish considerately, and if that means keeping hold of it until we find a bin with space or taking it home to put it in our domestic bin then that's what we need to be doing. I also urge residents to please report full bins, litter, and flytipping using the Love Clean Reading App or at [www.reading.gov.uk](http://www.reading.gov.uk)

I will again take the opportunity to remind residents that barbecues are not allowed in any of Reading's parks.