

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE: 15 MARCH 2021

#### PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 1

Jonathan Moore to ask the Chair of Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:

#### Planting More Trees on Residential Streets

As part of Reading Borough Council's environmental planning, would the Council commit to planting more trees on residential streets. This process has been taking place in Birmingham, London and Manchester for many years with great success. Additionally, tree species can be selected so that they require minimal upkeep (such as those that were selected for the Oxford Road). Areas that would particularly benefit are in Battle Ward where housing is dense and small front plots do not allow much space for vegetation. Additionally, these areas see a great deal of traffic and are used as a through route (for example the road I live- Norfolk Road). Trees would help reduce the impact of pollution while also improving aspect. Trees For Cities, the national charity, is looking for engagement from councils and they'd be willing to support the initiative. Their website can be found here: [www.treesforcities.org/are-you-looking-for-financial-support-for-tree-planting-this-year](http://www.treesforcities.org/are-you-looking-for-financial-support-for-tree-planting-this-year)

#### REPLY by the Chair of the Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:

I invite Councillor Page, the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport to make the response on my behalf.

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

I thank Mr Moore for his question.

I can confirm that the Council has already committed to planting more trees across Reading, which will include planting on residential streets. This is a central commitment of our new Tree Strategy, which we published on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, after consultation during 2020.

Since 2010, the Council has planted an average of 200 trees every year, most of which are on residential streets. The new Tree Strategy sets an objective of planting 3,000 trees on Council land by 2030, an average of 300 every year. In addition, the Tree Strategy seeks to extend the proportion of the Borough that is covered by tree canopy from 18% to 25%, also by 2030. The strategy also aims for no ward to have canopy cover of less than 12% by 2030. As Battle Ward currently has 7% cover, this will require a significant improvement.

The Council is already off to an excellent start. In 2020/21 the Council will exceed historic average numbers by planting over 350 trees. These have been planted across the Borough. This year, the Reading Tree Warden Network provided invaluable assistance in identifying locations and species. This is a big task, taking a lot of time and thought. The Council is very appreciative of this help and values its relationship with the Tree Wardens.

The Council also values the work of Ethical Reading, which seeks funding from local businesses to plant trees in and around the town centre as part of its 'Trees for Reading' initiative.

In making decisions about planting, the Council is guided by the principles set out in the new Tree Strategy, especially to increase the number of trees in areas of low canopy cover (including Battle Ward) and along treed corridors. The Council has also been attempting to increase the diversity of the varieties planted, and one of the actions of the new Tree Strategy is the production of a preferred species list.

Additional trees will be planted as part of the Council's pavement resurfacing programme, with Highways engineers locating suitable planting sites where there is no conflict with underground utilities, and trees sourced and planted by our Parks Department.

Most of the extra trees planted this year are 100 flowering cherry trees that have been gifted to Reading from Japan as part of the five thousand being given to the UK to celebrate friendship between our two countries. The trees were grown on in a nursery in England and are therefore safely quarantined.

As far as possible, the trees will be planted in groups, rows or avenues where they will give a good display during the flowering period. Suitable planting locations for clusters of between 6 and 25 trees include Overdown Road, Allcroft Road, Chiltern Road, Circuit Lane, Southcote Lane, Canterbury Road and Balmore Walk, and a few trees will be planted in other locations like on Tree Close and Tintern Crescent.

Finally, an elm, *Ulmus New Horizon*, has been gifted by the Tree Council to the Reading Tree Wardens Network. The Tree Wardens have asked to have this planted near Elm Park, on the wide verge of Tilehurst Road near Artillery Mews.

The Council is aware of the valuable work done by Trees for Cities. For many years, Trees for Cities has provided funding to the Tree Wardens and the Council has matched this funding so that large, semi-mature trees can be planted in low canopy areas. The last major project was the planting of over 60 trees along Hartland Road in Whitley over two seasons. However, the Council does not request "whips" for planting from either Trees for Cities or the Woodland Trust, which these organisations most frequently promote, as it is our experience that most of these do not survive. The Council plants larger, more established trees that have a real chance of

survival and we have an impressive record of over 95% of our newly planted trees surviving. The planting of thousands of trees, or “whips,” by a local authority may be headline-grabbing, but, because most fail, it is not an effective way to plant trees.

In order to meet our objective for tree canopy cover, it will be important that tree planting is increased everywhere, not just on Council land. We are therefore calling on all landowners, whether large or small, to consider whether there are opportunities for tree planting on their own land.

I would emphasise that the advice and expertise of our Council officers is available to assist private landowners and businesses with their own tree-planting initiatives.