

**AGENDA ITEM 6 - QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

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

**East Reading Mass Rapid Transit**

Will the Lead Councillor please update the Council on the latest timetable for re-submitting the amended planning application for the East Reading Mass Rapid Transit to Wokingham Borough Council, and will he also set out the enhancements and improvements that this scheme will deliver to Reading's riverside as well as the wider public transport and environmental benefits ?

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

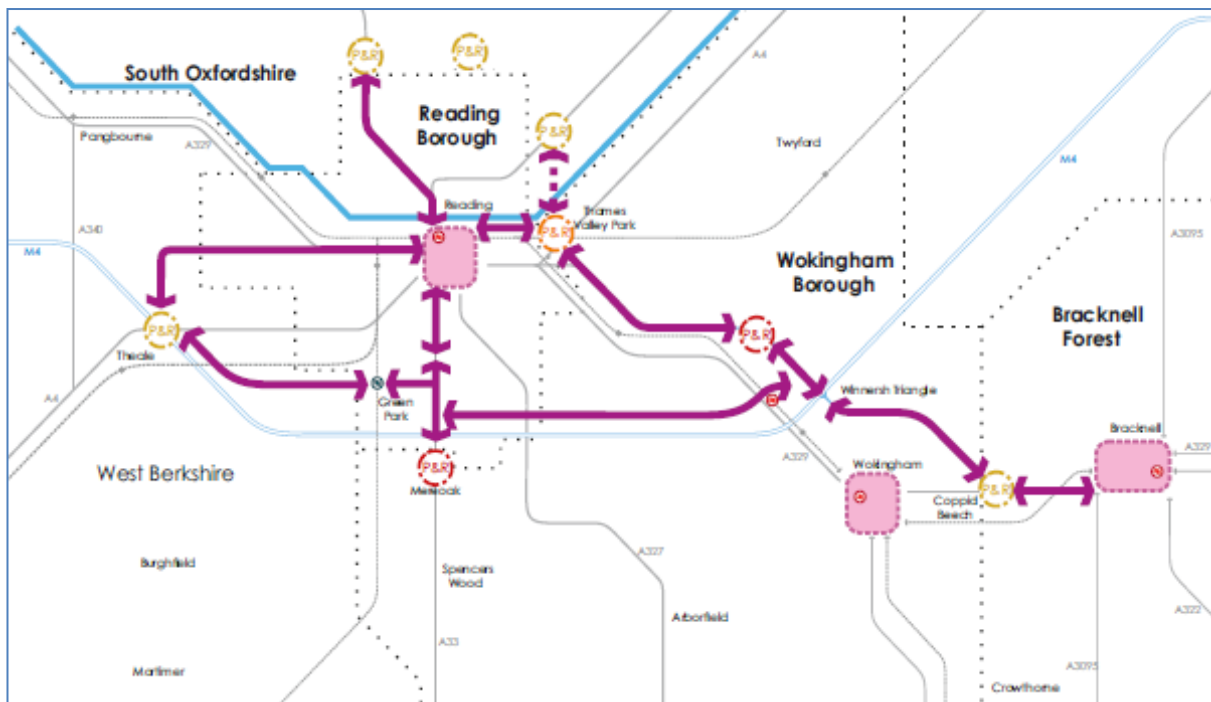
I thank Cllr Rowland for the opportunity to update on this important scheme. I do not apologise for the length of this reply as I believe it is necessary to place facts about the benefits of this important scheme in the public domain.

Reading will need to plan for thousands of new homes and jobs over the next 20 years, with tens of thousands of additional houses in the Wokingham, Bracknell and West Berkshire areas. Our transport strategy requires new park and ride sites to the north, west, south and east as is shown on the plan below. Enhancing the public transport offer is fundamental to our strategy.

A new East Reading Mass Rapid Transport link is a crucial part of Reading's planning to accommodate future development growth through more sustainable means. Without this new 400m link East Reading will face total gridlock in the years to come.

There are no alternative routes and all options along the stretch of London Road between Cemetery Junction and the railway bridge would involve unacceptable loss of park land, church land, and part of the cemetery, along with front garden areas. To deliver sufficient space for bus lanes would also require the demolition and rebuilding of the railway bridge, involving costs far in excess of the proposed ERMRT.

Once completed the ERMRT could be used by new technologies such as driverless buses, light rail, pods, guided bus systems, or whatever new means of public transport become available and affordable.



The business case for the scheme has been independently approved, demonstrating key benefits which include:

- Provision of a dedicated bus route allowing bus and coach operators to offer faster, more reliable bus services alongside local stopping services.
- Journey time savings for bus and coach services using the route of up to 13 minutes in the peak periods.
- An expected increase in public transport patronage of 15% compared to the future without the scheme (based upon the modelled assumptions for the business case).
- A new direct cycle route that is lit, segregated, with low gradient, low levels of traffic, does not flood, and benefits from natural surveillance from the passing regular bus services.
- An expected increase in cycling of 114 new trips per day compared to the future without the scheme (based upon the modelled assumptions for the business case).

Let me now turn to the benefits that the scheme will bring to the immediate vicinity. Let me again make it clear that the stretch of riverside most impacted by the proposal runs from the east side of Kennetmouth to the new park and ride site being constructed by Wokingham Borough Council at Thames Valley Park. The scheme will in no way impact the areas of open space or riverside in front of Thames Valley Park.

Despite substantial pre-application discussions and enhancements to the East Reading MRT scheme, and an officer recommendation to approve the application, Wokingham’s Planning Committee voted, by a single vote, to refuse planning permission in June due to concerns about harm to the character and appearance of the area. Subsequently a public consultation (from 12<sup>th</sup> September until 5<sup>th</sup> October) has been undertaken on a number of enhancement options to address these concerns.

A new planning application is currently being prepared for the scheme which will use plants and natural vegetation to deliver a softer and overall greener structure. This is consistent with Wokingham Borough Council's updated proposals for the new park and ride site at Thames Valley Park which were granted planning permission by Wokingham's Planning Committee on 10<sup>th</sup> October. This new ERMRT application will be submitted later this month for determination in the early New Year.

Other riverside enhancements, included as part of the original planning application, will remain namely:

- a) the installation of three new timber mooring platforms which will provide additional short-stay mooring facilities which are lacking in the area;
- b) alongside the new mooring platforms will be major riverside landscaping improvements - known as 'marginal shelving' - which will help to improve what is a shoddy and neglected stretch of riverbank and enhance people's experience of the edge of the River Thames.
- c) beneath the bridge on the Wokingham side we will create areas of marshy wetland and grasses providing capacity for seasonal flooding, and a diverse marshy habitat, which will include the locally-occurring Loddon Lily to the area. This will allow the marshy area under the bridge to remain open and unfenced (although this can be reviewed) whilst enhancing the sense of space. It will also reduce anti-social behaviour in the area.
- d) the scheme will also provide enhancements to both King's Meadow and Hills Meadow, including planting of four black poplar trees within King's Meadow, rotational management to reduce invasive species within the belt of vegetation at the north of King's Meadow, a one-off project to resolve tree and undergrowth management followed by rotational annual maintenance of the belt of vegetation at the south of Hills Meadow, and installation of bird and bat boxes.
- e) to further mitigate the visual impact of the bridge the width has been reduced by 1m at its closest point to the River Thames, creating a more open aspect and increasing sunlight on the towpath. The support structure has been reduced to single columns along the length of the bridge, a design that is considered to be more elegant and reduces the footprint, further increasing the sense of openness for towpath users.
- f) the lighting on the bridge has been designed to prevent 'spillage' over a wider area, whilst pedestrians and cyclists will be in a much safer environment and the regular use of the bridge will also act as a deterrent to anti-social behaviour.
- g) the long-forgotten and neglected mosaic (originally created by the Newtown community in the 1980's) will be restored and relocated into a more prominent location, rather than covered in weeds and rubbish.
- h) information and storyboards will be introduced to the riverside to provide further information for residents and visitors of the history of the area.

Besides the obvious long-term public transport benefits, this scheme will deter the drug-dealing, fly-tipping, illegal mooring and other anti-social activity, which has made this an unfriendly and quite threatening area by day and a virtual 'no-go' area at night.

In short the proposed new scheme will reclaim, rejuvenate and regenerate a section of Reading's run-down riverside.

2. Councillor Josh Williams to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

Let's Ride Cycle Events

'Let's Ride' events are fun, free cycling festivals held across the Country. Streets are closed around a local park and into town for a period, and everyone cycles on them. This is really simple, but really effective, as the surprise of seeing roads normally jammed with cars being used by families with bikes is really eye opening. Will the Lead Councillor join with me in calling for one in Reading, and will he ask officers to contact Let's Ride, British Cycling and other local Cycling organisations to positively discuss opening Reading's roads to a cycling festival ?

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

Thank you for your question Councillor Williams.

In principle I would agree that hosting these events is a good, but not the only, way of more widely promoting cycling and the benefits of sustainable travel and physical activity.

However, there are a number of practical, cost and resource implications that fall directly on the Council that need to be considered when planning to host activities on public highways - including road closures themselves, alternative routes and diversions for vehicles, marshalling, marketing and promotion.

In addition to the highlighted event hosted on highways, successful events also offer a wider range of activity options taking place in outdoor leisure facilities or parkland cycling. At this point in time, with constraints on both budget and staff resources, I do not think the Council is in a position to add such an event to planned activities.

However, Reading Sport & Leisure already host a number of regular cycle activities and initiatives around Reading working in partnership with Council colleagues from Transport.

Regular activities are delivered at Palmer Park Sports Stadium throughout the year including sessions for families, people with disabilities and additional needs, cycling beginners and more advanced and competitive cyclists. Local clubs and the cycle track league also utilise the velo track onsite to further support the development of track cycling.

We also host a number of cycle training activities in partnership with local organisations and work with charities and other groups to host larger scale cycle event activities such as the annual Cyclo-Cross event at Prospect Park and the British Heart Foundation London to Reading bike ride; all of which engage thousands of people of all ages and abilities to cycle.

In my opinion focusing on the development and delivery of these existing opportunities to encourage and grow participation in community cycling activity is a better use of available resource at this time rather than simply delivering a one-off event.

I am happy to keep this under review and the Council continues to seek out funding opportunities to deliver events and initiatives that support the delivery of Council objectives with regard to both physical activity and sustainable transport.

3. Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Housing:  
Housing Crisis in Reading

There is a housing crisis in Reading. Rough sleeping has been on the increase. Green councillors are deeply concerned that the rate of increase has been accelerating! The last figures that I requested showed an increase from 22 people sleeping rough in 2016/17 to a shocking 31 people sleeping rough in 2017/18.

What is Labour's target number of our residents sleeping rough at the next annual survey ?

The type of answer I am after is a number. If the answer is longer than one paragraph myself and everyone else in the room will know that the Labour councillor in charge of housing is avoiding answering the question.

**REPLY** by Councillor Ennis Lead Councillor for Housing.

Rough sleeping is a huge challenge nationally and locally. The most recent statistics published on 25 January 2018 (revised on 16 February) recorded a 169% increase in the number of people sleeping rough in England since 2010. Locally the Council and its partners already have a comprehensive programme to help people sleeping rough in the winter months but in spite of this rough sleeping has been increasing locally. **That's why this Council has a zero tolerance to homelessness and we are doing everything we can to ensure no one is sleeping rough on our streets.**

The Rough Sleeper Unit note that the national trend would suggest that a minimum 15% *increase* on the 2017 Reading rough sleeper headcount number is predicted without new interventions. Officers are actively working with our partners towards a reduction in the numbers of rough sleepers by the end of this financial year and the Council has just launched a new model of services focused on providing immediate and emergency responses for rough sleepers. Reading Borough Council has also recently been awarded £316,000 from a £30m pot of cash the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has set aside for 2018/19 to significantly reduce rough sleeping across the country.

Taken together this means that, once fully implemented, there will be a significant increase in the accommodation and support available for rough sleepers to lower the number of people sleeping on the streets of Reading this winter. This includes extra street outreach workers; more bed spaces and support within emergency accommodation; and additional officers to support with moving people into independent accommodation with the aim of freeing up much needed supported accommodation. However, additional funding was only advised part way through this financial year and the Council is in the process of mobilising to implement additional services with partners. The headcount takes place in early November and it is genuinely difficult to predict the impact at this stage.

Government have given an indicative allocation of funding for next year which is welcomed and will ensure that next year sees a really substantial reduction in numbers of people sleeping out in Reading.

This Council has demonstrably risen to the national housing crisis - reducing the number of households in B&B from well over 100 to single figures in 18 months; building new council homes - with 78 built and a further 150 to be completed over the next 2-3 years; preventing

homelessness and supporting people to access good quality Private Rented Sector homes through a range of routes including our innovative Rent Guarantee Scheme; and continuing to commit to £1.55m per annum to fund services to support rough sleepers and single homeless people, including specialist supported housing for homeless young people.

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

**East Reading Mass Rapid Transit Funding**

Green councillors supported Wokingham Council's refusal of planning permission for the unpopular East Reading Mass Rapid Transit scheme. Unfortunately Labour run Reading Council are manoeuvring to put in another planning application for this scheme.

I note that in the "Capital monitoring and forecasting" appendix of the Performance Monitoring report, which went to the September Policy Committee, £74,000 has been spent on East Reading MRT phases 1 and 2 this financial year. Can the Labour councillor in charge of transport breakdown exactly what this money has been spent on? Can he also clarify if this expenditure has been funded by the Local Enterprise Partnership?

Please can the Labour councillor in charge of transport give a brief answer of not more than two paragraphs and a list. The longer your answer is the weaker you look to myself and everyone else in the room.

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

As set out in my response to earlier questions tonight, and at previous meetings, the East Reading MRT scheme is a vital element in our overall transport strategy to help manage, in a sustainable way, the significant levels of planned housing and employment growth over the next 20 years across the wider Reading urban area as well as in Wokingham and West Berkshire.

Expenditure on the ERMRT this financial year relates to preparation of the planning application for the scheme. This includes undertaking surveys, development of the scheme and associated mitigation measures, preparation of consultation materials and planning application documentation, and associated legal advice.

The source of funding for expenditure to date is grant provided to the Council by central Government for transport schemes. This forms part of the overall local funding element for the scheme, which it is envisaged will include a significant proportion of private sector funding secured through the planning process. This local funding will unlock over £19m grant funding assigned to the scheme by the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership

5. Councillor Emberson to ask the Lead Councillor for Housing:  
**Reducing Homelessness**

Can the Lead Councillor update the Council on the work to reduce homelessness?

**REPLY** by Councillor Ennis Lead Councillor for Housing.

Reading Borough Council recognises that the national housing market is broken and that many people in our Borough are facing a housing crisis that can have a negative impact on every aspect of their lives. We also recognise that we have a pivotal role in working with partners and our residents to try and fix it. Of course homelessness, rough sleeping and a lack of

affordable housing continue to be major issues in Reading but the Council's commitment to tackling them in a variety of innovative ways is having a demonstrable impact.

The number of homeless households staying in temporary bed and breakfast accommodation in Reading has fallen dramatically following intensive efforts by the Council and its partners to tackle the problem.

A focus on homelessness prevention; the provision of more temporary accommodation; and proactive support to help people access suitable private rented sector accommodation have all helped reduce the number of households in B&B from well over 100 to single figures in 18 months. The number of households in emergency B&B accommodation in Reading stood at 136 on 31st March 2017 but had fallen to 29 by 1st April 2018. As of 1st October there were just seven households in B&B accommodation with shared facilities. There were 104 families in B&B in March 2017 but at the start of October there were just four.

The Housing department works with other services to ensure a joined up approach is taken to support families - helping them sustain their tenancies and prevent homelessness. This includes providing support where needed in respect of money management and working with families to mitigate the impact of welfare reforms with the provision of personal budgeting support, assistance into employment and access to other services as required.

Prevention is key to tackling homelessness but so is being able to support people to access affordable housing. The Council has driven a multi-strand approach to increasing the number of affordable homes available to those in need.

The Council recognises the vital importance of the private rented sector in Reading to meet local needs and has been working hard to build up good relationships with private landlords through initiatives such as the Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS). This matches people who need homes with landlords who have properties to let and offers benefits including guaranteed rent paid directly to the landlord, up to six weeks deposit and rent paid during void periods. The Council also supports households to access Private Rented Sector accommodation - with the Council paying a deposit and rent in advance to secure accommodation when needed. This has helped many families to avoid entry into B&B and helped others to move on quickly from B&B where an emergency placement was unavoidable.

An innovative temporary housing development in Lowfield Road, Caversham Park, has also played an important part in bringing down numbers of households staying in B&B accommodation. The 28 self-contained modular homes each contain two bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchen-diner and a living room and the first families moved in at the beginning of the year.

The provision of new affordable permanent housing is a priority for Reading Borough Council and we already have our own Local Authority New Build (LANB) programme approved. That programme, funded by available Housing Revenue Account borrowing along with S106 and Right to Buy receipts, has already delivered 79 homes with a further 151 to be delivered over the next 2-3 years. This includes the construction of 57 new Council homes in Conwy Close, Tilehurst - the first homes are due to be let this autumn.

There are major challenges in providing housing nationally and locally which are particularly acute in Reading. However, this Labour council are facing up to the challenges by working in partnership with homeless charities, organisations, the faith sector and private sector companies to deliver affordable social housing for the people of Reading.

6. Councillor McGonigle to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:  
Engine Idling

At the SEPT Committee on 23 November 2016 as part of Reading's Air Quality Action Plan it was agreed by the Committee that a campaign to reduce engine idling should go ahead. Vehicles idling whilst stationary cause unnecessary use of fuel, increase emissions and are noisy. The Road Traffic Regulations of 2002 give discretionary powers to officers to issue fixed penalty notices of £20, £40 if unpaid. The proposal at the Committee was to reduce emissions from idling vehicles at hotspot locations such as outside schools, hospitals and taxi ranks to help improve air quality. At this meeting we were shown a poster that had been produced by local school children to promote awareness of the dangers of engine idling. These posters are nowhere to be seen. While childhood asthma and COPD in the over 50s are on the increase taxis in residential streets are still idling sometimes for up to 30 minutes. Taxis in queues at the ranks in town can be seen idling 10 or 12 back in the queue, even when business is slow, and parents are still idling their engines outside of schools.

When spoken to the majority of drivers have no idea why they should switch off. Of course the Government should be acting on this issue but we won't hold our breath waiting for that to happen. Two years later it appears this Council has done little or nothing to implement this campaign. My question is this:

Does this Council have any intention of fulfilling its promise to effectively campaign against engine idling in this town and if so, when ?

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

I thank Cllr McGonigle for her question.

Since the SEPT Committee at which the no idling campaign was agreed, RBC officers have held three idling action events. One event was held in the town hall and town centre. The other two were held in schools, EP Collier and The Heights.

During the events volunteer members of the public were trained about vehicle idling. The volunteers were then paired up and sent out to speak to drivers about idling. They gave out leaflets on idling, and air quality themed snakes and ladders games which could be played at home with family to raise awareness about the issue.

The posters that Cllr McGonigle refers to in her question, were actually no idling signs designed in a school competition. 60 signs were ordered and put up at idling hotspots around the borough such as the taxi ranks outside the Reading Train Station, Garrard Street and on Friar Street, as well as outside schools that have requested them after being contacted by the Council.

The powers adopted under the Road Traffic (Vehicle Emissions) (Fixed Penalty) (England) Regulations 2002 to issue fixed penalty notices (FPNs), can only be used after a driver has been warned. Licensing officers have been speaking to drivers on the rank over the last 18 months bringing the problem to their attention and asking drivers to switch their engines off.

In addition to this on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2018 I sent a letter to all Hackney Carriage Taxi Drivers. The letter reiterated the issue to drivers and warned them that drivers found to be idling at the ranks without reasonable excuse would be subject to fixed penalty notices. To date no FPN has been issued.



**7. Councillor McGonigle to ask the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities: Abandoned Fridges and Freezers**

Abandoned fridges and freezers, apart from being unsightly, contain many toxic chemicals including CFCs, well known for harming our ozone layer, and oil from compressors which are leeching into our environment through water and air. The effects of these chemicals can last for over a century. Fridges and freezers are considered by the Environment Agency to be hazardous waste but, while regulations are in place for businesses to dispose of them safely and responsibly, private households are often dumping them on the streets or leaving them in their gardens, sometimes for many months.

As some residents cannot or will not use the Council's bulky waste collection service are there any other regulations that can ensure that dumping of fridges and freezers can be stopped ?

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

There are no specific regulations relating solely to the fly tipping of fridges or freezers.

Fly-tipping is a serious criminal offence for which you can be prosecuted pursuant under sect 33 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The courts have various powers available to them to tackle fly-tipping, including imprisonment, substantial fines of up to £50,000 orders to pay costs and an order to deprive rights to a vehicle used to commit the offence. Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN's) for small-scale fly tipping can range between £150 - £400.

Fridges and freezers are free for residents to dispose of if they take them to the civic amenity site in Island Road.

Residents can arrange for us to collect large items by calling 0118 937 3787.

Number of items	Householders	Concessionary YRP holders
<b>Fridges and freezers*</b>		
1 x under counter fridge/freezer	£35.00	£26.25
1 x fridge/freezer up to 60cm wide	£45.00	£33.75
1 x fridge/freezer over 60cm wide	£55.00	£41.25

The Waste Transfer Station at 19 Bennet Road has collected 4 tonnes of fridges and freezers so far in this financial year.

All of the collected fridges and freezers are transferred to FCC Environmental (civic amenity site in Island Road) where they are sent for further treatment where the harmful gases and oils are removed and the metals and plastics recycled.

Our contractor is part of a 'compliance scheme' which is undertaken by Repic. The scheme is funded by the 'manufacturers' which covers the cost of the degassing and recycling

**8. Councillor Eden to ask the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities: Anti Social Encampments**

Would the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities outline the work the Council have done to support residents from anti-social encampments ?

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

### **Taking Enforcement Action**

Unauthorised camping is trespass, which in England is a civil offence, giving landowners and local authorities the right to repossess their property using the due process of law.

The Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Team coordinate swift action to remove any unauthorised encampment where individuals are trespassing on Council land. A visit usually takes place the very same day, or the next working day that the team are notified. We follow a set procedure which involves proving ownership of the land, obtaining details of the encampment, assessing an encampment's effects on the local area, and then usually serving notices and summonses that will enable necessary authority to be obtained from the courts to order the travellers to leave the site. This Court process can be lengthy, however, and is not in the Council's hands.

During an encampment the Council's ASB team liaises regularly with Thames Valley Police to share information. The Council and Police work in partnership in assessing options and determining the most appropriate route to securing the land. Where there is evidence, the Council will request that the Police use their emergency powers under Section 61 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. This power can be used on any land *except* the highway to remove identified individuals and/or their vehicles from land where certain criteria are met. The decision to use this power remains with the Police, however, not the Council. In a number of recent encampments the Police have used this power at the request of the Council, based on evidence from members of the public demonstrating the impact of the encampment on them or their businesses. It is therefore important that residents and businesses who see or experience disorder at any encampment report this though to the Police on 101 or in an emergency via 999. They can also report directly to the ASB Team by e-mailing [asb.team@reading.gov.uk](mailto:asb.team@reading.gov.uk) and we ensure this is passed to the Police.

The Council's ASB Team liaise with the other departments across the Council to ensure that once vacated the site is clean and cleared as quickly as possible. This is normally carried out within hours of the site being vacated.

### **Protecting Council Owned Land**

The Council reviews all of its land that has or might be camped upon to identify how it might be protected. Between April 2017 and March 2018 the Council spent £104,000 on defending its most vulnerable sites. Managers from across Council services carried out a review of land and agreed with the Lead Member for Neighbourhood Services a process for prioritising work.

This was based on:

- The number of previous encampments on the land
- Assessment of Community Impact
- Assessment of Environmental Impact
- Assessment of Financial Impact

As a result defensive work was implemented on 13 locations across Reading by end of March 2018.

Since April 2018, protection works have been completed at a number of other council owned sites that have been repeatedly encamped including Portman Road, Walnut Way, Pottery

Road, Bran Close, Landsdowne Rd/Portman Gradens, Coronation Square and Burford Court. Expenditure to date has totalled £28,800 this year.

The Council continue to look at each new encampment and consider options to prevent further trespass, where possible and where budget allows.

### **Legal Powers Available**

A local authority's procedure for dealing with unauthorised encampments must reflect the need to balance the rights of the settled community, land owners and the travelling community.

The Council has continued to review the legal powers available to us to ensure that we are dealing with encampments on our land as swiftly and effectively as possible within the current legislative framework. This includes current work to draw up legal papers and collate substantial supporting evidence for a borough-wide injunction against a number of named individuals who have repeatedly camped on Council land. In some circumstances where there is a need to remove an encampment more quickly than is possible through the court (and either the encampment doesn't meet the requirements of S61-62; or the Police's assessment of the encampment is such that they do not believe there is a need to use their emergency powers) then the authority will consider removal of the encampment under common law powers.

The legal process for regaining possession of the riverbank and moving overstaying boaters on is identical to that required to move other travellers, requiring the Council to go to court and obtain an order. In 2017 the Council outsourced its mooring enforcement to District Enforcement, an established company with experience of working with the Environment Agency. This has been successful, with the number of reported incidents of misuse / abuse of moorings and the associated ASB reducing to a negligible level. Residents neighbouring the Council's riverside estate have made contact to express their satisfaction with the scheme.

### **Provision of Pitches for Travellers**

Please refer to Question Councillor Question 9.

#### **9. Councillor Vickers to ask the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities: Traveller Incursions**

Following the many traveller incursions that have taken place within Reading Borough this summer, the disruption to many of our residents and the escalating costs that this council has to find to evict travellers, secure and clean the site not to mention the time the officers of the council and the police incur in sorting out the problem there is growing concerns by local residents in Tilehurst and across the borough that next year will be just as bad if not worse. What is this council doing to help to combat future incursions ?

I know that a transit camp could be the solution and we were asked to suggest a suitable site. On the 10th September 2018 I sent in such a suggestion to the council for a piece of land by Smallmead which was turned down for the new secondary school as it was too small. I have had no feedback on this suggestion to date. Would this not be a solution ?

I would add that not all travellers are the same but unfortunately the ones that do not act within the law and cause the most antisocial behaviour tar everyone else with the same brush.

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

### **Tackling Unauthorised Encampments**

Please refer to the response provided under Councillor Question 8.

### **Provision of Pitches for Travellers**

Last year there were 87 unauthorised encampments in Reading, most of which were on Council land. Having a transit caravan site could in some circumstances help the Council move on unauthorised encampments more quickly. However, identifying a site has been challenging.

A Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) concluding in 2017 identified accommodation needs for 10-17 permanent pitches and for a transit site to house 10 caravans for gypsies and travellers in Reading.

Further to this independent study, the Council undertook a thorough assessment of 80 possible sites across the borough. These were closely considered against a range of Planning policy criteria. The assessment, reported to Policy Committee in September 2017, included a 0.25 hectare site at land to the east of Smallmead and south of Island Road. The site is at risk of flooding and would therefore not be suitable for this use. One potential transit site was identified on land at the junction of Cow Lane and Richfield Avenue but this suggestion was dropped following strong objections from residents and Reading Festival organisers and the proposal to locate a new school on the site.

Notwithstanding the initial assessment and further report to Policy Committee in June 2018, this Council has committed to undertake a further review of its land holdings and other opportunities in the Autumn in order to review potential sites and continues to raise the unmet need with adjoining Councils under the duty to co-operate agenda.