

**AGENDA ITEM: 6**

**QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

**1. Councillor Raj Singh to ask the Leader of the Council:  
Kentwood Hill Allotments**

Reading Borough Council's declared Climate Emergency cannot succeed unless we protect our vital green spaces and woodlands. Recently, in my Ward, the land around Kentwood Hill allotments has been put up for sale. Whilst I fully agree that we need more affordable housing in Reading, this sale could not only significantly impact our thriving local wildlife but it could also adversely affect the well-being of Kentwood's residents if any development goes ahead. I was pleased to see, therefore, that the Labour Party locally also agrees with me as a recent tweet from Kentwood Labour said, and I quote: "There is strong opposition to any development on the local allotments which Reading Labour support." So do the Labour administration agree with me in opposing any future plans to build on the allotments ?

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

I thank Councillor Singh for his question.

At this stage, we understand that this matter relates to a sale of land between private parties in which the Council is not involved. No planning application for any development in this location has yet been made.

The Council has set a clear policy for this location in the Reading Borough Local Plan, adopted in 2019. The Local Plan identified two areas with potential for development. An area on Kentwood Hill, identified in the Local Plan as WR3s, comprises the builders' merchants and adjacent land, and is identified for 41 to 62 homes. Another area on Armour Hill, identified as WR3t, comprises the car park and nearby scrub, and is identified for 12 to 18 homes. Neither of these areas identified for development include allotments that were in use at the time of the preparation of the plan.

The Local Plan protects almost all of the remaining land from development. The in-use allotments, the woodland known as The Withies, and the adjacent playing field are all identified as Local Green Space, which the Council's policy is to protect as open space, as detailed in policy EN7 of the Local Plan. The Withies is additionally identified as an area of recognised biodiversity interest, which policy EN12 of the Local Plan states should be protected.

Therefore, the adopted local policy prepared and endorsed by this administration, whilst identifying land within the area to bring forward much needed homes to include contributing towards affordable housing, does not propose to lose any in-use allotments in this area for development. The Council continues to stand by that policy approach.

I am pleased to note that Cllr Singh also supports Reading Labour's entire approach on this matter. He did, of course, vote in favour of the Local Plan on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

**2. Councillor Rynn to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:  
Readybike**

Following the mothballing of ReadyBike on 31 March 2019 at a cost to the local and national tax payer of around £1.9million, and following the Government funded of many more cycle lanes in July 2020, what are the Council's short term and long term plans for ReadyBike?

It is not right to lock up, hide away and allow to rust, tax payers assets when the Council should be doing everything possible to encourage healthy and environmentally friendly transport solutions around our town which not only benefits the national funding investment already received by the Council, but also the local residents.

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

I thank Cllr Rynn for her question.

The ReadyBike scheme consisted of 200 bikes with 29 docking stations across the borough and was funded through the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. The scheme stopped operating in March 2019 when, without a Council subsidy, it became impossible to operate commercially.

Since then approximately 150 bikes, in a variety of conditions, have been kept in storage on Council land. These bikes were offered to key workers in Reading as part of a short-term loan scheme during the pandemic.

Last year the Council undertook market engagement to assess the opportunities for a new provider to take over the ReadyBike scheme. However the feedback from potential operators was that the existing bikes are no longer suitable.

Bike technology has changed significantly since the introduction of ReadyBike with modern peddle bikes being lighter in weight and easier for the user to locate, pay, unlock, ride, park and lock. They can also be 'smart' with GPS and make use of a geofencing system that allows controlling where the bikes can be parked.

There is also a noticeable demand for e-bikes as they appeal to a wider demographic. I am advised that e-bikes are more profitable rentals though more expensive to purchase and maintain.

In March 2021 a decision was taken by the Council (via Decision Book Number 626) to donate up to 50 bikes to local hotels in Reading to aid the post-pandemic recovery in Reading.

Then, in September 2021, a further decision was taken by the Council (via Decision Book Number 640) to donate up to 50 ReadyBikes to local town centre small businesses to aid the post-pandemic recovery in Reading.

The remaining ReadyBikes were in a poor state of repair and have since been disposed of and recycled.

Transport officers will continue to review the potential to introduce a new public cycle hire scheme in Reading but, in the absence of public subsidy, any potential operators will have to bear the full cost of start-up capital and subsequent revenue operating costs.

### **3. Councillor Raj Singh to ask the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities: Fly Tipping**

A recent Freedom of Information request on the number of fly tipping reports at recycling sites made on the Love Clean Reading App revealed an increase of 1619% between 1<sup>st</sup> January

2019 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020. To clear away this fly tipping costs the Council thousands of pounds every year and results in very few prosecutions. Glass recycling banks act as magnets for fly tipping.

Running glass recycling banks cost the Council £154,119.00 in 2020 and only brought in £5,388.00 from the sale of glass in 2019/20. From our own research on glass recycling, 80% of residents questioned said they would favour kerbside glass recycling. Could the Council consider introducing kerbside glass recycling, as this would greatly reduce fly tipping across Reading if the recycling sites were no longer there, and what would the cost be to introduce kerbside glass recycling ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Barnett-Ward Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities.

Thank you for your question, Councillor Raj Singh.

I will address the first paragraph of the question first. The Love Clean Reading app is the most efficient method for residents to report fly-tipping or other highway issues in their local area to the Council. The app is used by members of the public, Councillors and business owners, as well as employees of Reading Borough Council to record work that has been investigated or completed. As a result of this, individual fly-tipping events are often recorded several times by different people. There is no restriction on the number of times a single incident can be reported on the app. Therefore, although it is a very useful way for people to report street problems, and I do encourage everyone with a smartphone to download and use the app, Love Clean Reading reports cannot be used to try and assess the level of flytipping in Reading. An increase in Love Clean Reading Reports is not evidence of an increase in flytipping.

Flytipping is recorded nationally through a database called. Flycapture. The Council's Enforcement team report all fly tip incidents to this database through the Waste Data Flow waste management system.

Reading's Waste Data Flow figures for flytipping are as follows:

April 2019 - March 2020 1,835 incidences. The Recycling and Enforcement Team was launched in November 2019 and issued 208 fixed penalty notices in this period.

April 2020 - March 2021 1,411 incidences of flytipping. The Enforcement service was suspended from March to June 2020 and issued 323 fixed penalty notices from June 2020 - April 2021.

April 2021-January 2022 1,240 incidences of flytipping and 328 fixed penalty notices issued.

The Recycling and Enforcement team have also successfully over the above time period prosecuted 51 court cases for flytipping and littering, awarded £39,500 from these court cases and £80,900 in fixed penalty notice fine income.

When put into context with the actual incidence of flytipping it is clear that any rise in Love Clean Reading reports should not be misrepresented as evidencing a rise in flytipping. What the rise in reports does demonstrate is a rise in people using the app to report street problems, which is to be celebrated.

Cllr Raj Singh is correct that some people do choose to flytip at bottle banks. This is why we have begun investing in CCTV cameras to monitor flytipping at these locations. We currently have three sets which have recently been used to monitor bottle banks at Kensington Road, Howard Street, and Amity Road.

Moving on to the second paragraph of the question - I was asked about plans for a kerbside glass collection service in Reading at the last meeting of Full Council, only a month ago. I have appended that response at the end of this one.

As I informed Council last time we met, we are unable to do any detailed work on the introduction of a kerbside glass collection service until the Government release the secondary legislation details for the Environment Act 2021. It is impossible to project even an approximate cost of delivering a glass collection service until the Government release the detail that will be contained in the secondary legislation of the Environment Bill. Our Waste Collection management team will continue to explore options and alternatives with our re3 partners whilst wait for the information to be released from Government.

Reply from February's Council meeting

## **COUNCIL MEETING**

**23 FEBRUARY 2022**

### **QUESTION NO. 2** in accordance with Standing Order No.10

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

#### **When will Doorstep Glass Recycling be introduced?**

Green Councillors have long campaigned for doorstep glass recycling. This would be good for the planet and tidy up the town. We currently have bottle banks, and some flats currently get glass recycling. But at the moment many glass bottles will unfortunately not be recycled. Can the Lead Councillor please confirm when this scheme will be expanded to every doorstep in Reading?

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

This question is covered by the glass recycling FAQs on the re3 website [Glass-Recycling-FAQ.pdf \(fccenvironment.co.uk\)](#) but I am of course happy to take the opportunity to go into more detail in this response.

Reading's Labour councillors are committed to maximising recycling and minimising the amount of Reading's waste that is sent to landfill. Our successful introduction of food waste collections has reduced residual waste collections by 30% and taken Reading's recycling rate over 50% for the first time ever.

Glass recycling is an important part of the overall waste management service and is well used by many residents. It represents up to 5% of an overall RBC recycling rate, for the year to date, of 51%. Bottle banks allow residents to recycle at a time that suits them: a total of 210 banks at 51 sites across the borough as well as the Household Waste Recycling Centre at Smallmead. However, Reading Labour Councillors know that some residents, particularly those with mobility issues or who do not have a car, would find a kerbside collection helpful. We are therefore in discussion with our Re3 partner authorities about introducing a kerbside glass collection.

The Environment Act was passed on 15 November 2021. It introduces significant changes to the way waste and recycling will be collected and how those services are funded.

There are three broad areas of change, as follows:

1. Extended Producer Responsibility
2. Consistency of waste collection
3. Deposit Return Scheme

The Extended Producer Responsibility element of the Act promises to transfer the costs of collection and processing waste for recycling, hitherto being met through local authority budgets, to the private sector. Government has explained that some local authority transition costs, including where new services must be introduced to comply with the Act, will be met through this change in legislation.

The Consistency and Deposit Return Scheme elements promise to change which waste is captured for recycling and how it enters the recycling process. There is likely to be a requirement to collect glass alongside a range of other materials that the council already collects. However, the Deposit Return Scheme is also likely to capture glass, meaning there is a high level of uncertainty about how the two schemes would coexist and what volume of glass could be expected to be diverted from local authority collections to the deposit scheme.

Government has said that the specific detail of changes will be made clear in Secondary Legislation, which will be informed by data collected in the course of public consultations. Consultations were conducted last year but their results have yet to be published. It is likely that the complexity of the legislative package is the reason for ongoing delays in the specific details being announced.

Along with our partners, Bracknell Forest and Wokingham Borough, this council foresaw difficulties in preparing an efficient and affordable glass collection service while significant uncertainties remain about the required scope and funding of such a service.

If this council introduced a glass collection service now the additional vehicles and staff would be funded from the council budget with little or no chance of claiming-back those costs through any future 'producer pays' scheme. That would inevitably have a detrimental impact on other services for residents. Despite our proven commitment to increasing Reading's recycling rate, Reading's Labour Councillors are not prepared to take the financial risk of rushing out a kerbside glass collection before the Government clarify their position by publishing the secondary legislation.

The re3 Board, which has Cllr Page and myself as Reading's representatives, has resolved to address this precise question at the earliest opportunity. In December 2021 the Board stated:

*That Members restate their commitment to preparing a service development programme, for kerbside glass collection, once there is clarity over the strategic status, scale and funding for such a service.*

I will be glad to provide an update on the position of Reading Borough Council once the Government has published the crucial secondary legislation and officers (both RBC and in our re3 partnership) have been able to analyse the detail and develop a plan for compliance.

In the meantime, the re3 partnership's recent change to allow mixed glass collections has helped to manage the busy post-Christmas period and will undoubtedly help the three councils to make the existing service more efficient whilst bottle banks are retained. Reading Labour Councillors will continue to take every opportunity to maximise recycling in the borough despite the restraints placed on us by Government delays.

**4. Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Education:  
Solar Panels on Schools**

Green Councillors were disappointed to hear that solar panels were not now going onto schools in Reading as part of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme. School sustainability is so important as we all strive to meet the Councils' zero carbon target by 2030. Could the Lead Councillor for Education update us on why this project has stalled and whether the money from the scheme has been returned, or if Council Officers have managed to find a way to continue the solar panel roll-out to schools ?

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

In March 2021 the Council was successful with a project bid to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme for £560,000 for a schools PV programme. The work was tendered, a contractor appointed and to date, solar panels have been installed on seven school sites.

Unfortunately, we had difficulties with the contractor, who with the recent issues in product supply and market fluctuations, felt they were unable to complete the rest of the programme to install 11 further sites.

We have since applied to Salix, who are managing the funding, for an extension of time until the end of June and are in the process of appointing a new contractor with the intention of completing the full programme. Initial survey and design works have commenced, and we hope to be working at speed to spend the funding allocation within the tight timescale and install panels across the school sites.

School sustainability is now a key focus for the team and we are striving to improve schools' carbon emissions to meet the Council's zero carbon target by 2030.

**5. Councillor White to ask the Leader of the Council:  
Central Club Update**

Disappointingly the Labour-run Council decided to sell the Central Club building and Black History Mural to a private developer. The developer failed to submit a planning application and the contract was then extended for 18 months. Can the Leader of the Council update me on the current planning and contractual situation of the Central Club building. Will the Council reopen talks with the African-Caribbean community about a community bid for this building ?

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

In relation to the contractual situation of the Central Club building, I confirm that after the original open marketing exercise the Council remains contracted to sell the former Central Club building on a long leasehold basis to the purchaser and, in this situation, the Council cannot hold disposal talks with another potential purchaser.

Under the existing contract, the purchaser remains obligated to secure planning permission for redevelopment, which will include the provision of community space as well as much needed residential units as well both restoring and preserving the mural.

Following a further planning pre-application submission, substantive feedback has been provided by the Planning Authority and the developer is taking this on board with a view to submitting a full planning application in the summer.

I would also like to avail myself of the opportunity to confirm that, in relation to the Black History Mural, a detailed condition survey and conservation assessment is required for the restoration and conservation of the Mural. The Council recognise the importance of the Mural to the community of Reading and to the artist, who wishes to remain closely involved with its conservation. The Council has engaged with Historic England to support us with this piece of work and we are arranging to meet with the Mural artist so he can be updated on the proposed actions and seek to ensure his continuing engagement.