

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### POLICY COMMITTEE

4 APRIL 2022

#### PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 1

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

#### Road Repairs in Redlands

Redlands ward contains a number of roads in poor repair, which go beyond the treatments being offered in the residential roads resurfacing programme.

The steep upper part of Alexandra Road is in poor shape and presents problems for cyclists. It has been placed in the major road repairs class.

The portions of Hexham Road, Corbridge Road, and Newcastle Road used by the frequent no. 5 double-decker service are also in a poor state. Residents complain of excessive vibration, damage to vehicles and a painful ride for people with sensitivity to jolting.

How will these roads be brought back to good condition? How and when can funds be found for this work?

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

I thank Mr. Cross for his question, which does highlight the extensive Residential Roads & Pavement programme that the Council is investing in over a three-year period.

This programme commenced in Oct 2020 and to date over 365 residential roads have been surfaced, with up to a further 125 due in Year 3. This investment by the Council will extend the life of our local roads, will help to prevent potholes from forming, will seal the roads, improve skid resistance and bring our highway network back to a safe steady state following years of underfunding by central government that led to a deteriorating condition.

Early evidence is showing that the number of potholes is rapidly declining as most recently reported to SEPT Committee. Residents' satisfaction levels are on the increase and Reading was rated '3<sup>rd</sup> best performer' according to the annual 2021 National Highways & Transportation Survey results.

The scale of this welcome investment programme has provided valuable lessons for the Highways Team to take on board, and to thereby improve service delivery through this extensive 3-Year project.

Inevitably, when rolling out such a large works programme, there will be some roads that require an alternative solution to the initial proposed micro asphalt surfacing material. The upper part of Alexandra Road, Hexham Road, Corbridge Road, and Newcastle Road fall into the roads that require an alternative solution, and these roads will be addressed in Year 3 (2022/23) of this programme.

Officers are in the process of tendering the Major Roads Resurfacing contract for the Department of Transport Local Transport Grant Funding sites and will include these high-profile residential road sites within that programme.

These works are expected to take place during the summer months and an update report detailing the roads selected will be brought to Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee on 7<sup>th</sup> July.

The Councils' own investment will enable another extensive Major Road Resurfacing programme to be delivered, which saw an additional 26 roads surfaced in Hot Rolled Asphalt material during this second year of our three year programme.

I would like to re-assure Mr. Cross that funding is still available and the roads he has identified remain an important part of our extensive road investment programme.

**COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 1**

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

**Environmental Impact of Development of Land Surrounding Tilehurst Allotments**

The land surrounding Tilehurst Allotments, currently owned by the TPLC charity which is up for sale for development includes within it a protected green space (The Withies) as it is an area of biodiversity interest. The Council have recently granted a blanket Tree Protection Order.

Could the Council please either undertake their own survey (or commission one) to urgently assess the environmental impact of building houses on top of an area of biodiversity interest? Consideration should also be given to the demarcation lines between the Withies and the building plots as these are based on anecdotal land use from over 20 years ago and does not reflect the reality of the site today.

Also, sufficient evidence has been provided from TVERC to prove active badger setts are on the land to be sold and developed, Could the Council explain how allowing this land to be built on still fits with their declared Climate emergency and their published biodiversity Action Policy?

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

I thank Cllr Singh for his question.

The land surrounding Tilehurst Allotments is divided into different designations within the Local Plan, as was only recently explained to Cllr Singh when Cllr Brock answered a question about this site at the last full Council meeting. Let me again explain these elements:

- 1) The in-use allotments as well as the woodland known as The Withies is protected as a Local Green Space.
- 2) 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.
- 3) Another area on Armour Hill identified as WR3t comprises the car park and nearby scrub, and is identified for 12 to 18 homes.

This is the adopted policy position in the Local Plan 2019, and was reached having considered the suitability of sites for development, including consideration of their biodiversity significance, as well as wider environmental, social and economic considerations. Cllr Singh and all his Conservative colleagues voted for the Plan on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

Policies WR3s and WR3t both state that development for housing on the land identified for that purpose is contingent on avoiding detrimental impacts upon biodiversity and on providing biodiversity net gain wherever possible, in line with the relevant policies in the plan. Development is also required to protect important trees, provide landscaped borders to Kentwood Hill and Armour Hill, and, in the case of the Kentwood Hill site, provide for well-vegetated green links between the copse and the Victoria Recreation Ground and Kentwood Hill.

It will be the responsibility of any developer to undertake an Ecological Assessment prepared by a suitably qualified and certified ecologist, to demonstrate that development of the site will not result in a net loss of biodiversity or detrimentally impact features of biodiversity interest on or adjacent to the site. This will need to be submitted as part of a planning application, and is required in order to validate the application. At that point, the Council will seek its own ecology advice on the development and accompanying assessment. The Council does not currently intend to assume the responsibility of the developer and undertake additional work at this stage beyond that process. It would not be an appropriate use of Council resources at this stage.

Badgers and their setts are protected by the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, meaning that it is an offence to interfere with a badger sett. A landowner and developer must comply with this law, irrespective of any existing planning designation of the land. The Ecological Assessment and other submitted information should identify whether badgers are likely to be present on any land subject to a planning application, and consideration of the planning application will need to assess whether the developer has taken appropriate measures to avoid, mitigate and, as a last resort, compensate for any negative effects on badgers. A developer is also likely to need to apply for a wildlife licence under separate legislation before starting work if a sett is to be damaged or removed.

The declaration of a Climate Emergency and the publication of the Biodiversity Action Plan does not in any way negate the need to address the significant need for housing, including affordable housing, in the local area. The role of the planning process is to consider all of these important priorities, and the adopted Local Plan policies provide the basis to do so.

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### **COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 2**

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

#### **Tackling Fly-tipping of Bulky Waste**

Green councillors have long campaigned on the issue of fly-tipping which blights the town. We were pleased to see a free bulky waste collection in the budget and support this. We think every household should get a free bulky waste collection. Please can the lead councillor explain exactly how the new free bulky waste collection will work?

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

Thank you, Councillor White, for your question. Council officers are still finalising the logistics of the scheme and details will be publicised before the launch. I am, however, happy to update the Committee on how we anticipate the service will operate on the understanding that the process is still under development.

The inclusion of a Free Bulky Waste collections service is a positive approach to encourage residents to dispose of large household items correctly. The project plan is for the Free Bulky Waste collections to commence on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 2022, with residents being able to book slots from week commencing 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 2022 with most bookings being facilitated by an online self-serve webpage.

Residents will be entitled to one free collection per six months of three items, or one fridge/freezer.

2022 - 6<sup>th</sup> of June to the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2022

2023 onward - 1<sup>st</sup> of January - 30<sup>th</sup> of June and 1<sup>st</sup> of July - 31<sup>st</sup> of December

The current list of permissible items will remain for both the Free and "Paid for" Bulky Waste collections, as will the existing rules that a maximum of two sofas, mattresses or bed bases can be booked per collection.

The Free Bulky Waste service will operate five days a week with 16 slots available each day totalling 80 per week. Of these slots, 16 slots per week will be reserved for vulnerable residents and will be bookable by telephoning the Customer Fulfilment Centre. The remaining slots are bookable via an online booking system and will be available on a first come, first served basis, slots will be bookable two weeks in advance. The ratio of online and telephone bookings will be closely monitored and can be easily adjusted to meet demand.

The existing "Paid for" Bulky Waste service will continue to operate as-is on two days a week and will provide 32 slots per week.

When booking online or by telephone for any Bulky Waste collection, residents will be asked whether they wish to book:

- a Free Collection (if not ready used)
- a “Paid for” Collection
- or both a Free and Paid for Collections (2 slots)

In addition to the Free Bulky Waste collection of up to three items or one Fridge, residents can pay to have up to five extra items collected at the same time, effectively booking two slots. These double collections will be restricted to the days the “Paid for” service operate only. (Monday- West Reading and Thursday- East Reading)

Fees from 1st April 2022 are:

Up to 3 items	£52.50 (£39.37 concession)
Additional items (per item)	£8.40 (£6.30 concession)
Fridge freezers	£50.40 (£37.80 concession)

Prior to booking a slot, residents will be signposted towards re-use options, including donating the item to charities, re-use sites and selling items.

Properties that are registered Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO’s) will be allocated additional Free Bulky Waste slots per six months, dependent on the number of rooms contained within the property.

Caution has been built into the proposed Free Bulky Waste service to avoid the scenario where the disposal budget has been exhausted part-way through the year. The disposal costs will be closely monitored and the number of available slots for Free Bulky Waste collections may be adjusted if deemed necessary.

The introduction of the Free Bulky Waste service will provide a valuable contribution in the prevention of fly tipping in Reading however, the Council remains committed to taking enforcement action when necessary to do so.

As reported at the Council meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2022, records supplied by the Council’s Recycling and Enforcement Team show there were 1240 incidents reported to Reading Borough Council via the recorded channels between April 2021 and January 2022. Of these incidents 655 were investigated by the Recycling and Enforcement Team and 328 Fixed Penalty Notices were issued. There were 28 cases heard in the Magistrates Court for waste offences during this time.

According to Waste Data Flow for the period of April 2020 to January 2021, there were 1411 incidents reported to Reading Borough Council. From these incidents, 338 were investigated, 323 Fixed Penalty Notices were issued, and 32 cases were heard in the Magistrates Court for waste offences. Please note that fly-tipping investigations were paused from March 2020 due to the pandemic and did not resume again until June 2020.