

QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor White to ask the Chair:

Electric Vehicle Charging Trial Update

Allowing residents in terraced streets with no driveways to charge electric cars is important for tackling pollution and cutting carbon emissions. Please can the Labour Lead Councillor confirm the date the trial for charging electric vehicles using cable protectors or channels in the pavement was first approved by the Strategic Environment Planning and Transport Committee, what date was the first licence issued on and how many licences in total have been issued ?

REPLY by the Chair of the Traffic Management Sub-Committee.

I invite Councillor Page, the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by Councillor Page, Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport:

I thank Councillor White for his question.

As Councillor White is well aware in November 2020 the Council adopted the Reading Climate Change Strategy which focuses on reducing Reading's carbon footprint and associated transport emissions by encouraging walking, cycling, public transport and a move to electric vehicles.

As part of this Strategy the Council declared a Climate Emergency and has set an ambitious target of net zero carbon emissions by 2030. Reading has also declared an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) based on the exceedance of the air quality objective for NO2.

The Council has improved its own vehicle fleet and, where possible, is opting to replace vehicles with electric vehicles and source green energy supplies. We are also encouraging private vehicle owners to move from higher polluting petrol and diesel vehicles to electric vehicles which will contribute towards some of the ambitions of the Reading Climate Change Strategy.

We recognise that the move to electric vehicles (EVs) will result in the need to charge electric and hybrid vehicles on the public highway, and we have already installed 15 lamp column and 6 other public 22kW EV charge points Boroughwide. Additional sites will be installed as funding opportunities materialise, and we will bid for any central government funds to assist this process as well as exploring potential partnership opportunities with the private sector.

We also recognise that suitable on-street EV charging points are not always available due to the nature of Reading's urban environment. As colleagues know only too well, Reading has a very high number of narrow terraced streets with minimal or no off-street parking, where residents have no alternative but to charge their electric vehicles from their property whilst it is parked on the public highway.

In March 2021 the SEPT Committee approved a trial whereby residents can apply for a free licence to legally and safely charge electric vehicles parked on the public highway.

To date we have had 55 enquiries and the first licence has now been signed with three further licences awaiting signature by the applicant.

It is understandable that the take up has been low, as a number of residents have voiced their concern about the difficulties in securing a dedicated parking space near or outside their property. This issue is further complicated within our existing residents parking zones and requires advice and guidance from national government so that the existing Traffic Regulation Orders can be appropriately amended. The problem impacts all local authorities with resident parking schemes and there are no obvious and immediate solutions.

Due to the low take up to date, and concerns from residents about being able to secure the parking space outside or near to their property, we are extending the trial period for at least another year, will keep this under review, and will continue to offer a free Section 178 (Highways Act 1980) licence to residents who would like to take up the offer.

Securing a dedicated parking space was not included within the original trial, but clearly this issue has national ramifications, as all Councils are grappling with how residents can legally secure what is public highway for their own use whilst charging an electric vehicle. We continue to encourage residents to take up this free licence offer so that, when they can park in front of their property, they can legally recharge their vehicle across the public highway.

ENDS

QUESTION NO. 2

Councillor White to ask the Chair:

Tackling Engine Idling and Pollution

Unnecessary engine idling is polluting our roads and worsening health problems. Please can the Labour Lead Councillor update me on recent work to tackle engine idling. In particular how many fines for engine idling have been issued each year for the last three years ?

REPLY by the Chair of the Traffic Management Sub-Committee.

I invite Councillor Page, the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by Councillor Page, Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport:

I thank Councillor White for his question.

Unfortunately the current national legislation in respect of vehicle idling is weak, requiring officers to first ask drivers to turn off their engines. Only if the driver refuses can a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) be issued. The practical implication of this is that drivers can idle with impunity, provided they turn their engine off when asked. This also increases the need for regular patrols by enforcement officers to speak to the drivers of idling vehicles, for which there is currently no resource.

Idling is part of a broader issue. We are presently bidding for funding, via Defra's Air Quality Grant, to carry out a wider air quality awareness raising, and behaviour change campaign. This includes idling and other educational initiatives to improve knowledge and decision making, promote mode change and active travel.

This is an action included in the draft Air Quality Action Plan, awaiting final approval, and is something that will be pursued when funding becomes available.

ENDS