

HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE
29 JUNE 2022

Present: Councillor Hacker (Chair);
Councillors Ayub, Cresswell, Cross, G Dennis, Emberson, Kitchingham,
Kretchmer, Lanzoni, McCann, McGonigle, Mpofu-Coles, O’Connell,
Rowland and Woodward.

Apologies: Councillor Barnett-Ward and R Singh

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of 10 March 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

2. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the following meeting were submitted:

Community Safety Partnership - 22 February 2022 and 21 April 2022.

Resolved - That the Minutes be received.

3. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
Caroline Langdon	Littering and Fines	Cllr Rowland
Caroline Langdon	Fast Food Littering	Cllr Rowland
Caroline Langdon	Begging	Cllr Rowland
Cllr Cresswell	Waterloo Meadows Refurbishment Update	Cllr Barnett-Ward
Cllr McCann	University Good Neighbours Plan	Cllr Rowland

The full text of the question and reply was made available on the Reading Borough Council website.

4. EMPTY HOMES PRESENTATION

Brigid Carey and Will McMahon, Action on Empty Homes, gave a presentation on the Reading Empty Homes Community Partnership. The presentation covered:

- Work carried out by Action on Empty Homes to date;
- Members of community partnerships;
- The overarching Empty Homes community partnership approach;
- Details of the community partnership approach for Reading;
- Progress on the Reading Community Partnership.

The Committee welcomed the presentation and noted that Action on Empty Homes had produced a toolkit to assist.

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Resolved -

That Brigid Carey and Will McMahon be thanked for an interesting and informative presentation.

5. MUSEUMS PARTNERSHIP READING NATIONAL PORTFOLIO ORGANISATION BID FOR 2023-2026

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which provided an update on the Museums Partnership Reading (MPR) and sought agreement to authorise the extension of the agreement with the University of Reading in the event of a successful funding bid.

The report explained that the Museums Partnership Reading was a strategic partnership between Reading Museum and the University of Reading's Museum of English Rural Life (The MERL) which was part of the Arts Council England National Portfolio 2018-2023. The two museums had been working together to provide cultural opportunities for Reading's diverse communities. An application had been submitted by the MPR on 18th May 2022 to Arts Council England's 2023-26 Investment Programme seeking a further three years investment from 1 April 2023 until 31 March 2026 from the National Portfolio Organisations programme. A National Portfolio Organisation was defined by Arts Council England as an organisation that received direct investment from the organisation in order to help support and realise delivery of Arts Council England outcomes based on the ACE Strategy 'Let's Create'.

The report set out the achievements to date of the MPR and detailed the nine core activities for 2023-24, plus an additional tenth activity to extended MPR's successful model of partnership to develop some of the activities with cultural partners in Slough.

Resolved -

- (1) That the successful track record of the Museums Partnership Reading (Reading Museum and the Museum of English Rural Life) to date be noted;**
- (2) That the Council's partnership with the University of Reading be extended until 2026 to continue the Museums Partnership Reading as a National Portfolio Organisation subject to Arts Council England offering NPO funding for 2023 to 2026;**
- (3) That the Executive Director for Environment, Neighbourhoods and Economic Growth, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Leisure & Culture, the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services and the Director of Finance be authorised to extend the partnership agreement with the University of Reading for the Museums Partnership Reading.**

6. READING ABBEY REVEALED, PROJECT EVALUATION REPORT

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that highlighted the achievements and key successes of Reading Abbey Revealed project since the start of its delivery phase in 2016. The report explained that over the past eight years the project team, volunteers, and partners had worked closely and flexibly with stakeholders and the funders, to develop, and to successfully deliver this major

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heritage and culture placemaking project. The report added that the project and the creation of the Abbey Quarter had been Reading's most ambitious heritage project for a decade. The Reading Abbey Quarter had been created to bring together the unique, cultural heritage that existed within the former grounds of Reading Abbey through interpretation, wayfinding, conservation, and community engagement. Notably the Quarter included Reading Museum, the Town Hall, Reading Gaol, St. James' Church, St Laurence's Church, the Forbury Gardens, and the remains of Reading Abbey. The Abbey Ruins and Gateway were both Grade I listed buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The conservation project had been a catalyst for positive change, putting this internationally important monastic and royal heritage site firmly on the map and having an impact beyond the Abbey Quarter across Reading's wider community, galvanising a step-change in the town's attitude to its distinctive past and providing a sense of place, ongoing community engagement, cohesion and pride for its diverse and expanding population. The full Reading Abbey Revealed project evaluation report was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report also set out the next steps that would form the legacy of the project, which included:

- To ensure that the key learnings and recommendations of this project were disseminated for good practice to colleagues and the wider heritage and placemaking sector;
- To continue to work with conservation specialists to ensure the Scheduled site was protected and preserved for the future, through the production and delivery of a new Conservation and Management Plan;
- To work with specialist consultants Bowles Green to finalise the outline Business and Marketing Plan to sustainably optimise potential income generation and increased promotion and awareness of the Abbey Quarter heritage site;
- To work closely with finance partners and colleagues to explore the Abbey Quarter management and ensure that the ongoing conservation plan was integrated in the Council's S106 funding programme;
- To work closely with internal and external partners to develop the public activities programme, promote the site, and investigate tourism opportunities;
- To work closely with funding bodies to investigate future funding opportunities and to work towards the financial and environmental sustainability of this heritage site;
- To ensure the Abbey Quarter continued to integrate with current projects such as the High Street Heritage Action Zone and the large scale developments in the town centre area;
- To ensure the vision for the Reading Gaol site was integrated with the wider Abbey Quarter vision and interpretation;
- To ensure that the Abbey Quarter and its sustainability was part of the wider emerging Cultural and Council strategies and plans.

Resolved:

- (1) **That the successes of the Reading Abbey Revealed placemaking project be noted;**

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- (2) That the next steps for the Abbey Quarter vision and plans to ensure the legacy of the Reading Abbey Revealed project, set out in paragraph 4.7 of the report, be agreed.

7. LIBRARIES IMPROVEMENT FUND: CAPITAL SCHEME APPROVAL

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report advising the Committee of the award of an Arts Council England (ACE) Libraries Improvement Fund grant of £62,000 for Tilehurst Library and requesting scheme approval in order to proceed with the project.

The report explained that in 2021 Arts Council England had announced a £5m Libraries Improvement Fund, requesting bids focused on capital investment into library buildings, using a two-stage bidding process. The final bid had been submitted in September 2021 and in February 2022 the Council was notified that it had been successful with its bid for works at Tilehurst Library, and awarded £62,000. As Arts Council England had provided the Council with a limited window within which to accept the grant, the Council had accepted the grant within the grant offer acceptance period.

The report also explained that one of the aims of the Libraries Improvement Fund had been to invest in buildings to support wider use and support digital inclusion and the bid had therefore focused on Tilehurst Library to improve the ability of the building to be hired, to investigate use of the building outside of staffed hours, provide digital device lending on site and facilitate digital device lending to homes. These aims fitted in with the Library Strategic Principles, which had been consulted on and adopted at Committee on 10 November 2021 (Minute 23 refers).

Resolved:

- (1) That the Tilehurst Library Project be approved and that it be noted that the scheme would be funded by Arts Council England Improvement Fund grant of £62,000;
- (2) That the Director of Finance exercise their delegated authority to accept the external funding of £62,000 from the Arts Council England Improvement Fund and allocate the funding to the Tilehurst Library Project.

8. FOOD SERVICE PLAN 2022-2023

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which set out the updated Food Service Plan for the period 2022-2023. The report explained that the Plan, which was attached at Appendix 1 to the report, had been drawn up in accordance with the Food Standards Agency Framework Agreement on Official Feed and Food Controls by Local Authorities. The Food Service Plan typically covered a one-year period, but the Covid-19 pandemic had meant that no plans had been completed for 2020-2021 and 2021-22. Due to the ongoing impact of the pandemic on services, the backlog of work created by suspended services and resourcing difficulties, the new Food Service Plan covered the period April 2022 to March 2023 and detailed the work plans of the Food & Safety Team in line with the FSA recovery plan.

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The report stated that there were over 1600 premises producing, retailing or serving food, which was an increase of 13% on the number of premises since the previous plan. The plan detailed the performance of the food service during previous years (2019-2022) and future performance plan for 2022/23. In addition, the Food & Safety Team plan had identified and would prioritise the following key pieces of work which aligned with the Council's corporate objectives;

- Ensuring that all officers were appropriately and correctly authorised to carry out their remit of work;
- Ensuring that all officers were appropriately qualified and trained in line with Food Law Code of Practice;
- Ensuring that the service worked to correct and up-to-date standard operating procedures to ensure consistency within the parameters of the Food Law Code of Practice and Practice Guidance;
- Fully resume a food hygiene and standards sampling programme to support interventions carried out within Reading's premises and ensure that the food sold was safe to eat and not misleading to the consumer whilst supporting wider national programmes to achieve this across England;
- Increasing awareness and uptake of our paid advice service for food hygiene and standards within our local community and Reading based businesses, including resuming our food hygiene training courses which were available to local residents and businesses;
- Improving digital access to our Food Service through our webpages and enabling interaction through social media platforms;
- Resetting the way special treatment premises licences were issued to ensure that premises met the required standards set by Reading's byelaw prior to trading.

Resolved: That the Food Service Plan 2022-2023 be noted.

9. COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which set out an update in relation to the workplan of Reading's Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and a proposed timeline for delivering its new three-year Community Safety Strategy and Plan as follows:

- Draft Strategy agreed by the CSP - July 2022;
- Public Consultation on the priorities in the draft strategy - July/August 2022;
- Finalised Strategy agreed by CSP - September 2022;
- Finalised strategy for adoption to Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee - 9 November 2022

The report explained that Reading's CSP had been established under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which set out a statutory requirement for key responsible authorities, including local authorities, to work together to reduce crime and disorder, anti-social behaviour and minimise re-offending in local areas. Each CSP had to carry out regular strategic assessments to understand its local issues relating to crime and disorder, develop a strategy to set out how it would tackle those identified issues, share strategies with Police and Crime Commissioners and review the strategies on an annual basis.

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The report added that Reading currently had an Executive Group that oversaw the work of the CSP and the delivery of its responsibilities. In 2021 the Chair of the CSP (the then LPA Commander of Thames Valley Police) and the Executive Group had agreed an internal review of what work was required to put the partnership on a solid footing for the next few years. The approaching issues included:

- The Thames Valley's Police and Crime Commissioner reduction of the Community Safety Fund allocation by half over a three-year period;
- Incoming legislation in relation to the Serious Violence Duty;
- The approaching end of the current Community Safety Strategy;
- A need for the partnership to be more effective in terms of customer engagement and communications;
- Rising concerns from residents about crime.

Resolved:

- (1) That the progress of the Community Safety Partnership workplan and the intention to produce a new Community Safety Strategy for endorsement by the Committee in November 2022 be noted;**
- (2) That the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety be authorised to approve consultation questions which would be posed when the public consultation was conducted in respect of the Community Safety Partnership & Serious Violence Strategies.**

10. REMOVAL OF AGE CRITERIA FROM COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK

Further to Minute 29 of the meeting held on 14 March 2018, the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that gave an update on the decision to remove the age criteria from the Council's general needs housing stock (non-sheltered) and sought approval to replace the remaining age-designated properties with local lettings policies where appropriate.

The report explained that this would allow properties to be available for those most in need whilst protecting those that were most vulnerable. The local lettings policies would include criteria that was specific to the issues in a local area by ensuring that suitable letting was carried out in a more targeted way, focusing on the specific needs of individuals and communities. This approach allowed for flexibility to introduce local lettings policies should issues or concerns arise in other blocks not previously age designated in order to protect older people within our communities. Where local lettings policies were required to replace age criteria, they would be developed to be specific to the needs of individual blocks and would take into account the views of the Lead Councillor for Housing and Ward Members. The policies would be regularly reviewed, normally annually, to ensure their ongoing effectiveness and to determine whether they were still required.

Resolved:

- (1) That age criteria be removed from the remaining age-designated general needs housing stock (non-sheltered) and replaced with local lettings policies where it was appropriate to do so;**

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- (2) That where local lettings policies were required to replace age criteria, they would be developed in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing and Ward Councillors.

11. RENT GUARANTEE SCHEME POLICY

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which set out the updated Rent Guarantee Scheme Policy, which had been amended to reflect how the Rent Guarantee Scheme practice had been amended following legislation that had come into effect in recent years, and clarified the annual process for calculating and setting the Letting Income (the sum of guaranteed rent paid to landlords on a monthly basis). A copy of the Rent Guarantee Scheme Policy (May 2022) was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that the Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS) had been in operation as a homelessness prevention tool since 2015, when it had been launched as an enhanced and additional offer to the Deposit Guarantee Scheme (DGS). The Rent Guarantee Scheme Policy set out the way in which the Scheme operated, covering responsibilities to landlords and tenants, the approach taken to facilitate tenancies and the way in which guaranteed rent levels were set.

Resolved: That the updated Rent Guarantee Scheme Policy be approved.

12. PRESENTATION ON ROAD SELECTION AND PROGRAMME OF WORKS

Sam Shean, Highways and Traffic Services Manager, gave a presentation on the way that roads were selected for maintenance work and the forthcoming Programme of work. The presentation covered:

- The different classifications of roads within the Borough;
- The types of survey used to identify the condition of the roads;
- How roads were selected for work once the condition had been confirmed;
- Definition of a pothole;
- Priority for maintenance works;
- Available funding streams;
- How to report defects;
- Ability to respond to exceptional problems that arise during the Programme.

Resolved: That the presentation be noted.

**13. WINTER MAINTENANCE TERM CONTRACT 2022-2025 (PLUS 3-YEAR EXTENSION)
TENDER & CONTRACT AWARD**

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report setting out the procurement process for the Winter Maintenance Term Contract 2022-2025 with a possible 3-year extension based on performance and seeking authority to enter into a contract with the successful tenderer after the tendering process in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. The Winter Service Plan was attached at Appendix 1 to the report at Appendix 1: Winter Service Plan and the Financial Implications Report at Appendix 2.

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The report explained that the aim of the Winter Service was to provide a service to reduce, as far as possible, the effects of adverse weather on the public highway during the winter period and provide travelling conditions that were as safe as reasonably practicable having regard to the road hierarchy. The winter maintenance service was provided by the Council for 26 weeks of the year, starting on 1 October each year and ending on 31 March.

The current term Winter Maintenance had come to the end of its term and the Council now needed to re-tender the contract in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. The total estimated value of the contract was approximately £750k over the first three years (36 months), at the rate of approximately £250k per year and potentially up to an additional £750k should the contract be extended for the subsequent three-year duration. The report further explained the steps that the Council would take to ensure that the contract would be tendered and awarded in accordance with the Public Procurement Rules and the Council's Contract Procedure Rules in advance of the winter season.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Winter Maintenance Term Contract 2022-2025 with a possible 3-year extension, be tendered subject to performance, in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015;**
- (2) That the Executive Director for Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services & Community Safety, the Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services and the Director of Finance be authorised to enter into relevant contracts required to undertake the Winter Maintenance Service Programme, as set out in the report.**

14. HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2022/2023

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that provided an update on Year-3 (2022/23) of the 3-year £9M Highway Capital Investment Programme 2020/21 to 2022/23. The report also informed the Committee of the Council's additional £8M five-year Highway Capital Investment Programme (2022/23 to 2026/27) and additional £4M two-year Highway Bridges & Structures Capital Investment Programme (2022/23 to 2023/24) and sought spend approval for these investments. The following documents were appended to the report:

- Appendix 1 £9M Residential Roads 3- Year Investment Programme Update;
- Appendix 2 Financial Implications Report £8M 5-year (2022/23 to 2026/27) Highway Capital and £4M 2-year (2022/23 to 2023/24) Highway Bridges & Structures Capital Investment Programmes.

Section 4 of the report set out details of the works that included highways maintenance, resurfacing of roads and pavements and works to bridges and other structures, plus the costs associated with these works.

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Resolved:

- (1) That the progress of the £9M Residential Roads & Pavements Investment Year-3 Programme 2022/2023 be noted;**
- (2) That spend approval for the Council's £8M additional 5-Year (2022/23 to 2026/27) Capital Investment in Residential Roads & Pavements Maintenance Programme be granted;**
- (3) That spend approval for the Council's £4M additional 2-Year (2022/23 to 2023/24) Capital Investment in Bridges & Structures Maintenance Programme be granted;**
- (4) That the Assistant Director of Environmental & Commercial Services in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services & Community Safety, the Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services and the Director of Finance be authorised to enter into the relevant contracts required to undertake the proposed Capital Highways & Traffic Services Programme, set out in Section 4 of the report.**

(The meeting opened at 6.30pm and closed at 9.30pm).