

**READING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE**

**16 NOVEMBER 2022**

**QUESTION NO. 1**

Hilary Smart to ask the Chair of the Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee:

**Cycle Path Maintenance**

From a twitter exchange with Councillor Barnett-Ward I understand that the council used to believe it could not maintain cycle infrastructure that did not meet certain requirements, but now thinks it can. This is particularly in the context of the painted bike lanes on Peppard Road, which Councillor Barnett-Ward was told were intentionally not repainted when the other road markings were redone. These are now almost invisible in places. After Councillor Lanzoni kindly raised the issue for me recently the council have said they will be repainted soon. Are there any plans to conduct a systematic review of cycle path maintenance that was not undertaken whilst the Council held the belief it could not do it? And then would it be possible to do this maintenance?

**REPLY** by the Chair of the Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:

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

**REPLY** by the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport (Councillor Page):

I thank Mrs Smart for her question.

Within the Borough, as is the case nationally, there is a range of facilities that are intended to support cycling on the carriageway. These extend from 'advisory' cycle lanes (broken white lines), to 'mandatory' lanes (solid white lines) and then 'segregated' lanes (including physical separators, such as bollards). Each have different design and supporting infrastructure requirements.

The Government has recently released cycling infrastructure design guidance for local authorities, with a clear - and understandable - emphasis on providing fully-segregated cycle infrastructure. This is the preferred approach of the Council, as they physically separate cyclists from other traffic and will significantly influence greater uptake of cycling. It is this approach that has been adopted for the delivery of the forthcoming schemes along Shinfield Road and Castle Hill, for which the Council has successfully bid for Government funding.

Segregated schemes require space to safely accommodate traffic and infrastructure. This isn't always available for every desirable application and often means costly

adjustments to the highway layout. They also require the implementation of segregation features, such as raised kerbing, or bollards. Even where such schemes are feasible, they can be very costly and while the Council is committed to delivering such infrastructure across the Borough, it will take time to secure the necessary funding.

Until the delivery of the Active Travel 'Tranche 1' schemes, (which were implemented with government emergency funding made available during the Covid-19 pandemic), Reading had relatively few advisory cycle lanes. Advisory lanes have been used where there is insufficient carriageway width available to accommodate the minimum lane widths required for mandatory cycle lanes and vehicular traffic, as has been the case with Peppard Road.

Whilst the Council rightly considered the aforementioned Government guidance, it also needed to be pragmatic, accepting that painted mandatory and, particularly, advisory lanes are not the 'gold standard' schemes for which it has the ambition to deliver. They instead provide the foundations on which to build, and provide cycle facilities that would otherwise not have existed.

The Council has a comprehensive highway inspection regime that includes lining. The advisory cycle lane markings on Peppard Road will be refreshed, as will other facilities that are seen to be faded.

ENDS

## **READING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE - 16 NOVEMBER 2022**

#### **COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 1** in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Councillor McElroy to ask the Chair of Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:

#### **School Streets**

The School Street trial on Crescent Road has reportedly been very popular, with children at Alfred Sutton and Maiden Erleigh saying they feel happier, relieved, and safer. A shift away from car use for parents bringing their children to school has also been reported, with a significant number of children surveyed at the primary school changing car journeys for walking, scooting or cycling to school, and a reported 6% reduction in car journeys to Maiden Erleigh. University of Reading measurements show a 40% reduction in nitrogen dioxide beside the Alfred Sutton Primary School compared with before and during the trial, suggesting that children are safer, that the air they are breathing is considerably cleaner.

Could the Lead Councillor please update the committee on what the Council is doing to get more schools to participate in this program ?

#### **REPLY by the Chair of the Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:**

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

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

I thank Councillor McElroy for his question.

Since setting up our School Street programme Reading Borough Council has facilitated the introduction of four School Street schemes across the Borough at Park Lane Primary, Wilson Primary, Thameside Primary, and the most recent at Crescent Road incorporating Alfred Sutton, Maiden Erleigh and UTC Reading.

With regard to the Crescent Road scheme, I am delighted to report that, since 7<sup>th</sup> November, this has now been extended to cover afternoon sessions as well. Full details were given in the RBC press release issued on 24<sup>th</sup> October which is available on the Council website.

School Streets create a safer and healthier environment for everyone, including local residents. The initiative contributes to the Council's wider ambitions for encouraging more active travel, such as cycling and walking, and as a result support better physical and mental health, lower carbon generation and improved air quality.

School Streets in Reading are run by the schools with volunteer marshals patrolling the closure points. The Council has produced a set of guidance and information along with an

application pack for schools to apply if they would like to introduce a School Street scheme.

It is important to note that not every school in Reading is appropriate for a School Street. However, where they do apply the Council works with the school to produce traffic management plans, undertake road safety audits, run marshal training, and provide cones and safety equipment. The Council also undertakes the legal work associated with introducing a Traffic Regulation Order to enable the road to be shut at agreed and specified times.

The Council is keen to see more School Street schemes introduced in Reading and officers are happy to discuss initiatives with any interested schools. The Council employs an Active Travel Officer in partnership with Sustrans who is engaging with schools to promote active and sustainable travel, walking and cycling. This has mostly been through visiting schools to give assemblies and workshops on active travel and as part of this interaction the option to introduce a School Street scheme is discussed. In addition other initiatives are promoted to deliver sustainable and active travel such as Bikeability cycle training, the Modeshift Stars national school travel planning programme, and road safety education events.

**ENDS**

## **READING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE - 16 NOVEMBER 2022**

#### **COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 2** in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Councillor Cresswell to ask the Chair of Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:

#### **Affordable Housing**

Can the committee be updated on the proportion of existing housing in Reading that is classed as Affordable, and the proportion of new-build housing built in recent years that is classed as Affordable?

#### **REPLY by the Chair of the Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:**

I invite Councillor Leng, the Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets to make the response on my behalf.

#### **REPLY by the Councillor Leng, Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets:**

According to the Office for National Statistics, at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, the proportion of existing homes that were classed as affordable homes was 16%. This is broken down into 9.6% owned by a local authority and 6.4% owned by another registered provider.

In terms of new build housing in recent years, over the five year period between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, 20.7% of new build homes were in the form of affordable housing. This is broken down into 2.8% Local Authority New Build and 17.9% that were developed by or passed to another registered provider.

It should be noted that the proportion of new build housing that is affordable differs from the proportion of all new housing completions that are affordable, because it excludes conversions and changes of use. Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, 15.7% of all new dwellings were affordable. The main reason that this is lower than the figure for new build is because so many conversions to residential are no longer subject to the need to apply for planning permission due to permitted development rights. The need to secure affordable housing for such schemes is a major element of the justification for the legal direction that came into force yesterday, 15<sup>th</sup> November, which ensures that such conversions are required to apply for planning permission in many areas of Reading.

The Council has strong policies that seek to secure affordable housing from development sites, including 30% on-site provision from sites of 10 or more dwellings. However, in circumstances where a developer can clearly demonstrate that compliance with these policies would make a development unviable, national and local policy mean that a lower contribution would be accepted. Therefore, whilst the Council will continue to work to maximise the contribution that all developments make towards affordable housing, there are a number of circumstances which must be taken into account for individual developments.

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE - 16 NOVEMBER 2022

#### COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 3 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Councillor Cresswell to ask the Chair of Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:

#### Renewable Energy

Neighbouring Councils are facilitating the transition to renewable energy working in partnership with providers such as Solar Together, for example. Has such a partnership been considered by Reading Borough Council? And is it viewed likely that a similar scheme will become available to Reading residents?

#### **REPLY by the Chair of the Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:**

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

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

I thank Councillor Cresswell for his question.

Reading Borough Council installed solar panels on its Council housing in 2014/15. This project put solar panels on 457 houses and added to the total volume of solar PV on the Council's buildings, including schools that had already installed solar panels. More recent projects include (a) Reading Community Energy Society who have raised public share funding to install solar on a number of community buildings; (b) new projects on Reading's Leisure Centres, (c) a number of remaining schools and (d) at the Council's depot site. In total over 10,000 panels.

In addition to the solar installation on public sector buildings, Reading has a community hydro scheme in the River Thames and, whilst situated just outside the borough boundary, the wind turbine at Green Park close to the Reading FC stadium. Both schemes are iconic symbols of the town's appetite to deliver renewable energy generation as part of its response to climate change.

Reading has a thriving sector for the supply of solar panels and whilst the price of solar panels has significantly fallen making them a very worthwhile investment, many householders are not able to afford the initial expense of installing a system. This has made the delivery of an equitable scheme challenging.

Whilst the Council has not yet launched a publicly accessible scheme for bulk purchase of solar panels, Reading Climate Change Partnership has set out the launch of such a scheme in the 2020 to 2025 climate change strategy action plan, scheduled for delivery in 2023. As such and with the provision of recent government grants which allow low income households to access measures such as solar panels, the Council is currently considering the options for the provision of a scheme. One option being explored is to

join the Berkshire Solar Together scheme. I will ensure colleagues and members of this Committee are kept informed of progress.

**ENDS**