

**STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE
23 MARCH 2023**

Present: Councillors Gittings (Chair); Carnell, Challenger, Cross, Griffith, Hornsby-Smith, Keeping, Leng, McElroy, Moore, Page, Robinson, Terry and Yeo.

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Page declared an interest in item 34 on the grounds that he was Vice-Chair of Transport for the South East.

28. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

29. MINUTES OF THE TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the meeting of Traffic Management Sub-Committee held on 12 January 2023 were received.

30. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the following meetings were received:

- Joint Waste Disposal Board - 29 September 2022 and 9 January 2023
- AWE Local Liaison Committee - 23 November 2022
- Reading Climate Change Partnership - 18 October 2022

31. QUESTIONS

Questions on the following matters were asked in accordance with Standing Order 36.

Questioner	Subject
Councillor McElroy	Incentivising Smaller and More Environmentally Friendly Cars
Councillor McElroy	Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy

(The full text of the questions and replies were made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

32. HIGHWAY ASSET MANAGEMENT ANNUAL UPDATE REPORT 2022/23

Further to Minute 29 of the meeting held on 14 March 2022, the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that provided the Committee with an update on the progress of the investigatory level safety defect criteria (potholes) in relation to highway carriageway defects, sought approval to amend the Policy for the management of Advertising A Boards on the public highway and updated the Committee on the Annual Status Options Reports for structures,

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carriageways and pavements. A copy of the Council's A Board Policy Application Process and Conditions was attached to the report at Appendix A.

The report included a table that showed that there had been a significant decrease in actionable defects over the previous Financial Year (2022/23). Customer contacts reporting carriageway defects had also significantly decreased over the previous two calendar years with 512 reported carriageway defects in 2021 and 271 in 2022. The Council's £9M capital investment into residential roads and pavements over the three years 2021/22 to 2022/23 had addressed the residential roads that were in most need. This had reduced demand on actionable carriageway defects/pothole repairs, which along with service improvements had enabled the transition to addressing defects of a lesser depth manageable. This had improved efficiency in the Highways and Drainage Operations Team as well as customer satisfaction, road safety and defending public liability claims. Analysis of performance compared with standard defect repair times had shown that the Highway Works Team were exceeding the performance standard for repair times which showed that there was currently capacity to continue with the lower investigatory level criteria. The Highways Asset Management Team had also made further efficiency savings by adopting a cloud based management tool that had improved speed of data transfer and had also allowed a saving of over £1,000 per asset management tablet, which was being reinvested back into the service. The Annual National Highways and Transport MORI Residents Satisfaction Surveys for 2022 had shown an improvement with 142 indicators being about average and 90 indicators improving, with the biggest improvement being in how the Council was dealing with the potholes/damaged roads indicator. The Highways Works Team were repairing the statutory pothole safety defect repairs within repair timescales and the vast majority of 28 day repair orders were being completed within the first week of issue. This had created capacity within the team to not only manage the statutory repair work, but also to take on additional income generation opportunities.

The report explained that the A-Board Policy, that had been adopted in November 2018, had had varying degrees of success and following the Covid-19 pandemic, and the subsequent need to support business recovery, enforcement of the Policy had reduced. However, this had created incidents of obstruction for pedestrians and other users of the public highway and therefore enforcement was to be tightened and increased to ensure compliance with the Policy. The Area Highway Inspectors regularly monitored A-Boards on the public highway, in the town centre this was carried out fortnightly. The Inspectors would raise any issues of non-compliance with the business owner in the first instance and they would be told that if there was a repeated, second, offence the A-Board would be removed and taken to the Council's depot. A fee equal to one year's Licence renewal fee, currently £80, would be payable on collection and any Boards not collected after 12 weeks would be scrapped/recycled. In order to address non-compliance concerns and to continue supporting businesses, amendments/updates to the existing Policy were necessary. The proposed amendments were as follows:

- Removal of any ambiguity regarding the siting/location of the 'A-Board' on the public highway;

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- Ensuring that the public highway was not obstructed and that the ‘A-Boards’ were sensibly positioned to maintain a clear pathway for all users of the public highway;
- Agreeing the number of ‘A-Boards’ permitted per applicant;
- Increasing the application fee and annual renewal fee;
- Detailing the enforcement action for non-compliance of the ‘A-Board’ Policy;
- Specifying that the Council’s decision on A-Board applications was final, in its capacity as the Local Highway Authority.

Community, Church and Charity Organisations would still need to apply for the licence for any individual event and the Council would waive the application fee and the terms of the licence would apply.

Finally, the report stated that the Highway Asset Management Board had met in December 2022 and had reviewed the Annual Status Options Report (ASOR) for structures, carriageways and pavements. The ASORs were an Asset Management Tool and were used by the Council to report on the condition, asset value and future funding requirements of public highway maintainable structures, carriageways and pavement assets. They were used to calculate future funding requirements to ensure that the assets were maintained in a reasonable and serviceable condition and assisted the Council by targeting available funding to assets in greatest need, thereby extending the life of the asset before it became necessary to carry out more expensive reconstruction. The updated ASORs would be submitted to a future meeting and would be published later in the year.

Resolved -

- (1) That the progress of the investigatory level safety defect criteria (potholes) be noted;**
- (2) That the updated Policy for the management of Advertising Boards (A-Boards) on the public highway, as set out in Section 4 of the Report, be approved;**
- (3) That the update on the Annual Status Options Report (ASOR) be noted.**

33. STRATEGIC TRANSPORT SCHEMES UPDATE

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing an update on the progress with delivery of the current programme of major transport projects in Reading, which were as follows:

- Bus Service Improvement Plan Programme
- South Reading Mass Rapid Transit
- Reading Green Park Station
- Reading West Station Upgrade
- Tilehurst Station Upgrade
- Active Travel Fund Tranche 2 - Shinfield Road
- Active Travel Fund Tranche 3 - Bath Road
- Active Travel Capability Fund

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- School Streets Programme

The report stated that in respect of the Bus Service Improvement Plan Programme (BSIP), detailed discussions had taken place with DfT officials that had resulted in the Enhanced Partnership (EP) Board agreeing an EP Variation in December 2022, which set out more detail on the various schemes and initiatives to be delivered with the initial phase of Government funding. Subsequently, the DfT had confirmed the full funding allocation of £26.263m to Reading in January 2023 which meant delivery of the programme could commence. The overall grant had consisted of £15.939m capital and £10.324m revenue funding. The BSIP programme included a range of capital and revenue measures to encourage passenger usage in Reading. The EP Scheme Variation set out the commitment to deliver, in partnership with operators, and the schemes that the DfT had awarded grant funding for, these were set out in the report with the capital schemes being subject to public consultation. The initial focus of work had been on developing a multi-operator fares discount ticketing scheme, preparing designs for the next phase of works for the South Reading MRT scheme, working with the Royal Berkshire Hospital on improvements to their shuttle services running from Mere oak and Thames Valley Park and Ride sites, and preparing the procurement documentation to appoint an operator for the continued provision of contracted Route 9 services in south Reading. Detailed work had also been carried out with the local operators through the EP arrangements to develop and agree the fares discount scheme which had been launched on 13 March 2023.

Construction works for Reading Green Park Station and multi-modal interchange were substantially complete and, therefore, supported by partners from the railway industry, the project had entered a period of thorough testing and authorisation prior to its official opening. The Council was working with Network Rail and GWR to ensure that the station was open as soon as possible and a further announcement was expected shortly to confirm details, however, this was subject to the final approvals being secured and GWR's fit out of the station building being completed. The upgrade of Reading West Station had seen GWR take possession of the southern footway of the Oxford Road entrance. Construction works for the new passenger building on the Oxford Road and works to deliver a new entrance and gateline at the Tilehurst Road entrance were progressing well. The overall project was currently projected to be completed by late spring 2023.

Delivery of the Shinfield Road cycle lane scheme, being carried out as part of the Tranche 2 Active Travel Fund Programme, was progressing well on-site, with the initial construction works having started at the University/Christchurch Green end of the route. The work was being carried out predominately by the Council's in-house Highways delivery team, however, due to resource limitations, a degree of sub-contracting had been required, this was being reviewed on an on-going basis. An indicative timeline for delivery was set out in the report and a timeline had also been included in respect of the Bath Road scheme.

Finally, the report explained that the Council had been awarded a further £124,250 from the Active Travel Capability Fund in 2022/23 and that this, and the previous

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award of £249,454, were the full indicative funding award available to Reading subject to a successful funding proposal. This was revenue grant funding to enable a programme of schemes and initiatives to be developed and delivered that were aimed at supported a shift in travel behaviour to active travel, to complement the segregated route facilities that were being delivered through the Active Travel Fund capital grant funding. In addition, the funding had been extended to support the Innovation Valley Rewards App which encouraged the use of sustainable travel through earning points for walking, running, cycling, bus or train travel. Once users started earning points they could be redeemed for vouchers at high street stores, restaurants and supermarkets, or donating to charity.

Resolved:

- (1) That the progress made on the delivery of the current programme of strategic transport schemes as outlined in the report be noted;**
- (2) That confirmation had been secured from the Department for Transport for the full allocation of £26.263m grant funding for the Bus Service Improvement Plan and that this represented the third highest funding award (by head of population) in the country, be noted;**
- (3) That the funding award of £124,250 from the Active Travel Capability Fund 2022/23, which would enable the continuation of the Council's programme of revenue initiatives to encourage walking and cycling as set out in the report, be noted.**

34. TRANSPORT FOR THE SOUTH EAST - STRATEGIC INVESTMENT PLAN

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that provided the Committee with an update on progress with development of Transport for the South East's (TfSE) Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) and sought endorsement of the final plan that would form the final part of TfSE's Transport Strategy. A copy of the Strategic Investment Plan for the South East was attached to the report.

The report explained that the formal public consultation period on the draft SIP had run from 20 June to 12 September 2022, with over 600 responses being received from a range of stakeholders. TfSE had reviewed the feedback and had amended the plan and was now seeking the agreement of its constituent authorities prior to submitting the final SIP to Government in spring 2023.

The schemes that were most relevant to Reading had been included in the Wessex Thames packages of interventions, which covered the area including Berkshire, North Hampshire and West Surrey and were set out in the report. The Plan also included a list of Global Policy Interventions that would help deliver the investment priorities of the South East.

Resolved - That the report be noted and the decision of the Council to agree that Transport for the South East submit the Strategic Investment Plan to Government endorsed.

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(Councillor Page declared an interest in the above item on the grounds that he was Vice-Chair of Transport for the South East)

35. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN - FINAL FOR ADOPTION

Further to Minute 24 of the previous meeting, the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that sought approval from the Committee for the Council to adopt the final version of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) for Reading. A copy of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2023-33 - Final for Adoption was attached to the report at Appendix A.

The report explained that the 12 week statutory consultation on the draft RoWIP had been carried out from 23 November 2022 to 19 February 2023. This had included a public survey and engagement with statutory consultees. The responses to the consultation had been analysed and the main themes of feedback were set out in the report; the RoWIP Strategy had been updated following the consultation. Individual responses had also been received from statutory consultees and neighbouring local authorities; a summary of the responses was set out in the report.

Following the consultation a number of updates had been made to the RoWIP to capture additional feedback as well as providing details on the responsibilities of the Council, the main updates were set out in the report. The RoWIP was a live document and further updates might be required in the future and any major amendments would be submitted to a future meeting for approval.

The Committee discussed the report and acknowledged that in monitoring Rights of Way in the Borough the Council was reliant on members of the public informing them of any concerns or issues they might have about a right of way. This could be done by contacting the Planning, Transport and Public Protection Team or through Ward Councillors.

Resolved - That the progress outlined in the report be noted and the formal adoption by the Council of the final version of the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2023-33 be approved.

36. LOCAL PLAN REVIEW AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report asking the Committee to note the Local Plan Review and agree that officers carried out a partial update of the Plan.

The report had appended:

Appendix 1	Equality impact assessment
Appendix 2	Outcome of Local Plan Review for individual policies
Appendix 3	Local Plan Review [to be added]
Appendix 4	Local Development Scheme
Appendix 5	Climate assessment tool [to be added]

The report explained that the Reading Borough Local Plan had been adopted in November 2019 and there was a statutory five-year period for carrying out a review of a local plan to determine whether an update was required. A Local Plan Review had been carried out which had determined that there was a need for a partial update of

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the Local Plan, in particular to take account of the new methodology for determining housing needs.

The Council was required to produce and maintain a Local Development Scheme (LDS) which set out which documents would be produced and the timetable for production. A LDS had been produced which, alongside other documents set out the timetable for carrying out the partial update of the Local Plan, which aimed for submission of the update to the Secretary of State by the end of the five-year review date in November 2024.

The Committee discussed the report and agreed that all Councillors should be allowed to provide feedback on the partial update, this would be considered by a Steering Group and then put forward to officers for possible inclusion in the Plan.

Resolved -

- (1) That the results of the Local Plan Review be noted;**
- (2) That a partial update of the Local Plan be undertaken be agreed;**
- (3) That the Assistant Director for Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services be granted authority to include additional policies within the scope of the partial update in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets and other relevant Lead Councillors and members as required;**
- (4) That the Local Development Scheme which set out the timetable for production of planning policy including the partial update of the Local Plan be agreed.**

37. ADOPTION OF THE RESIDENTIAL CONVERSIONS SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report asking the Committee to formally adopt the Residential Conversions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) as part of the Council's planning policy for determining planning applications.

The report had appended:

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| Appendix 1 | Equality Impact Assessment |
| Appendix 2 | Statement of Consultation on the Draft Residential Conversions SPD |
| Appendix 3 | Proposed adoption version of the Residential Conversions SPD (with changes tracked following consultation) |

The report explained that the SPD gave further detail to supplement the policies in the Reading Borough Local Plan, that had been adopted in November 2019, to deal with proposals for conversions of houses to flats and houses in multiple occupation (HMOs). A Draft Residential Conversions SPD had been approved for consultation by Policy Committee on 15 December 2022 (Minute 41 refers). Consultation had taken place between December 2022 and February 2023, and a total of 12 responses had been received, albeit five were to state there were no comments and a revised version of the SPD had been prepared, taking account of the responses that had been received.

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Resolved -

- (1) That the results of the consultation on the Draft Residential Conversions Supplementary Planning Document, undertaken between December 2022 and February 2023, as set out in the Consultation Statement at Appendix 2 attached to the report, be noted;
- (2) That the Residential Conversions SPD, as set out in Appendix 3 attached to the report, be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document.

38. EXTERNAL FUNDING APPLICATIONS FOR LOW CARBON PROJECTS

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report informing the Committee about a bid to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme to enable decarbonisation of the Hexagon Theatre and providing details of a similar funding application for further development of a heat network project for Reading, a strategic investment to decarbonise town centre heating which was at the early stages of development.

The report stated that the Council sought opportunities to apply for external funding to enhance its ability to deliver the objectives of the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy and Corporate Carbon Plan. An external funding bid had been submitted under delegated authority in October 2022 with the submission of a bid to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme to enable decarbonisation of the Hexagon Theatre. The bid had been for a grant of £1.88m generating a match funding requirement for the Council of £725,000 to be met from within approved capital budgets. A successful bid would enable installation of ground source heat pumps to replace gas boilers, insulation and lighting upgrades.

The report also explained that a successful application had been made in the past for successive rounds of funding from the Government's Heat Network Delivery Unit (HNDU) for funding to help develop a heat network for Reading. This funding had enabled feasibility work to be conducted which had identified a cluster of developments north of the station as offering the best prospects for a viable scheme, tapping into heat from the River Thames to provide a low carbon power source for a heat network. The next stage, known as 'Detailed Project Development', would build on the recently completed feasibility study and develop the proposal into an 'investment ready' proposition. An application had therefore been submitted to Round 12 of the HNDU fund for £168,000 in December 2022, for which match funding of £50,000 was required and would come from the Climate Change Reserve.

Peter Moore, Head of Climate Strategy, reported that the bid for ground heat pumps to enable decarbonization of the Hexagon Theatre had not been successful and had not been included on the list of funded projects. Bids had been subject to technical checks, but had been accepted on a 'first-come first served' basis and the allocation had been completed in ten minutes. However, funding was available from within the Council's approved capital budgets. The bid for funding from the Government's HNDU had been successful and a grant of £150k had been awarded, as had a grant for £825k from the Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership that would be used to replace gas

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heating in the Civic Offices with heat pumps, therefore providing a low carbon heating system.

Resolved -

- (1) That the submission of bids to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and the Heat Network Delivery Unit be noted;**
- (2) That the Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Director of Finance and the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport, be granted authority to agree and accept any grant offers arising from the bids.**

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and closed at 8.00pm)