

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

25 SEPTEMBER 2023

COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport:

Drone Superhighway above Reading

In January of this year the Guardian Newspaper broke the story that something called Project Skyway intended to create a drone superhighway above Reading and beyond. BT is said to have invested £5 million pounds in the project and its website lists one of its partners as Reading Borough Council. *{Following the meeting it was noted that BT have invested £5m into Altitude Angel, the Lead Partner in the Project.}*

Residents are understandably confused and concerned that yet again plans that affect them are being made behind closed doors.

Can the Lead Member responsible give us any information on the Council's plans for drone flights over Reading.?

REPLY by Councillor Ennis (Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport):

I thank Councillor White for his enquiry into this emerging project.

Project Skyway is an Innovate UK-funded 'Future Flight' project which is exploring the opportunities for beyond line of sight flights. The lead partner is Altitude Angel, a Reading-based company.

The Council has partnered in Project Skyway for the very reasons that Councillor White has raised concerns. Drone technology, beyond line-of-sight technology, and regulation thereof is emerging and without engagement from local authorities. Without council engagement, local place making and regulation risks missing out on scrutiny and expertise as well as engagement from residents.

The Council, along with Oxfordshire County Council and Coventry City Council, are partnering to provide advice on the application of the technology across the originally scoped 'superhighway' flight path, which starts outside the southern Borough boundary and moves up to Coventry. Whilst the superhighway is the focus of elements of the commercial case for the project, current proposals for drone flights within the Borough are highly limited in scope and scale and would be subject to consideration on a case-by-case basis. Officers are engaging with the Future Flight project team to provide advice as part of regular work streams and have recently conducted two focus groups with residents, which forms part of the feedback into the project team.

As Councillor White may be aware, Thames Valley Police are already regularly piloting flights in the area, as well as other commercial drone operators.