

RCCP Board Meeting - MINUTES

17 October 2024

Attendees: Heather Marshall (meeting chair); Dylan Parkes; Ben Burfoot; Tricia Marcouse; Chris Maddocks; Rachel Spencer; Scott Witchalls; Bryan Puszkar; Gudrun Freese (Minutes); Tracey Rawling Church; Nick West Oram; John Ennis

Apologies: Mike Wadelove; Paul Ducker; Sabine Mayeux; Clara Purnell

Previous meeting's minutes were approved by attendees.

PEOPLE CHANGES

Update on the Council's position on Peter Moore's (PM) role as RBC's Head of Climate Strategy:

- Reading Borough Council is restructuring and is not currently recruiting a replacement for PM, i.e. a Head of Climate Strategy.
- Ben Burfoot (BB) who is Head of Sustainability at RBC will assume some but not all of PM's RCCP responsibilities. BB will update us on Council news related to Head of Climate Strategy role. **(Action for BB.)**
- PM was the most senior RBC representative on the RCCP Board and a key link between the Council and RCCP, often acting as 'arbiter' or helping to influence and connect people or act on complaints and suggestions. As RBC's Head of Climate Strategy, he had a strong interest in the success of the partnership. PM initiated the review of the climate strategy, made the introduction to Dialogue Matters and allocated RBC climate reserve funds for the Year of Climate Engagement Project.
- RBC acts as host of RCCP, providing a legal framework for the employment of the RCCP Co-ordinator. PM guided the Co-ordinator's key projects and helped to manage expectations regarding the Co-ordinator's priorities and time.
- PM was also a 'guardian' of the RCCP Partnership Agreement and helped to steer the partnership members toward priority actions and to keep actions aligned with the RCCP Agreement and Constitution. He often acted to shield volunteers from unrealistic expectations, but also chased Board members for outstanding items which did fall within the agreed remit of the Board members.
- RCCP co-chairs should consider making their own proposal to RBC (in the first instance to Emma Gee) regarding PM's now vacant role and other RBC roles that would best support the work of RCCP. **(Action for co-Chairs.)**

Update on Gudrun Freese (GF):

- Until September 2024 GF was working as RCCP Co-ordinator (2.5 day/week) and also took on a selection of comms and engagement activities related to (1) Reading Climate Festival and (2) the climate strategy review (an additional 1.5 days a week, but this often stretched to 6- or 7-day weeks in the run-up to the Festival, with that extra time reclaimed in lieu).
- From September 2024 GF went back down to 2.5 days/week to allow her to take on external freelance work.
- From 1 December 2024 GF will reduce her RCCP hours to 1.5 days/week to enable her to take on additional external freelance work. Her RCCP work during this period will focus mainly on co-ordinator responsibilities, including:
 - Annual Report 2024
 - Invoicing and visa purchasing admin
 - Project management of Designing a Net Zero Reading meetings
 - Targeted outreach related to Designing a Net Zero Reading process
 - Account management of Dialogue Matters
 - Board Meetings and Ops Meetings
 - RCCP Website and RCCP Newsletter related to Designing a Net Zero Reading process
 - Steering group meetings for key projects
 - Supporting recruitment of new volunteer roles
 - Additional targeted comms as needed
 - Helping to shape the comms elements of the new climate strategy

Comms Theme Lead:

- Co-chairs and GF will manage recruitment for a volunteer Comms Theme Lead role for RCCP.
- They are also exploring other roles that could support delivery of the new climate strategy.
- The priority going forward will be to develop a comms and engagement strategy for the new 2025 – 2030 climate emergency strategy and to recruit someone to oversee delivery of this comms strategy – either a volunteer, or through an expanded Co-ordinator role or other role, or via a partner organisation with the resources to take this on. (Action: Co-chairs to discuss options and agree direction with BB.)

Resources Theme Lead and Nature Theme Lead

- Current Theme Leads for (1) Nature and (2) Resources are planning to step down and are helping to recruit their own replacements. (Actions for PD and TM.)
- TM has not found anyone willing to step into her Nature Theme Lead role and has flagged up her struggles to engage her RBC counterparts in the Nature Action Plan, due to lack of capacity at the Council. TM believes this will need to be resolved

before a volunteer agrees to take on the role, as RBC is the relevant landowner and volunteers will not want to give up their time without clear buy-in from the Council.

- BB has offered to facilitate these conversations and act as RCCP-RBC liaison for Nature-related queries. Rachel Spencer would like to be included in these conversations. (Action for BB.)
- RS suggested we approach local nature and wildlife charities to see if aspects of our action plan goals could be delivered by these organisations – e.g. where there are overlaps. (This would be in keeping with the purpose of RCCP, i.e. to mobilise local delivery partners / encourage adoption of relevant local net zero actions by local organisations.) HM seconded this approach to finding people at large charities to join RCCP to help align activities. (Action for who?)
- Public job descriptions for these roles will need to be developed and promoted. GF will oversee this in consultation with Co-chairs and Theme Leads. (Action for GF.)
- DP: From 1 October 2024 all University of Reading staff will have 2 volunteer days a year so DP will circulate volunteer roles through relevant channels. (Action for DP.)

Other issues related to roles and responsibilities

- Rachel Spencer (RS) asks BB if RCCP can be more closely aligned with relevant RBC roles, to make the most of synergies, e.g. neighbourhood teams and place-based pilots. BB pointed to current lack of capacity to nurture these links but agrees we should aim to foster these links to support delivery of 2025 – 2030 climate emergency strategy. The original intention of the Theme Lead roles was that they would convene a working group for their Theme, which would include key Council people. (Potential action for all Theme Leads: Invite relevant Council staff into reinvigorated theme working groups, which would meet quarterly, in the run-up to each RCCP Board meeting. RCCP Theme Leads would convene a discussion about progress related to theme action plans and other relevant actions, and report back on this at Board Meetings – as per original intentions.)

Reading Climate Festival 2025 – DYLAN PARKES

- DP is leading the Steering Committee for **Reading Climate Festival 2025** and **2026**, which met on 25 September 2024. Results and recommendations from the **Reading Climate Festival 2024** team were discussed at this meeting. Actions and minutes from this meeting will be shared with the Board along with these board meeting minutes.
- DP noted that the Festival began in 2020 as a collection of small online events. There was a big uplift in 2023 when the RBC Arts and Culture team brought the Gaia centrepiece to the Town Hall, which attracted 12,000 visitors. Gaia sat alongside the

smaller, community-led ‘original style’ Festival events such as online talks and presentations. In 2024 we did not have a centrepiece on the same scale as Gaia but did have a stronger programme of community-led events than we’ve had in previous years (e.g. two sold out events for schools, well-attended nature talks, a talk by climate stripes founder Ed Hawkins on Show your Stripes Day and several new RCCP-led events including Big Lunch Reading, a Community Energy Summit and several talks on net zero in Reading linked to specific climate strategy deliverables). RBC also commissioned a very successful multi-day ‘Create a Buzz!’ public installation near the Town Hall as their major contribution to the Festival.

- Based on recommendations discussed by the steering group, the broad proposal for Reading Festival 2025 is to:
 - Retain two-week time slot (**Saturday 7 to Saturday 21 June 2025**), although Water Fest will not coincide with the Festival this year as it is scheduled for 28 June 2025. RCCP
 - Retain the core focus, i.e. to inspire residents to take climate action during a two-week festival of events and activities but also engage key delivery partners of the new climate emergency strategy through targeted events.
 - Allow for open-ended / creative responses to our Call for Proposals but also be more pro-active in shaping some of the events to ensure they align with the climate strategy – e.g. who does the strategy call on to do what, and how can we support them in this or raise awareness of these calls to action?
 - Be clearer on objectives and metrics for success, which will also help when it comes to fundraising. Not just attendee numbers.
 - Get clearer commitments from RCCP members, Festival partners and local organisations to help promote the festival to their audiences. Build a comms alliance.
 - Address gaps, e.g. work with Council and other partners to prepare comms and events that offer clear guidelines and links to support available for households to insulate, change windows, install heat pumps and solar panels, etc.
 - Make a concerted effort to engage a much wider audience, going well beyond the usual suspects we tend to reach. This may include building on the Big Lunch concept which aimed to help residents *experience* a climate-friendly Reading *right now* (via climate-friendly food, low-carbon leisure, grow-your-own activities and music).
 - Launch the 2025 – 2030 Climate Emergency Strategy during Reading Festival 2025.
 - Leverage Festival to help raise the reputation of Reading as a place for proactive and co-ordinated climate action.
 - Start preparing now for a big RBC Arts and Culture centrepiece for 2026. This is also the University’s centenary. We need to start raising funds for this now.

- Map out a timeline that leads to 2026 to help shape working groups related to the Festival. (Action for DP)

Action for ALL – send DP any ideas you have for Reading Climate Festival 2025 and 2026 that you would like us to build into our thinking and planning.

Climate Emergency Strategy Review – GUDRUN FREESE

Workshop 2: 'Designing a Net Zero Reading'

- Held on 20th Sept 2024 in Council Chambers
- 38 participants + 6 facilitators
- Dialogue Matters presented the latest draft of our climate action priorities list, which has emerged from Workshop 1 and Survey 1.
- **Theme areas that emerged were as follows.** These are likely to become working groups for 2025 - 2030:
 1. Heat, power and energy
 2. Travel and transport
 3. Green and blue spaces
 4. Planning and development
 5. Food
 6. Resources and waste
 7. Water

Health did not emerge as a dedicated theme, but that was most likely because we could not attract any health-focused participants into the process. It has (for now) been included as a cross-cutting priority, see below.

- **Cross-cutting themes were identified as:**
 1. Campaigns and communications
 2. Training and capacity building
 3. Health and personal resilience
 4. Adaptation (place and infrastructure)
 5. Funding and resources
 6. Fostering behaviour change for net zero
 7. Smart cities and artificial intelligence
- During Workshop 2, participants added facts and figures related to the size of the challenge and helped to rank items in terms of relative impacts / carbon weighting. We also looked at who's already doing what and what more needs to be done for each priority action.

- We collected offers of support from potential delivery partners and brainstormed potential sources of additional funding and support.

Survey 2: Designing a Net Zero Reading

- Survey will be launched 21 October 2024 and close on 10 November 2024.
- Two versions of Survey 2 will be available: one version for Themed Expert Working Groups (curated by Theme Leads) and one for the general public.
- Survey 2 for the general public will be disseminated via the ReadingCAN newsletter, RCAN social channels, RCCP Board members and via the Council's residents' newsletter and socials; it will not be heavily promoted via any other channels because we need to focus our limited resources on processing working group responses before Workshop 3 in November. **(Actions for GF)**

Workshop 3: Designing a Net Zero Reading / 26 November 2024...and beyond!

- This will be the final meeting of the core deliberative group.
- After Workshop 3, Dialogue Matters will produce (1) a Workshop 3 Outputs Report and (2) a final report which sets out priorities for our Climate Emergency Strategy. This will be handed over to RCCP in late December or early January.
- Between January 2025 – June 2025 RCCP will shape inputs from our Year of Climate Engagement into a final Climate Emergency Strategy for 2025 – 2030. RCCP will hire someone to 'hold the pen' as this represents significant additional work. During this period there will be some additional, targeted stakeholder engagement needed to fill gaps and to bring additional delivery partners and resources on board.
- During this period, we will also need to develop a communications and engagement strategy and alliance / team to support the delivery of the new climate emergency strategy over the full 2025 – 2030 period.
- We aim to launch the new strategy during Reading Climate Festival 2025 – 2030.
- Questions:
 - How are we going to engage RBC in the finalisation and delivery of the strategy? How does RCCP benefit RBC and vice versa?
 - Who is going to write and design the final strategy? What funds are available for this?
 - Who is going to convene, write and deliver the comms and engagement strategy for the climate strategy? What funds are available for this?
 - What funds and other resources are available to help us land the strategy effectively, and manage / support ongoing engagement with it?
 - How can we support Theme Leads during this delivery period?

Action: Co-Chairs, BB and GF to discuss these questions.

Transparency

- We have been communicating with the general public about this Year of Climate Engagement via our own website, socials and newsletter and via partner newsletters and socials, including University of Reading, REDA, Reading Borough Council and others. We have posted outputs of both surveys and all three workshops on our website: www.readingcan.org.uk/priorities

BB: In the past, RBC has adopted the RCCP climate emergency strategies as policy. This happens via the Policy Committee, usually in November. (Action: GF and BB to develop a timeline for 'formal consultation period' and adoption as policy by RBC)

Cllr JE: The consultation process gives the strategy a useful 'public airing'. A launch event could act as a showcase for the partnership itself, to underline the message that 'no single organisation can address climate change effectively'.

HM: We will need the right list of people to engage during the consultation – especially those that may unlock funding for us. (Action: GF to gather names from Board and other stakeholders for this engagement list.)

Revisiting RCCP's purpose and scope – HEATHER MARSHALL

Heather Marshall:

- DP, HM, TRC, BB and GF have started a conversation about whether the partnership as it is currently formed is fit for the purpose of helping Reading get to net zero by 2030, and whether there is a clearer purpose we should be articulating at this point, with clearer boundaries.
- We aim to engage the Board in this question at the next Board meeting in January. With the new strategy in development this is an appropriate time to clarify roles and responsibilities, organisational intent, objectives, and purpose, and how we measure progress.
- We may invite you to propose some KPIs to help us all focus our limited time.

There are some challenges we might want to address, e.g.

- Many partners who signed up to be delivery partners for the 2020 – 2025 strategy have faded away. Some have said they don't know what it means, in practice, to be a delivery partner. How do we reconnect and reinvigorate those partners / the partnership, perhaps looking to Manchester's climate group as a good example of a group that has really clear accountability from a wide group of partners.
- How do we tap into funding streams?
- How can we encourage non-Board Members – e.g. members of working groups – to take on more of the project and public engagement work?

- When Board Members make suggestions for things 'we' should do, who do we mean by 'we'?

Annual Report – BB and GF

Ben Burfoot:

- The Annual Report headline question is 'what progress has the Borough of Reading made towards achieving net zero'?
- In a nutshell: Our downward emissions reduction trajectory returns this year after a slight post-pandemic uptick in emissions the year before. (Note: The government figures we use have an 18- to 24-month lag.) Effectively the last three of four years have been a plateau.
- The carbon intensity of the electricity grid went up in 2023, so we can expect to see upward pressure on our emissions for the 2023 data set.
- The overall message is: It's clear we need to steepen our curve and work out a plan to decarbonise further.
- We have continued to outperform most other local authority areas in terms of the drop in emissions relative to our own 1995 baseline figures.
- The previous government froze potential policy changes related to facilitating improvements in domestic emissions, but it seems likely the new government will re-open these.
- In terms of RAG ratings for our own climate action plans, which were adopted in 2020, the majority of actions are green or amber but we have a significant number of reds indicating we've had significant issues with delivery, which is likely due in part to some of our delivery partners fading away and in part to lack of resource in partner institutions and at RCCP. In some cases, reality has simply overtaken previous thinking and planning, and the actions are no longer relevant.

GF: Because of time and resource constraints (including no Comms Lead) we have placed the new Annual Report content into the previous Annual Report format, except for slight improvements to formatting of the RAG ratings and Case Studies. We did not have the resource to reshape the content supplied by RCCP members into a more public-friendly version, as the Annual Report preparation period coincided with the final workshop of the climate strategy review process, which took priority. This is in keeping with previous RCCP Annual Reports, which were developed more as a formality than a comms opportunity, but not in keeping with what we would like to be able to do with the Annual Report, with additional resources.

JE: The Annual Report is an opportunity to build allyship for the policies the Council is moving forward with, e.g. putting in bus and cycle lanes, which are attracting negative attention from people who don't want to change, but not enough vocal support from

people who do support these changes. We can use it as an opportunity to win hearts and minds for the policies that address climate change.

RS: Should we develop a public-facing Annual Report that helps to draw the link between improvements in public health and the policies related to changes in bus and cycle lanes, and other positive correlations? (Action: RS to ask the RVA comms manager to distill the Annual Report – especially the case studies – into a few pages.)

HM: We will assume the Annual Report has been approved by Board Members unless we hear from you before this time next week.

Theme updates – THEME LEADS

Paul Ducker – RESOURCES (supplied by email)

- RE3 is running a Recycle Week campaign and also offering virtual tours of their recycling facilities.
- Reading Food Partnership has been formed and is led by Sabine Mayeux. We hope Sabine will join the Partnership as Food Theme Lead and help us to finalise actions, which a future Food Theme Working Group could take forward.
- The Green Events Code of Practise pilot initiative is underway, which aims to support the outdoor festival community to achieve a 50% reduction in emissions by 2030. In Reading, we have Reading Festival, Readipop, Water Fest and East Reading Festival participating in the pilot project. ([More info.](#)) A national evaluation report is due to be published January 2025.

Chris Maddocks – TRANSPORT

- Reading's new local transport plan was adopted by full Council on Tuesday 15 October 2024. Much of this will overlap with the transport actions for the Climate Emergency Strategy.
- Updates: Bus discount scheme continues; Park and Ride offer was launched to coincide with the London Road bus lane and we are working with colleagues in Wokingham to optimise this; introduced new bus lane on Oxford Road with another to follow; electric buses project will see results next summer; pedestrian crossings have gone in on Upper Redlands Rd, which the University helped to co-fund and one on Richford Ave for the new secondary school; future schemes include more secure cycle parking in the town centre and SchoolStreet schemes.

JE:

- Noted that CM is working all hours to bring all these projects to completion and thanked him for this.
- Reading has the third lowest car ownership in the country, one of the best bus services in the country and we're building up our cycle offer. It's all coming together.
- There are new plans to build a cycle route from Woodley to Reading.
- A challenge is that we are surrounded by areas of high car ownership who use Reading as a car park. We are working with partners to address this.
- Locally, sticks are going to be needed; electric or not, you can't drive your way to net zero. There is a vocal minority who oppose changes (even potential charges) linked to net-zero transport, but we have to push on despite this, and without apology.

HM: Noted that many of our climate challenges have upstream components – as JE described with cars coming from outside the borough.

Tricia Marcouse - NATURE

- Wild Tilehurst, a new nature group, has been started. A big event in January aims to rally interest.
- St Johns on Oxford Road has achieved Gold Award Eco Church status. We are advising on planting there.
- We will plant more hedge this winter at Emmer Green shops.
- Hope to start a Nature Nurture scheme in South Whitley, dependent on funds coming through.
- An action to increase carbon storage in the town is not progressing as well as hoped. Because Reading does not have vast amounts of spare space for planting trees, it is important for us to store more carbon in the soil. The University has been working on carbon storage through biochar and RE3 is looking at this too. I'm struggling to get information out of Reading Borough Council about what happens to tree maintenance offcuts. In principle, we should be able to make biochar out of RBC tree maintenance waste and scatter that on the ground. Results from the University show that scattering does an enormous amount of good – it is not necessary to bury it. They report that it is 70% more efficient than tree planting. There is huge potential impact to be had via gardens and open spaces that could take this material.

Action: BB volunteered to liaise with Tricia about biochar projects.

Ben Burfoot - ENERGY

- Good news is it seems (from news report) that there's been a shift at SSEN around the Fleet and Bramley project for reinforcement, which could ease the pathway for connections going forward, related to heat pumps and EV charging projects. In Reading, we have been experiencing bottlenecks and some of our big development projects are at risk of not getting connections for heat pumps.

- Our heat network project is moving quite quickly, via a team of consultants funded primarily by the government from their heat network delivery unit. We will apply for government funding to support the next phased of this that programme.
- Boreholes project: Not sure yet if we will get our licences to move this project forward.
- Retrofit: We are not going to see the scale of work needed in this area, to get us to net zero, due to supply chain, skills / workforce and funding issues. There are new government policies related to the Warm Homes programme. We are looking at whether we are eligible for this funding, but criteria are very narrow. We need a local retrofit taskforce to address these issues. **(Action for BB)**
- Solar pays for itself nowadays.
- More work needs to be done on flexibility, e.g. with smart metres, to remove peaks and create more space for renewables. This would optimise the system we already have before customer money is spent on reinforcements.

Discussion related to Theme updates

Several members highlighted the need for closer relationships with relevant Council staff, in particular a closer link to planning team with regard to the Local Plan update.

HM reiterated that it is a good time to:

- Revisit our remit as a partnership to ensure we are engaging the right people at the right time, and focusing on areas where we can add value
- Help our society understand the links between different elements of local life and plans – especially health and active travel; health and food; health and air quality, etc. – and bring people together to shape joined-up approaches

CM: We in the RBC Transport team are definitely working to highlight links between transport and health benefits and are keen to have RCCP's support in this regard

SW: REDA will launch a business survey to discover what is important to local businesses and what attracted them to Reading. It will include questions on ESG and the business's climate targets and actions.

HM: Noted that Manchester uses surveyed business insights in their climate emergency strategy and also works from a baseline e.g. how many businesses measure x or do y and how is that changing year on year.

HM asked if RCCP could help shape the survey and SW said yes. **(Action for SW: Help RCCP contribute to the survey questions.)**

SW noted the vastly different budgets Reading and Manchester have for both surveys (which are expensive) and all the follow-up work.

BB noted that RCCP is lacking insights into supply chains and could the survey facilitate some of these insights to help Reading understand these sources of emissions a bit better.

NWO noted that the Berkshire Growth Hub is running supply chain workshops for local businesses, which advocate for change ahead of expected regulations related to supply chains and public sector purchasing as well as policies initiated by big private sector employers and businesses. NOW suggests we engage BGH in becoming a delivery partner / influencer for the 2025 – 2030 Climate Strategy to help shift business mindsets and to underline the financial benefits of change.

HM: Agreed that we need a mechanism for capturing and convening these initiatives for the collective good. We need a database of initiatives that are making an effort in our communities. **(Action for who?)**

BB: The LEP does still exist and is involved in EV charging and in skills development, so we do need to engage them.

Berkshire Prosperity Board (BPB) – DYLAN PARKES

A new body called the Berkshire Prosperity Board brings together the leadership of all six unitary authorities in Berkshire. It is tasked with fostering greater collaboration and joined-up work across the county.

It aims to drive and deliver economic prosperity across Berkshire and sets out to secure more funding, create more jobs and enable more affordable housing for residents. The councils will work together to promote Berkshire to investors, businesses and Central Government.

Net zero is a key theme.

- The UoR has hosted an initial gathering of the Council leaders (who form the Board), as well as a climate working group (with Ben Burfoot representing Reading).
- The 6 participating Councils all have their own versions of a climate emergency strategy and a variety of timetables and definitions related to net zero. Reading seems to be the only borough on the BPB where the climate emergency strategy is not driven by the Council. These strategies have varying degrees of external (including volunteer) support and input.

- The Board is not aiming for uniformity but rather to cooperate on cross-cutting issues where there is potential to do so.
- Carbon literacy and climate buy-in amongst council leaders was identified as a good first step, which would then be expanded to wider council staff body. Ben Burfoot is leading on this in Reading. The group is looking at opportunities to compare approaches to carbon literacy and to scale this more quickly. They are also exploring options to extend this to residents.
- Another area for cooperation is around joint efforts to secure government funding for retrofit.
- A third area discussed was adaptation. Reading's adaptation plan is based on a Met Office City Pack / Report.
- Met Office has launched a new climate support website for local authorities, which offers a bespoke city pack for every local authority in the country, providing a local summary and planning tool for potential climate impacts for that area.
- The new site provides an opportunity for BPB to consider joint actions around common risks.
- BB noted that there is no additional resource at RBC to support this work but we may find efficiencies in joint approaches to public engagement and other climate actions. He also noted that all other councils are experiencing the same challenges with retrofit.
- HM suggested we encourage mortgage and insurance companies to offer lower rates if 'able-to-pay' homeowners undertake retrofit.

Finance Report – BEN BURFOOT

BB will circulate a finance report via email before the next board meeting. (ACTION for BB.)

DP: Please do this asap as we need to budget for additional support to finalise the strategy and to also need to plan finances for Reading Climate Festival 2025.

AOB

TM: Draughtbusters is having great difficulty getting referrals. Could Board members help get the word out via their comms channels? We have already sent announcements via schools and that has never generated any responses.

JE asked TM to email him relevant details.

BB: Councillors are a good source of publicity for this.

BP offered to spread the word via SSEN's community engagement channels.

GF suggested they send messages via RBC's residents' email, which is sent by David Millward.