

COUNCIL MEETING – 24 MARCH 2026

AGENDA ITEM 5: QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

1. Alison May to ask the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport Air Quality

Access to air quality data provides communities with the opportunity to interpret the levels of types of pollutants being dispersed throughout their local area. Noting the UK Government's launch of a new interactive dashboard designed to make air quality information more accessible to the public, can the Council provide citizens with an update of the frequency and types of measured pollutants submitted to UK's Air's portal ?

REPLY by Councillor Ennis Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport

Reading Borough Council has monitored air quality across the Borough for more than 20 years. The monitoring network currently includes 3 RBC owned and operated continuous roadside monitoring sites that monitor Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) and Particulate Matter up to ten microns (PM₁₀). There are also two Defra owned and operated sites that are part of the national network, there is one urban background site monitoring NO₂, PM₁₀, PM_{2.5} and Ozone (O₃). The other is a new roadside site monitoring PM_{2.5}.

RBC also has a network of 60 NO₂ diffusion tubes around the Borough.

All the data collected at these sites is publicly available and is accessible on the Air Quality in England website. The platform allows the data to be viewed in a range of formats such as in a report, graphically or simply downloaded as raw data.

The UK Air portal is a platform where the national monitoring network data is available, the recently added dashboard in question provides added functionality to this existing platform.

The dashboard tool allows users to search by postcode and view air quality information relevant to their area, including local monitoring data. The dashboard will also showcase the actions local authorities are taking to improve air quality, as set out in annual reports along with other key information such as the identification of where Smoke Control Areas and Air Quality Management Areas are. The Council welcome the introduction of the dashboard and improvements made to this central repository for air quality data, whilst we should also stress that RBC also already make this information available to the public on the RBC website.

The dashboard only displays annual data in arrears but is linked to UK-Air which holds all the continuous monitoring data from the Borough in near real time. Please note that the same data is also available near real time on the Air Quality in England Website.

Air Quality in England Website: [Reading Borough Council - Air Quality monitoring service](#)

UK Air Dashboard: <https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/local-authorities-dashboard/>

2. Ulrike Magyarosy to ask the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety

Flooding in the Holybrook Area

Can the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety update on the latest situation of potential flooding in the Holybrook area, Southcote and can the Lead Councillor provide an update on the measures taken to prevent sluice gates being opened on the River Kennet and Holybrook which has negatively impacted on houses in Southcote ?

REPLY by Councillor Rowland Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety

I would like to thank Ms Magyarosy for raising this matter and fully appreciate her raising the concerns with flooding in the area.

Sadly, we are all affected by climate change and the Council recognises that Reading is not immune to the impacts of that, with increasing frequent and extreme events creating challenges and understandable anxiety for both the Council and residents.

Following the January 2023 flood event, with three significant storms culminating with Storm Henk, a limited numbers of properties along the Holybrook in Southcote and on Queens Road and Heron Island along the River Thames were identified as being particularly vulnerable during flood events. Since then, the Council has undertaken a range of works to reduce flood risk such as is reasonably practicable and within our legal rights to affect. However, it must be accepted that properties located adjacent to the Holybrook and the River Thames, particularly those in low-lying sections of the floodplain will always remain at risk during extreme flood events due to their geographical proximity next to these flood plain areas.

With regard to the Holybrook specifically, and within the Council's ability to affect, extensive clearance and ditching works have been carried out between the Holybrook and the private property boundaries. The road level under Briscoe Bridge has been raised, and repairs to the towpath have been completed. The culvert beneath the access road off Circuit Lane has been cleared, along with the ditch that had become overgrown that runs from this culvert. All roadside gullies have also been inspected and cleared. In addition, Network Rail has confirmed that their culverts beneath the railway line are all clear and operating effectively.

Works are continuing thanks to CIL funding that has been appropriated to this area by local ward Councillors. As part of those works, a flood gauge board indicating flood levels will be installed this Spring alongside additional clearance of the Holybrook itself. That will involve the removal of old fallen trees and debris, and the reuse of those collected resources to create biodiversity habitats elsewhere in the immediate area. These pre-scheduled works are imminently due to begin and will be carried out by our specialist contractor. Residents can expect these works to continue throughout the rest of this year until next winter's rainy season. This will not only ensure better water flow during the year within the flood plain area, but it will also improve accessibility and the aesthetics of the area for those that enjoy being out in the natural open space of our precious wetlands area in Reading.

The Council continues to regularly monitor the area at any indication of flood event potential. For example, officers were in the area daily over the recent wet rainy season to monitor activity. As a result of these consistent observations, the Council recently responded to high water levels in advance by deploying sandbags on the raised roadway at the Briscoe Bridge area.

It should be noted that the Holybrook area remains part of a designated floodplain and whilst ditch clearing works help improve flow, ditches essentially become useless in preventing flooding during extreme rainy weather events.

The Council will always advise residents in flood vulnerable properties, near to flood plains, to take appropriate measures to protect their property. This should include the independent storage of sandbags, to consider the installation of flood guards, and to ensure that any valuable items that could be at risk are raised above any flood levels they may have previously experienced.

Regarding the sluice gates, which are largely on private properties significantly upstream in Oxfordshire, it is important to reiterate that these are not Council owned or maintained assets and the responsibility for them lies with the Environment Agency (EA). The Council works with the EA

and raised concerns with them following the January 2023 Flood Event, to address the allegations that upstream flood sluice gates had been opened. The EA investigated these claims but found no evidence to support them and this was reported back to residents at the public meeting chaired by Matt Rodda MP last year. Nonetheless, please be assured that the Council will continue to liaise and work with the EA to ensure that they meet their Flood management responsibilities in relation to any upstream sluice gates.

The Council will continue to undertake annual inspections of our ditches and culverts and will carry out vegetation clearing works where necessary to ensure that all drainage assets under our control operate as effectively as possible.

3. Pratikshya Gurung to ask the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety:

Bins and Littering on the Oxford Road

There have been persistent issues with overflowing bins and littering along the Oxford Road for a number of years and the resolution of that is complex. However, I understand that the trial Kingdom enforcement team has been making significant strides in pursuing persistent littering and fly tipping. Could you outline how the Kingdom enforcement team could be utilised in tackling the persistent problems along the Oxford Road ?

REPLY by Councillor Rowland Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety.

Thank you Ms Gurung for your question, which allows me to update you on the environmental enforcement partnership trial with Kingdom Local Authority Support (KLAS) as well as the important work of the Council's in-house service and how this programme is being shaped towards seeing an improved environment for the Oxford Road in the future.

As of 15th of September, the Council began a partnership with Kingdom Local Authority Support (KLAS), which has provided an additional team of environmental enforcement officers who are patrolling Reading's streets to counter littering and fly-tipping. They have targeted on-the-spot litter enforcement in the town centre and other high footfall areas and have also targeted fly-tipping at our community recycling facilities and bottle bank sites where there are known issues, such as the Kensington Road bottle banks. A KLAS enforcement officer works each day with our street-scene team, undertaking visits with them as part of their scheduled work. To date, KLAS have issued 1387 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for waste offences including littering, fly-tipping and breaches of waste duty-of-care across the borough. The number of those fines given in the Battle ward/Oxford Road area since the programme began is 167 fines, although officers are being deployed increasingly in areas away from the Town Centre as the programme is bedding in and officers are becoming familiarised in dealing with the more challenging areas that need specialist work.

The KLAS team in partnership with the Council's in-house officers work closely with the community in identifying and tackling reported issues; patrolling known hot-spot areas and responding directly to issues reported by the public. We would therefore continue to ask all residents and businesses to continue to report any incidents of fly tipping or litter to the Council and its partner through the website, the contact centre or the Love Clean Streets (Reading) app, so resources can be targeted where needed.

In addition to the existing successful programme of work by environmental enforcement teams, in April the Council will be targeting this combined resource for a week in addressing some of the most persistent environmental challenges on the Oxford Road. The intervention will tackle littering, fly-tipping and poorly managed business waste.

The action week will see increased business waste compliance inspections, responsible residential waste disposal investigations, with enforcement action taken against those identified as committing environmental offences.

It is worth noting that the date of this action week in April will not be further announced, as businesses especially are expected to be following the rules around waste that have been set out previously by our Enforcement Teams along the route through their previous work with businesses there. Alongside the high-profile enforcement activity and increased officer presence, households and businesses will be provided advice and support, with reminders on correct waste disposal practice distributed.

Afterwards, there will be a consistent programme of follow-up inspections and routine patrols in place with KLAS to continue to monitor activity and improvement on the Oxford Road.

Further intensified enforcement activity will continue to be programmed as appropriate following a review of the project's success and any remaining areas of concern. There is no doubt that consistency of enforcement presence is recognised as key to achieving and sustaining long-term success in any area. We are hopeful that with the support of KLAS this can enhance the work that our in-house enforcement officers have already been doing in the area to significantly reduce the most stubborn issues along the Oxford Road.

4. Roy Rangarirai to ask the Lead Councillor for Leisure and Culture:
Leisure or Sporting Activities for People with Disabilities

As a young carer and a lifelong champion for access and inclusion, I know it can be difficult to arrange community leisure or sporting activities for people with disabilities and complex needs.

If you do not get caught up or discouraged by the physical barriers, including a lack of adapted venues, facilities, or equipment. You will surely encounter social barriers, much more subtle, but often far more dispiriting. This can include: lack of empathy from others within the community or simply having to explain care plans, medication and emergency protocols countless times.

We are all aware of the numerous studies that evidence the positive impacts of exercise and social interactions in the community. Therefore, I'd like to ensure those with complex needs, both visible and invisible, do not miss out on these positive health benefits.

Could the Lead Councillor please set out what the council is doing to promote integrated sport for people with disabilities in Reading?

REPLY by Councillor Barnett-Ward Lead Councillor for Leisure and Culture

Thank you for your question. Ensuring that residents with disabilities have full, equal and meaningful access to sport and physical activity across the Borough is a priority for this Labour Council, as evidenced by our recent £40 million investment in our leisure centres. Working in close partnership with GLL, our leisure partner, and a wide range of community organisations, we continue to expand inclusive opportunities, improve accessibility, and promote integrated sport for people of all ages and abilities.

The Council's £40million investment in our four leisure centres significantly improved their accessibility. Facilities now include accessible toilets and showers, Changing Places provision at Rivermead and Palmer Park, inclusive gym equipment, pool hoists and accessible poolside changing. Both Rivermead and Palmer Park also offer Pool Pods, enabling independent and dignified entry into the water.

Comprehensive access information is available on the GLL website, supported by inclusive marketing co-designed with MENCAP and accessibility software to help residents plan their visit. GLL staff receive dedicated accessibility training to ensure every visitor has a positive and supported experience. The Council's Access and Disability Working Group, along with local disability support charities, were consulted during the design and development phase. For example, residents with visual impairments trialled the public transport routes to Palmer Park Leisure Centre and as a result of their feedback we renamed the bus stop on Wokingham Road and incorporated a tactile paving route across the park to the new centre, and a Guide Dog toileting area into the designs. More recently the Access and Disabilities Working Group visited Palmer Park and Rivermead to assess the centres in action and suggest further improvements, which have been implemented.

Officers work closely with GLL to ensure that inclusive programmes continue to grow and develop. Current examples include the annual Festival of Inclusivity at Palmer Park, SEND Soft Play sessions at Palmer Park, specialist swimming lessons delivered through Level Water, SEND swim lessons, and inclusive senior and social sports such as adapted Pickleball.

The GLL Healthwise programme supports residents with long-term health conditions and disabilities, and organisations such as Sport in Mind and Compass Recovery College use the programme to deliver their own services to participants.

GLL offers a range of membership options to support residents with disabilities. Eligible residents can access concessionary membership, providing reduced rates for both memberships and pay-as-you-go activities. In addition, where a disabled user requires assistance, carers or support workers can accompany them free of charge, enabling fair and equitable access to all activities.

We are confident that GLL continues to promote sport for all and strives for excellence. This is reflected in recent Quest audits - Sport England's recognised continuous improvement framework for leisure facilities. Both Palmer Park and Rivermead achieved 'Excellent' ratings in the Tackling Inequalities and Accessible Facilities modules, with Rivermead achieving an overall rating of Outstanding, one of only seven facilities nationally to achieve this.

Beyond our leisure centres, Reading benefits from a strong network of inclusive community sports clubs. The Council has a focus on increasing sport and physical activity across the Borough, working closely with and supporting these clubs. Examples include wheelchair basketball and rugby through Reading Rockets and Sport Together Berkshire; pan-disability and SEND football through Caversham AFC, Reading FC Community Trust, Procision Academy and the BOBi League; inclusive tennis through Berkshire LTA and GD Tennis; disability cricket through Berkshire Cricket Foundation and Little Crickets; accessible bowls at Reading Bowls Club, Palmer Park and Prospect Park.

At the Ranger Station, in Prospect Park, residents can enjoy an accessible mini-golf course designed for wheelchair users, a Changing Places facility, and 3G courts used for inclusive activities such as walking football and Sport in Mind sessions. SEND sessions for children run during school holidays, alongside targeted play interventions during term time.

The Council has a Physical Activity Alliance Group, taking a whole-systems approach to understanding and addressing the barriers that prevent residents, including those with disabilities, from being active. Working with partners such as Get Berkshire Active and GLL, the group focuses on raising visibility, improving opportunities for all, and embedding the importance of physical activity across services and communities.

Through these combined efforts, this Labour Council is ensuring that people with disabilities in Reading can participate fully, confidently and independently in sport and physical activity and that inclusive provision continues to grow across the Borough.