

## COUNCIL MEETING – 30 JUNE 2026

### AGENDA ITEM 6

#### QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

1. Councillor Moore to ask the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety:

#### Pesticide Use in Reading's Public Spaces

In July 2023, the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee received a report on the outcomes of Reading Borough Council's 2022 trial of alternative weed control methods, and approved three recommendations: to note the trial outcomes; to approve the continued controlled use of glyphosate as the most cost-effective method; and to require that any new weed control contract include a commitment from the successful bidder to work toward a suitable alternative to glyphosate.

- (a) Will the Lead Councillor confirm whether a new weed control contract has been awarded since July 2023, and if so, whether the requirement for the successful bidder to work toward a glyphosate alternative was included in that contract - and what progress, if any, has been made against that commitment ?
- (b) Almost half of UK Councils are now taking some action to reduce or end pesticide use in public spaces, and Liberal Democrat-led Councils including Bath & North East Somerset and the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames have made formal commitments to phase out or significantly reduce glyphosate use. Will the Lead Councillor commit to bringing a report back to committee setting out options for a formal, time-bound pesticide reduction plan for Reading - for example by adopting Pesticide Action Network UK's freely available three-year phase-out framework ?

**REPLY** by Councillor McGoldrick Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety:

I would like to thank Councillor Moore for his question.

I know this is an issue many residents are passionate about and it is important we get the right balance between our environmental responsibilities while ensuring the public realm is maintained in the way residents expect.

Since 2024, have procured weed-control annually allowing flexibility to adopt new technologies as soon as they become viable. Contractors are required to work with us on alternatives, and officers continue to the market and the experience of other Councils. We have already reduced glyphosate use by 25% and apply integrated weed-management principles: targeted treatments, reduced frequency, avoidance of sensitive areas and continuous review of alternatives.

However, the evidence from our own trials and from the wider sector is clear: glyphosate is currently the only treatment that reliably kills the root system. Alternatives require far more labour, water and fuel, which have their own environmental considerations, while being less effective on established weeds. At present, no alternative offers the same combination of effectiveness, practicality and value for money and that is why most Councils still rely on it for large-scale highway weed control.

We already minimise use wherever possible and I am supportive of bringing a further report to Committee when the evidence base has moved on, setting out any realistic and sustainable options for further reduction of its use.

2. Councillor Moore to ask the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport  
**Flooding and Climate Change**

The Council recently screened the National Emergency Briefing, in which leading scientists and experts presented evidence on the accelerating impacts of climate and nature breakdown. The Briefing included evidence that 1 in 4 properties in England will be at flood risk by 2050, that UK winter rainfall has already risen 10% since 1980, and that the Climate Change Committee has found not a single assessed sector is currently being delivered at a good level on climate adaptation. In light of this:

- (a) Is RBC's drainage and flood infrastructure investment programme modelled against 2050 climate projections, or against current and near-term baselines only ?
- (b) Has RBC's emergency planning been formally stress-tested against cascading climate events - where multiple emergencies strike before recovery from the previous one is complete - and if so, when was that assessment last carried out ?
- (c) What assessment has been made of existing Council-owned infrastructure, including roads, drainage networks and public buildings, against future climate projections, and is there a programme in place to address any identified resilience gaps ?
- (d) Has RBC assessed its climate adaptation performance against the Climate Change Committee's local authority framework, and if so, what did that assessment find ?
- (e) Given that scrutiny of Reading's climate performance is shared between the Council and the Reading Climate Change Partnership - an independent body - what governance mechanism ensures that elected members can hold climate adaptation delivery to account, and will the Council commit to annual public reporting against the CCC's local authority indicators specifically, rather than solely through the Partnership's own reporting ?
- (f) Has the Council assessed which neighbourhoods - including vulnerable and low-income communities - face the highest climate-related risks, and is there a plan to prioritise investment in those areas through a climate justice lens ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Ennis Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport:

Thank you Councillor Moore for your question, please see the comprehensive answer to your concerns below.

For brevity I have included some of the answers from the more detailed answer below which I will read out.

The Council's Drainage & Flooding investment programme has been developed based on existing flood risk but with consideration to future flood risk. When projects are developed in detail, they will be based on climate change allowances based on their lifespans.

In Reading the most significant risk is from widespread fluvial flooding . Thames Valley LRF Exercise Blue Nimbus took place in November 2023 in order to test the response to a large-scale flood event which included on the Thames in Reading. The exercise scenario also included the cascading incident of reservoir over-topping at Reading University and the Reservoir Off-Site plan was activated as part of the exercise. Following the exercise a multi-agency debrief took place and the Multi-agency Flood Plan was reviewed and improved.

In addition to the hazard-specific plans we have plans which are for the consequences of any incident or group of incidents. The key plan here is the Berkshire -wide Rest Centre plan which would need to be activated in the event of a medium to large scale incident, or consecutive incidents, including flooding. This was tested in Exercise Red Beacon in November 2025.

Flood risk across the Borough's Highway network including to Council infrastructure is assessed through the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. Flood mitigation schemes are planned based on a combination of historic flooding and predicted flooding, including climate change.

The Climate Emergency Strategy does consider those most vulnerable to climate change and the impact of policy delivery on deprived and more vulnerable communities. 'Climate justice' is a term used to describe this challenge. The strategy identifies Fuel Poverty as a key challenge but also the impacts of climate change through flooding and heatwaves for example. The University of Reading, the Council and the Royal Berkshire Hospital are working together through the 'Just Systems' project to consider the extent to which systems factor climate implications into their design to ensure better outcomes for communities.

#### Comprehensive Answer:

The Council recently screened the National Emergency Briefing, in which leading scientists and experts presented evidence on the accelerating impacts of climate and nature breakdown. The Briefing included evidence that 1 in 4 properties in England will be at flood risk by 2050, that UK winter rainfall has already risen 10% since 1980, and that the Climate Change Committee has found not a single assessed sector is currently being delivered at a good level on climate adaptation. In light of this:

- (a) Is RBC's drainage and flood infrastructure investment programme modelled against 2050 climate projections, or against current and near-term baselines only ?

*Answer:*

*The Council's Drainage & Flooding investment programme has been developed based on existing flood risk but with consideration to future flood risk. When projects are developed in detail, they will be based on climate change allowances based on their lifespans.*

- (b) Has RBC's emergency planning been formally stress-tested against cascading climate events - where multiple emergencies strike before recovery from the previous one is complete - and if so, when was that assessment last carried out?

*Answer:*

*The Council's emergency planning obligations are set out in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. A central tenet of the obligations is multi-agency working including planning, training and exercising, and responding. This takes place through the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum structure and there is a standing Training and Exercising Group to ensure that the most significant risks are exercised.*

*In Reading the most significant risk is from widespread fluvial flooding. Thames Valley LRF Exercise Blue Nimbus took place in November 2023 in order to test the response to a large-scale flood event which included on the Thames in Reading. The exercise scenario also included the cascading incident of reservoir over-topping at Reading University and the Reservoir Off-Site plan was activated as part of the exercise. Following the exercise a multi-agency debrief took place and the Multi-agency Flood Plan was reviewed and improved.*

*In addition to the hazard-specific plans we have plans which are for the consequences of any incident or group of incidents. The key plan here is the Berkshire -wide Rest Centre plan which*

would need to be activated in the event of a medium to large scale incident, or consecutive incidents, including flooding. This was tested in Exercise Red Beacon in November 2025.

- (c) What assessment has been made of existing Council-owned infrastructure, including roads, drainage networks and public buildings, against future climate projections, and is there a programme in place to address any identified resilience gaps?

*Answer – Also covered by answer to d) below.*

*Flood risk across the Borough's Highway network including to Council infrastructure is assessed through the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. Flood mitigation schemes are planned based on a combination of historic flooding and predicted flooding, including climate change.*

*The Corporate Property Services team carries out ongoing assessment of the Council's Corporate and Community buildings for Statutory compliance as well as the health and safety of all staff and the public using these premises.*

*These, by their nature will have elements of climate resilience through a combination of:*

- **Condition surveys and asset management data**, which identify vulnerabilities such as building fabric condition, drainage capacity, and mechanical system limitations.
- **Decarbonisation, refurbishment and retrofit programmes**, where opportunities to improve resilience (e.g. insulation, ventilation, shading) are considered alongside carbon reduction measures, as far as possible.

*A range of programmes already contribute to improving building resilience, including:*

- **Planned maintenance and capital investment programmes**, which prioritise critical repairs and upgrades that enhance durability and weather resistance.
- **Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) and similar retrofit projects**, which incorporate measures such as improved insulation, low-carbon heating, and ventilation upgrades—helping to mitigate both overheating and cold-weather risks.
- *Although the PSDS is no longer available, we continue to consider these within our feasibility works for viability.*
- **Flood mitigation and drainage improvements**, where properties are known to be at risk.
- **Design standards for major refurbishments**, which increasingly embed climate adaptation principles (e.g. passive cooling, sustainable drainage systems, and resilience to extreme weather).

*The Property and Asset Management Service have agreed to collaborate on how we respond to the current extreme heat as we anticipate this trend may be continuous. We recognise that to date, our buildings were never designed for such conditions and so we will include, on all our projects:*

- *More systematic assessment of buildings against future climate scenarios*
- *Risk-based prioritisation of interventions*
- *Integration of resilience measures into all capital investment decisions*

*While elements of climate resilience assessment are already embedded within existing asset management, reactive repairs and capital programmes, the Council recognises the need for a more comprehensive and consistent approach.*

*Work is underway to begin strengthening this, and to develop a forward programme that ensures Council-owned public buildings remain safe, functional, and resilient in the face of future climate change.*

- (d) Has RBC assessed its climate adaptation performance against the Climate Change Committee's local authority framework, and if so, what did that assessment find ?

*Answer*

*An adaptation report was produced by Mott McDonald on behalf of the Reading Climate Change Partnership in 2019. This helped to inform the 2020 to 2025 Climate emergency strategy. Following this work was carried out by the University of Reading to produce a City Pack or Climate Pack for Reading. SPF City Pack. This highlighted the projections and their potential impacts for the town. An assessment of Climate risk for Council services was then carried out towards the end of this strategy, published in November 2024. This preceded a year of climate engagement on the new climate emergency strategy 2025-2030. Through this process services from the Council were involved in the design of the new strategy. The Strategy aligned with the Committee on Climate Change(CCC) reports, most significantly the 7<sup>th</sup> Carbon Budget report and its balanced pathway to net zero.*

*The new climate emergency strategy is early in its implementation and Council service leads are building these actions into their service plans. The first annual assessment of performance against this new strategy will take place in Q3 of the current business year.*

*It should be noted that Local Authorities do not have a statutory responsibility to carry out assessment of climate risk and implementation of policies to adapt to climate impacts. This means that they do not receive any government or other funding to carry out this function.*

*This said, Reading, like most Local Authorities, recognise the importance of this and have taken steps to consider the implications.*

*The recent report Commissioned by the CCC, "Duties and Powers for Local Authorities in the UK to Adapt to Climate Change" (DPLACC) opens with a statement about this:*

*"In England there is no single statutory duty to adapt. Instead, responsibilities are fragmented and incomplete. For example, councils have specific duties for flood risk (Lead Local Flood Authorities) and emergency planning. However, general adaptation relies on the "de facto" duty created by frameworks such as national planning policy, rather than a dedicated statute."*

*The Climate Emergency Strategy (CES) was written before the publication of the above DPLACC report. This document is therefore yet to be incorporated into Reading's climate policy framework. The CES action plan will be reviewed annually and this represents an opportunity to consider the latest policy guidance in.*

- (e) Given that scrutiny of Reading's climate performance is shared between the Council and the Reading Climate Change Partnership - an independent body - what governance mechanism ensures that elected members can hold climate adaptation delivery to account, and will the Council commit to annual public reporting against the CCC's local authority indicators specifically, rather than solely through the Partnership's own reporting ?

*Answer:*

*The Council hosts the climate change partnership and adopted the Climate Emergency Strategy 2025-2030 (CES) in November 2025. This means that the strategy is a policy of the council even though it does not apply solely to the council.*

*The Council has committed to lead by example and to work in partnership to tackle climate change. It leads by example through its direct actions and through setting more ambitious targets. The Climate Emergency Strategy Action Plan includes detail about who the*

*primary deliver partner is for a specific action. Given the breadth and relevance of activities led by the Council, the Council's role as a key partner is clear to see. The Council has a number of strategies and policies which feed into or link to the CES. Examples are the Local Transport Plan, The Carbon Plan, The Low Carbon Housing Plan etc*

*These strategies aim to deliver outcomes consistent with the CES.*

*Internally, the Climate Action Board convenes senior officers to monitor and develop Council climate projects and policies for progress against our policy framework. The Council's audit teams have also produced a report during the previous climate emergency strategy which set out a number of recommendations to the Council.*

- (f) Has the Council assessed which neighbourhoods - including vulnerable and low-income communities - face the highest climate-related risks, and is there a plan to prioritise investment in those areas through a climate justice lens ?

*Answer:*

*The Climate Emergency Strategy does consider those most vulnerable to climate change and the impact of policy delivery on deprived and more vulnerable communities. 'Climate justice' is a term used to describe this challenge. The strategy identifies Fuel Poverty as a key challenge but also the impacts of climate change through flooding and heatwaves for example. The University of Reading, the Council and the Royal Berkshire Hospital are working together through the 'Just Systems' project to consider the extent to which systems factor climate implications into their design to ensure better outcomes for communities.*

3. Councillor Williams to ask the Lead Councillor for Leisure and Culture  
**Children's Football in Reading**

Exercise and sport are vital to our children's health, and with the World Cup in North America the focus is on football. As Wales aren't there, I'll add, come on England !

Years ago, youth teams played football every weekend on the Alfred Sutton Playing Fields but since covid no matches have been played. In 2020 a new school was developed on part of the playing fields and as part of that development money was taken by the Council to improve the football pitches.

Can the Lead Councillor tell us how that £25,000 has been spent ?

The planning agreement with the new school also included Community Use provisions for the new changing rooms at the school so that the junior football clubs who used the field could access them for their use on weekends. Local teams would love to return to football on the playing fields. Will the Lead Councillor help get the next generation of England footballers back on the pitch, and offer the Council's help to make this happen ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Lanzoni Lead Councillor for Leisure and Culture:

Thank you for your question.

Reading currently has 20 youth football pitches across the borough, an increase of two since 2020, as set out in the Playing Pitch Strategy. This sits alongside 29 adult pitches and expanding junior and mini soccer provision, supporting nearly 300 Football Association affiliated teams.

Youth provision is meeting current demand, with no waiting periods, and should participation continue to grow, there is capacity to convert adult pitches to youth in line with the Football Association's evolving approach.

The council is working closely with clubs to improve pitches and park buildings, ensuring facilities are fit for purpose and support mixed participation. In addition, we are working with clubs to provide them with long term lease agreements that enable clubs to access Football Foundation capital funding for pitch and pavilion upgrades, further strengthening the infrastructure that underpins youth football across Reading.

The £25,000 Playing Pitch Improvement contribution linked to the school development was originally restricted solely to improvements to grass pitches. This narrow definition meant it could not be used for any potential wider improvements works on the Alfred Sutton pitches. In July 2025, a Deed of Variation was agreed to broaden the scope of the funding. The revised definition now allows the contribution to support a wider range of physical improvements to playing pitches, including potentially artificial turf. This ensures the funding can be applied more flexibly and in line with locally identified needs.

To date, none of the £25,000 has been spent while the Council works with partners to identify the most effective use of the funds under the expanded criteria. In the meantime, the Council continues to undertake routine maintenance at Alfred Sutton, including grass cutting, hedge trimming, and an initial pitch marking in preparation for the school's sports day.

#### 4. Councillor Clarke to ask the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport Kings Road

Too many residents have been killed or seriously injured on Kings Road and at Cemetery Junction. Local news organisations have reported four major crashes on Kings Road so far this year, with the most recent incident, an accident on 2 May, leaving a man in his 20s hospitalised after a crash by Kingsgate Street. This follows two accidents in February, both involving young people and leading to serious injury. The Greens have been campaigning to improve road safety here for over a decade.

Please can we be updated on what plans the Council has to improve road safety on Kings Road and at Cemetery Junction including:

- What options are being considered?
- What information has been shared with external partners such as Reading College?
- What is the timescale for a new scheme to be consulted or implemented?

**REPLY** by Councillor Ennis Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport:

Thank you for your question. Our thoughts are with these individuals and their families, and I wish them a full and swift recovery.

As I said in my reply to Councillor McCann at Full Council in March, Reading Borough Council takes road safety very seriously. We understand and share in the concerns around the incidents on Kings Road.

I continue to be briefed by officers on the nature of these incidents, and I trust you understand that I cannot share sensitive information about the details of the incidents in public. Equally, the details of these incidents have not been shared with external organisations, including Reading College.

Any engineering mitigations would seek to address the probable causes of incidents, as concluded by Police investigations and our review of the data that they provide to us. Engineering solutions are considered where road layout is assessed to be contributing factors. In addition, our assessments consider whether there are behavioural elements we can help to influence.

The Council has met the college on site twice and is grateful for the positive and constructive engagement of Reading College. As a destination that attracts both pedestrian and vehicular traffic, they have significant communication and educational reach for regular users of the area. Alongside any potential engineering options, any resultant actions, which will be supported by the Council, should assist with positively influencing some behaviours that are putting people at unnecessary risk. I must be clear, however, that this is not an issue that is exclusive to pupils of the College.

While a number of potential engineering items are being explored, one proposal is in the advanced design stages and officers expect to share details with me and Ward Councillors in the coming months and bring a report to the next Traffic Management Sub-Committee in September. This proposal involves the creation of filter areas in the outbound bus lane, in advance of junctions, and seeks to mitigate the risk of collisions caused by turning movements across the bus lane.

**5. Councillor Cross to ask the Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets**  
**Empty and Untidy Premises: Christchurch Road Parade of Shops**

Local residents, including the Friends of Christchurch Green, have raised concerns about the long-term empty retail units in the Christchurch Road parade of shops, namely the former RedServe and NatWest units. These premises have been unoccupied for some years, and are causing a detriment to the local streetscene, including graffiti, fly-posting, and general neglect. Furthermore, a ramshackle outbuilding to the rear of these shops remains in a state of disrepair. Following contact from Council officers several years ago, the wall was rebuilt and the roof partially reinstated, but there has not been any progress since.

A response on the subject of the introduction of High Street Rental Auction powers was provided to a member of the public at the November 2024 Policy Committee. In light of this, could the Lead Councillor please provide me with an update on:

- The current status of these auction powers and whether the Council plans to make use of them;
- Whether these powers could be used to deal with the vacant units on Christchurch Road;
- What alternative informal or formal enforcement steps officers can take to deal with the property condition issues in the Christchurch Road area in the meantime ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Leng Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets:

Thank you, Councillor Cross, for raising concerns regarding the condition and vacancy of premises on the Christchurch Road parade, which I recognise are important issues for our residents and the wider streetscene.

**High Street Rental Auctions (HSRAs) – Current status and Council position**

High Street Rental Auction powers were brought into force by Government in December 2024 as a tool to bring long-term vacant properties back into use. Recent correspondence from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (June 2026) suggests that a number of Councils are using these powers and that around 60 vacant properties have been reoccupied.

HSRA powers apply only where properties:

- are within a designated high street or town centre area
- have been vacant for at least 12 months (or 366 days within 24 months)
- are suitable for main town centre uses (e.g. retail, services, food and drink)

- would deliver a local benefit if reoccupied

The Government has also announced a new £10 million funding programme to support Councils in implementing HSRA powers, including work to identify suitable properties and support refurbishment of more challenging units.

Notwithstanding this, HSRA implementation remains a complex and resource-intensive process. At present, Reading Borough Council does not have the necessary capacity across planning property and legal services to establish and run a High Street Rental Auction programme. While the additional funding is welcome, the detail on allocation and longer-term resourcing is yet to be published. Previous funding arrangements did not cover the costs of implementing the programme. In the context of current service priorities, the Council is not progressing HSRA implementation at this time.

However, officers will continue to monitor the rollout of these powers nationally, any learning from local authorities and assess whether a future targeted approach in Reading could add value, particularly if additional funding and practical guidance reduce the barriers to delivery.

### **Potential applicability to Christchurch Road units**

In principle, HSRA powers could apply to long-term vacant commercial units such as those on Christchurch Road, subject to meeting statutory criteria around vacancy and location. However, given the current position outlined above, these powers are not being actively pursued at this time for these specific properties.

### **Alternative enforcement and action**

In the meantime, the Council is actively pursuing proportionate enforcement action to address the condition of the properties.

Planning Enforcement officers have recently undertaken site visits and assessed both properties under Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, which enables the Council to require landowners to remedy conditions that adversely affect the amenity of an area.

- For **76 Christchurch Road (former NatWest)**, officers have issued a “minor works” letter requesting that the owner undertakes basic improvements to the property and site condition. The situation will be monitored and, if no progress is made, further action may be considered.
- For **56 Christchurch Road (former RedServe)**, officers have issued a “full appraisal” letter. Should there be no satisfactory response or improvement, the Council will consider progressing to a formal Section 215 notice, which can require works within a specified timeframe and may lead to prosecution or works in default if not complied with.

These steps are considered the most appropriate and proportionate interventions in the short term and can be implemented more quickly than HSRA powers.

In addition to formal enforcement, officers will continue to engage with property owners to encourage maintenance, repair and reoccupation, recognising that early intervention and cooperation can often achieve quicker improvements.