

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

13 JULY 2026

COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 1

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

Road resurfacing in Reading

In the lead up to the local elections in 2020 the then Lead Councillor for Transport, Councillor Page, announced that there would be “Reading's biggest ever investment in new road surfaces for residential streets” which included in phase one, Cumberland Road in Park Ward.

Six years later, nothing has happened yet to Cumberland Road, and it still needs resurfacing.

Can the now Lead Councillor for Transport explain the delay to residents, and assure them that it will be resurfaced this year?

Can the Lead Councillor also tell us what other roads that were announced for resurfacing have faced such delays, and why?

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

I thank Councillor Williams for his question.

Since 2020, the Council has invested over £17 million in residential roads and footways, enabling the resurfacing of more than 700 residential roads and 200 sections of principal roads. This investment has significantly improved the overall condition of Reading's highway network.

With regard to Cumberland Road, it was originally identified for a micro-asphalt treatment. However, further assessment by our contractor found that this was not an appropriate solution. The road requires more extensive reconstruction and resurfacing works, which are considerably more costly and therefore need to be prioritised alongside other schemes across the borough.

As a result, Cumberland Road has not yet been included in a resurfacing programme. Whilst it remains on the list of roads being considered for future works, I cannot give an assurance that it will be resurfaced this year, as a number of higher-priority roads currently require attention first.

Cumberland Road is not the only scheme whose proposed treatment has changed following detailed assessment. Highway maintenance programmes are reviewed annually, and priorities can change as road conditions deteriorate elsewhere, budgets are allocated, and engineering surveys identify different treatment requirements. In the meantime, the road will continue to be inspected under the Council's risk-based maintenance regime, and any defects requiring repair will be addressed as necessary.

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 2

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

Prioritising Tree Planting in Reading

Trees help fight climate change, and in the extreme heat they can provide shade, habitats for wildlife, and improve our health. We all need trees. The Council's stated policy is that it will prioritise tree planting to areas with lower canopy cover, which it identifies through the tree equity score.

The lowest tree equity score in Park Ward is in Newtown, where I live, and where the Council has planted just two new trees since 2022.

Can the Lead Councillor tell us what the challenges are to planting trees in an urban area like Newtown, and what the Council is doing to meet and overcome those challenges?

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

The Council fully recognises the vital importance of trees as outlined by Councillor Williams, and this is why an up-to-date Tree Strategy was put in place in 2021 with highly ambitious targets including increasing the Council's own planting from 200 to 300 per year and increasing the percentage of the Borough that is covered by tree canopy from 18% to 25% by 2030.

Since the Tree Strategy was adopted, the Council has made excellent progress with its own tree planting. Across Reading, the net gain in trees as a result of Council planting across the last few years was as follows:

- 2022-23: 338
- 2023-24: 317
- 2024-25: 312
- 2025-26: 304

This has included planting of 15 trees in Park ward between 2023 and 2026.

The Council's own tree planting is only part of the picture, and at the same time there have also been increases in trees within new development sites. Tree planting has also taken place elsewhere on private sites which we are not in a position to fully monitor.

However, tree planting does need to be focused in those areas where it is possible to plant as well as those identified as a priority.

The Tree Strategy, which was adopted in 2021, identifies a particular priority of ensuring all wards have at least 12% canopy cover by 2030. At the last canopy cover assessment in 2022, Park ward had 14.9% canopy cover. Therefore, whilst there is

clearly room for improvement, the adopted strategy is to prioritise other wards as well as other features such as treed corridors and green links shown in the Local Plan.

Tree planting within densely developed urban areas, such as much of Park Ward, presents a number of significant challenges. These areas often contain extensive underground utility infrastructure, including water, gas, electricity, telecommunications and drainage services, which can limit the availability of suitable planting locations. In addition, there are constraints relating to the amount of available highway space, as sufficient width must be maintained to allow the safe and convenient movement of pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles.

There are also important considerations regarding the potential impact of trees on the surrounding built environment. Inappropriately located trees can create future conflicts with buildings, boundary walls, footways and carriageways, including issues related to root growth, canopy spread and ongoing maintenance requirements. These constraints are particularly relevant in established urban areas where development is dense and available space is limited.

A key objective of the Council's Tree Strategy is to increase overall canopy cover through the planting of large-canopy tree species wherever feasible, as these provide the greatest environmental, social and climate resilience benefits. However, larger species require more soil volume, rooting space and distance from surrounding infrastructure. As a result, some locations within Park Ward may not be suitable for tree planting, particularly where physical constraints cannot be adequately mitigated.

To address these challenges, the Tree Strategy promotes the principle of planting the right tree in the right place. This involves carefully assessing each potential location to identify species that are appropriate for the site conditions and surrounding environment. The Strategy also highlights the importance of providing suitably designed tree pits, which can improve growing conditions, protect nearby infrastructure and support the long-term health and sustainability of newly planted trees. Through careful site selection, species choice and tree pit design, opportunities for increasing tree cover can be maximised while minimising potential conflicts with existing infrastructure and highway users.

The Council will continue to look for opportunities to plant on its own land across the Borough but will also continue to apply the priorities set out in the adopted Tree Strategy.

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 3

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

Clear and adequate signage for bus lanes

Last month at Policy Committee I asked the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport how many penalty charge notices had been issued for driving onto the bus gate at Green Park Station. I was astonished to hear that 6,113 PCNs had been issued in less than two years for bus gate infringements at a station that is served by one bus an hour.

This prompted me to look into the figures. In the financial year 2024-25, Reading Borough Council issued 61,835 penalty charge notices for bus lane offences, according to figures given by RBC to the Traffic Penalty Tribunal, rather more than the 964 reported for the same period by West Berkshire, or the 378 reported by Hampshire County Council. Looking at purely urban councils, Swindon issued 19,008 PCNs for bus lane infringements in 2024-25 and the City of Southampton 15,814.

Why can drivers avoid infringing bus lanes in our neighbouring towns and cities, but not in Reading? The most obvious explanation for the discrepancy is that other councils have installed better signage and road markings to alert residents and visitors to bus lanes and bus gates. While Labour-run Reading Borough Council's signage may be legally compliant, though this has been contested by at least one adjudicator at the Traffic Penalty Tribunal, it could clearly be much better.

As the Lead Councillor said at the last Policy Committee meeting, we need enforcement to keep traffic moving, and especially to enable public transport to better serve Reading residents and visitors. I agree wholeheartedly. But in order to keep traffic moving, clear and helpful signage is needed. Reading Borough Council is taking an awful lot of money from drivers, many of whom, the figures imply, did not deliberately or negligently infringe the bus lanes.

In order to treat Reading residents and visitors fairly and to keep traffic flowing, will Reading Borough Council commit to reviewing and improving signage for bus lanes and bus gates? I realise this will be a major undertaking, so perhaps the Council could start with the worst hotspots.

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

Thank you, Councillor Thompson, for your question.

While Councillor Thompson points to the volume of Penalty Charge Notices issued in Reading compared with some neighbouring authorities, this does not necessarily demonstrate that Reading's signage is less effective. Reading has one of the most heavily used bus networks in England outside London, supported by a substantial

bus-priority network and camera enforcement regime designed to protect the reliability of those services.

The Council has invested significantly in bus priority measures over many years, and that investment is delivering results. Following the award of Bus Service Improvement Plan funding, bus patronage in Reading has grown strongly and now exceeds 20 million passenger journeys annually. Reading remains one of the highest-performing transport authorities in England outside London for bus use per head of population. Effective enforcement is an important part of ensuring those investments deliver reliable journey times and attractive public transport services for residents and visitors.

The number of bus lane contraventions recorded in Reading is therefore likely to reflect a combination of our compact urban geography, the scale of our bus-priority network, the volume of traffic using those corridors and active enforcement, rather than evidence that drivers are routinely being misled by the signing of restrictions.

The signing and lining of bus lanes and bus gates is governed by national regulations, which are intended to ensure that restrictions are presented clearly and consistently to road users across the country. The Council routinely inspects and maintains its signage and road markings, and considers representations, complaints and Traffic Penalty Tribunal decisions when reviewing the operation of traffic restrictions. Where evidence identifies opportunities to further improve clarity for motorists whilst maintaining effective bus priority, those improvements will be considered as appropriate.

For those reasons, I do not consider a borough-wide review necessary at this time. However, officers will continue to monitor locations that attract higher levels of contraventions as part of the Council's ongoing network management and maintenance responsibilities and will consider any targeted improvements where evidence demonstrates they would be beneficial.

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 4

Councillor Williams to ask the Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets:

Grade II listed Cemetery Arch

After years of being left to deteriorate, the landmark Grade II listed Arch at Cemetery Junction is well overdue a full repair and renovation by the Council.

Can the Lead Member tell us what is next for the Reading Old Cemetery Arch, and what plans does the Council have to get it into community use?

REPLY by Councillor Leng (Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets):

A conservation contractor was commissioned to carry out necessary work to address the western elevation of Reading's Cemetery Arch. This was the only area known to require structural work. These planned works were carried out between January and June 2025 at a cost of £100k. It was during these works that further structural defects were uncovered.

An inspection of previously inaccessible loft areas, now accessed from the scaffold, revealed further necessary works, including brickwork inner linings, timber roof structure and lateral restraints between the western and eastern pediments at an estimated cost of £700,000.

Scaffolding has remained in place since January 2025 with Heras fencing to protect passers-by. Officers submitted a bid through the budget setting process for 2026/27 and have been successful in receiving funding.

Officers are now in the process of procuring necessary contractors to design and complete necessary works. Once the works are complete, we will be marketing the property, and we do hope to receive some positive interest from the market.

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 5

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

Cyclist Safety

Reading has recently been named in a BBC News story as the worst local authority outside London for cyclist safety. This is deeply concerning for residents who already cycle and for those who would like to cycle but do not feel safe doing so. Poor road safety also undermines the council's ambitions to encourage more active travel and reduce congestion.

Can the Lead Councillor explain why Reading is performing so poorly, what action the council is taking to improve cyclist safety, and how success will be measured over the coming years?

Notes:

News story here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4gye8l8jedo>

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

Thank you for this question and I agree that it is concerning that Reading features highly on this list for the worst local authorities outside London for cyclists' safety.

The statistics showed that in 2024 there were 277 casualties in Reading on the highway where someone was killed or seriously injured and 80 of these involved an injury to a cyclist which is 28.9%, placing Reading 10th on the list. However, in 2015 there was a total of 425 casualties in Reading with 84 involving an injury to a cyclist which is 19.8% of the total casualties. Whilst we have seen a larger reduction in overall casualties we are still seeing too many for those involving cyclists.

We would however stress that any number of casualties on the highway, for any user, is too many.

The Council is committed to reducing risks for vulnerable users such as cyclists and pedestrians on Reading's roads and actively works to improve safety of all road users.

Reading has a number of cycling routes and the Council is always looking for opportunities to connect them when funding possibilities arise. We are looking to deliver our next Active Travel England funded scheme on the Bath road – Castle Hill later this year and over the next few years, using our Local Transport Delivery Plan Funding, we will review our Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan which will identify and deliver a number of scheme that will bring improvements in safety for cyclists and pedestrians throughout Reading.

This will include considering any opportunities to deliver improvements such as parallel crossings, reviewing junctions and missing links and where the introduction

of speed reduction schemes would be appropriate, such as the recent scheme on Northcourt Avenue.

We are also meeting with the Reading Cycling Campaign to get their input on this and where they consider the most important areas are where improvements for cycle safety are needed and we will continue to get feedback through the Cycle Forum.

We hope that the delivery of future schemes will help to better integrate the existing network and provide the missing links that are currently there to make cycling safer.

Finally, the Council also funds Bikeability courses for children at schools across the borough as well as free adult cycle training courses to help give children and residents of Reading the confidence to cycle and the skills and knowledge to cycle in the safest manner possible.