

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

16 SEPTEMBER 2026

COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor White to ask the Leader of the Council:

Supporting Reading Nepalese Community following the Nepal Flood Disaster

Green Party and I am sure other councillors were deeply concerned to see the recent catastrophic flooding in Nepal, triggered by the collapse of part of a Himalayan glacier.

The disaster caused widespread devastation, with more than 1,200 people killed, thousands more missing, and many families losing their homes and livelihoods.

Reading is home to a large and valued Nepalese community, many of whom will have family and friends directly affected.

Could the relevant Lead Councillor outline what support Reading Borough Council is providing, or could provide, to Reading's Nepalese community at this difficult time?

REPLY by Councillor Terry (Lead Councillor of the Council)

Along with everyone else, I was horrified by the distressing pictures of the Nepal-Tibet flash floods and deeply saddened by the awful loss of life.

My heart goes out to all those who have lost loved ones or who have been injured in the disaster and to all the families who have been impacted by this catastrophic event.

We have a significant Nepalese community here in Reading, and I liaised with Cllr Gurung to support with the Greater Reading Nepali Community Association to arrange a Vigil in the town centre on Monday 31 August shortly after the disaster.

In addition to a time of reflection, it provided an opportunity to raise awareness and bring the community together. It was also to support the Association in its fundraising to send support directly from the wider Reading area and I understand that so far £13,000 has been raised. The Director of another Local charity, Sadka, was also present and whose volunteers were already helping the flood victims on site.

I am pleased that the Prime Minister pledged an initial £5m government support and sent a Rapid Deployment Team to support those affected by devastating flooding.

Reading is a town with a big heart and our thoughts are with all those who have been affected by these devastating floods.

I would take this opportunity to again encourage those who want to help and support to donate to charities who are supporting victims like the Red Cross and Oxfam.

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 2

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety:

Reducing Waste at Reading Festival

Reading Festival is one of the UK's biggest and best-known music festivals and brings significant benefits to the town. It is an event that Green Party councillors want people to enjoy.

However, every year, large numbers of tents, sleeping bags, chairs and other equipment are left behind, along with substantial amounts of waste.

We want to see Reading Festival become a leader in reducing waste, increasing reuse and recycling, and minimising its environmental impact.

Could the relevant Lead Councillor outline what work Reading Borough Council is undertaking with Festival Republic and other partners to reduce the waste left behind after the festival?

What measurable progress has been made each year over the last three years?

What targets have been set for further reducing waste and increasing reuse and recycling, and is data published so residents can track progress year on year?

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

Reading Festival is a huge asset to our town, not just because it generates an estimated £30m for the wider Reading Economy but also because it is a flagship cultural event and a rite of passage for most Reading residents.

This Labour run council has been working with the organisers year after year to reduce the festivals environmental impact without reducing the fun of the festival. That is why we have strict guidelines in our Event Management Plan, which the licence holder is required to comply with.

Additional steps taken at this year's festival included improved provision of recycling points and free recycling and general waste bags in the campsites, a volunteer Green Team encouraging people to take their belongings home, and a Recycle to Win campaign which attracted more than 1,000 participants. There was also a new campsite repair facility, run with local Repair Café volunteers, which repaired 264 items over the festival weekend.

I would also like to put on record our thanks to the 30 local litter-picking volunteers who collected nearly 1.5 tonnes of waste and recycling.

Ultimately, the aim is not simply to clear the site after the festival, but to reduce the amount of material left behind in the first place, and to maximise what can be reused, repaired, donated or recycled.

In terms of targets, the key commitments are: zero waste to landfill, maintaining a material recovery rate above 50%, and increasing opportunities for reuse, repair and donation, alongside encouraging festival-goers to take their equipment home.

The Council is committed to continue to engage with Festival Republic on the effectiveness of its waste-reduction, reuse and recovery arrangements and a fuller update will be brought to HNL in November. We will continue to press on the commitments include in our licensing of the festival: zero waste to landfill, maintaining a material recovery rate above 50%, and increasing opportunities for reuse, repair and donation, alongside encouraging festival-goers to take their equipment home.

-----To be sent in writing-----

There has been significant progress in diverting festival waste from landfill. Under the Live Nation Green Nation Charter, the target is for all events to be zero waste to landfill. Reading Festival has achieved this since 2019. It has also already exceeded the Charter's target of achieving a 50% (or higher) material recovery rate by 2030.

This has been met since 2019, and the proportion of waste diverted through recycling and composting has steadily increased from 69% in 2021 to 87% in 2025:

For 2026, Festival Republic has continued to focus on waste reduction and reuse. Measures included improved provision of recycling points and free recycling and general waste bags in the campsites, a volunteer Green Team encouraging people to take their belongings home, and a Recycle to Win campaign which attracted more than 1,000 participants.

There was also a new campsite repair facility, run with local Repair Café volunteers, which repaired 264 items over the festival weekend. Around 30 local litter-picking volunteers collected nearly 1.5 tonnes of waste and recycling.

Importantly, this year has also seen a stronger focus on reuse. Around 150 people took part in the post-festival salvage operation. The current inventory, which is still being compiled, includes approximately 1,845 tents, 600 chairs, 2,344 sleeping bags and 897 air mattresses and roll mats, as well as around 750 kilograms of non-perishable food and drink.

Unwanted camping equipment, food and toiletries were also collected through donation points, while surplus food was collected in partnership with Oxford Food Hub.

Festival Republic has also introduced a new Campsite Clearance Commitment, with the aim of ensuring that the festival campsites are cleared and returned to their natural state within 14 days of the festival.

You may also be interested to learn that Reading Festival has played an important role in developing and testing the Green Events Code of Practice. Festival Republic worked with Reading Borough Council during the initial 12-month national trial in 2024 and has continued to support us as we work to make events across the town greener and more sustainable.

Reading Economic and Destination Agency (REDA) estimates, based on historical data adjusted for inflation that the festival generates around £30m for the Reading Economy, but also the longer-term value of having a positive, globally recognised association with the town is just as important. (Aug 2026)

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 3

Councillor White to ask the Leader of the Council:

Will Reading Council show solidarity with the people of Palestine?

Green Party councillors are deeply concerned by what the UN Commission of Inquiry and many international organisations and legal experts have described as Israel's genocide of Palestinians in Gaza.

Since the ceasefire announced in October 2025, more than 1,300 Palestinians have been killed in subsequent Israeli military operations, while the humanitarian situation remains catastrophic.

Last year, Sheffield City Council chose to fly the Palestinian flag above its Town Hall on the UN International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People as a gesture of solidarity with civilians affected by the conflict.

Would the Labour Leader of the Council consider Reading Borough Council taking a similar step by flying the Palestinian flag on an appropriate occasion, as a symbol of solidarity with the Palestinian people and Reading's Palestinian community?

REPLY by Councillor Terry (Leader of the Council):

The Council follows the Department for Culture, Media and Sport guidelines with regards to flag flying from Government buildings.

The government issues guidance regarding flying the Union Flag on all UK government buildings throughout the year as well as other national and local flags.

In England, the flying of flags is treated as advertisements for the purposes of the planning regime to ensure the flags do not impact on public safety or amenity. Some flags require formal Advertisement Consent from the local planning authority, whereas others like the Union Flag do not. The detailed controls over flag flying and the regulations for flag flying are set out in this document.

We are in the process of updating our own policy which will give us some future flexibility on the existing government guidelines.

For information - [Union Flag flying guidance for UK government buildings - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/672222/Union_Flag_flying_guidance_for_UK_government_buildings.pdf)

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 4

Councillor Williams to ask the Lead Councillor for Leisure and Culture:

Council failing to preserve Reading's Heritage and History

Reading Old Cemetery has been neglected through lack of care and poor maintenance of its historic listed buildings and its monuments. Historic England are considering placing it on their 'at risk' register.

All the Bs of Reading are in the Cemetery. The Suttons, the Collier and Wheeler family famous for bricks, and Simonds famous for beer. Edith Mary Sutton is there, the first woman to become a councillor in England, and the first female mayor of Reading. There is an international footballer, Charles Wollaston, along with the first ever registrar of Reading University, the Rev Francis Henry Wright, and so many of our fallen heroes from across the wars. Reading Old Cemetery provides a space where important conversations can take place with care and consideration about our colonial past. Young Willie Wimmera and Lucy May Owindia, an 8 year old First Nations girl, find their rest there, an awful long way from home.

Within the cemetery are victims of poverty and of the workhouse in unmarked graves, as well as those more fortunate, like Jane Austen's nephew, Herbert Grey Austen, who had his villa in Whitley. Sadly, that history and heritage is being eroded, as the Council lays down any monuments it deems unsafe, and has no plans in place for the preservation of the graves, the monuments, or the stories they tell about Reading's past.

Will the Lead Member pledge to put in place a Historical Management Plan to sit alongside the existing Environmental Management Plan for the cemetery, just like Tower Hamlets and many others do, to ensure this history is preserved as best it can be for future generations?

REPLY by Councillor Lanzoni (Lead Councillor for Leisure and Culture):

Thank you for your question. I agree that Reading Old Cemetery is an important part of Reading's heritage. It contains the graves of many individuals who contributed to the Borough's history and provides a valuable record of Reading's social, civic and cultural development.

The Council already manages the cemetery through its Ecological Management Plan, which seeks to balance biodiversity, public access, heritage interest and the practical realities of managing a large historic cemetery within the resources available.

The Council also has a legal duty to ensure memorials are safe for visitors and staff. Memorials are inspected on a rolling five-year cycle and, inevitably, some are found to have deteriorated to the point where they present a risk to public safety. Where this occurs, action must be taken to make them safe, which can include laying memorials flat. Whilst I understand concerns about the impact this can have on the

appearance of the cemetery and the historic landscape, public safety must remain our first priority.

I recognise the intention behind the suggestion of a dedicated Historical Management Plan and the desire to preserve and promote the many stories represented within the cemetery. However, the development of a standalone plan would require detailed surveys, specialist heritage assessments and additional resources, all of which would need to be carefully considered alongside the Council's wider priorities.

More broadly, I believe there is value in considering the future role of Reading Old Cemetery as a whole. The cemetery today serves a number of purposes: it is a place of remembrance, a historic landscape, an important ecological asset and a public open space. Balancing these different functions is not always straightforward.

For these reasons, rather than committing to a separate Historical Management Plan at this stage, I believe it is more appropriate that future reviews of the cemetery's management arrangements continue to consider how best to balance heritage, biodiversity, public safety, accessibility and community use.

Our objective should be to ensure that Reading Old Cemetery remains a respectful, safe and sustainable place of remembrance, with its rich history recognised and appreciated by future generations.

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 5

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

Data Centres

The government has designated data centres as Critical National Infrastructure and introduced a process that allows some large data centre proposals to be decided nationally.

A recent public petition about the proposed large-scale data centre at Thames Valley Business Park, close to Reading boundary, has highlighted a number of concerns from local people. These include the huge demand on energy and other infrastructure, environmental and climate implications, the effect on neighbouring communities and how much say local people and councils have over developments of this scale.

What is Reading Borough Council's position on the government's approach to data centres, particularly where decisions may be taken nationally rather than locally? And where a development outside the borough could have a major impact on Reading, how will the Council make sure the views and interests of Reading residents are represented?"

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

Data centres were designated as Critical National Infrastructure in 2024. This is not a planning designation but is rather a designation that ensures greater government support in recovering from and anticipating critical incidents.

In January 2026, data centres were added to the list of business or commercial projects that could be regarded as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) and potentially subject to the Development Consent Order (DCO) route under which applications can be made directly to the Secretary of State rather than the local planning authority. There is no specific scale threshold for what would make a data centre 'nationally significant' but a National Policy Statement for Data Centres is expected that should give more detail.

The Council has a number of significant concerns around large-scale development of data centres in the local area. These include:

- The significant greenhouse gas that would put meeting local net zero ambitions in jeopardy;
- There are additional pollution impacts where for reasons of supply limitations, fossil fuel powered systems are used.
- The high levels of demand on energy and water supply and the implications that this could have to these supply networks which could compromise the ability to provide utilities to the planned level of development in the Local Plan;
- Local environmental impacts including local heat and noise impacts from the associated air cooling apparatus; and

- The limited employment benefits of a data centre when compared to a more traditional warehouse.

However, the Council also understands that careful use of AI can offer significant benefits to individuals and organisations, including the Council, and the increasing take-up of AI necessitates an increasing need for data centres. There are also potential opportunities to utilise heat generated by these facilities within local heat networks.

In general terms, the Council believes that local planning authorities are best placed to determine development within their own areas, which ensures that communities have the ability to input into the process and that there is democratic oversight of decisions. The Council therefore has concerns about these decisions being taken out of local hands, particularly since there is as yet no National Policy Statement and nor is there a wider national strategy around the roll-out of data centres that ensures that they are appropriately located where they can be adequately serviced by utilities and where the environmental impacts can be satisfactorily mitigated. Whilst the nationally-significant infrastructure project route is required for key infrastructure that can clearly demonstrate a specific national significance and is required to be delivered in a specific location, in our view general expansion of data centre capacity falls short of meeting that threshold and should be determined at local level.

It should however be noted that data centres may not always require planning permission or development consent if they make use of existing premises that already fall within the B8 (storage and distribution) use class. There are already several data centres in Reading that did not require planning permission.

The proposed data centre at Thames Valley Park within Wokingham Borough is at pre-application stage, and at this stage no planning application has been made and the Council has not been formally consulted. The Council is generally consulted on significant planning applications close to its boundary by the respective local planning authority. For major developments (over 10 dwellings or 1,000 sq m of additional floorspace) a report is generally taken to Planning Applications Committee to agree a response. Whilst it would not be the role of the Council to undertake its own consultation on developments outside its boundary, a decision at Committee ensures the input of elected members.

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 6

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

Flood Ready Preparations

At the end of August Reading Borough Council put out on its news channels a timely warning to residents to check they are “flood ready” ahead of a change in the weather, when heavy rains and storms will have the potential to cause both river flooding and flash flooding.

Would the Council undertake to provide some more detailed advice and to make sure that this advice reaches all residents, especially those in the areas most likely to flood? More information on sandbags and emergency procedures is needed. Many residents think that the Council will provide the sandbags when a flood is in prospect, so do not lay in stocks, while others do not have the storage space for traditional sandbags or the physical ability to handle them. Tips would be useful on “sandless sandbags” and other options that are now available, so it would be helpful if the Council could provide that. Also, what plans are in place to help vulnerable residents who may have no one to help them with flood preparations or evacuation procedures?

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

I would like to thank Cllr Thompson for her timely question following the Council's press release asking residents to prepare for changing weather resulting from climate change, also, the effects of the growing **Super El Niño** that is now regularly broadcast on national television news channels, and whose effects we are yet to experience.

As Cllr Thompson has stated, the Council has a Sandbag Policy and we do not provide sandbags to private residences, hence the call for residents to prepare.

Cllr Thompson is also correct, there are lighter, easy to store water activated sandless sandbags available on the market, together with a wide range of other mitigation measures both temporary and permanent.. Like all sandbag options they may provide temporary and limited protection where flooding occurs, but residents need to be aware that once the ground water levels rise to match the surface water then properties may flood from underground upwards, including through internal floors. Water can also ingress through air bricks which are often the lowest point of access in a home. The difference with water activated sandless sandbags is that they must be put out before the flood arrives so that they can slowly absorb water otherwise they will simply float away. We do have a sample of these sandless sandbags and would be happy to meet community groups and residents to discuss how they can better prepare for flooding and other incidents. Air brick covers are also an easy-to-install and relatively less expensive measure which can be particularly effective for frequent low-depth flooding.

As mentioned in the Council's earlier press statement - people who live in areas that may flood should install more robust measures in order that they can be deployed ahead of flooding conditions, including flood guards. The National Flood Forum are a

charity who can provide advice on these measures, and their Blue Book is a directory of suppliers. They have a comprehensive website, and a telephone helpline for those who do not have digital access.

I am not aware of any proactive work that we do to provide protection for vulnerable residents, albeit that we do have a list of vulnerable residents in Adult Services that we interact with during various emergency situations, including flooding. As part of our multi-agency planning through the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum we do have humanitarian plans in place which provide for evacuation, shelter, and sharing of information on vulnerable residents during food incidents.

I can report that I met residents in Southcote following the January 2023 flood event with Matt Rhodda MP, where the Environment Agency, Thames Water, Network Rail and RBC Officers presented their findings to the flood investigation and offered residents advice on what to do should a flood event affect their properties in future.

The Council's Emergency Planning web page can be found on our website under 'Community Safety / Emergencies / Flooding' and it has valuable advice and links to various web pages including the Government & Environment Agency on how to prepare for flooding and what to do if being flooded.

The Council will of course re-issue Press Releases & Social Media warnings to Reading residents in advance of known weather events and ask that residents be as prepared as they can be.