

AGENDA ITEM 5

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

1. Tony Warrell to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

Crossing Points

Given the postponement of this long needed MRT link is it time for a change of emphasis on the Councils most favoured scheme?

The population of Reading is not helped by suppressing their need to travel freely and safely when they wish to? I therefore recommend that private enterprise be invited to help to solve the problem and give the greater Reading residents an immeasurably better environment with cleaner air?

Parking in Reading will continue to increase if all businesses are to thrive regardless of the bus but the Council may not admit it.

The cost of parking in central Reading will not be improved by the Council limiting the road space available to all other users in the Thames Valley, who unfortunately need to traverse the roads of transfixing traffic daily. It affects the hospital, schools, retailers, buses and services greatly.

May I therefore recommend an alternative mode of travel to lighten the load, an additional planning application introducing a new way to access the Reading centre between Suttons Industrial Estate and Napier Road? Either or; from Caversham to Reading prison too?

Construction work began on the confusingly named "Luton DART" last May. "DART" stands for Direct Air-Rail Transit the 2.1 km route will run from the new **Bartlett Square development** adjacent to the existing rail station to the **Luton Airport Terminal** with a journey time which will be "less than four minutes".

The transport link will run 24 hours a day and will be a fully automated double shuttle system driven by cable. It will be supplied by **Doppelmayr Cable Car**, part of the Austro-Swiss Group.

Cable Car already has a similar air-rail link operating at Birmingham International Airport. The civil engineering is being carried out by a joint venture firm, **Volker Fitzpatrick Kier**.

Could the Council provide an estimated cost benefit on such a scheme at the time of an application?

**REPLY** by Councillor Page Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

I thank Mr Warrell for his question. He needs correcting on many points.

Mr Warrell should reflect on the fact that over the next 20 years there will be substantial growth in housing and employment not only within Reading but also in the Greater Reading, Wokingham, West Berkshire and Bracknell areas.

We need to plan ahead to ensure that people travel around in ways that do not increase congestion, do not pollute our air and worsen the health of generations to come, and are

offered alternative and sustainable modes of transport that are more attractive than sitting in traffic jams.

The Council's transport strategy aims to provide choices for residents and visitors travelling to, from and within Reading. Significant progress has been made in delivering our strategy, with a range of schemes currently being implemented including imminent completion of the Cow Lane highway works, works underway on the new Green Park Station, plans now being developed to upgrade Reading West Station, delivery of the National Cycle Network Route 422 and a series of local area parking and traffic management initiatives.

These schemes will provide additional capacity and enhanced facilities on the transport network, rather than limiting road space. For instance the South Reading MRT provides additional capacity for public transport on the A33 whilst maintaining the existing capacity for general traffic. When completed it will also provide a dedicated route that could be converted to light rail, driverless buses or whatever technological developments emerge to offer fast and rapid public transport into and out of the centre of Reading. With the increasing likelihood of a new town at Grazeley such future proofing is essential to the planning of transport infrastructure and the need to offer attractive alternatives to the car.

It is therefore total nonsense to suggest that any of our policies seek to 'suppress' the need to travel.

The recent East Reading scheme proposed additional capacity to provide attractive choices for sustainable transport, including walking and cycling, and was developed in response to local congestion and air quality issues.

As part of the early feasibility work for the East Reading scheme, consideration was given to a cable car or monorail/pod scheme similar to the system referenced in Luton. However the analysis concluded that these options would only provide relatively limited benefits between the town centre and the new 277 space Park & Ride site at Thames Valley Park. This was compared to other options intended to provide benefits over a much wider area of future housing and employment growth extending to Wokingham, Bracknell, Twyford and Heathrow Airport.

Mr Warrell forgets the wider growth pressures in housing and employment and the need for us and our neighbouring authorities to plan and deliver transport infrastructure that gives priority to reducing congestion, improving air quality and improving health outcomes. That means planning for attractive sustainable transport alternatives to the private car, at a time when rapid technological change offers huge potential to deliver travel in ways that protects rather than destroys our local environment.

It should be noted that the Luton Airport DART scheme is in no way comparable to the former East Reading scheme which had an estimated cost of £24m - in comparison to the £225m cost of the Luton DART scheme.

The Council withdrew the planning application for the East Reading MRT scheme in January following the decision of Wokingham Borough Council's Planning Committee last December to refuse planning permission for a second time.

Nevertheless, the issues relating to congestion and air quality in East Reading remain and, in the absence of any action, they are forecast to increase with the significant levels of planned development in Reading and the wider area, particularly within Wokingham borough.

Mr Warrell promotes the idea of a ‘*new way to access the Reading centre between Suttons Industrial Estate and Napier Road*’. This is certainly not new and would involve the very crossing of the Kennet which has proved so controversial over recent months.

His suggestion of a new bridge crossing the Thames within Reading Borough between Caversham and Reading Prison is certainly one I have not yet encountered. I’m not sure what advantages he believes such a bridge would deliver, as it would not offer the relief to congestion in Caversham and central Reading that would be achieved by the long-advocated crossing to the east of Reading.

As a Council we remain committed to addressing the issues of congestion and air quality, alongside wider benefits that investment in sustainable transport will deliver in meeting our climate change objectives, as well as improving local health and wellbeing.

We are therefore planning to undertake a wide ranging public engagement exercise in the summer, with the aim of shaping our new Local Transport Plan which is intended to set the strategy for transport in Reading to 2036.

We will encourage as many residents, businesses and stakeholders as possible to provide their views as part of this consultation.

## 2. Micky Leng to ask the Lead Councillor for Housing: Council Houses Built in Reading

Building council houses is vital to solving the national housing crisis that is affecting families and young people. Can the Lead Councillor for Housing please update me as to the number of council houses built in Reading in the last three years ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Ennis Lead Councillor for Housing.

It is clear that there is a national housing crisis since 2010 where families are stuck in high rented properties of variable standards and young professional people having no opportunities to obtain mortgages or reside in quality affordable rented properties.

The Tory led coalition deliberately obstructed the building of council houses by use of increased bureaucracy and red tape in an attempt to sell off council homes and ensure no more affordable council houses were built.

Despite the numerous obstacles and red tape put in place by the Conservative administration Reading Borough Council has been delivering new build council homes since 2014. Since that date we have delivered a total of 101 new homes. This is a combination of the following:

- An Extra Care Housing scheme for older people providing 40 flats and communal facilities
- 12 flats providing specialist accommodation for disabled adults.
- 28 two-bedroom flats - built off site using a modular construction system providing temporary accommodation for families in housing need
- 21 general needs properties which includes 8 x 4 bed homes at Conwy Close (part of a 57 homes scheme still in development)

In addition, the Council has purchased 25 properties to be used as general needs permanent social housing.

This brings the total new council homes to 126 which have all been let to tenants.

This Labour council is extremely proud to have achieved the building of council homes for the first time in decades and we are in a minority of councils that are building council houses. We firmly believe that Reading Borough Council is the best landlord in Reading and the new build in Conwy Close is a testament to the high quality of council housing we are providing.

Labour led Reading Borough Council see that building council houses are an important objective to finding a solution in the national housing crisis and we call on all parties represented in this council and the present Conservative administration to support us in building more council homes, thus giving families, young people and the residents of Reading as a whole a chance to live in high quality and affordable accommodation.

**3. Micky Leng to ask the Lead Councillor for Housing:  
Council House Building**

Given the ongoing budget pressures that Reading is suffering from can the Lead Councillor for Housing please outline what plans there are currently for further council house building in Reading ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Ennis Lead Councillor for Housing.

The previous question highlighted that 21 new units of general needs Council homes have been completed and let at Conwy Close. This scheme is being delivered with a phased handover between now and the end of July. Once finished this will deliver another 26 units (a total of 57).

In addition, in 2017 the Council approved phase two of our Local Authority New Build housing programme which is expected to deliver a further 85 homes over a number of smaller sites - exact numbers may vary as the sites go through the Planning process. These sites are at different stages of development and will complete over the next 3 years.

In parallel to progressing phases one and two of the programme, the Council has been assessing the opportunities and capacity on Council owned land to bring forward additional affordable housing development. The outcome is that three sites have been identified that have the potential to deliver a total of 182 new homes which, if approved, will comprise phase 3 of our programme. In order to progress these developments, the Council has submitted a bid to Homes England for grant as part of their Affordable Housing programme, the decision has not yet been received. If successful it is hoped that these homes will be completed in 2022/23.

Should all three phases be completed as hoped, this will result in over 400 new council owned homes in Reading, and we will continue to review all land and funding opportunities to enable the programme to grow further.

It is important to remember that the building of high quality council homes for the people of Reading are paid through the rents of tenants like yourself Mr Leng within the Housing Revenue Account and this Labour run administration would like to thank you and the tenants for contributing to the housing solution in Reading and being so supportive in the building of council houses. We on this side are extremely ambitious in our programme to build more high

quality, affordable council houses despite being subject to austerity measures brought about by this Conservative administration.

**4. Richard Stainthorp to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation: William Marshal**

As I am sure the Lead Councillor is aware 2019 is the 800th anniversary of William Marshal dying in Caversham. William was eulogized by Stephen Langton as 'the best knight that ever lived', he served five English kings and was Lord Protector and regent of the kingdom during the reign of Henry III. As is the case for many of us Caversham was his favourite place. Can the Lead Councillor tell me what plans there are to commemorate the anniversary of this great man's death ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Hacker Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation.

Thank you for your question Mr Stainthorp and I am indeed aware of the anniversary of the remarkable William Marshal and the strong connection he had to our Borough. Unsurprisingly, we do indeed have plans to commemorate this particularly significant anniversary of his death.

Reading Museum is leading on work with local partners to mark this historic anniversary with two events on Saturday 11 May (which also coincides with the Forbury Fiesta).

The Friends of Caversham Court Gardens will have a 'pop-up' William Marshal exhibition at the Abbey Gateway (10am -3pm), which will also provide another opportunity to visit the newly restored medieval Gateway. While at the Museum there will be an afternoon talk (3pm - 4pm, booking essential via the Museum) on William Marshal by Dr Elizabeth Matthew, University of Reading. This fascinating talk is part of the popular continuing series of public lectures relating to the Abbey Quarter organised by the Museum and the Reading Abbey Revealed project.

During May half term on Tuesday 28 May the Museum is running 'The Greatest Knight!' family workshops. Children will be inspired by the greatest knight to decorate their own signature helmet and shield (1-hour sessions starting at 10am, 11.15am, 1pm & 2.15pm, booking via the museum).

You may also be interested to learn that after Marshal died at Caversham his body lay in state at the Abbey until it was transported for burial at the Temple church in London. The Abbey is of course famous as the burial place of King Henry I, but other members of the Anglo-Norman/Angevin family were also buried at this favoured royal abbey. The Reading Abbey Revealed project and the University of Reading are exploring this subject with a one-day conference 'Royal Death and Burial - Reading Abbey in Context' on Saturday 6 April (9am - 5pm, booking essential). Internationally renowned experts will set Reading Abbey in its context as one of the great royal mausoleums of medieval Europe.

**5. Richard Stainthorp to ask the Lead Councillor for Education: Adolescent Mental Health**

With adolescent mental health becoming a wider issue in society, can the Lead Councillor update me on what measures are in place to help our young people when they need it ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Pearce Lead Councillor for Education.

Reading has a comprehensive offer of mental health services for children and young people. The Schools Link Mental Health project is in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year, and has received local and national recognition. It provides training on mental health (e.g. self-harm, depression, anxiety), alongside support to school staff to identify concerns and use evidence based interventions. The Educational Psychologists and Primary Mental Health Workers offer direct mental health assessments and therapeutic interventions in school.

Following the success of the Schools Link Mental Health Project, Reading has recently become a government trail blazer for mental health. This means Reading will receive £400,000 to set up a multi-disciplinary Mental Health Support Team; this will be live from September 2019 and will provide additional direct interventions and systemic support.

Children and young people can directly access support through the Primary Mental Health Workers, through a referral via the Children's Single Point of Access. They can access Educational Psychologists in school via the Special Educational Needs Coordinator.

Reading schools are encouraged to attend the free training on the Therapeutic Thinking approach, which is central to the Education Strategy. This offers a model to support the development of an ethos of valuing equity and neurodiversity; it supports schools in developing therapeutic and nurturing environments, whilst giving them tools to apply to manage behaviour. Other authorities have seen a 90% drop in exclusion rates from using this approach.

A fuller report will be submitted to the meeting of the Adult, Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee in July 2019.

**6. Mark Lawrence to ask the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities:  
LGBT History Month**

Would the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities please outline how the Council has supported LGBT history month in February? In addition to the LGBT community is the Lead Councillor aware of Reading Borough Council supporting any other minority groups ?

**REPLY** by Councillor James Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities.

The Council has supported this year's LGBT history month through a range of events and activities. During the month of February we flew the Pride Flag from the Civic Offices to highlight the month. We also hosted Support U's Panel Discussion 'Is the LGBT+ Community Inclusive?' in the Mayor's Parlour. The Mayor of Reading, Cllr Edwards sat on the panel and spoke at the event and myself as the lead for equalities.

Throughout the month of February we also hosted the History Portal exhibition; 'Out of the Shadows - Historical LGBT+ figures in European Royalty' in the Civic Offices. The exhibition was specially curated and featured historical LGBT+ figures and events in recognition of LGBT cultural history and its impact on society.

Throughout the year the Council works closely with a wide range of minority groups by supporting and promoting a vast programme of community events and activities. Highlights include Reading Pride, Reading Community Carnival and the annual Black History Month programme which takes place every October.

The Council supports minority groups by commissioning services through the Narrowing the Gap commissioning framework which provides funding opportunities to support outcomes related to tackling poverty, promoting wellbeing, and supporting thriving communities. Through this, the Council provides funding to the voluntary sector to provide practical support to Refugees and Asylum seekers, employability support, in particular, English language acquisition, for people with complex or longer term support needs which affect their ability to gain employment. It supports an Equalities network and Hate crime forum to bring together all minority groups to promote respect between groups and across the wider community.

The framework provides funding for information and advice services for disabled residents; self-advocacy and independent living skills for adults with a learning disability and specialist peer support for disabled or frail elderly people with specific long term conditions or language/cultural needs.

It is a credit to our values that having lost £58 million of a £60 million block grant from central government, we are still flying the flag for a fair and equal society. Those are our values as a Labour led council and we will keep fighting for LGBT people, for their visibility and safety. We will keep facilitating events such as Reading Carnival and Black History Month and challenging racism wherever it appears. We have maintained services for disabled people in the face of savage cuts and we are committed to working with projects such as the Rose Centre which develops community leaders - women challenging female genital mutilation. We are Reading and we not only value, but, invest in the diversity of our community.

#### 7. Glenn Dennis to ask the Leader of the Council Local Government Funding

Is the Council any clearer about the Government's plans to fund local government from 2020 ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Lovelock Leader of the Council.

Section 8 of the Council's Budget report which was agreed by Council on the 26th February 2019 set out in some detail the uncertainty local government is facing in terms of its funding from April 2020.

In the intervening month the only update I have to report is that on the 13<sup>th</sup> March the Chancellor in his Spring Statement confirmed the government will hold a spending review in 2019 which will conclude in the autumn to coincide with the budget. He further stated that on the basis an EU exit deal is agreed, this will set departmental budgets and three year budgets for resource spending.

I am afraid we are no clearer as yet on the implications or timelines of the Fair Funding Review or Rollout of 75% Retained Business Rates.

It seems likely to me that the government will need a formula that redistributes national income from business rates between the more economically buoyant areas like Reading and those towns and cities who are struggling.

Also, given the chaos that the BREXIT uncertainties are causing, it is unwise to assume anything.

If there is no clear advice on what will happen until the Autumn it will give councils very little time to prepare budgets for 2020/21. As with the BREXIT negotiations it is no way for this

country to be run. Dealing with austerity has been bad enough, but until now at least we had the certainty that government grant was reducing by £58million, unwelcome though that was. To expect us to plan with no certainty about future funding demonstrates just how incompetent this government and it is time they resigned and allowed a general election to make way for a government which understands how vital local public services are.

#### 8. Glenn Dennis to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport Public Health Funding

The Conservative Government disgracefully and cowardly snuck out an announcement of further cuts to Public Health funding as parliament broke up for the Christmas holidays. Can the Lead Councillor please explain what kind of impact this will have on services and health here in Reading and how is the Council responding ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Hoskin Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport.

Thank you for your question Mr Dennis. The decision of recent Conservative governments to target Public Health funding for swinging cuts has been termed by a range of independent experts as “the falsest of false economies”. There has been much rhetoric about the importance of preventing ill-health and Theresa May famously tried to pretend austerity was coming to an end. Despite this the cuts to public health funding continues apace. The respected independent Health Foundation has calculated that an additional £3.2 billion pounds a year is required to reverse the impact of government cuts to public health spending and ensure that it is re-allocated according to need.

The urgent need for a reversal of these cuts is most clearly seen in that, for the 1st time in over 100 years, life expectancy improvements are stalling and starting to go into reverse and health inequalities between rich and poor are widening. There are many reasons to despair at the record of the Conservatives in government but for this health disaster alone they deserve to be condemned. British citizens are literally dying early as a result of endless austerity.

The reduction in Reading’s public health funding in cash terms between 2014-15 and 2019-20 is £1.6m. The Health Foundation has estimated that the core public health grant has fallen a quarter per person since 2014-15. Such reductions constrain the ability of local authorities to deliver vital public health programmes such as obesity, drug and alcohol and children’s services, and further reductions risk undermining the way in which public health plays a role in influencing wider services that affect people’s health, including housing and transport. It also influences the priority of prevention which is the focus of the NHS long-term plan.

The council had anticipated that there would be a further reduction in the public health grant in 2019/20 (in line with the 2.5% reduction between 2017/18 and 2018/19) and had planned accordingly. To ensure that we can deliver services with the reduced funding envelope we have reviewed or retendered all our major contracts to ensure they are operating in a way that delivers the best value for money whilst ensuring an efficient and high quality service for the residents of Reading.

The grant funding in Reading is used to deliver a wide range of services including public health nursing services (health visitors and school nurses) sexual health services, stop smoking service provision and drug and alcohol treatment services. A public consultation was undertaken last year in order to understand what the people of Reading felt was important with regard to the way in which services are provided. Services are being designed to deliver efficiencies and use more web-based approaches and target those most in need. Public Health services are being offered differently and in conjunction with the Adult Social Care Front Door rather than in isolation.



Whilst we are doing our best to get most value out of much reduced budgets what is really needed is a drastic change of policy from government so we're able to invest more in the health and well-being of residents, families and communities of Reading. If the Conservative government are unable to see the urgent need for a change of policy then we need an urgent change of government instead.

**9. Peter Burt to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport  
Reading Leisure Centres**

To follow up my question from the last meeting, please can the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing, and Sport provide me with a list of the key user groups which the Council has consulted over future requirements for Reading's leisure centres, and the dates on which feedback was received from these groups ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Hoskin Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport.

The following clubs and organisations were consulted during the development of the Councils Indoor sports facilities needs assessment between April and December 2015. This consultation was undertaken via a mixture of, meetings, site visits, emails, telephone conversations and/ or web questionnaires by the Sports Consultancy on behalf of the Council.

Sport England  
Badminton England  
Basketball England  
Volleyball England  
England Netball  
England Squash and Racketball  
English Indoor Bowling Association  
Boccia England  
The FA  
England Handball  
English Table Tennis  
British Wheelchair Basketball Association  
Great Britain Wheelchair Rugby  
British Gymnastics  
Reading Central Swimming Pool  
Meadway Sports Centre  
Greenwich Leisure Centre  
Arthur Hill Pool and Fitness Studio  
Palmer Park Sports Stadium  
Academy Sport  
University of Reading Sports Park  
YMCA  
West Berkshire - Cotswold Sports Centre  
Wokingham - Woodford Park Leisure Centre  
Kendrick Girls' Grammer School  
Morgan Sports Centre  
Prospect College  
Reading School  
The Abbey School  
Blessed Hugh Faringdon Catholic School

Highdown Sports Centre Cameron Hyde  
John Madejski Academy  
Reading Blue Coat School  
Little Heath School  
West Berkshire District Council  
Wokingham Borough Council  
South Oxfordshire  
Thames Valley Pro Taekwon-Do & Korean Kickboxing  
Underwater Hockey  
Stingray Henley Swimming Club  
JuventusUK  
Reading Rowing Club  
Reading Octopush Club  
Rivermead Indoor Bowling Club  
Cavershamt Trents FC  
Great Mistakes  
Manners/Stow  
Reading Lions Handball Club  
Tumble Tots  
Reading Judo Club  
Susan Pheby School of Dance  
Rotherfield F C  
East Reading Badminton Club  
Sport in Mind charity  
Rivermead badminton club  
Dynamo Deckchairs FC  
Direct Wines Badminton Club  
AFC Palmer  
Albatross Diving Club  
Reading Handball Club  
Wokingham BME Forum Healthy Life Style  
Mortimer Netball Club  
School of the Sword  
Reading Rascals Junior Triathlon Club  
Orchard Badminton Club  
Sonning and Charvil Junior Cricket Club  
Sonning CC  
Reading Hockey Club  
Phoenix College  
Eaves Sports (badminton)  
Gavin Sheppard Football Coaching  
Reading Fencing Club  
Robert Symons  
Tilehurst Swimming Club  
Madstad Badders  
Reading Kendo Club  
Henley Swimming Club  
Turtle Tots West Berks, Reading & North Hants  
Reading and Country Senior and Junior clubs

Cotswold Badminton  
Krav Maga Reading  
Defence lab Reading

Sepura Badminton club  
Gillette 5-a-side club  
Reading Naturist Group  
Reading Synchro club  
(Works) Badminton Club  
Woodley Netball Club  
Spikeopaths Volleyball Club

In addition through 2018 a number of meetings were held to which the following groups were invited in which the procurement process was explain and feedback requested.

RG50

Thames Valley taekwondo  
Tilehurst Swimming Club  
Reading Albatross Diving Club  
Little kickers  
Reading Trampolining Club  
Reading Swimming Club  
Meadway Squash Club  
Reading Cygnets  
Reading Royals Synchro Club  
Reading Shotokan Karate  
Compass opportunities Badminton  
Reading Naturist Group  
Reading Track Cycle League  
Reading Rockets Basketball Club  
Reading Road Runners  
Reading Athletic Club  
Sport In Mind  
Susan Pheby Dance  
Reading Aikido Club  
Palmer park Velo  
Reading Bowls Club  
Ignition Tennis  
Reading Judo Club  
Pinnacle trampoline club  
XY Badminton  
Rivermead Badminton Club  
East Reading Badminton Group  
Barry Fowler Badminton Club  
No String Badminton Club  
Highdown Badminton Group  
Reading F C Community Trust  
MAT House Ltd Brazilian Jujitsu  
Eldon Celtic  
South Reading Football Club  
JMA School

Written feedback was received during July and August 2018 from the following users groups

RG50 (Aquatics Group)

Reading Rockets Basketball  
Reading Track Cycle League  
Reading Road Runners  
Reading Octopush club  
Rivermead Bowls Club  
Reading Road Runners  
JMA SchoolSouth Reading F.C.  
Albatros Diving Club  
Swim England  
Brazilian Jujitsu  
Reading Badminton Club  
Sue Pheby School of Dance

10. Peter Burt to ask the Leader of the Council  
Arthur Hill Swimming Pool

Eight months have now passed since the meeting at which Policy Committee members voted to sell Arthur Hill swimming pool to OOAK developments, and six months have passed since the deadline for receipt of income from the sale. Why has the sale of the pool not been completed after all this time, and when do you expect arrangements for the sale to have been completed ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Lovelock Leader of the Council.

Timescales for completion are underpinned by both parties negotiating in good faith and resolving issues to ensure that a disposal is achieved as expeditiously as possible.

In this case, all due diligence work, including legal and property matters, are progressing in tandem with continued dialogue between the Council and the developer towards finalising the sale of Arthur Hill as soon as possible.