

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE - 9 JULY 2019

QUESTION NO. 1 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Michael Sage to ask the Chair of Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:

Lobbying Government on the Climate Emergency

What steps are Reading Borough Council taking to lobby government on the topics as listed (and any other relevant issues) in RBC's Declaration of a Climate Emergency 26th February 2019? Action on these topics are required now in order to meet RBC's commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2030.

REPLY by the Chair of the Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:

I invite Councillor Page, the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport (Councillor Page):

I thank Mr Sage for his question.

Reading Borough Council has been at the forefront in tackling one of the most important global issues of our time and has achieved much over recent years. However, it is abundantly clear that the scale and urgency of the challenge now requires commitment and action from organisations across every sector, as well as that of all our communities.

I would draw your attention to the fact that the Council launched its first climate change strategy in 2008/9. Since then carbon dioxide emissions for services within its direct control have fallen by 53% and the wider borough's emissions, according to latest Government statistics, have fallen by 42% between 2005 and 2016. Working closely with the Reading Climate Change Partnership the Council has ensured Reading continues to be amongst the best performers in reducing year-on-year green-house gas emissions in the UK.

The Council is proud of its record in this area but has showed further ambition this year by declaring a 'Climate Emergency' committing the Council to playing its full part in achieving a zero carbon Reading by 2030, some twenty years earlier than envisaged. However, the Council is only one organisation - albeit an important one - in communicating the message about the need for action and change. Local businesses, the voluntary sector and concerned individuals all have a role.

Central government must play a greater leading role in delivering clear policy and financial frameworks to enable everyone to respond effectively. I can confirm that the Council will be calling on the government to fully embrace its national leadership role, indeed one of the recommendations in this report is that the Chief Executive write to our local MPs, and to the Prime Minister and to relevant Government departments (DEFRA, MHCLG, DfT, and Treasury) setting out the above requirements and the need for new legislation and financial support to deliver this radical agenda

We have of course been working constructively with government departments for some time and our aim is to build on that to establish further detail on exactly what is required to support Reading to deliver its zero carbon target by 2030. The areas expected to be covered are statutory powers and regulatory bodies, fiscal measures, technology development and direct funding to local authorities and communities.

For example, the government's policy framework to date has led to a significant increase in renewable energy infrastructure, such as offshore wind, and reduction in the prevalence of coal as a primary fuel for power generation. Other areas, however, such as the retrofitting of buildings to use less energy have stalled and now need major investment at national level, to help local communities play their part by reducing reliance on fossil fuels.

Ground and water can provide stable sources of alternative heat energy via local heat networks and the government's support for this through the Heat Network Delivery Unit is welcome, but the subsidy regime for renewable heat is due to end in 2021. Communities cannot respond to the climate emergency without the certainty of the continued availability of such subsidised schemes.

Development of the technology for electric vehicles and other ultra-low emission vehicles is another key area with the potential to make significant impacts but, again, the subsidies remain patchy and for the most part insufficient to achieve the growth set out in the 'Road to Zero Policy', for both vehicles and charging infrastructure.

We must also not forget the need to protect our communities from the impacts we are starting to see from the one degree temperature increase that has already occurred and the potential severe climate change to come. Careful consideration will be needed as to how we adapt the town to protect from these effects, taking account of other policy areas such as economic growth and housing supply.

Reading Borough Council has set out a bold vision via the climate emergency declaration and acknowledges that we must continue to lead by example through our own actions and in engaging with all sectors to drive delivery in the local arena. It is clear, however, that a new pathway for societies requires an unprecedented multi-faceted response at government level, including equipping local authorities with the necessary powers and funding to drive change in their areas.

We have just over one decade to deliver this challenging transformation.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE - 9 JULY 2019

QUESTION NO. 2 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Michael Sage to ask the Chair of Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:

Resources for Tackling the Climate Emergency

As Reading Borough Council have declared a Climate Emergency, what resources are being deployed in order to meet the challenge to assist departments and fund investment? Does the RBC's sustainability department have the resources to inform, guide and support the radical action that will be needed?

REPLY by the Chair of the Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:

I invite Councillor Page, the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport (Councillor Page):

I thank Mr Sage for his question.

The Council has started the process of embedding the climate emergency actions across all departments and services. At this stage, the focus is on establishing corporate mechanisms to harness the resources of the whole Council to address the climate emergency challenge.

This can be seen in the reports to all Committees this month, which set out for each their lead responsibility in overseeing and monitoring delivery of the actions initially identified. This work will develop over coming months and be captured in a Climate Emergency Action Framework to be formally adopted later in the year.

We will continue to prioritise available internal resources towards a comprehensive response to this critical challenge. As detailed in response to your other questions at tonight's meeting, however, Reading Borough Council cannot deliver this in isolation.

It needs the support of local businesses, the voluntary sector, all of us as individual citizens and we are therefore calling on central government to provide the powers and resources essential to achieving a zero carbon Reading by the new target of 2030.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE - 9 JULY 2019

QUESTION NO. 3 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Michael Sage to ask the Chair of Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:

Business Participation in the Climate Change Strategy 3

What and how are Reading businesses and organisations being approached in order that they participate in the production of Reading Climate Change Strategy 3 and take action so that their operations can achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030?

REPLY by the Chair of the Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:

I invite Councillor Page, the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport (Councillor Page):

I thank Mr Sage for his question.

I would reiterate the contents of my reply to your question 6 at full Council on 25th June namely that the Council is already part of the Reading Climate Change Partnership, which is long established and wider than the Council. The partnership has representation from public sector organisations, businesses and community organisations. Whilst the members of the board of the Reading Climate Change Partnership are representative of their wider sectors, there is also a wider membership known as the Reading Climate Action Network (RCAN). To find out more about the partnership please visit: www.readingCAN.org.uk

You are most likely aware that the Council hosted the Reading Climate Change Partnership event on June 13th and this was the launching point for the third Reading Climate Change Strategy (CCS). The Strategy will contain actions from the Councils' own action framework for Climate Emergency and this will include direct integration with a number of other Council strategies policies and partnerships.

The Reading Climate Change Partnership has chosen a very interactive model to develop and deliver the CCS which is based on building 'communities of action' across each of the 6 themes of the strategy:

- 1) Energy and Low Carbon Development
- 2) Natural Environment

- 3) Sustainable Transport
- 4) Resources
- 5) Health
- 6) Water Supply and Flooding

These six groups will meet regularly to develop in the first instance the theme action plan for the strategy and thereafter to discuss and report on its progress.

In addition to the above, the Partnership is working closely with business-led Reading UK through our two Business Improvement Districts, and through the development of Reading 2050, a vision for Reading being developed jointly through business, community and public sectors, led by the University, Reading UK and local Architects Barton Wilmore.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE - 9TH JULY 2019

COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 1 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Councillor McGonigle to ask the Chair of Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:

Encouraging and Protecting Wildlife in the Borough

There are many ways we can encourage and protect wildlife in the borough and one of the most effective measures would be to allow many more grass verges to remain uncut until after wildflowers have seeded and set.

Apart from being an absolute joy to see, wildflowers and grasses provide a feast for birds, bugs, butterflies and other pollinators.

The benefits can now be seen in areas of our parks that have been left unmown although some of these areas could be greatly increased in size.

Sowing seed is not essential in all areas as most seeds will arrive with the wind. Not mowing so often can save many thousands of pounds per year.

This move is rolling out across the country with an increasing number of councils changing mowing patterns to allow wildlife to thrive.

How often do we now mow and can we commit to mowing less too?

REPLY by the Chair of the Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:

I invite Councillor Page, the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport (Councillor Page):

I thank Cllr McGonigle for her question.

The majority of highways verges are cut eight times a year during the growing season. During the spring growth flush, and particularly during periods of wet weather, this can mean that the grass along the verges is long before it is cut.

In respect of alternative options, the Council is committed to maintaining and enhancing the bio-diversity of the Borough and is currently working to update the Biodiversity Action Plan and Climate Change Strategy. This work will consider how best

to extend the current conservation grass management regime to roadside verges and how to manage this in a cost effective and affordable way.

In addition, the following actions have already been taken to progress this:

- The Parks Team currently manages approximately 36 hectares of conservation grassland across the parks estate. These areas are mown annually in late summer with grass and other arisings collected and removed from site. The Parks Team was awarded Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) funding in 2011, to support a 10 year scheme up to 2021.
- Parks have been working this year with a partner organisation which is in receipt of grant funding through the Climate Action Network. They have been engaging residents in planting wildflower plugs (supplied via Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxon Wildlife Trust's growers from local seed) into roadside verges across the town to see how these respond to the Council's existing mowing regime. Early investigation has established that clovers and birds foot trefoil manage to flower profusely with regular mowing and attract insects, and other species such as ladies bedstraw and selfheal also flower with regular mowing.

These areas will be monitored over the summer of 2019 to assess the success of the planting and will be extending the project into 2020 for further planting and monitoring. This will provide a subset of plants that are resistant to the regular mowing regime and are beneficial to insects. If successful, the Climate Action Network will seek further funding to expand the area planted.