

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE - 26 SEPTEMBER 2019

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	Questioner	Subject	Reply
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Petition presented by Peter Burt:

Reading Council - consult us on the future of Arthur Hill Pool

Reading Borough Council's plans to sell Arthur Hill swimming pool have collapsed and the Council is now reviewing options for the future of the site.

This provides a fantastic opportunity to reconsider the possibility of refurbishing our lovely pool and reopening it for public swimming.

We call on the Council to include the possibility of reopening Arthur Hill for leisure, sporting, and community activities in its options review, to consult fully and openly with members of the public on the future of the site, and to listen to the views expressed during the consultation.

RESPONSE by Councillor Brock (Leader of the Council):

Thank you to Mr Burt for submitting his petition, which calls on the Council to consider the possibility of reopening Arthur Hill for leisure, sporting and community activities.

The Arthur Hill Pool opened in 1911 was a pioneering project to provide both leisure and bathing facilities for the people of Reading. It served the town and its communities well for over 100 years. However, maintaining a building of that era and the pool in particular became prohibitive over time and difficult to justify in the climate of increasingly constrained public finances. The decision to close it was taken in that context, alongside a commitment to re-provide a facility that meets the expectations of our communities in the 21st century, including delivering on our sustainability and affordability objectives.

The Council remains committed to the delivery of new swimming and leisure facilities with a replacement for Arthur Hill Pool at Palmer Park. The procurement process is complex and a report on the next stages of the process is proposed to be presented soon with a potential contract start date in early 2020. The timetable for the delivery of a new pool at Palmer Park will be published as part of the procurement report. The new pool at Palmer Park will be built to modern standards including high standards of sustainable construction. Unlike Arthur Hill, the new pool will be energy efficient and will also have lower ongoing maintenance costs. This reduces pressure on the Council's revenue budget, helping us to protect services over the longer term.

The Council now intends to reprise the pioneering spirit behind the creation of the Arthur Hill pool by re-using the site and its locally listed frontage to respond to an important local challenge in Reading today. Nurses, teachers, social workers and Police officers are some of the public servants who underpin safe, sustainable and healthy communities. The ability to attract and retain these workers within Reading is vital for the continued health and well-being of all our communities. The Arthur Hill site offers an opportunity to create new housing for such key workers, in a sustainable location close to many public sector workplaces. Council delivery of around 15 new

homes provides immediate certainty on the future of the site and the fastest route to developing it. The new homes will provide a model for exemplary sustainable construction and living, setting the standard for the many more new homes we expect to see delivered in Reading over coming years.

There is a report on tonight's agenda setting out more detail on the proposed way forward for the Arthur Hill site, which we will be discussing in a few moments and you will have another opportunity to discuss the topic of your petition at Council on 4 November 2019.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 1

Roger Lightfoot to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport:

Leisure Procurement

Now that the Council has decided not to reappoint Grant Thornton as Assistant Director of Economic and Cultural Development, please can you tell me who is overseeing the project to privatise the Council's Sport and Leisure service, and how far the project has slipped behind schedule since the last Policy Committee meeting?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport):

Thank you for your question Mr Lightfoot.

The process to appointment a strategic leisure partner is ultimately overseen by the Council's Chief Executive and Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services. A number of officers support the project providing procurement, finance and service specific expertise.

Our leisure procurement process and the building of two new swimming pools for Reading is a major priority for the council. As a result of that prioritisation and the hard work of council officers we are on track to complete this process and I anticipate a report coming forward in the autumn with a formal appointment and a contract start in early 2020 following a necessary mobilisation period.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 2

Roger Lightfoot to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport:

Viability of Pool in Palmer Park

Can you confirm that both potential bidders for the Sport and Leisure outsourcing project have informed the Council that a new swimming pool in Palmer Park would not be a viable option because of its close proximity to Bulmershe and Loddon Valley pools, and are reluctant to take this option forward?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport):

Thank you for your question Mr Lightfoot.

No, is the short answer. The procurement process is ongoing and it would not be appropriate, in fact it could compromise the whole process, for me to comment in detail while those negotiations continue. Notwithstanding this, I am confident that the Council will be able to secure its ambitions to provide new swimming provision for the Borough including a pool at Palmer Park. I look forward to presenting the outcome of the process in the coming months.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 3

Peter Burt to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport:

Arthur Hill Pool

The Leader of Wokingham Borough Council recently agreed to consider options for reopening Arthur Hill Swimming Pool (<https://bit.ly/2YbXGrY>).

Will the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing, and Sport agree to meet with colleagues from Wokingham Borough to discuss possibilities for reopening the pool?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport):

Thank you for your question Mr Burt.

It should go without saying that I am always happy to listen to what colleagues at Wokingham Borough Council have to say and that I work with our neighbouring councils closely, particularly in the areas of Health and Wellbeing.

At Policy Committee in June, the Council's Leader set out that once due diligence in relation to the surveys and site investigations had been completed for the building the Council would need to take a decision about the future of the Arthur Hill Pool building.

The process is complete and a report is set out on this evening's agenda which proposes to develop the site to provide key worker affordable housing.

This is an important and imaginative proposal which makes best use of a vacant site by offering affordable flats to rent at 80% of the market price for key public sector workers. It is close to a number of important employment sites, including the town centre and the Royal Berkshire Hospital. We know that securing good, affordable housing is a challenge for many key workers in our town and this scheme would aim to help with the recruitment and retention of the talent, such as social workers, that our public services require.

The Council remains fully committed to providing a modern new community swimming pool for east Reading in Palmer Park, to replace the old Arthur Hill pool. The new Palmer Park pool forms part of a £30 million investment package by the Council in modern leisure facilities for Reading, with a progress report and selection of our leisure partner, in the autumn.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 4

Peter Burt to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport:

Outsourcing of Leisure Services

The Shadow Chancellor, John McDonnell, has said that he wants to limit the outsourcing of public services by local authorities and oblige councils to run services themselves in house (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-49055503>).

In anticipation of a Labour victory at the next General Election, will the Lead Councillor abandon the Council's plans for the outsourcing of Reading Sport and Leisure?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport):

Thank you for your question Mr Burt.

Reading Labour has always looked to make the right decisions for Reading and Reading people. Rather than be the local branch of a Westminster party we are, first and foremost, a party for Reading.

For this reason we largely resisted the fashion for outsourcing that was promoted by successive governments over the past 30 years, including Labour ones. This explains why we are one of the most insourced councils in England and we welcome the proposals by Labour nationally to put in place a raft of measures to support councils to move to much greater in-house provision along the lines of the Reading model.

Areas that are particularly proposed for attention are cleaning, waste collection and school dinners. It is proposed by Labour that it will introduce measures that will help councils to collaborate to deliver public sector alternatives in areas where individual smaller councils, like Reading, might not have the expertise or capacity to provide, to the highest possible standards, on their own. Leisure and sports provision being an obvious area for such work.

As I said earlier this Reading Labour Council will not put ideological purity or currying favour on the national stage ahead of doing the right thing for Reading. In the current climate and without the changes proposed by Labour in the future I am confident that our current plans provide us with the best route to delivering the excellent, improved and modern leisure facilities that Reading deserves.

I'm glad Mr Burt is also eagerly anticipating the election of a Labour government that will be genuinely radical and reforming. Maybe Mr Burt will be joining me on the campaign trail to re-elect Matt Rodda in the east and elect Rachel Eden in the west. He will be most welcome.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 5

Moira Gomes to ask the Lead Councillor for Education:

Nursery School Funding

Earlier this year the Heads of 251 maintained nursery schools across the UK sent a letter to the Chancellor asking for funding assurances from central government; at the moment funding is only known up until summer 2020. According to Heads this has led to large cuts and potential closure of some nurseries.

Is the Lead Councillor for Education able to provide any update on funding for our maintained nursery schools here in Reading?

REPLY by Councillor Pearce (Lead Councillor for Education):

For years our governments have neglected fundamental educational issues - such as funding and teacher recruitment - in favour of what are, at best, secondary issues, and at worst mere ideological passions.

Early years education has not been spared such treatment. "There seems to be little strategic direction to government policy on early years," concluded the House of Commons Education Select Committee in February - and this is, in truth, an understatement.

The Department for Education and Ofsted have devoted much of their energy to promoting sweeping and contentious changes to the early years curriculum, while studiously failing to address what is for many providers an existential crisis of funding.

Nowhere is this tension clearer than in the maintained nursery sector. While ministers and inspectors talk as if one of the main factors to prevent the narrowing of the attainment gap is the reluctance of the sector to adopt a more formalised curriculum, they overlook far more potent problems: the effect of benefit cuts, the rise in child poverty, and the decision to drain away resources from forms of provision that could work against such a programme of social destruction.

The achievements of maintained nursery schools are well-known. They demonstrate the difference that specialist, integrated provision can make. Concentrated in the poorest areas, they give priority in their admissions to disadvantaged children and children with special educational needs and disabilities. And they have the expertise and skills to support them successfully.

As research quoted by Early Education points out, in 2018 maintained nurseries had the highest percentage of children who were at risk of developing special educational needs. Yet many children identified as “at risk” at age 3 had caught up with their typically developing peers by the age of 5.

In a country where education policy was based on reason, evidence and a commitment to social justice, achievements like these would be studied, celebrated and copied.

But, as England enters its 10th year of austerity, the opposite is happening. These nurseries will lose nearly a third of their funding in 2020 if supplementary funding is not continued. Uncertainty hangs over the whole sector. In July, three in 10 told Early Education that they were unsure about their immediate future,

Chancellor Sajid Javid and education secretary Gavin Williamson have announced what they claim are “step-change” increases in educational spending. But they have said nothing about maintained nurseries, other than a promise to keep the issue of funding under review.

This isn't good enough. Guaranteeing to fund maintained nursery schools at 2016-17 levels should be among the top items on Javid's list. Its absence is a scandal.

In the face of this neglect, we on this side are supporting the School Cuts petition on nursery funding. Autumn will be a turbulent time for politics in Britain. But, whatever happens, we will make sure that the needs of the youngest, most vulnerable sections of our population are not forgotten.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 6

Ann Dally to ask the Lead Councillor for Corporate and Consumer Services:

Council Website

We welcome the development of a new RBC website and ask how the Council will ensure the new site is widely accessible and easy to use, allowing residents to log on by post code to one tailor-made ward page, showing both local residents' services, such as family support services, schools and sporting facilities, as well as giving information on how to apply for welfare benefits and Borough wide services?

REPLY by Councillor Emberson (Lead Councillor for Corporate and Consumer Services):

Delivering excellent online services is fundamental to delivering an excellent and consistent customer experience. It is important that the website is accessible and easy to navigate so that residents can access the information and services they need.

The new website will be built to meet the needs of our customers with the design informed by customer research and feedback. Customer focus groups for residents have been set up and a number of sessions have already taken place. The group will continue to be engaged throughout the project and we will take a test and learn approach during the design and build to ensure it is accessible and easy for our customers to use. After it is launched, we will ensure continual improvement based on customer experience and user feedback.

The new website will enable residents to easily connect with Reading Borough Council at a time and place convenient to them. We will ensure it meets the standards set out in the government's regulations for accessibility of websites and mobile applications (which can be found here: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/952/contents/made>)

Providing customers with location based information will continue to form a part of the way we display information to users. Further planned development of the online customer account will see the bringing together of customer information such as benefits payments and other council services as you outline in your question.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 7

Ann Dally to ask the Lead Councillor for Corporate and Consumer Services:

Online Payments

How will the new website offer a secure payments platform enabling a resident to make a single payment to cover all amounts due to the Council, through a variety of payment methods, but additionally offering the choice of payment frequency which matches when the resident receives their main income, whether that is weekly, fortnightly, four weekly or monthly?

REPLY by Councillor Emberson (Lead Councillor for Corporate and Consumer Services):

The website includes a secure payment platform provided by Civica UK. Civica are accredited to PCI (Payment Card Industry) and PA-DSS (Payment Application Data Security Standard) - and the platform is fully encrypted, safeguarding both the Council and our customers to make secure online payments. CivicaPay payments are processed in the cloud and not on our premises, and staff are not able to retrieve any customer card details, securing PCI DSS compliance.

The Civica online payment system enables our customers to make online payments at a time that is convenient to them. The system is able to take payments for a large variety of items: Council Tax, Housing and Garage Rents, Business Rates, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and Invoices.

There is an upgrade version of the CivicaPay engine that offers an Amazon look and feel, enabling customers to select items from catalogues i.e. Licencing, Building Control and After School Clubs and build a basket of items which can be paid for in one transaction and reconciled back to the service area automatically. The system screens are configured to fit all electronic devices i.e. Smart phones, tablets removing the need to scroll around the screen.

As part of the website improvement project we will conduct a review of the upgraded Civica Pay products alongside other such products such as GovPay. In line with our commitment to the Citizens Advice Protocol, we have committed to offering customers the ability to choose the frequency of payments, set up recurring payments, subscriptions and instalments. When reviewing the functionality of any new system we will ensure it meets this requirement, and that it offers an enhanced user experience to match our customer expectations and meets the technical requirements of the new website platform.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 8

Ann Dally to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport:

Debt and Mental Health

What progress has been made to strategically address the links between debt, poor mental health and an increased risk of death by suicide in the Council's Poverty Needs Analysis Action Plan so far; and how do the cross-directorate Welfare and Poverty Steering Group plan to monitor how effective this strategy is?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport):

Following a recent Reading Advice Network Forum and report in April 2019 focusing on debt, the Council has agreed to take action on a number of the report's recommendations. These focus on Council Tax debt: the biggest single debt issue seen by Citizens Advice.

The Council's Poverty Needs Analysis Action Plan, which is driven and monitored by the Council's Welfare and Poverty Steering Group will track progress with delivery of these actions on a regular basis. As mentioned in the information already sent to you, the group is currently being reviewed to ensure that it continues to add value and function effectively, and so it has not yet been finalised exactly how the group will work.

The Action Plan includes an action for suicide prevention training options and packages to be reviewed by the Berkshire Suicide Prevention Group in November this year, following a review by Health Education England.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 9

Michael Sage to ask the Leader of the Council:

Citizens Assembly

Many political commentators believe that the present day government and politics is flawed because it has a divergence of interests, it is unrepresentative of the population as a whole and relies on tribal loyalties, coercion and propaganda to hold on to power and implement policy. This has led to a paralysis in decision making and a lack of decisive and timely action in the face of an emergency. The climate and ecological emergency will require sustained participation and effort from all citizens and organisations and a radical change in mindset, material expectations and lifestyle. Can the present political structure can deliver that? Government and politics are broken.

There is a process that is truly representative of the population, deliberates on the facts and by consensus, makes recommendations - Citizens' Assemblies (CAs). Experience around the world of Citizen's Assemblies is positive - in Canada and Ireland for example, and, in the UK CAs have been established to tackle Climate Change in Oxford and Camden and nationally CAs have produced recommendations on Social Care and Brexit. However, the public are generally not aware of them and therefore they need to be informed and engage with the process. Many national and local politicians support the idea of CAs as it reinstalls trust in the political process, increases public involvement so that difficult decisions can be made and implemented. It should renew democracy not detract from it.

We, Extinction Rebellion, demand a Citizens' Assembly to deliberate and make decisions on the Climate and Ecological Emergency. What is the Council's view and response?

REPLY by Councillor Brock (Leader of the Council):

A citizens' assembly is a group of people who are brought together to discuss an issue or issues, and reach a conclusion about what they think should happen. The people who take part are chosen so they reflect the wider population - in terms of demographics (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, social class) and sometimes relevant attitudes (e.g. preferences for a small or large state). Citizens' assemblies are one of a number of methods that can be used to involve citizens in decision making.

Reading Borough Council has a long history of ensuring the public are fully involved in decision making and in supporting local people's involvement in

policy development, establishing the Council's priorities and shaping future service delivery. We have a Citizens' Panel of 1,500 residents, randomly selected to be a demographically representative sample of Reading residents, who can be asked for their views and feedback in a structured and ongoing way. The Citizens' Panel has been used to inform our decisions on community safety, concessionary fares, where to use the Community Infrastructure Levy, and, most recently, the Reading Transport Strategy 2036.

Regarding the climate crisis, the Council earlier this year declared a Climate Emergency and the Reading Climate Change Partnership (including the Council, Environment Agency, University of Reading, Greater Reading Environmental Network, businesses and the health service) began the process of developing Reading's next Climate Change Strategy (2020-25), inviting anyone who wishes to get involved to do so, knowing that the ideas, energy and commitment of citizens are of fundamental importance to achieving success. People can take part by attending meetings, commenting on proposals and by encouraging others to get involved.

The Council would welcome the Government holding a Citizens' Assembly to deliberate and make decisions on the Climate and Ecological Emergency.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 10

Michael Sage to ask the Leader of the Council:

Citizens Assembly

“Reading UK 2050 partnership was originally formed in 2013, when Reading UK, the University of Reading and Barton Willmore came together to drive discussions around the future challenges and opportunities for Reading.

Prior to the publication of the Vision, this team have supported the delivery of some 15 engagement events reaching over 350 local businesses and over 21,000 local people, in order to explore and test ideas.

Throughout this process, Reading Borough Council have been keen participants, but became a formal supporter in early 2017.”

This description above quotes Reading UK 2050 partnership’s website <https://livingreading.co.uk/reading-2050>. What is RBC’s role in this partnership and how is it engaging with Reading UK 2050 to ensure Reading achieves its objective of being Carbon Neutral by 2030?

REPLY by Councillor Brock (Leader of the Council):

Reading Borough Council is a partner in creating and developing the 2050 Vision. The 2050 Vision itself is owned by Reading UK, the economic development Community Interest Company for Reading.

The Council endorsed the Vision in its capacity as member of the Reading UK Board (represented by the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council). The Council are also members of the 2050 working group chaired by Kim Cohen and, as such, are involved in the overall direction and activities of the 2050 Vision.

From the start, the Vision has emphasised the challenge and importance of reducing Reading’s impact on our environment. A 2050 refresh workshop is to be run on 17th October and we fully intend to further consider the rising importance of climate change and the climate crisis at this workshop, thus linking more closely the work of the Climate Change Partnership with the 2050 Vision.

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26 SEPTEMBER 2019

PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 11

Stuart Kinton to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

Climate Emergency

At the SEPT meeting in July I responded to the Council's climate emergency report saying that the Council has not done enough to notify Reading residents of their declaration and state of climate emergency. Tony Page responded; "I think Mr Kinton must have been living in a bubble if he hasn't picked up quite a bit of the publicity that the Council has put out both in social media and in press releases, and the coverage at the time of the climate emergency debate and also the launch of the climate change strategy were substantial".

We at Extinction Rebellion Reading asked 368 people in Broad Street, Reading if they knew whether Reading Borough Council had declared a climate emergency. 214 of them were Reading residents and of those, only 16 knew that a climate emergency had been declared. Clearly the current communication strategy has not been effective. What additional communication is Reading Borough Council going to undertake to inform residents and organisations of the state of climate emergency in order that they can participate in and buy in to the radical changes that will be needed to reach the objective of a carbon neutral Reading by 2030?

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

I thank Mr Kinton for his question.

Since declaring a climate emergency in February, the Council has taken a number of actions to publicise our commitment to achieving a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.

Several very public campaigns have included a strong climate change component. These have included:

- Our recent Transport Strategy consultation, a key theme of which was creating sustainable travel options for the future
- 'Reading Does' - our new recycling campaign aimed at working towards a 50% recycling rate for Reading and including the introduction of a new weekly food waste collection service next year

- Working in partnership with Festival Republic on its successful 'Say no to Single Use Plastics and Take it Home' campaign, making full use of Council communications channels to encourage festival goers to take their tents home which resulted in a decrease in post festival waste this year

All of these activities have included briefing the local media resulting in high levels of local and regional coverage, posting content on the Council's social media accounts and promoting messages on the big screen outside of Reading Station.

The Council has additionally publicised a range of other initiatives, all of which feed into the Climate Emergency message. These have included publicity on Reading's new Cleaner Air and Safer Transport Forum; changes to the Council's constitution which all standing committees have signed up to, and which means all committee reports now include a section on environmental implications and mitigations; the Council's Clean Air Day event in June; and the new share offer by the Reading Community Energy Society.

The Council has also taken a number of reports through committee. For example, progressing the Borough's new Local Plan which goes significantly further in setting requirements for zero carbon planning on all large residential developments and BREEAM Excellent standard on large commercial developments. The Council has also agreed that it must select an energy supplier or suppliers that can demonstrate they purchase from 100 per cent renewable energy sources in respect of the Council's supply.

We have also been working with the climate change partnership on its strategy development work, including the establishment of a number of communities of action.

The Council will set out its response in more detail in a report to Policy Committee on the 18th November 2019. This report will inform and include details of a supporting communications plan, setting out how the Council will channel its communications on Climate Change Action. The Reading Climate Change Partnership has also been working on its own publicity and awareness raising activities, alongside the strategy development work mentioned.

Reading Borough Council can seek to engage with the media and set a proactive communications agenda in this area, but as we have said on a number of occasions widespread knowledge of the urgent need for climate action is the responsibility of all active partners, who must work together to raise public awareness and further the participation of the public and organisations alike. While we will do all we can, it is not something the Council can achieve on its own.

It is interesting to receive feedback on the awareness of the declaration made by the Council of its belief that we are facing a climate emergency amongst Reading's public. We would prefer to be known as a Council that is

acting on Climate Change, as our action predates the recent 'climate emergency' messaging by more than ten years.

Reading is proud to be in the top 5% of local authorities in Britain for cutting carbon emissions. We have cut our own carbon footprint by 53% between 2008 and 2017 and the town as a whole has cut its footprint by 44% between 2005 and 2017.

We know much more needs to be done by everyone, but we intend to continue to lead by example.

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26 SEPTEMBER 2019

COUNCILLOR QUESTION 1

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

Reading Council should oppose Heathrow expansion

A few years ago Green councillors were disappointed when Labour Reading Council changed its position on the environmental disaster that is Heathrow expansion from opposition to qualified support.

We think the only answer to the Heathrow expansion consultation is "no way".

Huge numbers of people already suffer from the associated congestion, noise and air pollution from Heathrow.

Recently Reading Council declared a climate emergency. The national Committee on Climate Change has already said a net-zero carbon target means the government has to rethink aviation expansion.

Will the Reading Labour Council join the Green Party in saying "no way" to Heathrow expansion?

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

I thank Cllr White for his question.

The Council's position on aviation expansion has been agreed through a motion adopted by full Council. This recognises the economic and employment benefits to Reading from Heathrow and Gatwick airports and accepts in principle the conclusion of the Davies Commission that the proposed northwest runway at Heathrow offers the 'strongest solution to the UK's aviation capacity and connectivity needs'.

However, the Council's position is clear that this support for Heathrow expansion will only be forthcoming if there is a significant investment in new public transport infrastructure, not only heavy rail but also light-rail, guided bus and coach services to both airports.

Specifically, the Council emphasises the importance of delivering the Western Rail Access to Heathrow scheme, for which platform provision already exists within the new and redeveloped Reading Station; the need for a new rail access into Heathrow from the south; and the inclusion of a spur to Heathrow if HS2 is implemented.

The Council also reiterates the importance of improving surface access to Gatwick, specifically the need for improved frequencies and capacity on rail services from Reading to Gatwick, and enhancements to Gatwick Station.

The Council emphasises the need for environmental concerns to be fully addressed, particularly given the Council's recently declared Climate Emergency. Mitigation measures should include the use of larger, quieter and much more environmentally friendly aircraft, the need for effective restrictions on night flights, and for the imposition of mitigation measures as a condition of expansion or any interim changes which make better use of existing capacity.

The Council calls for a review into the need for Government intervention and regulation in the competitive market for airport provision, and the allocation of landing slots, as part of a continuing need to reduce the environmental and noise impacts of aviation activity.

The latest consultation run by Heathrow over the summer focused on the proposed masterplan for the expanded airport (including the layout of the expanded airport, new runway and other airport infrastructure such as terminals and road access) and the mitigations proposed as a result of the previous consultations. The proposed mitigations include the introduction of a Heathrow Ultra Low Emissions Zone, Heathrow Vehicle Access Charge and a 6.5 hour ban on scheduled night flights.

The Council has provided a response to the consultation which reiterates the need to address environmental concerns in the following terms:

Reading Borough Council's view is that there needs to be effective public transport access to the airport to minimise the negative impacts of current car access, and the plans for airport expansion must include such provision as a central part of those plans.

Current public transport links to Heathrow Airport are unacceptably inadequate and poor given the existing level of flight operations. The proportion of passengers currently using public transport to access Heathrow is amongst the lowest of any of the large comparable international airports.

As the Davies Commission rightly said there is an immediate need for a range of public transport improvements covering buses, light and heavy rail, and cycling. RBC strongly endorses this view and believes that it is wrong to therefore link the funding of projects such as the Western Rail link to Heathrow to future airport expansion, when the need for such schemes is NOW.

Improvements to public transport links to and within Heathrow must be in place well in advance of any possible expansion taking place in order to improve current accessibility let alone future demands.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

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26 SEPTEMBER 2019

COUNCILLOR QUESTION 2

Councillor White to ask the Leader of the Council:

Central Club

Green councillors supported selling the Central Club to the Aspire community organisation for use by the community rather than to a developer for yet more flats. Following the collapse of the ill thought out sale of Arthur Hill swimming pool to a developer for flats, can the Leader update me on progress selling the Central Club? Please can the answer include a timescale for when this sale will be stopped if it has not progressed.

REPLY by Councillor Brock (Leader of the Council):

I can confirm that Central Club is now sold subject to planning permission. If planning consent is not granted by the 2nd of November 2020 either party can choose to terminate the contract. Alternatively, if there is still a "live" planning position at that date, and one that it is agreed should be allowed to run its course, there is a longstop date by which it must be completed of the 22nd of April 2021.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

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26 SEPTEMBER 2019

COUNCILLOR QUESTION 3

Councillor White to ask the Leader of the Council:

Climate Emergency and fossil fuel divestment

If we search our recent landmark decisions in local areas, we'll see that Reading Borough Council has preceded our neighbours to declare a climate emergency. On the 18th of July Wokingham Borough Council declared a climate emergency. Only a few weeks before on 2nd of July it was also declared by West Berkshire, and a few weeks before that on 25th of June was Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. However, Reading led the local acknowledgements with a declaration on 26th February this year. Reading must continue to lead our neighbours and must facilitate action. Three years before declaring a climate emergency, Reading Borough Council pledged to divest from fossil fuels, yet there has been no debate among the Berkshire Pension Fund Panel regarding fossil fuel divestment (according to the administering authority which is the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead).

The Fund holds £97m of direct and indirect investment in fossil fuel organisations. Still. Evidence now shows that continued fossil fuel investment is a big risk - and wrong in light of the climate emergency we face.

Will Reading Borough Council request and facilitate a Pensions Panel debate on fossil fuel divestment?

What will Reading Borough Council do to work with stakeholders such as Friends of the Earth to collect the evidence needed to affect the change it has pledged over 3½ years ago?

REPLY by Councillor Brock (Leader of the Council):

The Berkshire Pension Fund represents 250 scheme employers and 60,000 members. In response to the Government's requirement for Pension Funds to pool their investments the Berkshire Fund pooled with Local Pensions Partnership Investments Limited in June 2018. Local Pensions Partnership Investments Limited (LLPI) formed from a collaboration between the Lancashire County Council and the London Pensions Fund Authority.

The Berkshire Fund's Investment Strategy Statement states:

"The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead [RBWM] accepts that stakeholders will have differing views on how social, environmental and corporate governance considerations should be taken into account and believes no "one size fits all" policy can possibly be implemented across such a diverse portfolio as that of the Fund. Nevertheless RBWM seeks to protect its reputation as an institutional investor and ensures that its investment manager LLPI takes into account these issues when selecting

investments...BMW will not place social environmental or corporate governance restrictions on the investment manager, but relies on it to adhere to best practice."

Councillor Lovelock has recently been appointed as the Council's representative on the Pension Fund Panel and is keen to get a better understanding of arrangements and metrics in place to track LLPI'S performance and in particular how social and ethical investment is managed within the Fund. Cllr Lovelock will therefore be requesting a briefing with the Pension Fund Manager in the first instance prior to considering how best to take this matter forward with the Panel.

In short, I do want to Berkshire Pension Fund to take its responsibility to the climate seriously, and I also recognise that we have a lot of work to do to convince the other stakeholders.