

(B) QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

**1. Richard Stainthorp to ask the Leader of the Council:
Statutory Responsibilities, Duties and Obligations of Reading Borough Council**

Could the Leader of the Council please set out what the statutory responsibilities, duties and obligations of Reading Borough Council are?

REPLY by Councillor Brock Leader of the Council.

I thank Mr Stainthorp for his question and I hope my reply will go some way to answering another question on the list ‘Why does Reading Borough Council exist?’

Generally speaking, the purpose of local government is to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities to meet the current and future needs of communities for good-quality local infrastructure, local public services and performance of regulatory functions in a way that is most cost-effective for households and businesses.

All local authorities are bound by statute. Their functions are set out in numerous Acts of Parliament and many of these functions have associated legal duties. I hope you appreciate there are too many to recite here and that, in any case, it is not easy to provide an exhaustive list as it is a moveable feast due to new legislation and instructions from central Government. For example, shortly after the latest Prime Minister had taken office, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government wrote to me, along with all other Council leaders, instructing each of us to appoint a senior officer to act as a ‘Brexit Lead Officer’ for our areas and to do so within the next 10 days.

In order to address your question specifically, Reading’s responsibilities are set out in our Constitution: Article 4 describes the Full Council’s role, which includes agreeing the policy framework and budget of the authority; Articles 7-10 provide details of the terms of reference for Committees, Sub-Committees, Forums and Working Groups, which summarise our duties and sphere of interest; and Part 3 includes details of the ‘Responsibility for Functions’ flowing from The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations as well as the Lead Councillor portfolios.

As a unitary authority Reading is responsible for a wide-range of vital services for people and businesses. Among them are well known functions, which are fundamental to our Corporate Plan priorities, such as delivering social care to protect vulnerable people, promoting health & wellbeing, education and culture, providing decent housing and dealing with waste to keep our environment clean, green and safe. We are also responsible for lesser known services such as licensing, business support, registrar services and pest control, which also provide much valued services to the Council and local people. Some duties may be less than popular, such as levying and collecting Council Tax, but they also play a crucial role in ensuring that the Council delivers its priorities by helping us remain financially viable into the future.

2. WITHDRAWN

3. Philip Allen to ask the Leader of the Council: Why does the Council Exist ?

Why does the Council exist ? It does not say on ballot papers or election blurb. As:

- (a) It cannot Stop the damaging whims of its officers such as buying unfairly traded goods; plastic cups; using Roundup around trees & fencelines so litter can blow across the roads into other people's property; not giving trees even the nominal 2m RPA required in development (although tree roots extend normally at least the tree's height outwards) as driving mowers under the canopy damages the roots & compacts the soil to add to climate change & increases flood risk.
- (b) The government's Local Plan inspector is not allowing the Council to insist development makes any Economic, Social or Environmental benefit to the area (MM1 policy cc1) Nor cover the cost of monitoring (mm5 policy cc9 4.150 (the application fee should cover this)) Nor ask for contribution towards increased housing need from employment development. He also prevents you from reaching your CO2 targets by stopping you requiring all new developments to be at least CO2 net zero (mm21 policy H5 4,4,36)
- (c) It does not use its licencing powers to stop food shops selling poisons such as weed killer or to stop fast food outlets using non-returnable packaging. All producers & sellers in the area must be made responsible for all the waste they produce including post consumer and have to independent prove their products are safe to users, society & the environment before being allowed to advertise/sell.
- (d) Not using schools to design roads, buildings & the town to be green. Nor using schools to help people identify their strengths & value to create sustainable income streams.
- (e) Not having a just economic system using True Costs or local collection of all taxes for the benefit of the local people & to then buy services that the government can provide more efficiently such as creating war, poverty, pollution, inflation, inequality & illness.

What is the Council doing to overcome the Treason of the Government?

Thinking anything that boosts the profit of a few (their sponsors) must be good despite not considering the harm caused to the majority for over 400 years & believing the lie business creates wealth by concentrating customers' existing wealth in the hands of a few business owners. Tax subsidies for polluters Allowing the DfT to "fix" pollution problems by building more roads (bypasses, motorways) to promote more traffic & thus increase total traffic pollution for over 100 years Using a system of Fake Accounting called GDP that has been known for 50+ years not to measure anything of importance to a country. Eroding society with Austerity Cuts & removing democracy for 40 years Accelerating Climate Change for 30 years

Adding Flouride to drinking water to prevent our Thyroid Glands getting the Iodine it needs for Our Health Giving tax cuts to the rich so they can speculate to increase prices & rob more people and store the money in the City of London's islands tax havens. Brexit Allowing developers to avoid even minimum home standards by converting offices into flats to add strains to existing local communities as they do not have to compensate those they harm.

REPLY by Councillor Brock Leader of the Council.

I thank Mr Allen for his question. Your question is very detailed but it is often these types of question which show the complex and wide reaching role and purpose of the Council. Many of the matters you raise are not within the control of local government but where the Council has a role I have attempted to respond as best I can in the time available.

The Council has taken its responsibilities in respect of climate change seriously for the past decade when it published its first climate change strategy. Since this time emissions in the Council and the Borough have continued to fall, with the most recent published data showing reductions of 53% and 44% respectively. The Council is proud of its record in this area but has showed further ambition this year by declaring a 'Climate Emergency' and committing to play its full role in delivering a net zero carbon Reading twenty years earlier than previously planned by 2030 and this is being embedded across every area of the council's work.

The Council has to act within the policy framework of the government and we continue to lobby for further powers and resources to help us to tackle climate change locally.

I address the specific points you raise below:

- The Council has made efforts to reduce its use of plastic but there always more that can and should be done.
- Tree protections - We have strict guidelines in place to protect trees when works, such as utility works, are undertaken on the public highway and in relation to our mowing regimes. The Council's planning policies also seek to safeguard valued trees and seek replacements where appropriate.
- Herbicides - The use and supply of chemical herbicides is carefully controlled by National Government Guidelines.
- Local Plan - The Council have recently published the Local Plan which sets out how Reading will develop up until 2036 and in a sustainable way. As above, the council have also pledged to work towards becoming a carbon neutral town by 2030 and this is being embedded across every area of the council's work. Whilst modifications have been recommended by the Inspector to the Local Plan, this does not alter the overall significance of the contribution that it will make to achieving future sustainable development in Reading. I do regret that the Inspector essentially required the removal of the requirement for employment development to contribute

to affordable housing, but equally I must respect the outcome of the examination process.

- Poisons - Since 2015 the local authority no longer has involvement in the enforcement of legislation covering the sale of poisons.
- Food Packaging - All food packaging must be safe to human health in that there is no migration of chemicals into the food products. There are no current licensing requirements available to the Council for static shops which supports the reduction of packaging which might be damaging to the environment. Street traders in Reading have to follow locally agreed consent conditions which include a condition that says all food packaging and utensils for use by customers shall be made of biodegradable or recyclable materials.

All in all, I'm sure Mr Allen will agree that the Council does an awful lot of work. I'm happy to agree with what I think is his general sentiment that this authority should have greater powers, though. After all, I'm quite sure the country would be far better governed by local government than the present national government.

4. Roger Lightfoot to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport:
Pop up Pool

Could I draw to the attention of the Lead Councillor unsatisfactory cleaning of the facilities at the pop up pool. A bullnose tile is missing or needs replacement. The showers frequently have accumulated hair on the drains, the toilets smell and what appears to be blood is on a wall near the clock which has been there several months.

What will the Councillor be doing about this ?

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

Thank you for your comments about Rivermead, the feedback you have provided over the last year or so and your question tonight. As a parent who takes his youngest daughter to regular swimming lessons at this pool I agree that the cleaning of the changing areas has often fallen short of the standards we expect and has been something we have been working with Greenwich Leisure (GLL), who manage Rivermead for us, to rectify.

As you may recall there was some discussion at the time the pool opened about a conflict between providing shallow access steps and use of the pool for lane swimming. The decision made was on balance improving pool access was felt more important than the likely damage to the tiling that would be caused by frequent removal of the steps. Frequent removal of these very heavy steps has meant that tiles have got caught or damaged. Consequently GLL are regularly replacing the tiles as they are displaced. The same tile has been reattached at least three times since the pool opened and most recently replaced again on the 21st September.

The mark below the clock has been removed and is believed to be rust rather than blood.

We have been working with GLL over the last 12 months or so to improve the quality of service being achieved. They have undertaken a number of changes in an attempt to address the problems being experienced. This has included initially changing the cleaning regimes, changing and increasing staffing and most recently the introduction of contract cleaners. However, staying on top of the standards of cleanliness in the changing area has remained problematic and in response GLL are currently reviewing the programming of the facility and are trying to create opportunities for more cleaning at peak times without reducing the availability for public use.

It is worth noting the demountable pool has a significant through put for a small swimming pool. GLL are reporting that there are about 1500 people on swimming lessons; a key reason for providing the pool. In comparison about 1100 were attending the 4 times larger Central Swimming Pool when this closed. While this demonstrates the success of the pool in one area it does present a number of operational problems when trying to cater for significantly more people, while the support facilities e.g. changing rooms, are significantly smaller.

It is also worth noting that the purpose of the demountable pool is to provide a facility whilst our new swimming facilities are being built and not a replacement for those closed.

Details of the new replacement facilities will be announced shortly.

**5. Roger Lightfoot to ask the Leader of the Council:
Arthur Hill Site**

Would the Leader of the Council, please confirm that the 15 proposed flats at the Arthur Hill Pool site are in fact studios/bedsits. Could RBC incorporate with the answer a detailed plan and front elevation of a typical ground and first floor flat roughly in the area where the current pool is, with the maximum internal dimensions shown of each, and showing position of individual kitchen and bathroom facilities; and will they all have natural light ?

REPLY by Councillor Brock Leader of the Council.

A high level appraisal of the site has indicated that it would support 15 flats; a mix of 1 and 2 bedroom properties - not 'studios/bedsits' as you suggest. Detailed plans of the flats are not yet available as the design process is not yet complete. The designs will ensure that all flats have access to natural light. The final design for the new homes will be subject to gaining planning permission and meeting the policies and requirements of our new Local Plan.

**6. Peter Burt to ask the Leader of the Council:
Arthur Hill Site**

At the last Policy Committee meeting the Leader of the Council said:

“When Arthur Hill was closed all of the proper processes were followed of course, which involves indeed some consultation with the public.”

(2:31:20 in the Council webcast of the meeting).

Please can the Leader of the Council tell me, when Arthur Hill Pool was closed in 2016, exactly what opportunities for consultation the public were given; what were the results of this consultation and where can they be found; and on what basis the Council concludes it has a mandate to develop flats on the Arthur Hill site.

REPLY by Councillor Brock Leader of the Council.

The decision to close Arthur Hill Pool was taken at Full Council on 18 October 2016 alongside a debate on a petition seeking to keep Arthur Hill swimming pool open until a replacement had been built. The decision was made in public and advertised in advance, not least by notices placed at the site and consultation held with schools. Members of the public had ample opportunity to make representation and, indeed, did so.

The Arthur Hill site is identified for development for residential in the Council's Local Plan, which is to be considered for adoption at this meeting. It was subject to formal consultation in the draft version (May 2017) and the pre-submission draft version (November 2018). Local Plans are subject to examination in public by an independent Planning Inspector. This included a public hearings session on the Arthur Hill site on 5th October 2018. It is for the Planning Inspector to determine whether the plan is sound and legally compliant. Paragraph 123 of the Inspector's Report states that:

“Policy RL6 relates to the protection of leisure facilities, however considering the allocation of land at Palmer Park (Site ER1j) which includes a new swimming pool, the allocation for residential development at ER1h is justified.”

Therefore, the identification of the site for residential development has fulfilled all of the legal and procedural requirements

7. Peter Burt to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation: Parkland in Reading

Is the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage, and Recreation committed to preventing development on parkland in Reading and is she committed to protecting Palmer Park from development ?

REPLY by Councillor Rowland Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation.

This meeting of Council will discuss the adoption of the new Reading Borough Local Plan. This document contains the Council's policies on a range of matters including protection of open space. Policy EN7 identifies Reading's most important spaces for protection from development, and this includes Palmer Park, which is identified as Local Green Space. This states that:

“Proposals that would result in the loss of any of these areas of open space, erode their quality through insensitive adjacent development or jeopardise their use or enjoyment by the public, will not be permitted.”

The Local Plan also contains a presumption in favour of retention of any open space that is not specifically identified under EN7, unless it is clearly demonstrated that replacement open space, of a similar standard and function, can be provided at an accessible location close by, or that improvements to recreational facilities on remaining open space can be provided to a level sufficient to outweigh the loss of the open space.

The Local Plan will be the main consideration in determining planning applications, and decisions will need to be made in line with it unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

With specific reference to Palmer Park, Local Plan Policy ER1j sets out that the stadium and track, car park and access road are identified for additional leisure development for a new swimming pool. A draft Development Framework to deliver this allocation, as well as other improvements to the park, was consulted upon between December 2018 and February 2019. The proposed amended Framework will be presented to Policy Committee in the near future.

8. Michael Sage to ask the Leader of the Council:
Citizen’s Panel

We understand that an online Citizen’s panel was established in 2017.

Please could you answer the following:

Why is the recruitment to the panel and its discussions or decisions not widely publicised?

How has the panel influenced RBC’s recent decisions, is RBC bound by the decisions of the panel ?

What are the terms of reference of the panel ?

Has the panel considered measures to tackle climate change and if not, why not ?

To provide a democracy fit for purpose, we at Extinction Rebellion Reading believe the Citizens Panel should be upgraded to a Citizens’ Assembly and: be fully publicised, transparent and open in its deliberations; consider measures to tackle Climate Change; have access to appropriate expert advice; make decisions that are binding on RBC.

REPLY by Councillor Brock Leader of the Council.

The Council’s online Citizens’ Panel is a flexible mechanism for involving residents in decision making and shaping Council priorities. The Panel is a demographically representative group of Reading residents, and to ensure this, recruitment is carried out by an external market research company, who aim to fill the quota for

each demographic group. Initial recruitment to the Panel was also advertised on the Council's website. The Panel is made up of approx. 1500 residents with 250 Panel members refreshed on an annual basis. The annual refresh process and request for volunteers is, again, advertised on the Council's website.

The Panel are asked to respond to approximately four surveys a year via the Council's website. Some of the surveys are also available to residents generally. The feedback from the Citizens Panel is reported as part of the consultation process and fed into decision making processes. For example, following consultation on changes to the Concessionary Fares Scheme for Access Pass Holders, we consulted further on a proposal to align the Older Persons Pass and Access Pass for Disabled People by ending free use of the ReadiBus service for Older Person Pass holders. The Citizens Panel was invited to respond as part of the consultation, and as a result, it was resolved that none of the proposed changes would be made to the discretionary elements of the concessionary travel scheme.

The Citizens' Panel does not itself have discussions or make decisions but, for example, earlier this year, the members of the panel were invited to take part in focus group discussions as part of the Council's recent consultation on the new transport strategy.

In September this year, the Panel was invited by the Reading Climate Change Partnership to take part in the development of the next Reading Climate Change Strategy, due for publication in spring 2020. As part of the strategy development, a number of climate change 'theme' groups, open to all residents, are being developed in order to feed into the strategy and action plan. Further details can be found at: <https://readingcan.org.uk/strategy-consultation-interview>.

It is also worth noting that the Council is currently considering how it can best engage with residents in the future and reviewing the operation of the Citizens' Panel.

9. Michael Sage to ask the Leader of the Council:
Reading 2050 Refresh Workshop

Please could the Council report on the results of the Reading 2050 refresh workshop held on the 17th October and in particular about how and to what extent Reading 2050 aligns with RBC's objective of Reading becoming Carbon Neutral by 2030 ?

REPLY by Councillor Brock Leader of the Council.

The Reading 2050 Vision: Refresh and Review workshop is taking place on Monday 4 November 2019.

10. Michael Sage to ask the Lead Councillor for Corporate and Consumer Services:

Council's Energy Provider

Is the council's energy purchased from a renewable energy provider and if so, who are they? If not, why not? A renewable energy provider would be compatible with RBC's objective of Reading becoming Carbon Neutral by 2030.

REPLY by Councillor Emberson Lead Councillor for Corporate and Consumer Services.

The Council is in the process of changing its energy contracts for electricity and gas to Total Gas & Power Limited. Under the new contract, 100% of the Council's electricity (including in-contract schools) will be provided on the '100% Pure Green' tariff. This uses 'Renewable Energy Guarantee of Origin' (REGO) certificates which ensure that each MWh of electricity purchased is directly linked to volumes generated from renewable sources. In other words all electricity is offset by renewable generation.

As power is supplied via the national grid and local distribution network however, it cannot be guaranteed to be from renewable sources. In order to achieve this, the Council is increasing its renewable energy generating assets in order to supply its own energy directly. At present 14% of its electricity consumption is supplied in this way.

The Council is also encouraging the installation of renewable energy generating equipment in the Borough to improve the proportion of local energy that is from renewable sources.

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

Heathrow Expansion

In response to Councillor Page's comments on Heathrow expansion at the Policy meeting on 26th September I wholeheartedly support and encourage the changes required to significantly increase journeys to Heathrow by public transport. This must happen irrespective of the conversation about Heathrow expansion. The fact of the matter is that a third Heathrow runway will see a 25% increase in Heathrow's Co2 emissions which already stand at 20 million tons of Co2 per year. Councillor Page stated that, "The science and technology is there to deliver a step change in improvement in the emissions from aircraft. The technology is there, it requires intergovernmental action across all countries to accelerate the process". A 2016 paper by the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research in Manchester states that, "Even a highly optimistic uptake of the most promising technologies for reducing the Co2 intensity of flying cannot deliver the rapid and deep rates of mitigation to comply with the IPCC's carbon budgets for a reasonable-to-likely chance of staying below 2 degrees." I am not asking for all air travel to stop. There must be a significant reduction in the amount of flights from Heathrow if we are to achieve targets that are in line with IPCC targets. Heathrow expansion is not

compatible with such targets. The Council appears to be basing its decision on Heathrow expansion partly on the false hope of technologies that don't yet exist. Will the Council therefore reconsider its position and come out in opposition to Heathrow expansion ?

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

I thank Mr Kinton for his question.

As I stated at the meeting of Policy Committee on 26th September, the Council's position on aviation expansion has been agreed through a resolution 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 support for any Heathrow expansion is heavily qualified and dependent on significant improvements to both public transport infrastructure as well as aircraft emission standards. It is worth noting that vehicular traffic into, out of and within Heathrow Airport contributes considerably to the poor air quality in the area over and above anything from aircraft movements.

Current public transport links to Heathrow Airport are unacceptably inadequate given the existing level of flight operations. It is wrong for the Government to link the funding of projects, such as the Western Rail link to Heathrow, to future airport expansion, when there is an immediate and urgent need for such schemes.

Regarding aircraft emissions, it is important to recognise this is an international issue that must be addressed by airlines and their manufacturers with pressure from Governments.

Reading Borough Council believes there are a range of measures which can be utilised to significantly improve current standards, including the use of larger, quieter and much more environmentally friendly aircraft and more effective restrictions on flight patterns, particularly at night.

Locally we will continue to urgently respond to the Climate Emergency through the delivery of an ambitious programme of sustainable transport measures, in parallel with preparing our new Local Transport Plan and Climate Change strategies.

It is right that we should review all our policies in light of our recent Climate Emergency Declaration. I have therefore asked officers to bring a report to the March 16th meeting of SEPT Committee so that we can review our position on airport expansion, access to Heathrow and Gatwick, and other related environmental issues.

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

Council's Declaration of a Climate Emergency

Thank you for Councillor Page's response to my recent question highlighting that only 16 of 214 Reading residents asked on Broad Street were aware of the Council's declaration of a climate emergency. Does the Council have communication strategies prepared for alternative forms of emergency that are seen as more immediate and if so why are these not being employed in this emergency ?

What measure or measures are used to assess Reading's Co2 emissions? Is this form of measurement recognised and is it appropriate to account for all of Reading's Co2 emissions ?

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

I thank Mr Kinton for his question.

At the outset it is important to clarify the terms "Emergency" and "Climate Emergency" as the two sound similar, but are different.

The Councils 'Emergency Response Plan' sets out in detail how the Council will provide an immediate response to real time or imminent emergencies or Major Incidents for example flooding, fires, vehicle collisions, terrorism etc. By their nature these emergencies provide little or no warning.

A Climate Emergency is different and is the term which is associated with an international campaign to urgently tackle climate change. Climate change is related to the continuing release of green-house gases into the atmosphere.

The Climate Emergency Declaration describes the urgent action needed to mitigate this process by reducing our emissions of greenhouse gases to zero as quickly as possible. Steps are already being taken locally and nationally, but globally stock levels of CO₂ and other green-house gases continue to rise. As the climate changes in response to this the Council may need to respond to a greater number of emergencies arising from these changes.

The ongoing processes of mitigating and adapting to climate change are mainly through "prevention" as opposed to "response", although, as described changes to risks to certain events that require emergency response are considered in the planning for emergencies.

The Council works closely with the Reading Climate Change Partnership to communicate climate change as an issue and to stress the urgency of action by communities, businesses and organisations across the borough to help to reduce our contribution to climate change and to prepare for the local impacts. As mentioned in previous reports, press etc, a new third climate change strategy is under preparation. You can find out more at www.readingCAN.org.uk

In respect to the aspect of your question relating to the CO₂ emissions for the borough, the Council uses the Government statistics to assess the Borough's CO₂ emissions: UK local authority and regional carbon dioxide emissions national statistics. The most recent data set covers 2005 to 2017.

This is understood to be the most accurate data set available to gauge local authority area emissions. The data are compiled from a range of sources but are largely consistent with the UK Greenhouse gas inventory.

The emissions data include domestic and commercial/industrial emissions from gas and electricity, transport emissions and land use.

The emissions do not include 'embodied' emissions in products which are accounted for through the emissions associated with their location of manufacture.