

QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor McGonigle to ask the Chair of the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee:

Tree Planting Programme

Trees are one of the best ways to absorb CO2 from the atmosphere.
Trees improve air and soil quality.
Trees shade and cool the air on urban streets.
Trees provide habitats for wildlife.
Trees mitigate flood risk.
Trees cut noise levels.
Trees are good for public health and well-being.
And they improve the look of just about everything.

It is good to see that the council is up-dating the tree strategy and the hope is that since the last tree strategy in 2010 we are now more aware of how vital it is to have an extensive tree planting programme and protection for existing trees especially as so many have been lost to development.

Can we be given an estimate of how many more trees can be planted in our parks and on our roadsides and can we know how can organisations and residents can best get involved?

REPLY by the (Councillor Davies):

I invite Councillor James, the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities (Councillor James):

The Council recognises the importance of trees in the urban environment. A commitment to environmental improvements is contained in both the Corporate Plan and the Reading 2050 Vision.

The Council's new Local Plan provides planning policies detailing expectations for developments within the Borough relating to trees, landscaping and biodiversity.

The adoption of the first Tree Strategy in 2010 resulted in the allocation of an annual tree planting budget, which has enabled the Council to carry out comprehensive planting over the last decade. The capital budget is supplemented by allocations from the Housing Decent Neighbourhoods Fund, Section106 agreements, and schools' budgets. This has enabled the planting of an average of 1,895 trees over the past nine years, an average of over 200 trees annually.

[A table recording tree planting by land-owing department is below for reference.]

The Tree Strategy is proposed to be updated and will commit the Council to continuing to plant around 200 trees on public land annually. This includes not only in parks, but also on the public highway and other public open space.

This is about the number that can realistically be irrigated adequately over the growing season, ensuring that each tree gets sufficient water for survival. Insufficient irrigation in the first years following planting is the main reason for the high failure rate of newly planted trees nationally. By contrast, in most years, apart from the very dry summer of 2018, the Council has consistently lost only around 1% of its new trees, because of regular watering.

The Council already works with community groups to promote tree planting and preservation in Reading.

In 2010 the Reading Tree Warden Network (RTWN) was set-up. The RTWN has, over the last 10 years, provided invaluable help in securing funds for tree planting and carrying out tree planting projects alongside the Council.

The Council is also partnering with Ethical Reading in its Trees for Reading programme, which seeks business funding for new tree planting. The first significant donor to this scheme is the Thames Lido.

The Council would encourage interested individuals to support the RTWN and businesses to respond to the Trees for Reading appeal if they wish to be involved in promoting tree planting. For residents who do not want organisational involvement, they should be encouraged privately to support the aims of the updated Tree Strategy through tree planting in their own gardens, letting the Council know so that the information can be captured for our monitoring purposes. Once published, the Action Plan within the revised Tree Strategy will help interested parties to understand how they can get involved.

Table 1: Tree planting in Reading Borough by land-owning department

Year	Highways	Housing	Parks	Schools	Total
2010/11	56	86	152		294
2011/12	160	101	69		330
2012/13	Not known	124	24	25	173
2013/14	130	62	9	32	233
2014/15	64	72	54		190
2015/16	94	10	38	3	145
2016/17	95	14	32	20	161
2017/18	156	40	46		242
2018/19	55	33	20	19	127
					1,895

QUESTION NO. 2

Councillor Singh to ask the Chair of the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee:

Norcot Youth & Community Centre

Norcot Youth and Community Centre, on the Lyndhurst Road in my ward, Kentwood, has been closed since October last year and will be demolished and replaced with much needed affordable housing. Some of the aims of this Youth and Community Centre were to represent and promote the interests of residents living in Norcot estate, boosting community pride and reducing crime. The council has pledged to keep the community centre in its plans and also plant more trees. Can the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhood and Communities confirm the timeline by when the residents will have access back to this much-needed Youth and Community Centre and how many more trees will be planted and also assure the residents it will continue to hold the same aims as objectives as mentioned above? Furthermore, please confirm the centre will remain and be promoted as a youth club by the Council?

REPLY by the Chair of the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee (Councillor Davies):

I invite Councillor James, the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods & Communities (Councillor James):

The Norcot development has now obtained planning approval and officers are currently undertaking a tender process to enter into contract with an appropriate contractor early in the new year for the construction of the new homes and community space.

The existing centre is being prepared for demolition and a contractor has been procured in line with standing orders. The demolition is due to commence in January 2020 and the works to deliver the 18 flats and community space will follow shortly after.

The scheme includes additional tree planting. With regards to the community use the space will be available to local residents to use for local activities and events. In addition to this, work will begin next year on the provision of a new community hub on Dee Park which will provide a range of community of services for residents in the west Reading area including a Childrens Centre and youth activities and services.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

6 NOVEMBER 2019

QUESTION NO. 3

Councillor Singh to ask the Chair of the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee:

Norcot Youth & Community Centre

Mopeds nuisance in our local parks (Arthur Newbery and McIlroy) and in the alleyways (Pierces Hill/Beverley Road) have become a major and persistent problem. This is causing distress and annoyance to the residents, especially families with young children. A young mother narrated to me how one of the mopeds nearly drove into her two-year old in an alleyway. This issue has been reported on a number of occasions, both to the police and to the ASB team by the residents. Can the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities confirm to me that she is aware of this issue and to resolve this, what ideas and strategies she has discussed so far with the Anti-Social Behaviour team and when the residents in my ward Kentwood can see some results?

REPLY by the Chair of the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee (Councillor Davies):

I invite Councillor James, the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods & Communities (Councillor James):

Motorbike misuse has been a problem across a number of areas of the town historically. Where the problem is identified the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Team will work closely with the local Neighbourhood Police, who have the most appropriate powers to deal with this type of nuisance.

Arthur Newbery and McIlroy parks have not been identified as a hotspot by the Parks Team for this type of ASB and the ASB Team have not had any reports of this type of behaviour relating specifically to these parks or roads in the last three months. The police have informed us that they have had a report for motorbike nuisance associated with this area although not specifically to these parks.

Tackling motorbike nuisance is difficult and challenging work as it is often hard to positively identify either the riders or vehicles involved and both the ASB Team and Police rely on residents reporting incidents in a way that allows them to direct resources to the right place at the right time. I would therefore encourage anyone who witnesses this behaviour to report the incident to the ASB Team or where there is evidence of dangerous driving, directly to the police.

Council officers have worked in collaboration with local police teams and Safer Neighbourhoods Forums to provide key information for residents in hot spot areas. These include leaflets detailing what to look out for and what information is helpful in reporting this nuisance to the authorities. This area specific information has been distributed throughout the Borough.

If the contact details of those who are experiencing this problem could be passed to the ASB Team they will make contact with them to gather all the relevant information. For example in the past where the nuisance takes place on parkland the ASB Team, police,

and Neighbourhood Initiatives Team have worked with the Parks Team to identify defensive measure that might be put in place to protect the area. Whilst these may not always prevent motorbikes from getting onto a park, these defences can make exit more difficult and therefore support police action to stop the offenders.