

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

17 DECEMBER 2025

PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 1

Emily Brooke to ask the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport:

FM Conway – odour complaints

The council has been made repeatedly aware by Reading residents of a persistent odour and associated negative health complaints that have strong correlations with wind direction and observed smoke from the FM Conway Plant located at Wigmore Lane, RG30. In relation to this issue:

Why have stricter requirements not been placed on FM Conway to install market-leading odour, VOC, and dust extraction technologies—such as those used at their Hayes plant (<https://www.lybover.be/en/solutions/odour-voc-and-dust-filtration-for-asphalt-producer/>)?

REPLY by Councillor Ennis (Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport):

The FM Conway plant operates under an Environmental Permit issued by Reading Borough Council. Under this permit they are permitted to make discharges to air via their flue. As a roadstone coating plant, there is a limit placed on the amount of particulate matter they can discharge. Regular monitoring takes place to confirm that they meet this limit and the results are submitted to us. We carry out regular inspections to ensure that they are meeting the other requirements of their permit.

There are no other emission limits other than particulate matter. This is set nationally by Defra who issue process guidance notes for industrial processes and tell councils and the Environment Agency to what level such processes should be regulated.

The Conway plant referred to in the question is not comparable to the one in Reading, as unlike the Reading plant, it processes recycled asphalt which is a more polluting process.

The other enforcement remit we have over the issue is that odour can be considered to be a statutory nuisance. We have investigated reports of the odour thoroughly and have not determined it to be a statutory nuisance as it is short lived, sporadic and has yet to be verified by our officers. Note that there is not currently any objective evidence that confirms the source of the alleged odour to be FM Conway.

Residents have raised questions about the air quality impacts of bitumen, including PAH emissions. There is currently no local air quality monitoring of PAHs as it is not covered by the local air quality management regime. The PAH air monitoring network is operated by Defra at a national level, with the nearest monitoring station being in Basingstoke. It should be noted that there are many sources of PAH emissions in the environment.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 2

Emily Brooke to ask the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport:

FM Conway – odour complaints

What can the Lead Councillor do to better resource the Environmental Health team to fully investigate odour complaints, including:

- Monitoring during reported odour/emission times (e.g., 6am–8am on weekdays),
- Using wind direction data to identify appropriate downwind locations for testing,
- Investigate emissions using appropriate instrumentation, as was done for London Road when the new bus lane caused residents to report increased emissions,
- Install a fit for purpose monitor for the Oxford Road or at another suitable location. The current monitor only captures PM10, which is insufficient. Most relevant would be CO, NOx, VOCs, SO2. NOx and VOCs are both associated with unpleasant odours and so it is of great importance to measure these and correlate with residents' reports,
- Advising the environmental health team to accept 3rd hand collated reported data (they are currently refusing). We currently have a collated list of incidents reported to us that the Environmental Health team refuses to accept as evidence. Can you please also accept emissions data (VOCs, PM etc) that has been collected by private individuals using Reading University calibrated instrumentation?

REPLY by Councillor Ennis (Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport):

The Environmental Protection team has been investigating reports of the alleged odour, which includes the gathering of information from residents on locations and timings of the odour, and attending the locations of the reported odour at the reported times including early mornings. Due to the sporadic and short-lived nature of the odour, Environmental Health Officers have been unable to determine it to be a statutory nuisance as it does not meet the threshold for a substantial interference in the use and enjoyment of people's property.

Whilst reports from residents can be used in conjunction with officer evidence to prove a case, it is not enough on its own to prove that a statutory nuisance exists, particularly as there is no objective evidence that confirms the source of the alleged odour to be FM Conway. There are many other potential sources of the odour that is being described, and the descriptions of the odour are also variable. Evidence must be robust enough to stand up to challenge in court and cause and effect must be linked.

The Council has been in communication with FM Conway about the complaints, and they have asked any residents who are impacted by the alleged smell to report this

directly to them so that they can establish whether there is any pattern relating to their activities. The Council is also continuing to log reports of the odour.

As part of the investigation, the Council has installed additional short term air quality monitoring in the west Reading area in order to provide additional information on the levels of pollutants. If high levels are detected, then a significant amount of further work would need to be carried out to determine the source, as there are many possible sources of air pollutants and there is no simple way of linking the pollutants to a particular source. If high levels are found then we may require the support of the UK Health Security Agency in investigating further, and we have contacted them for advice.

In a wider context, the Council are also in the process of procuring some additional air quality sensors to increase our particulate monitoring network. The aim of the project is to understand local variation in PM_{2.5}, Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) and Oxone (O₃) air pollutant concentrations across Reading. We aim to use the monitoring data derived to inform public health interventions that help raise awareness of how to reduce and mitigate risk of exposure; to identify effective mitigation and incentivise behavioural change to reduce exposure in local neighbourhoods.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 3

Emily Brooke to ask the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport:

FM Conway – odour complaints

Can the Council respond to FOI requests for the FULL emissions report from FM Conway? Similar to how Newhaven Council published the Socotec Emissions Report from the inspection of the FM Conway plant in Newhaven.

REPLY by Councillor Ennis (Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport):

Clarification was being sought from the Information Governance Officer as to whether the full copy of the report could be provided. The report has now been provided.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 4

Alison May to ask the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety:

Waste Incinerators Bill

The second reading of The Waste Incinerators Bill, as presented on 25 November 2025 by Dr Andrew Murrison, the Member of Parliament for South West Wiltshire, is currently scheduled to take place on Friday 16 January 2026. Can the Council advise of their plans to engage the MPs relative to the Reading area, namely the MPs for Reading West and Mid Berkshire, the MP for Earley and Woodley and MP for Reading Central, on this important subject?

REPLY by Councillor Rowland (Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety):

I'd like to thank Ms May for her question which allows me to advise her on the conversations we are continuing to have with our local MPs around this issue.

The Waste Incinerators Bill is a Private Members Bill under the 10 Minute Rule that proposes three principal policy positions on EfW facilities.

The first is to prohibit construction on new incinerators (save for where substantial construction has already begun). It is important to note that this position is already broadly supported by the current Government, via its statement of 30 December 2025 entitled '*Government to crack down on waste incinerators with stricter standards for new builds*'.

Additionally, the bill seeks taxation of waste disposed of by incineration and also seeks to prohibit local authorities from entering into any contract for the incineration of waste which requires them to pay financial penalties if a minimum amount of waste is not delivered for incineration.

The bill has not yet been voted on and our local MPs broadly back the Government's stance on waste incineration.

The Government does not support an over-capacity of incineration throughout the country, but in some cases, accepts that incineration through Energy from Waste facilities is the best environmental outcome that can be achieved. The Government continues to acknowledge the greatest environmental harm lies with landfill and that landfill use is the least desirable outcome for waste that has reached the true end of life. Incineration is principally a form of waste disposal of which energy-from-waste is a positive by-product. Not harnessing the embodied energy in the process would be more wasteful. These facilities provide around 3% of the UK's total energy generation, which provides some current energy security and helps in cutting proximate customers' bills.

The Government's stance on new build EfW plants sets out that these will only receive planning permission if they help reduce the amount of non-recyclable waste sent to landfill or enable the replacement of older, less efficient plants. New projects must be carbon capture-ready once the requirements come into force. Currently, DEFRA (Department for the Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs) is working closely with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero on carbon capture technology for waste incinerators.

Any future projects will also need to show how they will make use of the heat they produce and includes plants that produce fuels that can be used to decarbonise other sectors. New waste incinerators must meet existing high standards on air pollution and other environmental impacts.

However, realistically, we must all acknowledge that there will always be waste that must be disposed of, either through EfW or landfill - and EfW continues to be the preferable option of those two.

Reading, as a member of the Re3 Partnership of councils, would clearly like to see less end-of-life waste, which is manifested through our educational campaigns such as our recent food recycling push. The partnership is committed to supporting residents to focus on the reduction of consumption in the first place; the reuse of items and contributing to the circular economy; and finally stronger take up by residents around recycling and composting. It is only via these routes, that the need and demand for EfW will wane and reduce in the future.

It should be noted that Ten-Minute Rule Bills are intended to draw attention to a particular issue and that they are extremely unlikely to pass into legislation. As set out in my response above, the Government is addressing the reality around from Energy-from-Waste that the previous Government kicked into the long grass. The current Government is bringing down the cost of energy and addressing the issue of energy security in the round, including increasing the UK's renewable capacity and building more resilient energy infrastructure, something that has unfortunately been opposed in Parliament by MPs from the Green Party and other parties that are not constructively addressing the bigger picture that the Government is having to work through.