

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE - 21 NOVEMBER 2018

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

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

Road Pricing

Does the Council have the legal authority to introduce road pricing (for example, a Congestion Charge) within the Borough without obtaining approval from the Secretary of State or anyone else ?

REPLY by the Chair of the Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee (Councillor Debs Absolom):

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

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

I thank Cllr Williams for his question, to which the short answer is ‘No’.

Local Authorities have the power to introduce road congestion charging schemes under Part III and Schedule 12 of the Transport Act 2000, as amended by the Local Transport Act 2008. However the legislation is clear that charging schemes may only be made “if it appears desirable for the purpose of directly or indirectly facilitating the achievement of policies in the charging authority’s local transport plan”.

The procedure involved in making a charging scheme, as set out in the Act, is for the Local Authority to advertise and consult on a Scheme Order. The Order would need to be submitted to the Secretary of State for approval, who may decide to call a public enquiry.

We are currently in the process of updating our Local Transport Plan, which will include a public consultation in early 2019. A key focus of the plan will be to develop and extend sustainable travel options and thereby reduce reliance on the private car. Therefore a congestion charge, or similar demand management measures such as a Workplace Parking Levy, could help achieve our objectives.

However before either of these options could be approved we would need to demonstrate how the income would deliver the necessary and complementary

alternative sustainable transport options such as more park and ride facilities, Mass Rapid Transit priority routes, additional bus services and frequencies, new light rail and new stations, and enhanced walking and cycling routes.

The current Administration recognises that any proposed new charging schemes must clearly and transparently show how every penny raised would be invested in improved transport infrastructure that offers convenient, effective and rapid alternatives to the private car.

Without these sustainable public transport alternatives our roads, particularly radial routes into and out of Reading, will become totally gridlocked with thousands of new motorists trying to get into and out of Reading from the tens of thousands of new homes planned in the Wokingham, Bracknell and West Berkshire area over the next 20 years.

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STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE - 21 NOVEMBER 2018

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

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

Working with the Local Community

Earlier this year, The Director of Public Health concluded that green spaces can fundamentally define the spaces in which people live and work. The natural environment can have wide ranging health benefits for our communities and have an important role to play in helping to reduce health inequalities. The Director recommended that Local Authorities should foster new relationships with organisations aiming to improve the natural environment and its use. Could the Lead Councillor give us a brief update on the work the Council is doing and actions it has taken, or plans to take, to foster those new relationships ?

REPLY by the Chair of the Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee (Councillor Debs Absolom):

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

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

I thank Councillor Williams for his question.

Reading's Parks and Open Spaces are one of the most used of any service the Council provides, and are enjoyed by all socio-economic groups across the Borough.

We regularly undertake work to improve the natural environment and have done so for many years. This has included schemes such as the development of Fobney Island Nature Reserve and its ongoing maintenance, the more recent major tree works along the adjacent river banks and, of course, improving access and habitat within Lousehill Copse along with the provision of a dipping platform.

In addition to the physical works, we host hundreds of community event activities and bookings throughout the year generating hundreds of thousands of visits. We have numerous well established partnerships with many organisations to provide larger scale community engagement events promoting participation in physical activity such as Race for Life, The London to Reading Bike Ride, fun runs, sponsored walks and boot camps.

Reading Borough's first Park Run was launched in May 2018 at Prospect Park. This activity is free to participate in and fully volunteer-led. Partnership working with the organisers to establish and facilitate requirements takes place throughout the year and, to date, the Park Run has attracted over fifteen hundred participants also generating thousands of visits to the scheme.

The Council developed the Reading Walks programme which has now been operating for a number of years to increase the health and well-being of those unlikely to use traditional leisure facilities. These walks are led by our volunteer leaders creating a social friendly club-like atmosphere. We support Walk leaders to deliver the walks, collecting data for monitoring, marketing the scheme and referring people to walks as part of our GP referral scheme. Last year, more than three hundred people took part generating thousands of visits to the scheme with over a thousand hours of volunteer time being given to lead the walks themselves.

We also work with a host of other organisations to provide volunteering opportunities and/or improve and maintain our open spaces, these include the Environment Agency, Friends of Fobney Island, Conserve Reading on Wednesdays, Econet, Tools for Self-Reliance, Friends of Clayfield Copse, Conservation Volunteers, Friends of Caversham Court, Friends of Reading Abbey and the Probation Service amongst others.

In addition to the activities being run we are also working with the Lawn Tennis Association to improve our tennis facilities and again increase participation in physical activity with the "Club Spark" scheme starting at Christchurch Meadows this year, which we will look to develop further at other sites.

The play service has now moved to Prospect Park and we are growing the number of events and activities we provide in-house within open space. We will build on this summer's successful Out Post project and the growing number of play and family days run at Prospect Park. With a partner operating our Leisure Centres next year, the retained Leisure and Recreation team will also be able to focus more on partnerships, Public Health Outcomes and wellbeing rather than the operational management of indoor sports facilities.

Notwithstanding the continuing and swingeing cuts in our government grants I hope this answer illustrates some of the initiatives we are implementing and supporting across our open space estate, and demonstrates that we will strive to do even more in the future.

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

John Booth to ask the Chair of Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:

Climate Change Emissions

We note that the report to this Committee at Item 13 says that the Council is making good progress against its carbon reduction targets, but (3.8) that it is not on target with renewable energy generation at 6.1% against a target of 15% by 2020, and has had recent problems with renewable heat.

The report says (3.4) “The Government’s latest strategy aimed at delivering the fifth carbon budget and air quality objectives is called the Clean Growth Strategy.”

However these targets and strategies were derived based on limiting the global average temperature rise to 2°C and before the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report on the importance of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C. This new report is discussed in an article on Reading Climate Action Network website <https://readingcan.org.uk/ipcc-special-report-15-global-warming-of-1-5degc> which discusses the requirement for much faster reduction in emissions over the next decade.

Even against its emissions target of 80% reduction by 2050 the Climate Change Committee’s 2017 progress report found “although good progress has been made to date, that progress is stalling. Since 2012, emissions reductions have been largely confined to the power sector, whilst emissions from transport and building stock are rising.”

Locally, a wide-area traffic simulation (including Reading’s roads) for the ‘Smart M4’ found that carbon emissions from road transport will rise by 8% between 2013 and 2037 (with a 30% increase in numbers of trips) when the Climate Change Committee’s fifth carbon budget says that national transport emissions should fall by 48% between 2013 and 2030.

So even if we have a rapid transition towards an all-electric vehicle fleet, and do as much as possible to reduce emissions from conventional vehicles in the meantime, we may not achieve the deep and immediate cuts now required from the transport sector. To keep global warming below 1.5°C, we also need to reduce miles driven by all vehicles, conventional and electric. Reducing miles driven by battery electric vehicles will also reduce the additional demand on the grid and free up renewable power capacity, as well as cutting dangerous particulate pollution from brake and tyre wear.

Please will the Council assess CO2 emissions from transport (to, from, through and within Reading), as well as the benefits to congestion and air quality of planning for traffic reduction, when developing the emerging Local Transport Plan.

REPLY by the Chair of the Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee (Councillor Debs Absolom):

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

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

I thank John Booth for his question.

As he well knows, this Council is fully committed to playing its part in what should be the national and international campaign to avoid catastrophic Climate Change.

As a leading authority on this issue we have set out our stall by aiming to reduce our emissions by further than the pace set through national policy. The Council has surpassed its 50% reduction target three years early in 2017/18 with a 54% reduction in emissions since 2008.

The emission reductions for the wider Borough of Reading are also well above target, with reductions of 41% in 11 years since 2005. This exceeds the UK wide emissions reduction over the 27 years since 1990.

The Council has committed to realising a 'Zero Carbon Reading'. This we feel is what we need to do to play our part in the <+1.5°C future that we must achieve to avert catastrophic climate change. We are proposing to introduce a Zero Carbon Development policy into the new Local Plan and are working closely with the Climate Change Partnership and Reading 2050 to develop and deliver community and technology solutions to achieve this.

Transport emissions have continued to fall in spite of the increased population in Reading. However, the transport network will come under considerable pressure with the planned growth in Reading and the surrounding areas. In order to meet this challenge, whilst continuing to reduce carbon emissions, we must press ahead with our plans to develop the transport network into a smart multi-modal system. Expanding our already successful public transport network is a fundamental part of our strategy. That means more mass rapid transit schemes into and out of Reading delivering greater frequency and reliability of sustainable alternatives to the private car - although I note that Mr Booth and many of his colleagues continue to oppose some practical schemes to promote and extend public transport improvements.

Our fourth draft Local Transport Plan will be available for public consultation in early 2019 and will focus on promoting sustainable alternatives to the private car, managing

congestion and air quality whilst enabling sustainable growth in Reading and the wider region. This will help manage growth and support a sustainable and efficient transport system that improves accessibility, quality of life and health, including reductions in CO₂ emissions. Initial assessments will be undertaken on such measures as part of the development of the LTP and developed further as part of business cases and funding bids.

Currently CO₂ emissions from transport are calculated by the Department for BEIS using transport and fuel sales figures from each borough. I am advised that they do not include information on where journeys start and finish. This means, in practice, that transport policies must act across boundaries. For example someone who selects a public transport route to work, to replace a car journey which begins outside the borough would reduce emissions attributed to neighbouring boroughs in addition to Reading. As mentioned, however, specific transport schemes will also include more detailed assessments of the expected impact on carbon emissions and air quality impacts.

Reading Borough Wide CO₂ Emissions: 2005 to 2016

Year	Transport Emissions CO2 (eq)	% overall reduction on 2005 level	Total Borough emissions	% overall reduction on 2005 level	Population 000's
2005	156.4	-	992.4	-	146.9
2006	150.7	4	971.7	2	148.3
2007	151.8	3	928.0	6	149.7
2008	146.0	7	936.6	6	151.5
2009	141.5	10	827.9	17	152.3
2010	139.0	11	844.7	15	154.3
2011	137.9	12	742.7	25	155.3
2012	136.2	13	796.9	20	156.8
2013	133.5	15	764.0	23	158.6
2014	133.8	14	672.2	32	160.3
2015	136.1	13	629.0	37	161.7
2016	137.5	12	580.6	41	162.7

*source www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-local-authority-and-regional-carbon-dioxide-emissions-national-statistics-2005-2016

The Council is also improving and updating its own vehicle fleets to incorporate electric vehicles and is working closely with Reading Buses to ensure that the bus fleet remains an effective sustainable alternative to the private car in Reading. As reported at Item 12 today, the Council has obtained government funding to retrofit up to 137 buses to Euro 6 standard. Improvements to the quality of the local bus fleet, and the sustainability of fuel supply, will continue to deliver benefits to local air quality and CO₂ emissions.

Reading Buses already has one of the UK's cleanest and greenest fleets, but that does not mean we can't deliver further improvements to air quality and tackling congestion

as we promote more mass rapid transit options and bus priority measures - with more 'clean and green' buses coming into and out of Reading.

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STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE - 21 NOVEMBER 2018

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

John Booth to ask the Chair of Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:

Clean Air

A year ago Reading Friends of the Earth presented a petition to this Committee, signed by over 400 people, calling for “a new air quality action plan to be put in place by 2018 with the necessary resources to cut all pollutant levels to below World Health Organisation guidelines by 2020.”

We note that the report to this Committee at Item 12 says that the Council is to obtain government funding to retrofit 137 buses to Euro 6 standard. It is good that the Council was able to persuade the government to consider other roads in addition to the IDR and to obtain funding for this measure.

However it is alarming to see in the Defra document that at least four roads in Reading in 2018 are at least 20% above the legal limit for NO₂ and that legal compliance on London Road and Chatham Street will not be achieved until 2021. The legal limit is not a safe threshold so the Council is right to progress further measures.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/746100/air-quality-no2-plan-supplement.pdf

The report to this Committee at Item 12 said less about particulates - PM_{2.5} - which are believed to have much greater impact on human health than NO₂. The response to our petition (Item 10 in March 2018 SEPT) said (section 4.6):

- “The locally produced portion of PM_{2.5} will predominantly be from traffic and smoke from chimneys and bonfires.”
- “the cost of increasing the monitoring network to include PM 2.5 is prohibitive. The Council currently has three roadside monitors which are capable of monitoring PM₁₀. It is possible to approximate PM 2.5 levels from these measurements as well as draw conclusions from levels of nitrogen dioxide measured i.e. a reduction in nitrogen dioxide is indicative of a reduction in particulate matter.”

Please will the Council at least provide estimates, if not measurements, of roadside PM_{2.5} in critical locations, and an assessment of its impact on health, and include measures to address this pollutant in its revision of the local transport plan

REPLY by the Chair of the Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee (Councillor Debs Absolom):

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

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

I thank Mr Booth for his question.

Reading does not have any roadside PM_{2.5} monitoring, but it is possible to estimate PM_{2.5} from PM₁₀ readings. The estimated levels at our roadside sites are:

Site	Location	PM10	PM2.5* (0.70PM10)
Caversham Road AQMS	Roadside	23	16.1
Oxford Road AQMS	Roadside	21	14.7
London Road AQMS	Roadside	18	12.6

*The PM_{2.5} levels given in the above table have been calculated using the method recommended in Defra's Technical Guidance LAQM.TG(16)

There is no specific target level set for PM_{2.5}, but local authorities in England have been given a flexible role to work towards reducing emissions and concentrations of PM_{2.5}, which is a very important area of focus due to the well-documented health impacts.

Measures to address the high-level of PM_{2.5} at the identified locations are already underway, including the declassification of the Oxford Road and supporting package of sustainable transport measures along the corridor as well as improvements to the bus fleet that will see vehicles upgraded to EURO VI standards.

These measures will be further supported by key policies and schemes developed as part of the Local Transport Plan 4, which will focus on promoting sustainable alternatives to the private car, managing congestion and air quality whilst enabling sustainable growth in Reading, and the wider region.

The draft fourth Local Transport Plan will be available for public consultation in early 2019.