

Reading Friends of the Earth



Newsletter January - February 2024

For more info: www.readingfoe.org.uk * ... or Twitter @ReadingFOE ... or Facebook [Reading Friends of the Earth | Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/ReadingFriendsOfTheEarth/) ... or email info@readingfoe.org.uk ... or 'phone 07503626167.

* Note: Our website <http://www.readingfoe.org.uk> is not secure and some browsers will not open it. We are in process of shifting to <https://www.readingfoe.co.uk> which already has some content.

General Meetings: Reading FoE usually meet on the **second Wednesday of each month** either in person or on Zoom. Often in Room 1 upstairs at RISC, 35-39 London Street, at 7:30 p.m. Access to RISC from London Street is via a passage to the right of the shop-front. Most meetings will be 'hybrid' using Zoom. Please request a Zoom link if you have not received one. Most meetings discuss plans and general topics - some have a particular focus or guest speakers. Meetings are open to all. Meetings may cancel at short notice due to Covid or availability of group officers - if in doubt check our website www.readingfoe.org.uk on the day or phone or e-mail for confirmation (contacts above).

Wednesday January 10th: 7:30 pm. Will meet in person at RISC and on Zoom. Topics include:

River Action - presentation by Chloe Peck (communities coordinator for the charity River Action) at 8:00 pm by zoom – to share their plans for the next year and give guidance as to how to take action to save our local waterways. <https://riveractionuk.com/>

- River Action is a small charity with a mission to rescue Britain's rivers. Last summer, River Action worked alongside community groups in Henley on Thames to test the Thames for phosphate, nitrate and harmful pathogens, all indicators of sewage run off.
- In 2024 they plan to partner with British Rowing to test the water quality of the Caversham training grounds, as well as different sites along the Thames.

Air Quality: – response to RBC 'Action Plan' consultation – see below

Reading Plan 'Partial Update': – response to RBC consultation – see below

Reading for Warm Homes petition: progress and next steps.

Wednesday February 14th: 7:30 pm. Will be on Zoom – hope also to be 'hybrid' - venue to be decided in January. Topics to include plans for future meetings and summer activities.

Fifty years on...!??

Legend has it that Reading FoE first met at the Rising Sun in Forbury Road in 1974.

The pub has shut. The original members have moved on. But Reading FoE have continued and there is still lots to do.

People, governments, councils and NGOs have made some great changes, but research now shows that environmental issues are far more important, complex, and urgent than most people had imagined back then.

Image from 1975 – demo calling for Reading to install more than just the one cycle stand. And the one that was there was just a concrete wheel-grabber ... times have changed!



Recent Activities

Clean Air and Safer Transport Forum: Chris and John attended RBC's CAST Forum on 30th November. Highlights:

- Air Quality Update
 - Smoke Control Area to be increased from 62% to 100% of Borough in 2024 but compliance and effectiveness seem to be variable. <https://www.reading.gov.uk/climate-and-pollution/smoke-control-areas-smoke-control-areas/>
 - Schools Air Quality Awareness Programme to cost £327k – need schools to sign up to be involved. <https://www.reading.gov.uk/climate-and-pollution/clean-air-living-matters-exploring-reading-with-schools/>
 - Air Quality Action Plan – AQ has improved but still a few non-compliant hotspots (IDR, Friar Street, Cemetery Junction) against current legal limits. Consultation to run from December.
- Strategic Transport Update
 - Reading Transport Strategy 2040 - consultation in progress. Councillor Ennis still keen to reduce through traffic.
 - Bus Service Improvement Plan - £26 million spending in progress.
 - Active Travel Schemes – discussion of improvements.

Reading Minster Display: Tricia Marcouse arranged with Reverend Sonya Wratten for our 'Warm Homes' display to be on show with material from Econet and Draught Busters in the weeks leading up to Christmas.

January-February Activities with Reading FoE, FoE SE region, and national FoE:

Thursday 11th January – 7 pm – 8:15pm. National FoE webinar. **Sharing our stories: campaigning on air pollution.** Come along and get inspired by some great air pollution campaigns already underway in Manchester and London and share your own stories, <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/sharing-our-stories-campaigning-on-air-pollution-registration-764395787377>

Wednesday 31st January – 12 pm – **Positive Campaigning for Local Transport** Webinar - 12pm organised by the Foundation for Integrated Transport (FIT) <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/positive-campaigning-for-local-transport-tickets-763403790287>

Wednesday 31st January – 6 pm - National FoE webinar. Adapting **United for Warm Homes** campaign for expected 2024 elections. <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/united-for-warm-homes-launching-our-new-tactics-to-win-political-support-registration-773675964637>

“Reading for Warm Homes” - petition to Reading MPs – sign now!

Including 'on-paper' signatures we now have about 150. National target date for presentation to MPs was 18th November but we can continue for the moment. We need to decide when to arrange to present it to MPs and when to stop collecting signatures. There may be an opportunity to re-use the petition signatures in the run-up to the expected election in the new constituencies.

Sign petition here: <https://tinyurl.com/5n7tu5tt> Please sign if you are in either Reading constituency (Alok Sharma in Reading West or Matt Rodda in Reading East) or in the new 'Earley and Woodley' constituency – we can sort by postcode later.

Petition calls for:

Urgent support for people dealing with sky-high energy bills.

A new emergency programme to insulate our heat-leaking homes

An energy system powered by cheap, green renewables.

Please help us publicise this initiative to other local people and concerned groups. We will be happy to supply leaflets, petition forms, draft articles for newsletters, etc.

Reading Air Quality Plan Consultation:

Please respond to <https://consult.reading.gov.uk/dens/air-quality-action-plan-2024-2029-consultation/> and help to create a group response. Closes 17th January 2024.

Councillor Ennis' introduction admits that “we still have some locations in the Borough which are above the UK and World Health Organization (WHO) air quality limits.”

The plan has been developed in recognition of the legal requirement on the local authority to work towards Air Quality Strategy (AQS) objectives. It includes a great deal of interesting data and analysis.

On an initial 'skim' reading the following points seem relevant:

- Acknowledges importance of PM2.5. But this is only measured at the 'Urban Background' site in the cemetery which is probably not representative of levels inhaled by people in worst-case locations. Does not seem to explain how and where PM2.5 concentrations are going to be measured.
- In discussing long-term and short-term effects does not seem to differentiate between effects of NO2 and PM2.5. Does not discuss potential impact of short-term periods of relatively high pollution caused by temperature inversion. Does not give meaningful/comprehensible estimates of likely effects on people in Reading of each pollutant, so does not suggest how health will improve as air quality is improved.
- Does not explain difference between UK objectives and (much tighter) WHO objectives.
- Does not explain how much of PM2.5 inhaled by people is regional background – requiring change elsewhere - and how much is due to local emissions in Reading.

National FoE analysis was covered in Reading Chronicle in October finding 95 neighbourhoods in Reading were exposed to air pollution exceeding the World Health Organisation recommended safety limit. This meant approximately 157,000 people were breathing polluted air in the area in 2022.

<https://www.readingchronicle.co.uk/news/23849154.dangerously-high-air-pollution-nearly-reading-neighbourhoods/>

Reading Plan 'Partial Update' Consultation:

Please respond to <https://www.reading.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/new-local-plan/local-plan-partial-update/> and help to create a group response. Closes 31st January 2024. It is a large and complex document so need to pick key areas on which to comment.

The Local Plan sets out the strategy for how new development takes place in Reading. This consultation is on Scope and Content and does not yet include draft updated wording, but instead it generally describes how the Council expect to change certain policies. It suggests that government estimates of need to increase housing may be excessive.

Among other areas it looks to strengthen the policies that deal with climate change and environmental impacts, now including 'embodied carbon'. We should find out how it integrates with the Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy <https://rbwmtogether.rbwm.gov.uk/berkshire-local-nature-recovery-strategy> (that is under development) to deliver 'Biodiversity Net Gain'.

The 'Sustainability Appraisal' considers each option for a policy or site, in turn, and examines it against a range of environmental, social and economic objectives. Instead of 'limiting the impact of climate change' it now seeks to 'address the climate emergency'.

<https://images.reading.gov.uk/2023/12/Local-Plan-Update-Sustainability-Appraisal-Reg-18-Nov-2023.pdf>

Campaign for Better Transport:

This group does good work campaigning "for a cleaner, greener future with more frequent, affordable trams, buses and trains, less traffic and pollution, new and reopened rail lines, fewer domestic flights and a supported, sustainable bus network." <https://bettertransport.org.uk/>

Transport Action Network:

Busy website including a look forward to 2024 - <https://transportactionnetwork.org.uk/what-to-expect-from-2024/>

Reports that University of Leeds researchers say traffic reduction is essential to adequate decarbonisation <https://decarbon8.org.uk/new-report-identifies-gap-in-britains-transport-decarbonisation-journey/>

Also that the National Audit Office say the Department for Transport "does not deliver sufficient action in the transport sector to provide carbon savings, meet air quality and biodiversity targets, and adapt to climate change, as required by law." <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/DfT-Departmental-Overview.pdf>

Reading Library of Things:

Reading Library of Things plans to open for lending things on 9th February in Caversham, with plans for two more centres in Tilehurst and South Reading. Anyone can join the Library for a minimal fee and then borrow tools, a marquee for a summer BBQ, display boards This reduces the need for individual purchases and subsequent storage and provides good information on how to use the tools effectively. They are open for donations between now and then. There is more information on <https://lotreading.myturn.com/library/>

National FoE verdict on COP28:

"Self-interest, weak leadership and a lack of urgency by wealthy countries like the UK, Japan and US and the EU bloc, has resulted in a desperately inadequate COP28 resolution that leaves the world on a collision course with the worst of climate breakdown." <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate/cop28-weak-climate-deal-slammed>

Heat Pump Association comment on government policy changes.

<https://www.pbctoday.co.uk/news/energy-news/decarbonising-home-heating-a-call-for-a-firm-commitment/134145/>

Council Climate Scorecards:

Recording of November webinar explaining the system is at

<https://vimeo.com/friendsoftheearthuk/review/885600207/593ff39944>

Main website with Scorecards for every council's actual performance against the climate goals they have set is at

<https://councilclimatescorecards.uk/> . Reviewed in our November newsletter ... some reservations about methods and accuracy but probably useful to identify areas for discussion.

Other Activities (not run by Reading FoE so check for changes):

24th January – Global Justice Now meeting at RISC about progress in Columbia.

<https://www.facebook.com/events/179563305243731/>

Reading and District Natural History Society – programme of events – see <https://rdnhs.org.uk/blog/>

Kidical Mass Reading – “Making space for the next generation, one bike ride at a time!” - are holding a number of rides for children in the coming months - see www.kidicalmassreading.co.uk or on Twitter @KidicalMassRead

Reading Critical Mass cycle ride. ... Rides on the last Friday of the month. Leave at 19:30 from the Civic Offices in Bridge Street. Leisurely ride for about an hour and a half finishing at pub.

XR Reading hold meetings and events – see <https://www.facebook.com/groups/XRRdg/>

Reading Cycle Campaign – has regular monthly meetings and other activities. <https://readingcyclecampaign.org.uk/>

Repair Cafe – usually third weekend of month - <http://www.transitionreading.org.uk/projects/reading-repair-cafe/>

Reading Bicycle Kitchen – regular sessions – see <https://www.readingbicyclekitchen.org/>

Green Drinks – usually on the first Tuesday of every month in the Castle Tap – see [Reading Green Drinks | Facebook](#)

Useful Links and General Information:

Recent links for Reading FoE stalls and campaigns: www.readingfoe.org.uk/links

Friends of the Earth 'England, Wales and Northern Ireland' <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/>

– Policy and Insight <https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/>

GREN - Greater Reading Environmental Network <http://www.gren.org.uk/>. Also [Greater Reading Environment Network | Facebook](#)

Reading Climate Action Network - <https://readingcan.org.uk>

Extinction Rebellion, Reading: <https://www.facebook.com/xrReading/>

Transition Reading - Reading's Transition Town movement <http://www.transitionreading.org.uk>

Reading FoE Officers etc.

Our 2023 AGM on April 13th 2023 elected Enrico Petrucco to continue in the post of Co-ordinator and Paolo Turati to take over from John Booth as Treasurer.

Reading FoE e-mail communications

If you would like to become a supporter on our mailing list and receive and join in our day-to-day communications please send an email to info@readingfoe.org.uk to request our GDPR Consent form. We have separate lists for people who only want to receive our newsletter (currently 6 per year) and information about important events and actions, and for people who want to be more involved and communicate directly with other active supporters.

Reading FoE Subscriptions:

A subscription/donation would be welcome from supporters but is not required. We're much happier to have an extra pair of hands doing the important stuff. We aim to provide a regular newsletter to keep members up to date with the group's activities. Our subscriptions run from April to March and are set at £8.00 / £5.00 (waged / unwaged) to address newsletter costs, meeting room hire and campaign expenses. Further contributions would be greatly appreciated. To contribute please pay cash at a meeting or event or request our bank account details.