

# Reading Friends of the Earth

## Newsletter January – February 2025



For more info: [www.readingfoe.co.uk](http://www.readingfoe.co.uk) \* ...

or Facebook [Reading Friends of the Earth | Facebook](#) ...

or email [info@readingfoe.co.uk](mailto:info@readingfoe.co.uk) \*\* ... or 'phone 07503626167.

\* Our new website is improving. Our original website – probably to be kept updated until March 2025 – is at <http://www.readingfoe.org.uk> .

\*\* **Our old e-mail address [info@readingfoe.org.uk](mailto:info@readingfoe.org.uk) has been discontinued.**

**General Meetings:** Reading FoE usually (*but not in January 2025*) 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 there will be 'hybrid' - 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.

**Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> January** (*third Wednesday!*) 7:30 pm. Back room, Castle Tap, 120 Castle Street, RG1 7RJ <https://thecastletap.co.uk/> In person only. We will discuss issues and make plans for 2025.

**Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> February** (*second Wednesday!*) 7:30 pm. Room 3 at RISC. **“Sustainable Allotments”** – a talk by John Sharpe – see below. Please request a Zoom link if you need one.

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### **Future Events and Opportunities with Reading FoE, National FoE, and others:**

**“Sustainable Allotments”** – a talk by John Sharpe.

Our February monthly meeting will be held on **Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup>** in Room 3 at RISC at 7:30. The in-person meeting will also (we hope – subject to technology working) be live-streamed on Zoom.

John comments: Allotments can provide good locally produced food but traditional methods of horticulture, as in farming, have often ignored their environmental impact. Too often the results have relied on artificial fertilisers, pesticides, fungicides and herbicides in an attempt to compensate for the damage caused to the soil biome by their practices. To steal a phrase from organic grower Iain Tolhurst, "I've realised that I am really creating biodiversity and my crops are a bi-product".

John has managed his two Bulmershe allotments organically for over 30 years. One as a top fruit orchard and the other for a mixture of vegetables and soft fruit. Over that time his methods have adapted in the light of changing knowledge. In the current iteration he has adopted the Vegan Organic Growing method of avoiding animal fertilisers as well as artificial ones. External inputs are minimised, requiring careful management of the soil to keep it healthy and productive. In this presentation John will outline the methods that he uses to grow, using these principles.

He has been a member of Garden Organic, previously called the Henry Doubleday Research Association, and the Heritage Seed Library, throughout this time, and has participated in members' experiments. He is also a member of the Reading Food Growing Network where he actively supports the Seed Swap by propagating and saving seeds, especially Heritage varieties.

We hope other local experts and enthusiasts will join for discussion afterwards so please invite anyone you think may be interested.

### **National FoE: Campaign for ‘Big Climate Plan’:**

After legal action by national FoE and others the government is required to produce a revised plan by early May 2025. A webinar on 20<sup>th</sup> January will update us on how to make progress. <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/100-days-to-a-big-climate-plan-getting-mps-on-board-registration-1111636678229>

Reading FoE decided not to engage with FoE's proposals for autumn/winter petitions, and a 'scarf stunt' for 'Warm Homes' on 4<sup>th</sup> February, so will monitor suggestions to follow up on our October meetings with 'our' three local MPs. <https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/insight/what-we-need-big-climate-plan-thats-bolder-and-fairer>

### **National FoE: Planet over Profit:**

“Join the first Planet over Profit webinar of the year to hear more and get involved in the campaign to hold UK companies accountable for the environmental and human rights impacts of their global supply chains. We will share updates on the campaign and what’s coming up from our campaigners, hear from local groups about how they have taken part in the campaign and find out how to get involved in the International Day of Forests on 21st March”  
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/planet-over-profit-february-webinar-registration-1109227060999>

### **Ask your MP to support the Climate and Nature Bill:**

National FoE is supporting Zero Hour’s campaign for the Climate and Nature Bill. “Many local action groups are already supporting this proposed UK law, which aims to address the full extent of the climate and nature crisis in line with the most up-to-date science. For the bill to progress, we need at least 102 MPs to show up to vote in favour at the second reading on Friday 24 January. Please use [template email](#) to send to your MP(s) as soon as possible.”

### **Other National FoE training webinars:**

Wednesday 22 January – Active Hope. 6pm to 8:15pm. Online. [Save your spot.](#)

Tuesday 18 February AI tools to help your local campaigning: surgery session. 7pm to 8pm. Online. [Save your spot.](#)

### **Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy:**

A lot of work has been done led by staff at RBWM so maps, plans and strategy are advanced. It will be used to guide local authorities and allow developers to achieve off-site biodiversity net gain. Final consultation expected to launch in February so we may wish to get involved. <https://rbwmtogether.rbwm.gov.uk/berkshire-local-nature-recovery-strategy>

### **Low Traffic Futures:**

Looks like a relevant campaign to integrate planning and transport. <https://lowtrafficfuture.org.uk/>

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### **Recent Activities with Reading FoE:**

#### **Reading FoE 14<sup>th</sup> November meeting – Heat Pumps**

**Mike Smith** was formerly the Engineering Director of BSRIA, a specialist test house serving the building engineering services sector of the Construction Sector. One of his key interests was Heat Pumps. He emphasised:

- ‘efficiency’ or ‘Coefficient of Performance’ is strongly dependent on the temperature difference between heat source (air or ...) and heat supplied (water to radiators warming the house). Hence preference for underfloor heating (running at perhaps 35°C) or large radiators (running at perhaps 45°C), and need to scrutinise conditions under which sales literature quotes COP (or assumes when calculating running costs).
- Be very careful with quotations from suppliers – often misleadingly low to get your interest.
- Be careful who you trust – MCS certification is a low bar for contractors to pass. <https://mcs-certified.com/>
- If air-source heat pumps are to be quiet they need to be physically large sized ... and likely to cost more.
- To be efficient heat pumps should run consistently because they won’t usually have the power to rapidly increase temperature of a house.
- While required electricity supply may be adequate in modern developments (unless lots of people also have EVs) in some older estates available supply will not be adequate if lots of people change from gas to heat pumps – adding cost/inconvenience/delays to network operators and/or customers.
- At current gas and electricity prices running costs slightly favour heat pumps but is it enough to justify capital cost and retro-fitting disturbance?

**Marc Adams** gave a short presentation about his newly-fitted system – hope we can arrange another meeting in the spring when he can report on performance in colder weather. He emphasised:

- The importance of good design, selection and installation of system. He had used ‘Heat Geek’.
- That carbon emissions should be very much lower than gas central heating or direct electric.

#### **Gold Eco Church Award – 6<sup>th</sup> November**

We took a stall to St John and **St Stephen’s Church** (Orts Road) to join celebration of their award. Eco Group chair, Joanna Laynesmith said: "What I've really appreciated is the way the EcoChurch survey structure provides opportunities for people with very varied passions to see how Creation Care impacts on their concerns: from wildlife lovers like me to those who have found our children's work blossoming through Forest Church and those trying so support local people in fuel poverty. Now a new journey starts as we aim for net zero carbon emissions and building up our wildlife oasis."

<https://www.oxford.anglican.org/index.php/news/50th-gold-eco-church-awarded-in-reading.php>

#### **Clean Air and Safer Transport Forum 28th November.**

Chris, John Sharpe, and John Booth attended this RBC meeting on 28th November.

- RBC project ‘CALM’ (Clean Air Living Matters) to engage schools and children on the issues had not completed the targeted number of interventions and would continue to Summer 2025.

- LEVI (Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund) had been awarded £866k to provide infrastructure. Tenders for private sector action are being prepared. John S. asked for cost of electricity to consumers to be regulated.
- Smoke Control Area now everywhere in Reading. JS asked for fires to be banned on allotments.
- 6 School Streets running now.
- Bus Service Improvement Plan and ZEBRA (Zero Emission Buses) seem to be going well. 19.5M bus trips / year makes Reading the 3rd highest town for bus use per person after Brighton and Nottingham and represents an 11% increase
- John B asked about London Road bus Lane – impact on AQ and traffic flows. The reply was that it was too early for air quality results but there are broadly little change in average journey times. AQ analysis will be done when 6/12 data available.
- John B asked whether electric bikes and scooters were a significant safety problem.
- Active Travel schemes discussed
  - Tranche 2 Shinfield Road – part done, paused, out of money.
  - Station underpass complete.
  - Others in planning/funding stage.
  - Cllr Ennis said would like a cycle hub in Minster quarter.

### **Delivering FoE's Climate Change Act Report to MPs and further actions on climate.**

To mark the 16<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Climate Change Act on 26 November Friends of the Earth published a report to showcase what the Act has achieved so far, and how its future legacy is under threat.

“The climate consensus ushered in by the Act has started to unravel. It was the Conservative government that updated the Act to set the net zero target, but the Conservative Party Leader Kemi Badenoch has described herself as a “net zero sceptic” and accused the target of hurting the economy. However, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), which speaks on behalf of over 100,000 businesses, sees it as an economic opportunity.” *Read more:* <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate/climate-crossroads-report>

We delivered hard copies to the offices of Yuan Yang MP (Earley and Woodley) and Clive Jones MP (Wokingham), and by e-mail to Olivia Bailey MP (West Reading and Mid Berkshire). National FoE proposes we seek to promote the ‘Big Climate Plan’ to MPs in further action on this in February 2025 (see above).

### **Reading FoE December Monthly meeting:**

We met at The Biscuit Factory on 11<sup>th</sup> December. Chris; Enrico ; Paolo, John B.; Graham; John S.; Sue. We welcomed Jill Wigmore-Welsh - introductions prompted a good discussion on role of RFoE in local ‘ecosystem’ of campaigning groups – concluded we should try to have more focus on one or two active campaigns to involve more people. Discussed: Heat Pumps; what comments to make on Reading Local Plan Update (see below); Climate and Nature Bill; and support for East Berkshire Palestinian Solidarity Campaign. Agreed to meet on 15<sup>th</sup> January in Castle Tap and that John Sharpe would give talk for us on Sustainable Allotments at RISC on 12<sup>th</sup> February. Agreed not to renew group e-mail address [info@readingfoe.org.uk](mailto:info@readingfoe.org.uk) to reduce costs, retaining [info@readingfoe.co.uk](mailto:info@readingfoe.co.uk). Started a Reading FoE WhatsApp group.

### **Reading Climate Action Network:**

Reading FoE submitted inputs to a couple of consultations in 2024 during RCAN's ‘YEAR OF CLIMATE ENGAGEMENT PROJECT’ (YoCEP) which is RCAN's work to update Reading's Climate Emergency Strategy – intended for adoption by RBC in 2025. All the outputs from the two surveys and all three workshops are available now at [www.readingcan.org.uk/priorities](http://www.readingcan.org.uk/priorities) under the heading ‘Outputs so far’. The next steps will be to (1) shape these outputs into our final climate emergency strategy, and to (2) develop a communications strategy for 2025 - 2030 that will support the overall strategy and delivery of the action plans.

RCAN's Annual Report for 2024 is at <https://readingcan.org.uk/about-us/annualreport/>

### **Reading Local Plan Partial Update – consultation on Pre-Submission Draft:**

This is the final consultation before RBC submits the Plan for examination by a government Inspector, presumably in 2025. Background: <https://images.reading.gov.uk/2024/11/Local-Plan-Partial-Update-Pre-Submission-Draft-Covering-Document-November-2024-1.pdf>

RFoE response submitted on 18<sup>th</sup> December – thanks to Enrico, Tricia, John Sharpe, and John Booth. See [http://www.anjoro.plus.com/RFOE/Documents/Reading\\_Local\\_Plan\\_Response\\_December\\_2024.pdf](http://www.anjoro.plus.com/RFOE/Documents/Reading_Local_Plan_Response_December_2024.pdf)

## **National FoE Review of 2024:**

<https://friendsoftheearth.uk/system-change/2024-wins-10-reasons-celebrate-people-power>

Featuring 10 achievements and a short video.

For updates from National FoE its Press Releases are at <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/latest/press-releases>

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### **Other up-coming activities (not run by Reading FoE so check for changes):**

#### **Is Water, a Right or a Commodity?**

**Global Justice** January meeting: 7.30pm Wed 29 Jan, RISC RG1 4PS

<https://www.facebook.com/events/450280678134653/>

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

**People Planet Pint:** an informal social meet up, primarily aimed at people involved in sustainability. Reading will now have its own PPP on the second Thursday of the month. Milk Bar, 8 Merchants Place, Reading RG1 1DT.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/reading-small99s-people-planet-pintm-sustainability-meetup-tickets-923173094577>

**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](http://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. Not sure if still happening. Check before you go! <https://criticalmassreading.wordpress.com/> doesn't seem to be updated ???

**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/>

### **Useful Links and General Information:**

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>

Newbury Friends of the Earth – Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/groups/755866711218545/>

### **Reading FoE Officers etc.**

Our 2024 AGM on April 10<sup>th</sup> elected Enrico Petrucco to continue in the post of Co-ordinator and Paolo Turati to continue in the post of 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.co.uk](mailto:info@readingfoe.co.uk) to request our GDPR Consent form. We have separate lists for people who only want to receive our newsletters (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 free of charge newsletter to keep members up to date with the group's activities. We need funds to cover meeting room hire, zoom licence, website costs, and campaign expenses. Contributions of perhaps £10 a year would be greatly appreciated.

To contribute please:

- if you use PayPal go to <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/readingfoe>
- to pay by bank transfer request our bank account details by e-mail to [info@readingfoe.co.uk](mailto:info@readingfoe.co.uk)
- or pay cash or cheque at a meeting or event