

Reading Friends of the Earth



Newsletter March - April 2021

For more info: www.readingfoe.org.uk ... or Twitter @ReadingFOE ... or Facebook [Reading Friends of the Earth | Facebook](#) ... or email info@readingfoe.org.uk ... or 'phone 0118 9868260.

General Meetings: Reading FoE usually meets on the **second Wednesday of each month** in Room 1 upstairs at RISC, 35-39 London Street, at 8:00 p.m. Most meetings include discussion of general topics – some have a particular focus or guest speakers. Meetings are open to all. **However because of Covid 19 the next meetings will be on-line by Zoom.** Links to register will be sent to our email lists – or if requested by email to info@readingfoe.org.uk

Wednesday March 10th: General meeting – respond to 'Smart M4' and 'Active Travel' etc. Zoom meetings booked for 8:00 and 8:45 (in case the first one times out).

Wednesday April 14th: Brief 'Annual General Meeting' followed by general discussion. Zoom meetings booked for 8:00 and 8:45 (in case the first one times out).

Other Activities with Reading FoE:

Advance warning: **'Beanpole Day'** is planned for 1st May or possibly 22nd May – depending on Covid restrictions. When/if it goes ahead this is one of our regular opportunities to run an open-air stall to engage with interested members of the public so please save the dates if you want to join in.

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

The Town That Could Be:

A series of workshops in March to design the sustainable future of Reading – 7 to 9 pm on: 10th - Housing, 17th – Green Spaces and Nature, and 24th – Disability and Accessibility. (1) [Commando Jugendstil | Facebook](#)

Repair Cafe – usually third weekend of month - seems to be continuing when legal but check on their website ... (1) [Reading Repair Cafe | Facebook](#) ... see also <http://www.transitionreading.org.uk/projects/reading-repair-cafe/>

Reading Bicycle Kitchen – regular sessions at the Queens Arms – but currently outdoors – see <http://www.readingbicyclekitchen.org/>

Green Drinks at RISC – usually on the first Tuesday of every month – not sure what if anything is happening during Covid restrictions – see <http://www.greendrinks.org/Berkshire/Reading> and also <https://www.facebook.com/groups/243919622305571/>

Anniversaries!

2 years ago: Councillors Brock and Page – RBC Climate Emergency Declaration
26th February 2019 – *photo Tony Goodchild*

50 years ago: Friends of the Earth was set up in Britain in 1971 – returning non-returnable bottles to Schweppes



Reading Climate Emergency Declaration is Two Years Old!

26th February 2021 was the second anniversary. Since 2019 the Council has appointed a new 'Head of Climate Strategy' (Peter Moore) and last November, with the Climate Action Network, published a revised Plan <https://readingcan.org.uk/our-plan/> which includes updates on recent progress as well as plans for the future. But it says 'the ambitious target of net zero by 2030 can only be achieved with substantial policy changes from national government' ... so lots more lobbying and publicity is still needed.

Reading Chronicle used our Press Release (thanks to all who helped with this) with additional comments from XR and Reading Cycle Festival <https://www.readingchronicle.co.uk/news/19120712.reading-achieved-two-years-climate-emergency-pledge/>

Good to see that Reading Council featured it on its website <https://www.reading.gov.uk/news/reading-marks-two-years-of-action-since-declaring-a-climate-emergency/>

FoE has sent us a checklist to help us to review the Borough's performance on climate change. It is very detailed but hope to send out some comments for consideration soon.

Friends of the Earth is Fifty!

FoE was founded in the USA in 1969 and a group started in the UK in 1971.

Wikipedia tells us "One of the first campaigns was to dump almost 1000 glass bottles in front of the HQ of soft drinks giant Schweppes in Connaught House, London in protest at the company's policy of having non-returnable bottles. Other initial activities focused on opposing an open cast copper mine in the Snowdonia National Park (which led to an early victory when this was stopped) and on work to save endangered species. This grew into the world-wide 'Save the Whale' campaigns by FoE, Greenpeace and others.

"Opposition to nuclear power and support for renewable energy was a core campaign issue which developed into work on climate change - now in 2020 the central theme for FoE EWNI work." A major achievement (by FoE and others) was the passing of the Climate Change Act in 2008.

'Smart M4' proposals:

Opening of the first section of the 'Smart M4' is imminent so ***we should consider a group response***. Reading FoE was active in opposition – primarily because of traffic growth, air quality and climate change implications of the very costly change to 'all lane running' - summarised in this note from 2016

<http://www.anjoro.plus.com/RFOE/m4/Documents/Smart%20M4'%20-%20summary%20of%20impacts.pdf>

'Smart' – mandatory speed limits, warnings and lane closures signalled on gantries, accident detection – seems potentially useful, but 'all-lane running' (4 lanes with no hard shoulder) adds capacity and the projections were for more traffic, longer journey times and rising emissions.

Now there are renewed concerns about safety - <https://eandt.theiet.org/content/articles/2021/02/uk-rollout-of-smart-motorway-safety-tech-brought-forward/> and the government promises that 'Stopped Vehicle Detection Radar' (radar technology to detect drivers who break down in live lanes) will be rolled out across the entire network by the end of next year. (i.e. 2022). Need to find out if it will be in place before the section near Reading opens.

Transport for the South East published a post-Covid analysis saying the "overall reduction in the total number of car trips is forecast to last at least three years. It is unclear how this will change beyond this period, but we could well be planning in the medium to long term for lower levels of car traffic than previously envisaged." So it is arguable that there is no urgent demand for more capacity.

Hope to discuss at our next meeting - what should we call for? – some combination of:

55 mph speed limits all or most of the time – to improve safety and capacity and environmental impact?

No all-lane running at all because three lanes and a hard shoulder is safer?

No all-lane running, or lower speed limits, unless Stopped Vehicle Detection Radar is in place?

Road user charging on trunk roads and motorways – to manage congestion and meet construction and policing costs?

Reading 'Active Travel' proposals - consultation:

Consultation on 'Active Travel' proposals has been launched. It seems that government funding proposed is not enough to implement all the options - as it says "Your feedback will be vital in helping to shape which schemes are progressed, ahead of a further public consultation later in the year on more detailed proposals" - so it's something of a beauty contest. Presumably the proposals for London Road are relevant to prospects for a return of the East Reading Mass Rapid Transit that we successfully opposed a few years ago. Consultation ends on 23rd April – ***we should respond as a group but also individually.***

<https://www.reading.gov.uk/news/have-your-say-on-new-cycling-and-walking-scheme-proposals/>

Reading Golf Course – plans for at least 257 houses in Caversham:

A new planning application (Number 210018) had been submitted to Reading Borough Council – housing numbers have been reduced to 257, car parking spaces are to be reduced, but more trees are to be felled.

An objection to the previous application (withdrawn by the applicants) was submitted for Reading FoE addressing Air Quality, Transport, and Climate Change – see

<http://www.readingfoe.org.uk/Documents/Objections%20to%20Reading%20Planning%20Application%20200713%20from%20Reading%20FoE.pdf>

According to 'Keep Emmer Green' Green (KEG) <https://www.keepemmergreen.com/>

- “Reading Golf Club (RGC) has announced plans to build on the part of the golf course in Reading Borough with a possible further development of an additional 500 homes on the part of the golf course in South Oxfordshire.
- “Around 99% of the application is exactly the same. There are 3 fewer housing units; 4 more trees to be cut down; the health centre useable area reduced by 250m²; around 100 parking spaces removed; garages are marginally larger; and pavements now on both sides of the spine road.”

Looks as though our previous objection can be used again with some minor changes – objections from groups are requested by 7th March. Objections from individuals will be accepted up to 18th March – see

<https://keepemmergreen.com/posts/objection-guidelines-xn466>

SOAR Petition:

In a recent assessment, Wokingham Council recommended that the beautiful stretch of Thames Path at Kennetmouth in East Reading should NOT be designated as protected Local Green Space, so Save Our Ancient Riverside have launched a petition to get the Kennetmouth area designated as Local Green Space.

Petition - Wokingham Borough Council: Designate the Thames Path at Kennetmouth as Local Green Space - Change.org

Divestment from fossil fuels:

Reading Council's pension funds are invested in a Berkshire Pension fund. FoE have released an on-line tool to give access to the investment profile of local authority pension funds. [Divest your council – UK Divest](#) This says that of £2.2 billion total fund value £27 million is invested in fossil fuels. This is about 1.3% compared to a UK average of 3%.

Reading passed a motion to divest in 2016 but the Berkshire fund is still partly invested. Enrico has been working on relevant Councillors who control the fund - £27 million to go!

For a 'long read' see: [Divesting-to-protect-our-pensions-and-the-planet-Feb-2021-V2.pdf](#)

Green Homes Grant scheme:

The Green Homes Grant scheme is likely to be scrapped, after using just 6.3% of its budget. Just 22,165 grants worth £94.1 million were issued. The initial target was to secure grants for 600,000 homes, with a £1.5 billion budget.

One of our members comments that 'it is useless for most people who only want insulation (primary) and doors (secondary) and secondary must cost less. If you have £20k spare for a heat pump you can get £5k grant so it is not surprising there are hardly any takers so rules will need to change.'

<https://greenhomesgrant.campaign.gov.uk/>

Reading Climate Festival events:

Recordings of many of November's events are now on-line. Watch now - long winter evenings will soon be over!

<http://www.readingculturelive.co.uk/genre/reading-climate-festival-genre/>

FoE Budget Proposals:

FoE has put out a press release calling for Budget to fund 250,000 green apprentices.

<https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate/quarter-million-green-apprenticeships-needed-fix-youth-unemployment-crisis>

FoE Tools:

FoE has released the following 'tools' to enable local people and Councils to check out how their areas are performing on environmental issues. It has recently consulted on how they may be improved.

- ["How climate friendly is your area?" tool](#)
- [our woodland opportunity map](#)
- [our greenspace access map](#)
- [our "50 point climate action plan"](#) - (template plan for councils - formerly 33 points)

If you've used any of the tools please complete survey here: <https://friendsoftheearth.typeform.com/to/woJi772r>

Local Transport Strategy Revision:

As in our last newsletter “RBC’s post-consultation version was expected to go to committee in 2020 but has not appeared yet. Could well be that Covid is both delaying work and creating uncertainty ...” But now in his comments on the Climate Emergency Anniversary Councillor Page has said “it is set to be finalised in the next few months.”

Environmental Recovery after Brexit – Environment Bill back to Parliament

Once again debate (and therefore enactment) of the Environment Bill has been delayed – this time put back at least until the autumn. <https://www.sustainweb.org/news/feb21-environment-bill-delayed/>

Friends of the Earth commented “This delay is not the action of a government wanting to demonstrate world leadership on the environmental crisis. Ministers must get on with the urgent task of cutting pollution, improving biodiversity, and stemming the flow of plastic waste pouring into our environment.”

Local Group e-mails:

If you would like to receive local group update emails from national FoE, group members need to complete a simple form. <https://campaigning.friendsoftheearth.uk/general-resources/register-group-member>

Useful Links and General Information:

Friends of the Earth ‘England, Wales and Northern Ireland’ <http://www.foe.co.uk>
– Policy and Insight <https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/>

GREN - Greater Reading Environmental Network <http://www.gren.org.uk/>.

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 Sustainability Centre - <http://readingsustainabilitycentre.co.uk/>

Save Our Ancient Riverside - <https://saveourancientriverside.co.uk/>

Reading FoE Officers

Our 2020 AGM scheduled for April 8th was postponed so Enrico Petrucco and John Booth will continue in the posts of Co-ordinator and Treasurer respectively until a meeting can be convened.

Reading FoE e-mail communications

If you would like to be on our main mailing list and receive and join in our day-to-day communications please send an email to info@readingfoe.org.uk . Alternatively we have a separate list for people who only want to receive our newsletter (currently 6 per year) and information about important events and actions.

Reading FoE Subscriptions – Subscribe NOW for 2020/21

To join or renew, just fill in the slip below and send it off with your subscription. 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 cover newsletter costs, meeting room hire and campaign expenses. Further contributions would be greatly appreciated. Even if you don't have time to take an active part, your support is welcome and allows us to demonstrate more local support.

Name: _____ Telephone: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Please tick if you are able to take an active part in our campaigns. We may contact you by phone.

I heard about the group from: _____

Please make your cheque payable to Reading Friends of the Earth, and return to the Reading FoE Treasurer, c/o 27 Instow Road, Earley, Reading RG6 5QH.