

Reading Friends of the Earth

Newsletter May/June 2018

For more information: <http://www.foe.co.uk/reading> or www.readingfoe.org.uk
email info@readingfoe.org.uk or 'phone 0118 9868260. Twitter @ReadingFOE



Diary:

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.

Wednesday May 9th – 8:00 pm at RISC – **General meeting** – topics to include East Reading Mass Rapid Transit and campaign to get Councils to create better environments for pollinators – plus AOB.

Wednesday June 13th - 8:00 pm at RISC – **General meeting** – topics by e-mail later – deciding final details for stalls at the weekend – unless we go to Wokingham Planning meeting (see below).

Other Activities with Reading FoE:

Wednesday May 30th – **East Reading MRT** – probably a demonstration at Reading Civic Offices at 18:00 if Planning Application is to be considered from 18:30 but not sure if this will be this month. Await confirmation!

Wednesday June 13th – **East Reading MRT** – 18:30 at Shute End, Wokingham – possibly a demonstration if Planning Application is to be considered from 19:00 but not sure if this will be this month. Await confirmation!

Saturday June 16th – **Waterfest** – please offer to help on our stall on the riverbank near Reading Jail – we have some volunteers for this but more would be merrier!

Sunday June 17th – **East Reading Festival** – please offer to help on our stall in Palmer Park – at the moment we have few volunteers for this so more are essential!

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

Wednesday 17th May – 7:30 pm at RISC - **TTR AGM** - <http://www.transitionreading.org.uk>

Weekend 1st to 3rd June – **Basecamp** - Basecamp is Friends of the Earth's annual environmental festival. It is set in the heart of the stunning Peak District. Booking essential. <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/latest/basecamp>

Repair Cafe – third weekend of month – not sure of details for 2018 so see www.readingrepaircafe.org.uk and <https://www.facebook.com/ReadingRepairCafe>

Reading Bicycle Kitchen – ‘pop-up’ events in various locations – see <http://www.readingbicyclekitchen.org/>

Green Drinks at RISC – usually on the first Tuesday of every month. Come along to the Global Café from 6.30 to 8.30 p.m. to meet like-minded people for a chat over a drink or two. <http://www.greendrinks.org/berkshire/reading>

Willow tree threatened by East Reading MRT



Photo: Tamzin Morphy

Air Quality Supporters in Civic Offices after SEPT on March 19th.



Air Quality:

On 19th March we went to the Council's **Strategic Environmental Planning and Transport Committee** meeting where Air Quality was on the agenda. Enrico asked the Council to:

- **Look at how a Low Emission Zone or even an Ultra-Low Emission Zone scheme could bring clean air and lower congestion to Reading**

Enrico suggested that such a scheme could be installed for around £200k. Councillor Page said he hoped central government would allocate resources to allow feasibility studies to proceed.

Enrico's supplementary question was to ask the Council to

- **Publish figures for concentration of micro-particles PM2.5 in Reading.**

In response Councillor Page said that the numbers Reading provided to Defra could be made available but cautioned against focussing on single measurements from particular locations when air quality across the Borough was poor and in some places very low. A comprehensive strategy was needed.

Reading FoE Questions to Council – Press Release with lots of links:

http://www.readingfoe.org.uk/transport/RFoE_AQ.pdf

The Council also presented its response to the petition we presented in November 2017 saying it would now get government funding for a feasibility study on tackling NO2 “but it is currently unclear what level of support this will be” and not responding to some of our suggested measures to reduce traffic in the urban area.

On micro-particles PM2.5 it responded “The cost of increasing the monitoring network to include PM 2.5 is prohibitive.” “PM2.5 is a transboundary pollutant meaning that the majority of it travels over large distances. Local measures will therefore not be effective in reducing this portion. The locally produced portion of PM2.5 will predominantly be from traffic and smoke from chimneys and bonfires.” http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/8525/Item10/pdf/Item10_1.pdf

More recently Caversham Globe have used national FoE monitoring kits and found high levels of NO2 on local streets north of the river – see post for 27th April at <https://www.facebook.com/cavershamglobe/>

Interesting discussion of PM2.5 is on 28th April in FoE Clean Air Facebook suggesting background level is important and a lot comes from fires not vehicles <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1684068241909458/> referencing 2016-17 stats from <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/air-quality-statistics> .

A new study shows that climate action could cut air pollution and realise significant health benefits

<http://bit.ly/2vPBniD>

Public meeting on Local Transport

Our meeting on 21st March brought together a diverse group of speakers and audience to address some of Reading's transport issues – it was a useful briefing meeting and quickly led to a joint survey of local election candidates (see below). Intend to get presentations on website soon.

- John Booth said regional simulations for the ‘Smart M4’ had showed rising traffic, longer journey times, and increasing climate-changing emissions – none of which were acceptable. Even small reductions in traffic would lead to large improvements in congestion.
- Jim Dunning (a retired town planner) pointed out much travel is not necessary and asked “should we provide for demand?” and answered ‘No’ for many good reasons especially cost, climate change, and resource depletion. Today people do not live in communities of place. In 1950 every Briton travelled 5 miles per day. By 1999 it was 28 miles.
- Enrico Petrucco ran through the air quality issues we have been looking at.
- John Sharpe (of Save Our Ancient Riverside) pointed out that according to official figures traffic levels were already falling on the A4 through Cemetery Junction and the MRT modelling did not predict improvements in either air quality or congestion.
- Dr. John Walker (author of “Road Pricing: Technologies, economics and acceptability”) said that research showed that neither more roads nor better public transport would cure congestion and gave examples of successful road pricing schemes in Stockholm and Madrid.
- Adrian Lawson (Chairman of Reading Cycle Campaign) said the ideal was a segregated and connected cycle network and criticised Council schemes which were not direct and called for cyclists to use pavements in some places and keep off them in others.

Local Election Candidates Back Low Emission Zone

Reading Friends of the Earth joined with the Cycle Campaign and the Save Our Ancient Riverside (SOAR) group to ask all the candidates in Reading whether they would support action to improve air quality, support segregated cycle routes, and oppose the proposed East Reading Mass Rapid Transit.

22 of 28 candidates who gave yes/no replies to our question “**Will you vote for a ‘Low Emission Zone’ to improve air quality by charging the dirtiest vehicles to use the IDR?**” agreed with the proposition.

For more details of the survey see <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1H9ByWYfO16RMfh5bLQAfrs37aArtekv>

GREN's Environmental Hustings on April 27th

This was dominated by MRT and transport-related questions – see

https://www.gren.org.uk/resources/GREN_PREnvironmentalQuestionTime2018_websitereport_ib.docx

East Reading Mass Rapid Transit:

Reading FoE has put in an objection on Air Quality – www.readingfoe.org.uk/mrt/RFoE_ERMRT_Air_Quality_final.pdf – and we hope to add objections on 'Open Space and Health' and 'Alternatives'.

After our Local Transport meeting Dr. Walker put in a detailed 'observation' saying:

- “A limited road charging scheme on the A4 in East Reading at peak hours to reduce congestion, using Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR), is much cheaper than the proposed £24 Million East Reading Mass Rapid transit Scheme (MRT). The capital cost would be around £31k, with annual cost £3k and no environmental disruption or visual intrusion.”
- “The resulting reduction in congestion would reduce delays to buses on this stretch of their route, and improve journey time reliability, as well as reducing delays for other traffic in East Reading.”

Reading has now made minor changes to the MRT proposals – one of the attractive Willow trees to the east of the Kennet will not be felled but the one pictured overleaf is still to go. Wokingham is requesting comments on these changes by 23rd May and Reading by 18th May.

SOAR's Tamzin Morphy has been doing detailed work on the trees to be felled – calculating that over 1,000 trees would be cut down and about 40,000 tree-years would be lost (based on life-expectancy of trees to be felled). While the Council proposes some re-planting the value to wildlife and amenity of saplings is much lower than for mature trees.

The MRT is now expected to go to Reading's planning committee on 30th May 2018. On the Council's figures it will have a negligible effect on air quality and on traffic densities on the A4. The people who benefit will be people who take the buses over Kennet Mouth - travelling between the town centre and Wokingham or beyond; the people who lose will be the local people who used to walk along the riverbank, and taxpayers whose £25 million could be better spent.

To see others' objections, and to make your own:

Wokingham: <http://planning.wokingham.gov.uk/FastWebPL/welcome.asp> use application number 172048.

Reading: http://planning.reading.gov.uk/fastweb_PL/welcome.asp use application number 171108.

See SOAR Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/SaveOurAncientRiverside/>

Bees and Pollinators – Neonic Ban!

On 14th March we gave away many leaflets at 'The Bee's Needs' – a lecture at UoR by Dr Mike Garratt, a Senior Research Fellow in the School of Agriculture Policy and Development, who presented the latest research on pollinators and what we can do to help protect them. His talk was mainly about research into effects of different pollinators on different crops.

He did not say much about neonics in the talk – in question time said there was a lot of evidence they were a big problem, but some evidence they were not, and that risks were that banning them could lead to adoption of even more-harmful practices. He thinks the best approach, and something they work on a lot at Reading, is promoting integrated pest management (IPM) and better use of natural pest control. This can promote effective pest control without many of the unintended consequence of the use of some agro-chemical control measures.

On 27th April the European Commission enacted a **complete ban on outdoor use of three neonicotinoids**

https://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/pesticides/approval_active_substances/approval_renewal/neonicotinoids_en

“The Commission has concluded that further risks to bees cannot be excluded without imposing further restrictions. Bearing in mind the need to ensure a level of safety and protection consistent with the high level of protection of animal health that is sought within the Union, it is appropriate to prohibit all outdoor uses.”

The sun shone on our stall at **Beanpole Day** and we gave away guides to bee identification for the 'Great British Bee Count', and Bee stickers, as well as discussing air quality and other issues with people.

The next **Bee-action** we will be promoting is an e-petition calling for Councils to do more for pollinators:

<https://act.friendsoftheearth.uk/act/ask-your-council-put-pollinators-first> - please support it now!

If you're a gardener then FoE has released '**Gardening for Bees**' – advice on making the best of your garden:

<https://friendsoftheearth.uk/bees/gardening-bees>

If you would like to be advised when the **Great British Bee Count App** is launched on 17th May sign up at

<https://act.friendsoftheearth.uk/act/join-great-british-bee-count-2018>

Afterthought:

I read somewhere that the average teenager spends less time outside than the average prison inmate.

Useful Websites etc.:

Friends of the Earth 'England, Wales and Northern Ireland' <http://www.foe.co.uk>

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

Reading Climate Action Network - <http://www.readingclimateaction.org.uk/>

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

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

Action AWE (Atomic Weapons Eradication) is a grassroots campaign of nonviolent actions dedicated to halting nuclear weapons production at the Atomic Weapons Establishment factories at Aldermaston and Burghfield.

<http://actionawe.org/>

Greenlink Berkshire www.greenlink-berkshire.org.uk

True Food Co-op: www.truefood.coop - shop in Emmer Green.

Citizens Committee on Oil Peak And Decline (COPAD) www.copad.org

<http://www.fishonline.org/> gives info on over-fishing, fish to avoid, etc.

www.ejfoundation.org (Environmental Justice Foundation)

RISC <http://www.risc.org.uk/readingfairtrade/>

Reading FoE Officers

At our AGM on April 11th 2018 Enrico Petrucco and John Booth were re-elected to the posts of Co-ordinator and Treasurer respectively. A draft Privacy Policy was approved.

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 and information about important events and actions.

Reading FoE Subscriptions – Subscribe NOW for 2018/19

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.