

# Reading Friends of the Earth

## Newsletter Sept/Oct 2017

For more information: <http://www.foe.co.uk/reading> or [www.readingfoe.org.uk](http://www.readingfoe.org.uk)  
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### 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 September 13th** - 8:00 pm at RISC – **General meeting** – discussing progress on Air Quality, Bees, and Mass Rapid Transit, and preparing for stall at Town Meal on 30<sup>th</sup> September.

**Wednesday October 11th** - 8:00 pm at RISC – **General meeting** – topics by e-mail later.

### Other Activities with Reading FoE:

**Saturday September 30th** – **Reading Town Meal** – Please offer to help on our stall – need to arrange a rota to cover from 12:00 to 16:00. Likely to feature petitions on air quality and pesticides and information on food and other topics. <https://www.food4families.org.uk/ReadingTownMeal.cfm> and <https://www.facebook.com/TownMeal/>

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

**Wednesday 6th September:** 19:30 at RISC - "**Five reasons to fear the Great Repeal Bill**". Sam Fowles's talk for Global Justice Now. The bill empowers the government to remove rights and protections that we all value. This talk will explore how we can fight back. <https://www.facebook.com/events/109733073014379>

**Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> September:** 20:00 at RISC – **Berkshire Greenpeace** monthly meeting at RISC. <https://greenwire.greenpeace.org/uk/en-gb/groups/berkshire-greenpeace> - probably also 5th October.

**Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> September** – Visit a **Superhome in Reading!** Find out how people reduce domestic CO2 emissions by at least 60%. See website and book a time <http://www.superhomes.org.uk/superhomes/reading-eastern-avenue/>

**Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> September** 12:00 to 4:30 - **Repair Cafe** - rLab, C1 Weldale Street, RG1 7BX ... all the usual opportunities. [www.readingrepaircafe.org.uk](http://www.readingrepaircafe.org.uk) and <https://www.facebook.com/ReadingRepairCafe>

**Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> October** - 7:45 to 10:00 - **An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power** – Al Gore's follow-up showing at Reading Film Theatre. <http://readingfilmtheatre.co.uk/events/an-inconvenient-sequel-truth-to-power-pg/>

**Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> October:** 19:30 at RISC - '**Putting people before profit - Building a new global economy**'. Nick Dearden's talk for Global Justice Now. Alternatives to a world of free markets and corporate controlled trade.

**Reading Bicycle Kitchen** – has left Jackson's Corner but is now running frequent '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>

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**Earley Green Fair on August 5<sup>th</sup>** – was the usual busy event with a few unusual heavy showers – thanks to everyone who helped!

We featured new 'Clean Air Everywhere' balloons and T-shirts and bunting as well as our regular Bee Cause T-shirt costume!

44 Clean Air petition cards were signed and 66 Bees/pesticides petition cards – and lots of people were engaged in conversation.



### **SOAR! - Save Our Ancient Riverside:**

The East Reading campaign against Park and Ride (PNR) and Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) proposals around Kennet Mouth has been re-branded as 'Save Our Ancient Riverside'. Reading FoE members cycled along the riverside to look at the locations at our July meeting and saw beautiful wild areas with trees and shrubs and flowers - and found amazing blackberries! We were on the pedestrian route downriver from Newtown which is the Thames Path.

The proposals are discussed in the latest Cycle Campaign Newsletter <http://www.readingcyclecampaign.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/RCC-September-2017-webready.pdf> - there is an article on Page 5 and a comment on the Vastern Road roundabout already being dangerous for cyclists on Page 3 at end of the article.

**Park and Ride:** The PNR site at Broken Brow will have 277 spaces and is only intended to cater for weekday morning commuting traffic to Reading – people who would pay to park in town. It has planning permission and was granted £2.9 million funding by the Local Economic Partnership's 'Berkshire Local Transport Body' (BLTB) in July.

At the BLTB meeting it was not explained why land transfer was at zero cost nor why the business case showed no running costs. Campaigners were not told which private enterprise will run the scheme and on what basis – but the duration of any franchise is key to calculating the benefit-cost-ratio which has been calculated over a 60 year period.

The PNR will deliver little or no benefit to congestion or air quality – traffic growth is expected to overtake any temporary gains. Reading Councillor Tony Page commented that it is a 'small scheme' that 'will not reduce congestion on London Road' but he supported it as part of a wider strategy to address anticipated rising demand for travel.

**East Reading Mass Rapid Transit:** Planning applications have gone in to Reading and Wokingham Councils, and if they are passed then funding (probably around £20 million) will be applied for in November.

The bridge and roadway will have a major impact on visual amenity and wildlife when it is complete – and the construction phase will be even worse. It is claimed the average bus journey time in peak hours will be 8 minutes compared to 10 to 24 minutes via Kings Road – so if eventually congestion is reduced the benefits of the MRT will be reduced.

The MRT may save a few minutes for people travelling between Reading station and places in Wokingham borough and beyond, but the buses using the MRT will no longer serve existing stops within Reading so will be less convenient for some existing service users. Is this really going to be better value for £20 million than many alternative measures? ... but the 'business plan' is not part of the planning application and other measures are not considered.

The 'missing link' in bus priority is from Cemetery Junction to the Suttons Seeds roundabout – approximately 700 metres taking perhaps a minute at 30 mph or 2 minutes at 15 mph. Measures to introduce a tidal (or perhaps signal-controlled in alternate directions) bus-lane would presumably be far cheaper than the preferred route and could be implemented much more quickly. Much of the adjoining land is Council-owned (Palmer Park and Cemetery). There are three lanes between Cemetery Junction and the Suttons Seeds roundabout – at present two in-bound (east-to-west) and one outbound (west-to-east).

As with the PNR it is hard to see that this scheme will have a major impact on congestion without further measures to reverse projected traffic growth – but measures like road pricing or workplace parking levies, or subsidies for public transport from out-of-town development, or demolition of car parks (selling the sites for large sums of money and providing more space for town centre development) might be more cost-effective anyway and would have less impact on wildlife and amenity.

Although the nominal date for objections to be sent to the Councils has passed campaigners have been told that it is not too late to submit comments. Wokingham Planning Application 172048 - Reading Planning Application 171108. See <https://en-gb.facebook.com/NoPaRThamessideWokingham/> for latest updates and guidance on how to object.

### **Doughnut Economics:**

Kate Raworth's presentation on 4<sup>th</sup> September for 'Outrider Anthems' <http://www.outrideranthems.com/> in the 'Dazzle' series of events was well- received by a large audience.

She criticised neo-liberal 20<sup>th</sup> century economics' narrow focus on GDP and 'rational economic man' and looked towards a 21<sup>st</sup> century economics that recognises that the economy is embedded within society and society must operate within planetary limits. The 'Doughnut' has no jam in the centre but defines a 'safe and just space for humanity' between two spider diagrams – one addressing the requirements of society, the other ecological limits.

Recommend investigating on-line at <https://www.kateraworth.com/doughnut/> and viewing the seven short animations at <https://www.kateraworth.com/animations/> which effectively summarise her presentation.

### **Progress on Neonicotinoids:**

The European Commission proposals to completely ban neonicotinoid pesticides will be voted on by European governments in October. The UK, along with the other countries in the European Commission, will be voting on whether to extend the current temporary ban to all crops (currently it only covers those which are attractive to pollinators).

Last week FoE staff in London headed over to DEFRA (dressed as giant bees of course) and handed over the recent petition – with over 33,000 signatures, some of them from Reading - to Michael Gove. The petition asked for a comprehensive and permanent ban on neonicotinoids. To keep the pressure up FoE is to launch an on-line action asking people to send a personal message – written on an attractive poster - <https://www.foe.co.uk/bees/make-poster-save-our-bees> .

Also FoE report that 9 out of the top 10 garden centres have committed to getting neonics out of their garden plants.

### **Great Repeal Bill:**

This is the topic of Global Justice Now's meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> September (see Diary above). While the 'second reading' is on 7<sup>th</sup> September this will not be the end of it. The Wildlife Trusts have launched a campaign to get members to write to their MPs to raise a number of issues <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/RepealBill> and FoE has joined a number of other organisations in an effort to scrutinise the process. <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/over-70-civil-society-organisations-join-repeal-bill-scrutiny-campaign.html>

### **Air Quality:**

The government's latest 'Air Quality Plan' says that modelling of annual average Nitrogen Dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) shows the worst Reading roads at 41 ug/m<sup>3</sup> in 2019 but 39 ug/m<sup>3</sup> in 2020 – just within the legal requirement of 40 ug/m<sup>3</sup>. Because of this Reading is 'not required to conduct a feasibility study' to reduce NO<sub>2</sub> levels. See Page 86 of [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/633270/air-quality-plan-detail.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/633270/air-quality-plan-detail.pdf)

Supporters of Reading Friends of the Earth have been involved in a national scheme to take samples of NO<sub>2</sub> pollution over a few weeks duration to compare with the legal limit. The results are displayed on a national map at <https://www.foe.co.uk/clean-air/clean-air-campaign-air-monitoring-kit-results?origin=d7>. Local measurements indicate that pollution levels fall with distance from roads and are worse in heavily trafficked areas.

Some locations in central Reading had 'Measured Average' levels over the sampling period that would be 50% above the legal limit if they were representative of the annual average. In particular a site south of Reading Station, and a site on Oxford Road, gave much higher readings than other roadside locations. We are concerned that the government modelling may be underestimating levels of NO<sub>2</sub> – especially the effects of trains and taxis at Reading station and slow traffic along Oxford Road.

We think the Council should urgently investigate measures to reduce traffic in the areas where we have found the highest NO<sub>2</sub> concentrations because:

- Our sample results suggest that Government modelling may be underestimating pollution levels in central Reading.
- We think that government and Council should aim for legal compliance by the end of 2018 not 2020.
- 40 ug/m<sup>3</sup> is not a 'safe' limit for NO<sub>2</sub> so lower levels should be achieved without delay.
- Other pollutants from vehicles – particularly micro-particles PM<sub>2.5</sub> – are not being monitored on the streets where NO<sub>2</sub> levels are highest ... and ...
- Reducing traffic will reduce congestion and carbon emissions as well as improving air quality.

Enrico will be leading a small group to discuss our results with a RBC 'Environmental Protection' officer soon.

### **Green New Deal:**

This national group has for some years been calling for "a 'Green New Deal' designed to power a renewables revolution, create thousands of green-collar jobs and rein in the distorting power of the finance sector while making more low-cost capital available for pressing priorities."

Good to see its letter in Guardian <https://www.greennewdealgroup.org/?p=319> calling for a £50bn-a-year green infrastructure QE programme to pay to make the UK's 28m dwellings and 2m commercial and public sector buildings super energy efficient, dramatically reducing energy bills, fuel poverty and greenhouse gas emissions. It could also tackle the housing crisis by building affordable, highly insulated homes, predominantly on brownfield sites. This form of QE would provide job security and local business opportunities in every constituency, since its infrastructure improvements would take place across the UK.

## 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](http://www.greenlink-berkshire.org.uk)

True Food Co-op: [www.truefood.coop](http://www.truefood.coop) - shop in Emmer Green.

Citizens Committee on Oil Peak And Decline (COPAD) [www.copad.org](http://www.copad.org)

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

[www.ejfoundation.org](http://www.ejfoundation.org) (Environmental Justice Foundation)

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

## Reading FoE Officers

At our AGM on April 12<sup>th</sup> 2017 Enrico Petrucco and John Booth were re-elected to the posts of Co-ordinator and Treasurer respectively.

## 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](mailto: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 2017/18

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.