

Reading Friends of the Earth

Newsletter September-October 2020

For more information: <http://www.foe.co.uk/reading> or www.readingfoe.org.uk
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Diary in the days of Covid-19:

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. and this venue is booked for September and October. Most meetings include discussion of general topics – some have a particular focus or guest speakers. Meetings are open to all.

BUT because of Covid 19:

- We are considering greater use of Zoom instead of face-to-face meetings – let us know what you think.
- We may cancel at short notice if we find people don't feel confident to attend – or if local infection rates rise.
- Global Café is not open in September so access is via the rear of the building – alley to the right of front.
- RISC has imposed a limit of six people at meetings in Room 1 and requires visitors to follow social distancing, hand sanitising, and not come if they have any symptoms or recent contacts.

So we will institute a booking system for our meetings – if you are thinking of coming to a planned meeting:

- Check our website www.readingfoe.org.uk for changes of plan since this newsletter ... **and** ...
- Phone or e-mail (contacts above) and leave your details and we will contact you to confirm there is space for you, or let you know if the meeting is cancelled ... **and** ...
- If possible check our website www.readingfoe.org.uk for late changes before you travel.

Wednesday September 9th: We have RISC Room1 booked from 8:00 pm and plan to meet – perhaps until 09:30 – hope to meet outdoors in RISC Roof Garden if weather is suitable. Note Global Café will be closed so bring any refreshments you would like. Need to discuss position of Reading Transport Plan, Golf Course development, Town Meal and International Festival presentations ... and doubtless much more.

Wednesday October 14th: We have RISC Room 1 booked from 8:00 pm and plan to meet.

Other Activities with Reading FoE:

September 26th to October 3rd – Reading Town Meal. Instead of usual stalls in Forbury Gardens and free food Food4Families is now planning to promote on-line meetings on various topics between September 26th and October 3rd before 'a stay at home food celebration' on Saturday 3rd October. Currently we're proposing to conduct a Zoom webinar on **Transport and the Environment in Reading** – date and time tbc – but other suggestions welcome.

October 13th to November 13th – Reading International Festival. Instead of the usual series of meetings at RISC and elsewhere this year it is to be a set of on-line events with the theme "**Global Solidarity in a Post Covid World**". If we can suggest an event or a speaker on this theme that would be great – but need to decide by 10th September.

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

18th September – 13:00 – Zoom -'UN Sustainable Development Goals: A global ethical action plan' meeting for Ethical Reading <https://www.ethicalreading.org.uk/event/webinar-un-sustainable-development-goals-a-global-ethical-action-plan/>

23rd September – 7:30 – Zoom -'Stop the Toxic Trade Deal with Trump. Why a US/UK Trade Deal must be opposed'" meeting for Global Justice Reading with various speakers. Contact details on <http://groups.globaljustice.org.uk/reading/>

Repair Cafe – usually third weekend of month - seems to be continuing but check on their website – <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 – **but closed until further notice because Global Café closed** - see. <http://www.greendrinks.org/berkshire/reading>

Instead of face-to-face meetings there are many webinars, Zoom meetings etc.

Friends of the Earth: Lots of videos on youtube at <https://www.youtube.com/c/FoeCoUkEWNI/videos>

Air Pollution 30th September 19:00 FoE staff expert Jenny Bates will explain why it's a huge health issue and how we can campaign for a planet with clean air. <https://act.friendsoftheearth.uk/act/how-save-planet-live-talks>

Training webinars: <https://takeclimateaction.uk/training/training-join-webinar-and-brush-your-campaigning-skills>

IEMA (Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment):

Offers many webinars including one on 16th September with Thalia Carr (formerly of RBC).

For a full list and to book (free) go to <https://www.iema.net/events> and set filter to 'Non Member'.

Centre for Alternative Technology

Has a number of free webinars scheduled: [https://www.cat.org.uk/cat-at-](https://www.cat.org.uk/cat-at-home/webinars/?date=upcoming&view=grid&type=Online-Courses-and-Events&category=All)

[home/webinars/?date=upcoming&view=grid&type=Online-Courses-and-Events&category=All](https://www.cat.org.uk/cat-at-home/webinars/?date=upcoming&view=grid&type=Online-Courses-and-Events&category=All)

Reading Transport Plan Revision

The consultation on this has closed. Documents are available at <https://www.reading.gov.uk/transportstrategy>.

Normally a report would go to the next Strategic Environment Planning and Transport Committee (SEPT) but because of Covid there doesn't seem to be one scheduled.

Because the consultation was on a strict format requiring responses to questions we should create a longer response in report form to go to the SEPT Committee members.

It is very welcome to see that in Section 6.4 the document says "Due to key challenges including the declared climate emergency, car emissions causing poor air quality and the forecast levels of growth increasing future demand for travel, continuing with the status quo is not an option."

However it is not satisfactory that the performance indicators (section 9.3) still show 67 kt of CO2 per year in 2036 and there is no indicator for air quality or reduction in time lost to congestion although "the average car commuter in Reading spends 26 hours a year in congestion during peak hours, with a total estimated cost of £75 million" which is £375k per working day.

But as in Reading FoE's comments on the previous LTP3 consultation in 2010:

"These documents represent a great deal of useful work by the Borough's transport team and would be very welcome if they were "An Initial Review of Issues and Options for Transport in Reading" prior to strategy development. However as an LTP they do not amount to a credible Plan to achieve environmental objectives in the required timescales."

In 2010 we pointed out that in his comments in 2008 on the Reading Transport Commission report Sir David Rowlands (Former Permanent Secretary at the Department for Transport) said:

"The most challenging aspect of the report is its recommendation that the case for managing demand by road pricing needs urgent examination. But without it, the rest of the package of proposals will not deliver a long term solution as demand continues to grow constrained only by the physical limits of the roads themselves."

In absence of government action Reading should implement its own demand management system – building on experience with bus lane enforcement. Sophisticated charging regimes can vary charges depending on time of day, type of vehicle and fuel, address at which vehicle is registered (discounts for local people), as well as location - so addressing both congestion and air quality. Likely to be a system based on automatic number plate recognition with cameras on main radial roads and entry and exit points along the IDR but a prime action should be development and comparison of different schemes. A pilot scheme should be trialled as soon as possible to show the public that the benefits will be real.

Friends of the Earth has published a paper addressing road pricing. See <https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/insight/eco-levy-driving-cut-carbon-clean-toxic-air-and-make-our-towns-and-cities-liveable>

Reading Golf Course – plans for at least 260 houses:

A planning application (Number: 200713) has now been submitted to Reading Borough Council for a development of at least 260 houses on Reading Golf Course off Kidmore End Road, Caversham, with an allocation for 570+ cars.

Closing date for comments is 25th September. Opposition is being led by 'KEG' (Keep Emmer Green) ... their website carries a good analysis of the issues with links to documents etc. <https://www.keepemmergreen.com/>.

Reading FoE were invited by a representative of 'KEG' to comment on Air Quality implications of the proposals. John Booth replied – key points were :

- Road traffic from the proposed development will mainly head for Caversham and the bridges. It will potentially increase congestion and make air quality worse than it would otherwise be ... and congestion in Reading is serious and air quality is already at a dangerous level in many places.

- Unfortunately the modelled pollution levels are compared to National Air Quality Objectives (which we believe to be too high) so while the NAQOs may be achieved – so allowing development to proceed – they are not safe thresholds and the science is evolving.
- In particular while NAQO for annual PM2.5 is 25 ug/m³ the WHO guide is 10 ug/m³ and WHO are explicit that this is not a safe threshold. Defra says: “levels of PM_{2.5} (and population exposure) close to roadsides are often much higher than those in background locations.” also “levels of PM_{2.5} (and population exposure) close to roadsides are often much higher than those in background locations.”
- Analysis of impacts of increased traffic on PM2.5 concentrations were only for receptors on and close to the site. This should be extended to Caversham Road where there is an automatic monitor for NO2 and PM10. PM2.5 concentration can be inferred from PM10 and RBC estimated in 2018 it was 16.1 ug/m³ so above the WHO guide.

John Booth has offered to help KEG to respond to developer’s statement on climate change. We need to decide whether to submit objections as Reading FoE to raise awareness of key environmental issues.

Planning reforms to increase local development around Reading

Government proposals to reform the planning system - <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/launch-of-planning-for-the-future-consultation-to-reform-the-planning-system> - to “streamline process, cut red tape and harness technology to deliver homes faster” have been widely criticised.

But the Prime Minister welcomed “Radical reform unlike anything we have seen since the Second World War” and they have been endorsed by the CBI and Gleeson Homes.

The proposals will further reduce the opportunities for strategic planning across wide areas. Local Plans will have to identify three types of land – **Growth** areas suitable for substantial development, **Renewal** areas suitable for development, and areas that are **Protected**.

Kate Gordon, senior planner at Friends of the Earth, commented:

“These planning reforms are bad news for our communities, climate, and local democracy.

“Ditching key safeguards, such as environmental impact assessments, and curtailing local democratic scrutiny, will only fuel fears that this is little more than a developers’ charter. This threatens a wave of poor development in the wrong location, and will undermine confidence in the planning system.” There is a FoE petition on the link.

<https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate-change/planning-reforms-are-bad-news-communities-and-environment>

While local authorities will have some say in their local plans they will still have to plan for housing numbers dictated by central government, according to its priorities. An ‘algorithm’ is to be used to set these numbers. The Government’s White Paper proposes to replace the Standard Method for calculating Local Housing Need with a nationally-set method for setting local housing requirements which will continue to focus growth on London and the South East (where arguably the environmental capacity is low) and away from the North (where ‘levelling up’ is needed) and will have a radical effect on local housing numbers, particularly in Wokingham ... and other authorities around Reading.

Annual Housing Numbers:				
	Current Local Plan Requirement	Average Delivery (3 years)	Current Standard method	Proposed Standard method
Reading	689	776	649	700
West Berkshire	525	513	513	692
Wokingham	662	1231	789	1635
South Oxfordshire	547	995	608	723
Total	2423	3515	2559	3750
As % of Current Plan	100.00%	145.07%	105.61%	154.77%

Sir John Redwood MP has criticised the method <http://johnredwoodsdiary.com/2020/09/03/levelling-up-and-planning/>

Wokingham Borough Council’s leader John Halsall has branded the numbers as "completely and utterly unacceptable" and has launched a petition against them. <http://bit.ly/EnougisEnough>

Reading Climate Festival

RCAN is curating a week of activities starting 9th November. <https://readingcan.org.uk/events/event/reading-climate-festival> **We have been invited to put on an event – suggestions and offers please!** Application form at https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1gGF5FLr8rL86Z4e-YDo-fhV_KN6NdYsu1Y1J1U3Qfw/viewform?edit_requested=true

Reading Cleaner Air and Safer Transport Forum.

Meets on-line on 10th September – not open to public but Reading FoE have a ‘seat’.

Reading Strategies – final releases awaited.

Public consultations for the Climate Emergency Strategy, the Biodiversity Action Plan, and the Reading Tree Strategy are now closed and we await release of completed documents.

Minerals and Waste Plan:

Joint plan for Reading, Bracknell, Windsor and Maidenhead and Wokingham Councils is going to consultation at <https://www.hants.gov.uk/berksconsult> . If anyone wants to read and critique it for us please do so!

Environmental Recovery after Brexit – Environment Bill back to Parliament in September

Defra secretary of state George Eustice gave a speech in July looking at environmental protections. He promised “a new consultation on changing our approach to environmental assessment and mitigation in the planning system. If we can front-load ecological considerations in the planning development process, we can protect more of what is precious.” And announced “a £5m pilot on establishing a new Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment.” <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/george-eustice-speech-on-environmental-recovery-20-july-2020>

Commentator Miles King thinks the EU Environmental Impact Assessment Directive was doing quite a good job and the new proposals both denigrate the present system and offer weaker nature protections. <https://bit.ly/32D2mgn>

Former FoE CEO Craig Bennet, now CEO of the Wildlife Trusts, commented “Spending £27bn on destructive road building projects, when just £40m has been earmarked for nature conservation projects, will only further damage our threatened wildlife.” “We’re pleased that the Secretary of State is committed to the return of the Environment Bill in September and is at last planning the appointment of a Chair for their new environmental watchdog, the Office for Environmental Protection. The Government first recognised the need for a new environmental watchdog almost three years ago, yet in that time the Environment Bill needed to deliver this has barely passed the first hurdle in Parliament.” <https://bit.ly/2ZPPlyh>

The Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill:

The new bill was to be introduced to Parliament by Caroline Lucas MP on 2nd September, just as Extinction Rebellion were on the streets of London again. Getting it supported, debated and passed is going to take a lot of time and effort!

Caroline Lucas said:

- It would see aviation and shipping fall within the UK’s net zero target and provide greater protection for nature, wildlife and soils.
- It would not replace the Climate Change Act but strengthen it and patch its many holes. The Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill includes emissions from aviation and shipping, for example, as the Committee on Climate Change recommends, and those which come from our supply chains.
- We cannot continue to claim credit for reducing emissions in the UK when we have simply outsourced them to other countries, and then consume what they produce.

<https://www.ceebill.uk/>

Road Investment Strategy – TAN campaign update!

Transport Action Network want to challenge the government’s £27 bn Road Investment Strategy 2 (RIS2). In late July they were given permission to proceed with their legal challenge to the “largest ever roads programme” at the High Court. An order by Mrs Justice Lieven declared the case to be significant, meaning it will be fast-tracked for a hearing before the third of November.

See ‘Case Updates’ in <https://www.crowdjustice.com/case/stop-largest-ever-roads-programme/> ... where they are still appealing for funds.

Clean Air:

Government has announced additional £2 million funding for local actions to improve air quality, bringing current total Air Quality Grant scheme funding to £64.5 million. Not very much compared with Department for Transport’s £27 billion roads programme <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/2-million-fund-for-local-action-on-air-quality?>

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/>

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

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.