

Topics and questions for GREN Hustings 2016

Introductions:

Chair will invite each panellist to give a 2 to 4 minute introduction outlining their party's political philosophy and explaining how this relates to environmental issues.

Topics:

Last year's event only managed four topics – it's important that audience is involved and that debate should not be curtailed if it's interesting - so may not reach a fifth topic – if there is time at the end then can take more topics from the floor.

A version of this document will be made available to the audience on the night so propose that the chair reads out the topic title and the initial question, gets fairly brief responses from the panel, and then calls for supplementary questions from the floor on that topic.

Topic 1: Where's Reading Heading? - New Reading Plan

Context:

RBC has consulted on 'Issues and Options' for a new local plan 2016-2036. Starting point is 699 new homes per year in Reading in the context of a total of 2,855 homes per year in Reading, West Berkshire, Wokingham and Bracknell Forest combined.

The Sustainability Appraisal of this level of housing provision in Reading found that all ten environmental impacts assessed were negative or significantly negative.

Question:

Is a high level of housing and population growth right for Reading and central Berkshire, and should it continue to 2036, and how do you propose to influence the local plan process to make these developments sustainable?

Topic 2: Local energy issues and opportunities

Context:

Reading's Climate Change Strategy has a target to generate at least 8% of the Borough's energy from renewable sources by 2020 – which would leave 92% from conventional sources. The issue of converting a lot of late-Victorian houses to low-carbon is particularly important for Reading, as is fuel poverty.

Central government has withdrawn both the 'Green Deal' to fund energy efficiency improvements, and the 'Feed-In Tariffs' to support renewable energy.

'Switched On London' <http://switchedonlondon.org.uk/> is a proposal for a publicly-owned non-profit local energy company to invest in energy saving and renewable energy, and offer fair, affordable prices, based on a progressive pricing system.

Question:

Should RBC establish a local energy company – or are there better ways to manage energy costs and reduce the town's carbon footprint?

Topic 3: Transport

Context:

Reading is quite congested with cars and other vehicles at peak times, its main roads are designated air quality management areas, the M4 is to become 'all lane running', and the population of central Berkshire is set to expand.

Cross-rail and central area office development may increase demand for road travel to and from central Reading.

Various solutions are proposed by various people – cycle lanes, subsidised buses, car-free days, park-and-ride, road pricing, Third Thames Bridge (recent estimates of cost between one and two hundred million pounds), and closure of car parks.

Question:

What is your vision for sustainable transport?

Topic 4: White (blue-rich) LED Streetlights

Context:

Reading is proposing to spend around £9 million replacing street lights with LEDs which campaigners argue will have adverse effects on people and wildlife.

Question:

Do you think there should be more consultation and assessment before this goes ahead?

Topic 5: Waste and Recycling

Context:

Reading is currently recycling 33% of its waste when the national average is 44% and the target for 2020 is 50%.

Question:

What sticks or carrots should the Council use to reduce waste and increase recycling?