



InterClimate  
Network

# 2022 Reading Schools Climate Conference

## Questions & Answers

### Climate Action

Are 'Just Stop Oil' and 'Extinction Rebellion' role models for young people who want to take action, and if not them, who?

**Grace Andrews:** I suppose it depends what you expect in a role model. In my opinion, they are gathering the attention of the media and all of you. It may not be in the best way but I think the passion behind it should be focused on. They're passionate people.

**Alison Foster:** I do admire what they're doing - they're turning up the volume and it isn't in the media's interest to portray them in the best way. This isn't a comfortable issue, and it is controversial, but they're doing us all a favour and the future a favour in what they're doing.

What can we do to make our leaders prioritise climate action despite not being able to vote?

**Grace Andrews:** A major proposal has been put forward by the Votes at 16 campaign ([see here](#)). The response does just show how important it is to the people of the country. At the time, the politicians weren't taking it seriously but now the Youth Parliament is allowed in Parliament, showing how important it is. If you want to get your voice heard, you should think about joining the Youth Parliament.

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**Peter Moore:** Writing to/e-mailing your elected representatives (MPs or Councillors) can be influential, particularly if you are clear about your concerns, support your arguments with evidence, and ask them what they are going to do to address your concerns.

**What laws and legislations are there that decrease the carbon footprint of companies and businesses in the UK?**

**Peter Moore:** A wide range of legislation is designed to reduce the carbon footprint of the UK as a whole, and individual businesses within it. A key law is the Climate Change Act 2008 which set legally binding targets for the Government to reduce emissions. From this a range of other laws and policies flow to support that overall goal. The way in which they apply to individual companies varies but can include legal requirements for reporting on carbon for larger companies, standards to reduce emissions from vehicles or buildings, or legislation to make company pension schemes take account of climate risk.

### Schools and Climate Change

**What can we ask our schools to do to connect more to nature? How do you think schools should adapt further to help with climate change?**

**Natalie Ganpatsingh:** Sometimes you have to ask, what are the drivers of the people you're talking with? So something you can put as a benefit is in terms of curriculum enrichment: how connecting with nature supports learning, and pupils concentrating more when they're back in the classroom. Then you might urge your school to do a biodiversity audit of their school.

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Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) would be able to offer you guidance to audit i.e. wild flowers, pollinators, tree planting with the benefits of trees during the hot weather. Beforehand, do a bit of research on the value of outdoor learning to make the case.

**Peter Moore:** We have just finished a major programme installing solar panels and LED lights in a whole number of Reading schools. This used £1.4 million government funding plus £1 million matched funding from Reading Borough Council, which means schools can keep bills down and keep more money for books etc. You can ask in your schools, 'What are we doing about energy reduction?'.

**Cllr Tony Page:** Adding to the health agenda, the way that you and colleagues travel to school is important. This includes turning roads outside schools into 'School Streets' where roads immediately around schools are closed at drop off and pick up times so it imposes a new discipline in how you travel to school. It's healthier to either walk or cycle and use public transport to get out of the habit of going in the car to school.

**Heather Marshall:** There was a great quote from the Director for the Environment at Microsoft who said something like, 'I can tell you how to get to Starbucks in 3 minutes but I can't tell you how many trees I have in my back yard'. My advice is to Measure, Monitor and then Manage it effectively. Understanding what we have here in Reading is important. In some cases, schools water systems can be difficult in terms of what is going into the toilets and drains. It's worth flagging not to put anything else in the loos to save hundreds of pounds, and water usage can have a big impact on water bills.



## Water, population, and environmental jobs

Enquiring about water, how much water is leaked from them. It leads to hosepipe bans, are you aware of the impact?

**Heather Marshall:** At the moment, we leak about 24% of water from our network and it's a big problem. This comes from the hot and dry summers when the rain isn't soaking through - as the ground gets hard and dry, old pipes under the ground shift around and crack and it's that movement as things expand and contract. It's our responsibility to get them fixed as quickly as possible.

What effect does increasing population in Reading have on our environment?

**Peter Moore:** An increasing population can, for example, add pressure to natural resources like water, and can result in more energy being used, but these impacts can be reduced if the houses people live in are made more energy and water efficient. Increasing population is therefore not necessarily the main driver of environmental harm. Some people believe inequality is a more important factor than population. Research suggests that the wealthiest 10% emit around 48% of emissions globally, whilst the poorest 50% are responsible for just 12%.

What careers are there in relation to the environment? [One career you are each aware of that would be a positive move towards tackling climate change]

**Panel recommendations:**

- Ecology;

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- Reporting side (finances);
- Engineering;
- Hydrology, water;
- Corporate Social Responsibility.

**Cllr Tony Page:** Get involved with the political process either way and get stuck in!

**Grace Andrews:** Any job can be environmentally friendly if you know your policies.

**Peter Moore:** There is a wide and growing range of environmental careers and government policy envisages creation of a large number of 'green jobs' in the coming decades. Careers are available in air quality, conservation, corporate and social responsibility, environmental assessment, environmental science and waste management. All the major industrial sectors will employ people in these areas. The water and energy industries are major employers who need scientists, researchers, technical and managerial experts with environmental knowledge. Nature conservation is also a growing sector whilst agriculture (including animal care, fisheries, forestry and horticulture) is also a significant employer.

### Transport and developments

With the growing population in our area, more people are in use of transport leading to more emissions from cars, buses, coaches. Due to all the people moving into new houses being built and driving around we lack parking and that leads to more driving in search for a place to stop, further wasting petrol and releasing gas. What are you doing to help with this?

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Tony Page said the refuse truck fleet is on its way to all electric – are there plans in place to convert Reading buses to electric?

**Cllr Tony Page:** The use of a bus can remove anything up to 80 cars from our roads - and trains considerably more! If we provide power and fuel sources that are genuinely renewable and sustainable, the environmental benefits are self-evident. But, as with all public transport, reliability and convenience are of the essence if we are to encourage modal shift.

The Council is looking to move as much of its operational fleet to electric vehicles in the future, subject to battery technology and capacity allowing this. The battery capacity required for electric buses is still in its infancy and, for the time being, we need to look for alternative clean fuel such as methane and other natural gas generated from processes such as the treatment of waste food. The waste food from Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell goes to a treatment facility near Wallingford and clean, green fuel is produced from this as well as beneficial fertiliser for local farmers.

Promoting the greater use of public transport, cycling and walking, along with greater environmental awareness, will reduce the future dependency on the private car. Reading is a very compact area and there are major sites that are being developed mostly for flats. We're looking at high density living with homes that can be accessed by train and bus. Whilst the private car is likely to be with us for many, many years we should be looking to more localised car sharing clubs which thereby spread the costs of owning expensive vehicles, and thereby reduce the amount of street space needed for cars.



Areas of concentrated population lend themselves to the development of more car clubs. Car sharing provides flexible use for those occasions when good public transport, walking and cycling links are inappropriate. Reading is in a very good position to develop such car clubs which spread the cost of owning a car whilst still allowing people to have access to a private car on a ready accessible pre-booking system.

**Do you have plans building a new hospital that maybe is out of town, which would reduce traffic and ambulances get to hospital quicker?**

**Alison Foster:** There isn't a meeting in the last year and half where we haven't been asked about the car park. We are not encouraging cars to come to the hospital – most transport should be done away from the site. We have started park and ride schemes for staff to use and purchased parking off site. We're providing that for free and if you do park on site, you pay. On our App, we have included points for sustainable travel as incentives, and encourage staff to think about their own personal health using rewards. There is a contract with Reading buses where the hospital is paying for some of the travel for people to get into town and out.

## Reading Community

**Are there many community run environmental projects around Reading to get involved in?**

**Natalie Ganpatsingh:** There is a Green Well-being network in Reading and there are lots of community garden projects where you can learn about food growing. These often have links with those with some of the food kitchens and refugee support organisations. There are also lots of

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conservation organisations for example The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) do a lot in Reading. Often volunteering is for ages 16 or 18+ but certainly with Nature Nurture, we are happy to bring younger people on board.

**Alison Foster:** We have a staff well-being centre across from the hospital which is huge and offers lots of training opportunities. It's partly open now but there will also be a community garden for people to use.

**Peter Moore:** Yes - Reading has a long tradition of community run environmental projects. Many of these come together in the Greater Reading Environment Network - their website ([www.gren.org.uk](http://www.gren.org.uk)) includes details of local groups and projects. Reading also has a Community Energy Society - this raises money from public share offers to fund solar panels on community buildings, with any profits being invested back into community projects.

### How are local householders engaging with retrofitting?

**Peter Moore:** Retrofitting your house with energy efficiency measures is one of the most cost-effective ways of reducing energy bills and cutting carbon. Many people do this using their own initiatives but we need more houses in Reading to be retrofitted to meet our ambitions. The Council applies for money from Government to enable retrofit projects but these are generally only available to low income households. The Council also invests in retrofitting its own housing stock such that the average energy performance certificate (EPC) for these is 'C' compared to 'D' nationally (with 'A' being the best).





## Do you think we're on track to becoming a 'Green City' in Reading?

### *Panel responses*

- Yes;
- Yes;
- Most certainly;
- Yes;
- Yes;
- Maybe!

**Peter Moore:** Yes - Reading Borough's carbon footprint has reduced by 55% since 2005 which is a good start although there is a long way to go to reach 'net zero'. Reading Borough Council has also adopted a Trees Strategy which includes the ambition to plant 3,000 trees on council land by 2030, and to increase the percentage of the Borough covered by tree canopy from 18% to 25% by 2030.