

DRFA

Derby Road Fund Association

Contact details:

Email: derbyroadfund@gmail.com

Post: 31 Derby Road

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Dear Neighbour,

Infrastructure renewal: structurally unsafe street lighting columns – results of vote and update

Following our May 2025 letter which set out Reading Borough Council's 2 options for street lighting columns replacement, we would like to take this opportunity to update you on current issues and the results of the vote.

The result of the vote is as follows: -

Option 1: Standard Columns Phillips Luma – 71 votes

Option 2: Heritage style column – 5 votes

Total votes cast: 76.

Update on the current position

The Committee understands and recognises the affection many residents attach to the various lamps. Of the ten street lighting columns on the road, five lamps are swan necks; the remaining five are modern or different designs not changed since the 1970s. The Committee explored options, some of which were suggested by residents, within the constraints of Victorian heritage bespoke/reproduction models. However, the reality is that the costs are prohibitively higher than what the residents can support, especially considering other essential things that need to be covered, road resurfacing, traffic calming measures etc.

During the exploration of options suggested by residents it was noted that as far back as 2018/19 the committee were informed, by SE, that the street lighting columns were declared unsafe. The Committee discussed four replacement options of street lighting columns.

The Council's Street lighting contractor, M Group, has deemed all street lighting columns to be structurally unsafe, meaning the extent of any potential underground cable damage or related issues will only be revealed during replacement. To assess the financial and safety implications, including potential damage to underground cables, electrical infrastructure, and supply disruptions, the Committee has sought advice from SSEN, the electricity Distribution Network Operator.

SSEN advised that any latent damage to underground cables, safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations, electrical infrastructure and supply issues would be their responsibility. Latent, meaning in terms of hidden defects that are not readily apparent during a reasonable inspection.

However, damage associated with DRFA maintenance and remedial works will be at a cost to the Fund. Remedial damage refers to actions taken by the DRFA in relation to maintenance, defects or damage.

Notwithstanding the minuted position in 2018/19, the current legal obligation on the DRFA is ***"It should be noted that SSEN is obliged by legislation to remove assets (incoming cables, fuse carrier, earth/neutral connection blocks) from street furniture confirmed as being unsafe due to damage or degradation if the owner doesn't take the appropriate action to ensure safety."***

The Committee sought advice from the DRFA insurers in relation to liability and their response is as follows:

"If DRFA, along with local businesses and property owners involved, makes a final decision as a group to replace or not replace the street lighting columns and a claim arises, The DRFA Committee would be held liable as they collectively represent DRFA and are responsible for the road and streetlight."

Furthermore, if your current insurance policy does not cover a specific claim, the insurers would not provide a payout. Since DRFA is responsible for the road and streetlight, they would need to fund the claim."

The Committee will be in touch once we have received the Council's timetable for the replacement of all the street lighting columns.

Yours sincerely

DRFA Committee