

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Public and political engagement with climate change as a topic increased sharply in Reading in 2019. However, the link between climate change and health impacts is rarely addressed explicitly, and interest appears to have fallen again as Covid has dominated the more recent news.
- *Public engagement:* The Reading Chronicle increased its coverage of climate change considerably in 2019 and 2020. However, only 16% of articles that mention climate change address the links between climate change and health.
- *Political engagement:* Climate change was mentioned by Berkshire MPs in just 129 of the 4895 debates they participated in. The link between climate change and health was made implicitly in 14 of these cases, and explicitly, only twice.

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

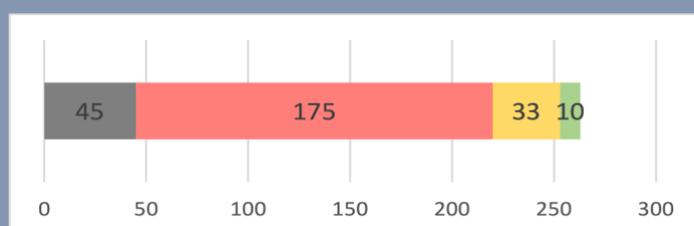
Public engagement with climate change and its link to health was measured in terms of references to climate change and its links to health in articles published in the most widely read local newspaper, *the Reading Chronicle*, between 2008 to 2021 (thus far). Of the 263 articles that meet the criterion of referencing climate change in this time frame, only 16% featured a reference to health and just 3.8% featured a strong overt link to health.

Strikingly, 40% of all articles which mention climate change over the past 12 years are from 2019. This may be due to Extinction Rebellion activities; Greta Thunberg-inspired school strikes for climate; and local Reading actions, including:

- The declaration of *climate emergency by the Reading Borough Council*
- Policy proposals to reduce Reading's carbon emissions
- Climate protests in Reading and globally
- Discussion of climate change by parliamentary candidates before the general election.

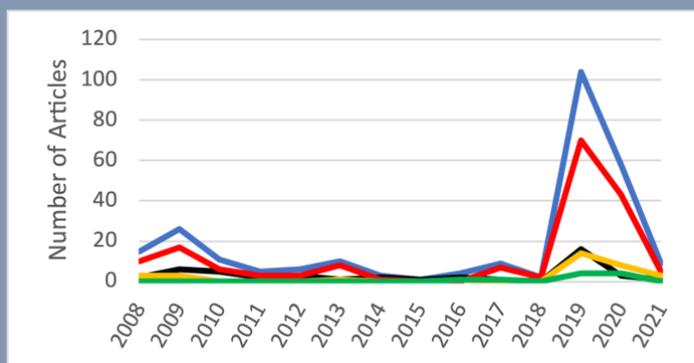
While 2019 saw an uptick in climate change discussion in local news (only 4 articles overtly mentioned the link between climate change and health), that total count (104) nearly halved in 2020 (58), and 2021 is on track to see similar numbers to 2020; findings of particular importance during a period in which reducing unnecessary pressure on the healthcare system is of the utmost priority.

## READING CHRONICLE COVERAGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE



The total number of articles that mention the term 'climate change' (n= 263) were given 1 of 4 ratings:

- **Black:** articles use the term in another context (i.e., a jazz band called Climate Change)
- **Red:** articles about climate change but with no connection to health Impacts
- **Amber:** articles that *implicitly* connect climate change and health
- **Green:** articles that *explicitly* connect climate change and health



Reading Chronicle mentions of 'Climate Change' (Colours labelled as above, Blue: total articles)

## POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Political engagement with the link between climate change and health was monitored by measuring mentions of “climate change” and health in individual debate participations by members of parliament representing a Berkshire constituency since 2006 (based on written Hansard Records).

All Berkshire MPs have mentioned climate change in at least one debate since 2006 with the exception of two only recently elected (2019). In total, ‘climate change’ has been mentioned in 129 of the 4895 debates (2.64%) participated in by each Berkshire MPs since 2006, on topics including: national and international legislation; renewable energy; deforestation; biodiversity impacts; flooding; and low/no carbon transport. A notable omission from these conversations are the effects of increasing temperatures and heatwaves, with no explicit mention in any debate.

Of these 129, the link between climate change and health was *implicitly* made 14 times, addressing foreign hurricane events; air pollution (particularly surrounding the Heathrow expansion); flood and drought risk; and further links between low/non-carbon transportation and improved health.

Links between climate change and health were made *explicitly*, only twice, both by former Shadow Minister for Local Transport (2016-2020), Matt Rodda, in reference to the need to reduce emissions and pollution, and the health benefits associated with the subsequent increase in walking and cycling.

As was the case in local media, political attention to climate change spiked in 2019. This is likely due to many of the same causes, with the addition of the UK governments commitment to a 2050 net-zero carbon emissions target. It is worth noting, however, that none of these events were directly mentioned by Berkshire MPs in any debate.

## LOCAL IMPORTANCE

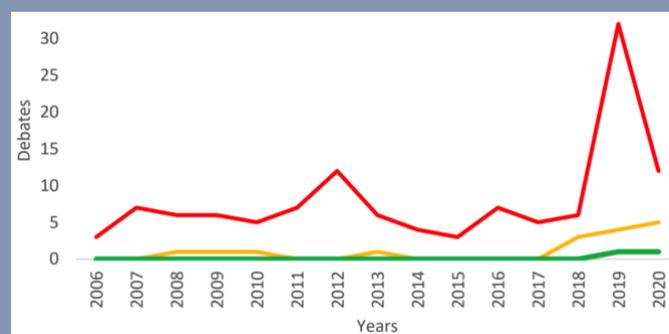
It should be noted that of the 129 references to climate change made by Berkshire MPs, only three were in relation to local, Berkshire-specific issues related to climate change, as these discussions are largely dominated by climate issues and legislation on the national level.

The three Berkshire specific climate issues addressed were:

- A bridge in Reading across the Thames as an example of encouraging walking and cycling
- A green flag winning school in Maidenhead
- An increase of driving due to a decreased train service in Maidenhead

Overall, few connections have been made between climate change and public health by Berkshire’s politicians. This, therefore, in part highlights the importance of this report in encouraging discussion of the issues of climate change and public health at a local level as well as a national and international one.

### CLIMATE CHANGE ADDRESSED BY BERKSHIRE MP’S



Numbers of debates where Berkshire MPs mention climate change (red), climate and health explicitly and implicitly (amber) and climate change and health explicitly (green).

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