

Reading Labour

**Manifesto
2021**

Preface

The past year has been entirely dominated by a global pandemic and its impact on each and every one of us. We have all been presented with challenges none of us would have thought possible. All of us, I'm sure, are very much looking forward to returning to a level of normality in the not-too-distant future.

We should, though, take at least a brief moment to reflect on some of the key work that has taken place over past year. Reading's Labour councillors have throughout been at the forefront of developing and delivering Reading Borough Council's response to the pandemic. We swiftly launched the One Reading Community Hub to bring enhanced coordination to the partnership work between the Council and the town's thriving voluntary and community sector organisations. We also worked to ensure that policies were rapidly implemented to allow support to get to businesses that needed it and have consistently lobbied, with some success, the national Government for further financial support for residents and businesses where this is needed. For many residents, though, the most important achievement may be that we have managed to preserve the vast majority of the Council's 'business as usual' services with minimal disruption and, even where services have been directly impacted, have found ways to ensure alternative provision wherever possible. Public service excellence is at the core of our values.

It is worth particularly highlighting one area of work – alongside the NHS and other public sector staff like police and teachers, the Council's social care workers have been the heroes of the Covid 19 response. Without such an effort from our local social care teams to get people out of hospital and into appropriate care quickly, the NHS would not have been able to do their life-saving work. Often this work goes unheralded in public, and Labour councillors want to take this opportunity to thank everyone working in the Council's adult social care services and at Brighter Futures for Children. In this area and a great many others, partnership working has been integral to our successes over the past year and we remain committed to the approach as we move forward.

As a Labour Group, we are looking forward and remain committed to all of our ambitions for Reading. These are ambitions that the electorate have backed us to drive forward in previous elections and we are, once again, asking for Reading's residents to support Labour in its desire to push our town

forward from the pandemic in pursuit of a truly inclusive future. A future that delivers benefits for everyone across Reading, whatever their circumstances, and a future that is sustainable in social, environmental, and economic terms.

Reducing our impact on the environment remains a priority. Residents are already taking advantage of the Council's weekly food waste collections and I can tell you they are already making a real difference to recycling rates. As we drive towards our net zero carbon target for Reading by 2030, we continue to invest in energy efficient buildings, renewable energy and sustainable travel options. Green Park Station will be completed later this year and work begins shortly to start the regeneration of Reading West Station. We are also creating more cycle and walking routes through our Active Travel plans. As we move forward from the pandemic, it is vital that we unlock these new opportunities for people to travel into and around Reading in a greener, quicker and more sustainable way. When we ask people what they would most like to see improved in Reading, the answer is always the condition of the roads. Last summer we embarked on Reading's biggest ever road repair programme and £9 million is being spent on new road surfaces and pavements.

Keeping fit and healthy has never been more important and I am pleased that our £40 million investment in modern new leisure facilities for Reading remains firmly on track. This includes brand new swimming pools at both Rivermead and Palmer Park and is the most ambitious leisure facilities programme in Reading's history. Our town will have the best leisure facilities it has ever had, and they will be fit-for-purpose in the twenty-first century.

And we continue to do everything in our power to tackle a housing crisis which has not gone away. By making the very best use of Council buildings and Council-owned sites, we are increasing the number of affordable homes in every part of the borough. At the height of the first lockdown 260 people were kept safe and off the streets by moving them into local B&B and hotel accommodation. We are now investing in the creation of bespoke temporary accommodation alongside holistic support to help break the cycle of rough sleeping in Reading. Moreover, new key worker housing in East Reading is to be joined by our largest Council housing development in a generation in Coley, a new 100% affordable housing development in Southcote, the ongoing Dee Park estate regeneration, and new Council homes at North Street. Most ambitiously of all, though, is the forthcoming provision of a mixed Council housing and adult social care services

development on Battle Street – a transformational project for the area that will secure top class facilities for residents in need of them.

There are still tremendous challenges ahead, of course. The pandemic continues to raise uncertainties about future levels of demand and, even when a 'return to normality' comes, may yet prove to have fomented permanent changes in our society. Covid has also added to a severe funding crisis in Councils which existed long before the pandemic arrived and for which the Government has once again failed to find a solution. They have long promised a plan for adult social care, but none has been forthcoming. In spite of this, we have managed to build a platform of financial stability for Reading Borough Council and are able to continue our investment in Reading's future. We need to fulfil our duties to all of Reading's residents, including the older generations, and it is time that the Conservative Government recognised that too.

Cllr Jason Brock
Leader of Reading Borough Labour Group and Leader of Reading
Borough Council

Securing Reading's Economic Success

1. Faced with a difficult economic recovery from the pandemic, we will promote the Reading UK Powered by People strategy that strives for a recovery focused on economic inclusion and sustainability.
2. Work with businesses and partners to ensure that Reading has the right mix of jobs and opportunities for everyone in our town.
3. Work with the Local Enterprise Partnership and our arms-length Community Interest Company, Reading UK, to promote skills training in schools, colleges and employment, ensuring that Reading's workforce is prepared for the future.
4. Harness the economic growth of Reading for the benefit of all by promoting a Sustainable Economy charter in our town, acknowledging that true sustainability considers environmental, economic and social factors as intrinsically linked. Such a charter will especially promote work to provide job opportunities for disadvantaged residents.
5. Tackle inequality in Reading by developing initiatives that promote new economic opportunities directly aimed at reducing it.
6. Support the formation of co-operatives in Reading, noting the potential they have to provide new job opportunities for residents alongside a strong emphasis on social responsibility.
7. Having implemented a social procurement strategy for the Council, we will always look to secure good social value from any contracted services to ensure that residents' prospects are improved. We will work with key anchor partners across the town, both public and private, to encourage the promotion of social value in their procurement and foster their commitment to corporate social responsibility.
8. Promote the new Ethical Recruitment Charter to all businesses across the town, helping to protect residents from irresponsible recruitment practices.
9. Continue our existing partnerships with infrastructure providers to ensure that super-fast broadband and 5G continues to be rolled out to all Reading residents and businesses, and that users have a competitive choice of providers.
10. Promote Reading as a tourism destination, seeking the opportunity to develop a new economy in the town around this and working with partners to ensure that decent jobs and opportunities are generated.

11. Through New Directions and partnerships with other providers, explore opportunities to promote remote learning as a way to help residents seeking to retrain and reskill who may otherwise not have access to such opportunities.

Delivering Housing for Reading

12. Continue and expand our successful large-scale Local Authority New Build Council Housing programme, which has already delivered new homes at Conwy Close and Lowfield Avenue and now has schemes in progress at Wensley Road, North Street, Battle Street, and Cattle Market.
13. Where the Council cannot viably develop a prospective housing site itself, we will continue to prioritise partnerships with housing associations where possible, as we have at Dee Park and Coronation Square.
14. Deliver new Key Worker Housing, including the current scheme in East Reading, helping to recruit and retain more essential public sector workers in Reading – especially in our own social care workforce.
15. Use the planning determination system to deliver more affordable homes at the Reading Affordable Rent level, helping residents to access good-quality housing provided at developers' expense.
16. Continue our Rent Guarantee Scheme, which enables more residents to secure affordable accommodation around our town.
17. Ensure that housing developments – whether by the Council, housing associations or private developers – build strong communities, contributing the necessary infrastructure and public services and to benefit residents.
18. Build on the success of our Empty Homes Strategy and ensure that empty properties are brought back into use, reducing the blight that such houses cause in our neighbourhoods while providing much-needed new homes.
19. Pursue the ambitious requirements for zero-carbon new build housing in Reading, as set out in our Local Plan.
20. Ensure that we achieve the maximum possible affordable housing contribution from all private developments in Reading, with a particular emphasis on securing on-site contributions.

21. Build on our success and keep working with partners to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping across Reading, including the challenge of helping those with complex needs.
22. Review the Council's policy around the keeping of pets in sheltered accommodation, recognising that pet ownership is beneficial for residents and can help to alleviate loneliness and improve both mental and physical health.
23. Maintain our robust strategy of enforcement action against rogue landlords who fail to fulfil their responsibilities to tenants, working with tenants to ensure appropriate and firm action is taken. This includes our expansion of the House in Multiple Occupation licensing regime to apply to smaller properties than the statutory requirements.
24. Improve the Council's role as a quality assessor of private rented sector housing, provide further information for private tenants on their rights and expectations they should have of landlords, and promote the Rent With Confidence scheme.

Protecting and Enhancing the Lives of Reading's Adults and Children

25. Work closely with the NHS and the local Clinical Commissioning Group to ensure that local health services deliver for residents, especially as we face a world shaped by the long-run consequences of the pandemic in general, the specific issues experienced by those suffering from 'long Covid', and the need to address the unequal health outcomes for black and minority communities.
26. Campaign to protect our NHS from Conservative Government cuts and always stand up for our health services in Reading, placing particular emphasis on the need for better-funded mental health services.
27. Noting that poverty is among the very strongest indicators of negative health outcomes, we will ensure that our economic development work connects with public health strategy to promote opportunities.
28. Target Public Health funding towards ensuring the widest possible promotion of health and wellbeing in Reading, including subsidy for community intervention and leisure programmes, with a particular emphasis on reducing the stark inequalities of health outcomes across the town.

29. Noting that childhood obesity is a rising issue and is best addressed by providing inclusive and welcoming opportunities for physical activity, we will invest further in the refurbishment and expansion of playground provision for younger children, develop and maintain specialist facilities for adolescents, and seek to enhance the Council's support for youth sports and activities provision.
30. Continue to build on our strong record of cooperation between hospital and social cares services, always seeking to deliver the best possible outcomes for those using services.
31. Commence a three-year transformation programme to deliver modern, co-located adult care services on two sites in the town – at Battle Street and Hexham Road – providing day services, respite care, sheltered and general needs housing.
32. Promote 'home first' community-based care, working with partners and voluntary organisations to achieve this.
33. Work with residents to refine our care framework to provide those with disabilities with greater flexibility around the support they receive, giving them greater choice and control.
34. Work towards Reading becoming a 'Dementia Friendly' town, as per the Alzheimer's Society guidelines.
35. Continue our successful partnership with Brighter Futures for Children [BFfC] – the Council's wholly-owned children's services company – as we build on the improvements recognised in their Ofsted inspection.
36. Support BFfC in their ongoing campaign to recruit more foster carers, ensuring that looked after children are placed in or close to Reading wherever possible.
37. Develop Reading's growing reputation as a trauma-informed town through BFfC's overarching approach - think trauma informed, respond restoratively, therapeutically and whole family. This is supported by the One Reading C&YP Partnership vision for Reading to become a trauma-informed town and organisations across Reading are embedding this approach.
38. Continue to enhance our 'Early Help' services for families, including building upon successful partnership working, to help those children and families most in need as quickly as possible.

39. Continue to improve recruitment and retention across the social care workforce, further reducing our use of agency workers.

Keeping Reading Moving

40. Keep the climate crisis and the need to encourage sustainable transport at the heart of our strategic approach.
41. We will continue delivery of a £9 million investment in Reading's 'minor' roads and pavements over the next three years, acknowledging that the streets where people live need upgrading for the benefit of pedestrians, cyclists and all road users.
42. Introduce a bold new Local Transport Plan, emphasising the need to encourage a modal shift away from cars towards public transport and active transport to reduce congestion, tackle the climate crisis, and improve air quality. We recognise that the pandemic will require amended targets due to the, hopefully short-term, constrained use of public transport.
43. Explore new initiatives that combat rat-running through Reading, especially from those using our network as a shortcut to the M4.
44. Continue to explore ways to improve road safety, including new 20mph zones and speed-calming measures.
45. Lobby Thames Valley Police and national Government for the devolution of speed enforcement powers to Reading Borough Council, allowing us to focus on enhancing residents' safety and quality of life by tackling an issue that blights neighbourhoods.
46. Build on the success of our Active Travel Forum in bringing together partners to explore the ways in which we can expand provision for cyclists and encourage more people to walk instead of taking their cars.
47. Continue to work with neighbouring authorities and national Government to secure a third Thames crossing that reduces pressure on Reading's roads and creates better public transport connectivity to the north of our Borough.
48. Develop, wherever possible and especially through the planning determination process, the necessary infrastructure to allow for a successful transition from petrol- and diesel-powered vehicles towards electric and hydrogen ones.

49. Build on our successful partnerships with neighbouring authorities to promote further Park and Ride and Park and Rail use into Reading.
50. Complete the new Reading Green Park railway station, unlocking new public transport possibilities to the south of our town.
51. Upgrade Reading West station so that it is fit for the twenty-first century. Planning permission for this work has now been granted and we continue to lobby Network Rail for the provision of a fully accessible station, which would ultimately require a full rebuild of the platforms as a major project.
52. Remain steadfastly committed to helping Reading Buses, the Council's wholly-owned bus company, continue to deliver its award-winning and comprehensive service across our town, one of the few areas to see year-on-year increases in bus usage pre-pandemic.

Keeping Reading Clean and Green

53. Build on our success as a Council and a town and commit to invest £34 million in environmental initiatives to achieve our target of a net carbon-neutral Reading by 2030.
54. Play a leading role in the new partnership Reading Climate Change Strategy and act as an exemplar in the town.
55. Promote initiatives by organisations across Reading, including our University, businesses, and voluntary sector, that seek to reduce carbon emissions or offset them.
56. Build on our new weekly food waste collections from residential properties and seek new and innovative ways of helping to reduce unnecessary refuse.
57. Encourage residents and businesses to recycle as much as possible, including exploring possibilities for kerbside glass recycling with our Re3 partners.
58. Look to establish positive initiatives to engage residents and businesses to plant trees to help us achieve an overall 25% canopy cover by 2030 and to ensure that no ward in the town is below 12% canopy cover – or equivalent carbon reduction benefit.

59. Ensure our nature reserves are well-kept and used, working with voluntary groups and partner organisations to ensure they are protected.
60. Look to maximise the biodiversity value of our parks, ensuring that all of our open space is maximising its best possible contribution to society and to tackling the climate crisis.
61. Work to provide biodiversity corridors throughout the town, linking destinations and open spaces to improve wildlife and reduce carbon, and continue to expand our wildflower strategy by exploring additional areas to increase biodiversity, bees and insects.
62. Ensure that the Kennet Meadows are managed to allow a year-round low-level flood plain, acting as one of the largest natural carbon-sinks for the town, encouraging bird life, and providing environmental educational for all.
63. Invest in upgrading our street cleaning provision and public realm, delivering a better environment for residents. We will also work with local residents and community groups who want to volunteer their time to keeping their local areas clean, ensuring that they are provided with the resources they need and that their efforts and achievements are properly recognised.
64. Trial alternatives to glyphosate usage and seek new methods of working, including community partnership with residents, to allow for alternative modes of weed management.
65. Promote the adoption of reusable nappies by offering schemes to make it easier and more affordable for families to move to environmentally friendly alternatives to disposables, recognising that this benefits all residents by reducing landfill.

Strengthening Reading's Communities

66. Launch a new £100,000 a year fund for grassroots community groups across Reading, providing funding for initiatives that can help address the needs of residents.
67. Work with organisations representing Reading's diverse communities to develop new initiatives that will help ensure equal opportunities are available for black and minority residents and acknowledge that positive action is required to address the deep-rooted and pernicious consequences of racism. Moreover, we will continuously work with our

diverse communities to celebrate and acknowledge their positive contribution to our town.

68. Acknowledging the particular issues for Reading's black community, highlighted by the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, we commit to working with representative community organisations to ensure that the Council uses its powers and influence to best promote the black community's interests, economic outcomes, and educational outcomes.
69. Work with the voluntary sector to deliver meaningful benefit for residents and help to strengthen the sector's resilience. This includes a review of the Council's 'Narrowing the Gap' funding framework for future years to ensure that public money delivers public good and financial certainty for the voluntary sector.
70. Build on the success of our Community Hubs projects to ensure that the Council always provides facilities that work for local communities and allow residents to access the services and support that they need, whether from the Council or from partners.
71. Continue to prioritise community safety and campaign for greater Police resourcing for Reading.
72. Enhance and strengthen our strong network of Safer Neighbourhood Forums, a key mechanism for bringing together the Police, the Council, community groups and residents to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour across our town.
73. Continue our successful Community Safety Partnership and work with the Police to tackle the priority issues in Reading,
74. Recognising our responsibility to ensure adequate housing provision for all communities, we will continue to work towards creating a transit traveller site in Reading to providing accommodation for travellers and reduce illegal incursions on public and private land. Moreover, we will explore new approaches to better manage illegal encampments to minimise disruption and improve cross-community engagement.
75. Tackle, via the Council's trading standards team, fraudsters who prey on the vulnerable.
76. Ensure our Licensing policy remains fit for the future and acknowledges the need for diverse and safe provision in the night-time economy for the benefit of all communities.

Ensuring Reading's Education, Leisure and Culture Offer Delivers Opportunities for Everyone

77. Act as a school-led hub to promote the sharing of best practice across Reading's schools, helping to deliver a Borough in the top 25% for educational attainment across all key stages.
78. Deliver new Special Education Needs provision, including the relocation of Phoenix College to the Hamilton Centre, introducing two new Autistic Spectrum Centres in primary schools, and supporting a new SEN school.
79. Ensure enough school places exist to meet the needs of our growing population, including provision of a new secondary school, a new primary school at Green Park, and an increase in current school capacity where required.
80. Continue to lower exclusion rates across primary and secondary schools, acknowledging that there is often a connection between socio-economic disadvantage and school exclusion and that a holistic approach is required to address this.
81. Place climate change and an anti-racist curriculum at the forefront of every school's thinking, with accredited ambassadors in every school.
82. Build new flagship swimming and leisure provision at Rivermead, a new pool at Palmer Park and provide upgrades to South Reading and Meadway leisure centres.
83. Continue our programme of investing £1.5 million over three years in our parks and play equipment, including enhancing accessibility for children with disabilities so that play is open to all.
84. Continue to utilise the knowledge of our Disabled Access Play Task and Finish Group to ensure that accessible play is well-integrated throughout the borough for play areas of all sizes.
85. Continue to engage children and young people in arts and culture through the Cultural Education Partnership.
86. Build on the investment in Reading's Town Hall and Museum and ensure that its successful outreach work with schools and residents goes from strength to strength.

87. Ensure our theatres and museums deliver a programme of events catering for a wide range of cultural tastes and focus on enhancing provision for black and minority communities in particular.
88. Support Reading's art and culture groups through the What's On guide, both online and printed.
89. Recognising that libraries are a vital facility for local communities, ensure that they are properly resourced to provide the myriad services they support, with a particular emphasis on enhancing inclusion and access.
90. Work with partners to ensure that Reading Prison becomes a key cultural and heritage draw for Reading, completing the Abbey Quarter and enhancing regional, national and international tourism whilst providing a valued leisure outlet for residents.

Ensuring Reading's Council is Fit for the Future

91. Build on the success of the One Reading Community Hub during the pandemic. We will look to formalise arrangements into a new sustainable framework to ensure that residents can access holistic, wraparound, support that tackles the causes of issues rather than simply offering short-term relief.
92. Having signed the Race at Work Charter, undertake a full Equalities Audit of the Council's workforce and implement new recruitment, retention, and career development strategies – including apprenticeships – to improve black and minority representation in the Council's workforce at all levels, including senior management.
93. Drive forward our new Customer Strategy, ensuring that residents access the support and advice they need more straightforwardly and quickly.
94. Having launched, after consultation with residents, a new website with improved functionality and accessibility we will ensure that feedback and refinement is an ongoing and progressive process, allowing people to access services and information more easily and swiftly.
95. Following on from adopting the Citizens Advice Council Tax Protocol, continue our successful work with partners to support residents struggling with debt.

96. Continue to explore opportunities to consolidate Council services in fewer locations to reduce costs and improve service to the public. In particular, we will explore opportunities to use the Civic Offices for provision of a broader range of public services, working with partners where appropriate.
97. Pursue opportunities to grow our traded services, protecting jobs and increasing income.
98. Further develop our consultative approach to ensure that residents have meaningful input into developing our policy programme and budget.