

Reading Labour

Manifesto

2022

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Preface

We are all trying to learn to live with the ongoing impact of the pandemic. Your Reading Labour Councillors have been striving to push forward all the key projects we've committed to while, at the same time, ensuring that your Council is responsive to the needs of all those most requiring support across Reading.

Just as the impact of the pandemic does not fall equally on everyone, the rising cost of living also affects some people more than others. The Tory rise in National Insurance payments in April will hit residents and it will hit businesses, but it will hit those on lowest incomes the most. The failure of the Government to get to grips with the energy and fuel price crisis is pitiful, but it will have real consequences for people across Reading.

Labour Councillors are doing what we can to reduce the impact for those who are hardest hit. Residents eligible for Council Tax support will have more of their bill covered by the Council this year. Over the medium-term, we're also commencing a targeted programme of work to help those in our lowest income neighbourhoods to get ahead and share in Reading's economic success.

Ultimately, the rising cost of living will affect everyone in Reading, and it affects the Council too. The Tory Government's underfunding of local councils existed long before the pandemic began and has now been exacerbated by it. When the Tories fail to step up and help local services, it's incumbent on Labour Councillors to make the right choices. In Reading, we've carefully built a robust financial position and that's why, this year, the Council can once again invest across the town. Our responsible approach means we're able to put an extra £5 million into Adult Social Care and £1 million into Children's Services.

It's also why we are now into year three of Reading's biggest ever road repair programme. When complete, 436 residential roads will have been completely resurfaced as part of a record £9 million investment. But we are not stopping there. We have now built another £8 million into our budget for road repairs over the next three years too, meaning hundreds of additional roads and pavements will be resurfaced across Reading to benefit every single road user, however you choose to travel.

If you pass by Palmer Park or Rivermead you can see for yourself the massive strides being made on the construction of Reading's two brand new swimming pools, and work will now accelerate through the summer months. Palmer Park's modern six-lane community pool is set to open by the end of this year. Rivermead's new flagship centre is set to open in Spring 2023. South Reading Leisure Centre's refurbishment is complete, and work starts soon at Meadway Leisure Centre. And because we want leisure opportunities in everyone's neighbourhood, we're investing in playgrounds across the borough too.

This year also sees the opening of an entirely new railway station in Reading, the first since 1906. The Council-led construction of Green Park Station is now almost complete. We are also completely renovating Reading West station with our partners.

As Labour Councillors, affordable housing continues to be a major priority for us. We are investing £88 million to build hundreds of new Council homes over the next four years. This will help us reduce the housing waiting list and provide affordable rental properties to local residents.

Your Labour-run Council was also recently named as one of only 11 in the UK – and one of just 95 across the world – to make a coveted 'A' list on environmental action. Reading's overall carbon footprint has been cut by nearly half since 2005 – the 5th largest reduction of 379 UK local authority areas. It is important to say, however, that the rate at which Reading cuts emissions will need to double to achieve our ambitious goal of net zero by 2030. There remains much work to do, and we hope that the Government will step-up and join us in our aspirations.

For all the challenges, it is an exciting time for Reading as Labour continue to drive forward our plans to provide excellent services and facilities for everyone in our town. I hope you'll lend us your support on 5th May so we can continue to deliver for Reading.

Cllr Jason Brock

Leader of Reading Borough Labour Group and
Leader of Reading Borough Council

March 2022

Labour is Best for Reading; Labour Delivers for Reading

Our strategic priorities for Reading, and how we plan to deliver on them

A town of sustainable and inclusive communities

Delivered by:

More Council homes; more affordable housing from private developments; more key worker housing; working to promote our black community's economic and educational outcomes; protecting employment sites from conversion to residential; more accessible play equipment across the Borough; protecting our Community Hubs and making them available to community groups; work to enhance local centres; tackling anti-social behaviour and crime; campaigning for more Police resources in Reading; City of Sanctuary status and working to Council of Sanctuary status; finance and support for our voluntary and community sector.

A town that's aspirational and offers opportunities for everyone

Delivered by:

More apprenticeships at the Council and in the town; encouraging Living Wage accreditation for employers; targeted work to tackle economic inequalities; closing the Council's pay gap for black staff to set an example across Reading; requiring social value commitments from all Council contracts and procurement; New Directions College skills training; support for those looking to set up small businesses or go into self-employment; delivering the best leisure facilities and swimming pools that Reading has ever had; getting a good deal for Reading from private investment; encouraging employers to offer opportunities to our school children.

A town that tackles the climate crisis and enhances its environment through action, not words

Delivered by:

Investment in bus and rail infrastructure; new active travel opportunities and cycling infrastructure; more electric vehicle charging points;

retrofitting of Council housing blocks; best-in-UK net zero demands from private developers; enhancing our biodiversity; cleaner streets and free bulky waste collection; protecting and investing in our parks; planting more trees across Reading; more recycling opportunities on your doorstep; electrifying our Council vehicle fleet.

A town that's a great place to grow up and grow old

Delivered by:

Investing in and improving Children's Services; new support for youth services in our community centres; growing the budget for Adult Social Care; implementing new social care programmes to encourage greater independence; new Council extra-care housing; new SEND school places and a new secondary school; investing in new play equipment and recreation opportunities; enhancing our cultural offer; getting a good service for residents from the NHS; ensuring adequate childcare provision in Reading.

A Council that provides good value for money

Delivered by:

Reading's biggest ever road resurfacing programme; lowest Council Tax rise in many years in 2022/23; enhanced Council Tax Support scheme for those on lower incomes; new Customer Service strategy; investment in fit-for-purpose facilities and services; consolidating the Council's estate; always prioritising the protection of front-line services; maintaining all our libraries.

Securing Reading's Economic Success

1. Deliver a targeted programme of work to holistically address entrenched economic inequalities in our communities, with a focus on ensuring that people have the skills and opportunity to access job opportunities in Reading.
2. Deliver new apprenticeship opportunities at the Council across a range of roles, setting the standard for what we expect of employers in Reading. Work with businesses and partners to ensure that Reading has the right mix of jobs and opportunities for everyone in our town.
3. Encourage more workplaces to follow the Council's lead and become accredited Living Wage employers.
4. Work with the Local Enterprise Partnership and Reading Economic Development and Destination Agency CIC to promote skills training in schools, colleges and employment, ensuring that Reading's workforce is prepared for the future.
5. Harness the economic growth of Reading for the benefit of all by promoting a Sustainable Economy approach 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.
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 successful social procurement strategy for the Council, we will continue 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 College 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. Expand our successful Local Authority New Build Council Housing programme, which will already deliver over 300 Council homes in the next four years.
13. Invest £32 million in a retrofit programme for Council housing blocks, providing better energy efficiency, lower bills for residents, and reduced carbon emissions.
14. 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.
15. 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.
16. 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, with a particular emphasis on securing on-site contributions.
17. Continue our Rent Guarantee Scheme, which enables more residents to secure affordable accommodation around our town.
 18. Ensure that housing developments – whether by the Council, housing associations or private developers – build strong and sustainable communities, contributing the necessary infrastructure and public services to benefit residents.
 19. Pursue the ambitious requirements for zero-carbon new build housing in Reading, as set out in our Local Plan.
 20. Maintain 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.
 21. Build on the success of our Cattle Market temporary housing and keep working with partners to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping across Reading, including the challenge of helping those with complex needs.
 22. Implement a 'presumptive yes' policy for 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 new Integrated Care System 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 care 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. 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. Provide a further £8 million investment in Reading's road resurfacing programme, additional to the £9 million already committed, 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, new pedestrian crossings, 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. 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 explore a potential 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, 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. 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.
53. Build on our success as a Council and a town and commit to investing in environmental initiatives to achieve our target of a net carbon-neutral Reading by 2030.
54. Continue play a leading role in the new partnership Reading Climate Change Strategy, act as an exemplar in the town, and use our national and international recognition on tackling climate change to encourage partners to join our endeavours.
55. Promote initiatives by organisations across Reading, including our University, businesses, and voluntary sector, that seek to reduce carbon emissions or offset them.
56. A scheme of free bulky waste collections for residents, helping provide no excuse for illegal fly tipping.
57. Build on our new weekly food waste collections from residential properties and seek new and innovative ways of helping to reduce unnecessary refuse. Encourage residents and businesses to recycle as much as possible, including exploring possibilities for kerbside glass recycling with our Re3 partners.
58. Establish more positive initiatives to engage residents and businesses to plant trees to help us

Keeping Reading Clean and Green

- 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 they maximise their possible contribution to both society and 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. 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.
67. Acknowledging the particular issues for Reading's black community, highlighted by the Black Lives Matter protests, 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.
68. Double the size of the Council's small grants pot for community groups across Reading to £200,000 per year, providing even more funding for initiatives that can help address the needs of residents.
69. Work with the voluntary sector to deliver meaningful benefit for residents and help to strengthen the sector's resilience.
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. Campaign against the Conservative Police and Crime Commissioner's cut to Reading's Community Safety funding and fight for the resources that our town needs and deserves.
72. Continue to prioritise community safety partnerships, fight for greater Police resourcing for Reading, and look to pioneer innovative policies with the Police to reduce levels of drug-related crime.
73. Invest Community Infrastructure Levy funding

into projects that tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in our neighbourhoods.

74. 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.
75. Continue our successful Community Safety Partnership and work with the Police to tackle the priority issues in Reading.
76. 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 provide accommodation for travellers and reduce encampments on public and private land.
77. Tackle, via the Council's trading standards team, fraudsters who prey on residents.
78. 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 Delivers

79. 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.
80. 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.
81. 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.
82. 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.
83. Place climate change and an anti-racist curriculum at the forefront of every school's thinking, with accredited ambassadors in every school.
 84. Complete new flagship swimming and leisure provision at Rivermead, a new pool at Palmer Park, and upgrades to South Reading and Meadway leisure centres.
 85. 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, and further advance our successful approach of consulting residents on the children's play opportunities they want in their neighbourhoods.
 86. Deliver a new family activity centre at Prospect Park, establishing it as a leading recreation destination in Reading.
 87. 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.
 88. Continue to engage children and young people from all backgrounds in arts and culture through the Cultural Education Partnership.
 89. Build on the investment in Reading's Museum to ensure that its successful outreach work develops, especially to embed appreciation of our cultural diversity.
 90. 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.
 91. Support Reading's art and culture groups through the What's On guide, both online and printed.
 92. 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.

93. Work with partners to ensure that Reading Prison becomes a key cultural and heritage draw for Reading, completing the Abbey Quarter, enhancing the tourism economy, and providing a valued leisure outlet for residents.

Ensuring Reading's Council is Fit for the Future

94. Continue to 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.
95. Work with the Council's staff and recognised trade unions to develop fit-for-purpose flexible working arrangements for all staff, from day one of employment.

96. Drive forward our new Customer Strategy, ensuring that residents access the support and advice they need more straightforwardly and quickly.
97. Following on from adopting the Citizens Advice Council Tax Protocol, continue our successful work with partners to support residents struggling with debt.
98. 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.
99. Pursue opportunities to grow our traded services, protecting jobs and increasing income.
100. Further develop our consultative approach to ensure that residents have meaningful input into developing our policy programme and budget.

