

Reading Labour

Manifesto
2023

Preface

While many other councils struggle to set budgets – including one or two very close to home – years of Labour’s sound financial planning is coming to fruition in Reading this year with the opening of major modern new facilities in our town.

North, south, east, and west – whichever way you look across Reading, big improvements are happening in 2023.

You may have already visited the new community swimming pool and gym in east Reading at Palmer Park Leisure Centre & Stadium. Or, looking towards the north, perhaps you’ve watched the new flagship Rivermead leisure centre taking shape on the banks of the Thames.

In the south, Reading’s first new train station for 117 years is now just weeks away from public use at Green Park Station. Delivered by the Council along with its rail partners, I’m certain it will prove to be a welcome new option for residents living nearby and for Royals fans getting to and from home games.

And in the west of the borough, the modernisation of Reading West Station is fast taking shape. It is now nearing completion with new entrances and a brand-new station ticket office on the Oxford Road.

We are also modernising playgrounds all over Reading, including a brand-new flagship playground for the town at Prospect Park, which joins our recently opened activity centre and mini-golf course.

Looking across the borough, you’ll see evidence of Labour’s biggest Council house building project in a generation. We’ve expanded our ambition and now have over 400 Council homes in the pipeline, including provision for key workers, for the elderly and for the vulnerable. We are also retrofitting hundreds of existing Council homes, making them warmer and cheaper to heat. And we continue to invest in low carbon technologies, building on the Council’s 71.3% reduction in its carbon footprint in just 13 years – the 4th best in the UK (and once again recognised internationally in the CDP Global A-List).

Recognising our responsibility to keep the town on a path to net zero, Reading Labour continues to invest in easy, realistic, cheap, and sustainable new travel options for residents. Our new segregated cycle lane along Shinfield Road is progressing at pace. Work begins later this year on new cycling and walking facilities along the Bath Road and Castle Hill. We also are investing in Reading’s award-winning bus services, utilising technology to make travelling by bus easier and offering cheaper fares for passengers.

All of this is against a backdrop of major challenges faced by every council. Just as the cost of living crisis impacts on your household budget, inflationary pressures will cost the Council nearly £9 million

extra this year, at a time when revenues remain down from the ongoing impact of the pandemic. And despite repeated promises, the continued failure of this Conservative Government to solve the national adult social care funding crisis means we have also had to budget for an additional £4.4m this year to care for the vulnerable and elderly residents in Reading who rely on us and an extra £2.5m for children's services – both services are vital as we recover from the pandemic.

We know that in difficult times some communities are impacted more than others, and we are again maintaining our vital financial support for our incredible voluntary sector in Reading, who help us reach and support communities and residents who are struggling with poverty and inequality.

The balance between maintaining a strong local economy, investing in modern new facilities for residents and providing support to those who need our help the most during a cost of living crisis, is not an easy one to strike, but I believe our plans achieve just that.

Our priority remains helping Reading realise its potential and creating new opportunities so that everyone who lives and works here can share in the benefits of our amazing town's success. If you share our vision of a successful, fairer, greener, cleaner town, I hope you'll once again lend Labour your vote on Thursday 4th May.

Cllr Jason Brock

Leader, Reading Borough Council and Reading Labour Group

April 2023

Labour is Best for Reading; Labour Delivers for Reading

An inclusive town

We will continue to build more council homes and work with private developers to build more affordable homes. We'll ensure we don't lose work sites to other uses. We'll help the black community achieve its potential. Community groups will be able to enjoy better local centres and our Community Hubs, and more accessible play areas will benefit all children. We'll push for more police resources and tackle anti-social behaviour and crime, making Reading safer for all.

A town where everyone can succeed

We'll support those starting up small businesses, and we'll make sure Reading gets the best deal it can from private investment. We'll help people get the skills they need to succeed by creating more apprenticeships, supporting skills training, and encouraging local employers to give our schoolchildren the opportunities they need to do well at work. The Council will work to close any pay gap in its own staffing, and we'll make sure all our sub-contracts include improving some aspect of life in Reading. This will all be balanced with the best leisure facilities and swimming pools the town has ever had.

A town that tackles the climate crisis

Your Labour Council has got on with the job of leading the charge in tackling the climate crisis, and we'll continue to do so. We'll create more rail and bus capability, more chances to cycle and enjoy other active travel; more EV charging points and retrofitted Council housing; private developers building to our best-in-UK climate standards. And we'll enhance our natural environment with cleaner streets, free bulky waste collection, more doorstep recycling, more tree planting, and investment in our parks.

A town for every generation

We're going to put more into Adult Social Care, provide new extra-care housing and help those in care regain greater independence. For the next generation we're adding a new secondary school and more special needs places. There'll be new play equipment and recreation opportunities, and improvements to our Children's Services. And we'll ensure the right childcare provision to support hard-working parents.

A Council providing value for your money

We're focussing on maximising the value you get from the money we are allowed. We're delivering the biggest road resurfacing programme the town has ever seen and we've invested in better facilities and services. We're proving that while we're maintaining front-line services, such as our libraries, we are able to consolidate the Council's buildings and land. And while doing that we're not forgetting to enhance the Council Tax support scheme for those on lower incomes.

Securing Reading's Economic Success

1. Tackle economic inequality, ensuring people have the skills to get jobs in Reading
2. Continue to deliver new apprenticeship opportunities - at the Council, in businesses, and public sector partners
3. Deliver the Minster Quarter development, reinvigorating the town centre
4. Make Reading a Living Wage Town, where employers are committed to paying staff the real Living Wage as a minimum
5. Promote skills training in schools, colleges, and employment, getting Reading's workforce ready for the future
6. Support the creation of co-operatives, providing socially responsible job opportunities
7. Continue to obtain good social value from any contracted services
8. Promote ethical recruitment in all Reading businesses
9. Ensure super-fast broadband and 5G is rolled out to all Reading residents
10. Promote development of a tourism economy in Reading
11. Promote the use of remote learning to help residents retrain and reskill.

Delivering Housing for Reading

12. Further expand our successful New Build Council Housing programme, already delivering over 400 new Council homes

13. Invest £32 million in an energy efficiency retrofit programme for Council housing blocks
14. Where we cannot deliver new homes directly as a Council, we will prioritise partnerships with housing associations to build more new affordable housing, as we have at Dee Park
15. Deliver new Key Worker Housing
16. Continue our Rent Guarantee Scheme, so more residents can access affordable accommodation
17. Ensure that housing developments include the necessary facilities and public services to build strong communities
18. Build on our ambitious plans for zero-carbon new build housing in Reading
19. Ensure that empty properties are brought back into use
20. Tackle homelessness, building on the success of our Cattle Market temporary housing
21. Work with tenants to make sure rogue landlords are tackled and that all landlords fulfil their responsibilities
22. Improve our quality assessment of private rented housing.

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

23. Work closely with the NHS to ensure that local health services deliver for residents and address health inequalities, while also campaigning against Conservative cuts to health services
24. Work to ensure that services provided by the Council or by partners are

- conscious of the needs of neurodiverse residents
25. Scrutinise the provision of NHS sexual health services, including treatment of sexually transmitted infections and provision of contraception, to ensure they meet the needs of residents
 26. Provide help for those on low incomes experiencing poor health outcomes
 27. Focus public health funding on getting the widest possible promotion of health and wellbeing in Reading
 28. Renew and expand playgrounds for younger children, develop facilities for adolescents, and increase Council support for youth sports and activities
 29. Increase cooperation between hospital and social care services, to deliver the best possible outcomes for users
 30. Deliver modern adult care services on three new sites in the town – Battle Street, Hexham Road, and Amethyst Lane
 31. Promote “home first” care in the community
 32. Provide greater flexibility for those with disabilities, giving them greater choice and control
 33. Work towards Reading becoming a “Dementia Friendly” town, as per the Alzheimer’s Society guidelines
 34. Support the recruitment of more foster carers, ensuring children in care are placed in or close to Reading wherever possible
 35. Further develop Reading as a town that understands the needs of children and young people suffering from trauma
 36. Continue to help those children and families most in need as quickly as possible

37. Continue to increase the proportion of permanent social care workers in our care workforce.

Keeping Reading Moving

38. Keep the climate crisis and sustainable transport at the heart of our transport strategy
39. Implement our £26.3m plan for further improving our nationally award-winning bus services
40. Deliver a new railway station at Green Park and upgrades to Reading West and Tilehurst
41. Continue Reading’s biggest ever road resurfacing programme
42. Introduce a bold new Local Transport Plan, encouraging a shift towards active transport and public transport
43. Combat “rat-running” of cars through Reading
44. Continue to improve road safety, including new 20mph zones, new pedestrian crossings, and speed-calming measures.
45. Campaign to let Reading Borough Council enforce speed limits in the borough, so that we can stop the speeding through our streets and neighbourhoods
46. Expand provision for cyclists and encourage more people to walk instead of taking their cars
47. Continue to explore a third Thames crossing to reduce pressure on Reading’s roads and create better public transport to the north of our Borough
48. Develop the necessary infrastructure to transition away from fossil-fuelled

vehicles towards electric and hydrogen ones

49. Promote further Park and Ride and Park and Rail use into Reading
50. Remain committed to helping Reading Buses continue to deliver its award-winning and comprehensive service across our town.

Keeping Reading Clean & Green

51. Commit to achieve our target of a net carbon-neutral Reading by 2030
52. Continue to play a leading role in the new partnership Reading Climate Change Strategy
53. Put further funding into cleaning and maintenance services for our streets
54. Embrace new initiatives to tackle littering and fly tipping and maintain our enhanced enforcement operations
55. Promote initiatives by organisations across Reading to reduce carbon emissions
56. Encourage residents and businesses to plant trees to help us achieve an overall 25% canopy cover by 2030
57. Ensure our nature reserves are well-kept, used, and protected
58. Maximise the biodiversity in our parks
59. Work to provide biodiversity corridors throughout the town, and expand our wildflower strategy by exploring additional areas to increase wildlife habitats
60. Ensure that the Kennet Meadows continue to act as one of the largest natural carbon-sinks for the town, encouraging bird life, and providing an educational resource for all

61. Invest in upgrading our public realm, delivering a better environment for residents.

Strengthening Reading's Communities

62. Ensure equal opportunities are available for women, black, and minority residents
63. Put tackling Violence Against Women and Girls and support for those suffering domestic abuse at the centre of our community safety work
64. Work with LGBT+ community groups to tackle issues facing members of the community
65. Work with community organisations to promote the black community's interests, educational outcomes, and economic success
66. Maintain the Council's small grants pot for community groups across Reading at £200,000 per year
67. Support the Closing the Gap programme with voluntary and community sector partners, to improve outcomes for residents across the town
68. Bring more community centres back into Council management and provide a new community centre in Whitley Wood
69. Continue our successful Community Safety Partnership and work with the Police to tackle the priority issues in Reading
70. Invest in projects that tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in our neighbourhoods
71. Strengthen our network of Safer Neighbourhood Forums, bringing together police and the community

- 72. Deliver the new transit traveller site in Reading to provide accommodation for travellers, reducing encampments on public and private land
- 73. Tackle fraudsters who prey on residents
- 74. 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 & Culture Delivers

- 75. Promote best practice across Reading's schools, helping to deliver a Borough in the top 25% for educational attainment across all key stages
- 76. Ensure enough school places exist to meet the needs of our growing population, including provision of a new secondary school in 2024
- 77. Deliver more school places for children with special educational needs and disabilities
- 78. Continue to lower exclusion rates across primary and secondary schools
- 79. Complete new flagship swimming and leisure provision at Rivermead
- 80. Continue to invest £1.5 million over three years in our parks and play equipment, including enhancing accessibility for children with disabilities
- 81. Continue involving children and young people from all backgrounds, especially

- less advantaged ones, in arts and culture
- 82. Deliver a new community-focused performance space at the Hexagon as the first stage of the renewal of the theatre overall
- 83. Build on the investment in Reading's Museum so that its successful outreach work grows
- 84. Ensure our theatres and museums deliver a programme of events catering for everyone in Reading
- 85. Deliver a new Central Library while also maintaining our existing Branches
- 86. Campaign for Reading Prison to become a key cultural and heritage asset for Reading.

Keeping Reading's Council Fit for the Future

- 87. Improve black and minority representation in the Council's workforce at all levels, including senior management
- 88. Ensure that residents access the support and advice they need more straightforwardly and quickly
- 89. Continue our successful work with partners to support residents struggling with council tax debt
- 90. Grow our traded services, protecting jobs and increasing income.

