

Housing Strategy for Reading 2020- 2025

Foreword by Councillor John Ennis Lead Member for Housing

I am delighted to introduce the Housing Strategy for Reading 2020-2025. A warm and safe home is the foundation for good health and education, strong connected communities, a sustainable environment and a thriving population. This is fundamental for all residents of Reading regardless of income, age or location. With the Housing Strategy 2020-2025 Reading Borough Council are leading the way in the provision of homes and services our communities need to flourish.

Reading Borough Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019, highlighting the importance of every aspect of our work in mitigating the impact of climate change, and helping meet our target of net zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2030. Reducing the emissions from people's homes is a critical part of achieving this target and I am proud that, as set out in this strategy, that we as a council are forging the way in reducing the carbon emissions from both new and existing properties.

Since the production of our last Housing Strategy, Reading has grown into one of the most important towns in the country, and strongly influences the prosperity of the South East region. Reading is a clear urban centre of the Thames Valley and even in these challenging times, Reading is in an enviably robust position to continue to thrive. However, this expansion and development does not come without its challenges; it is critical that all residents are supported to make the most of opportunities that arise both in terms of accessing decent accommodation and in keeping the accommodation they already have.

The transition from house to home is rooted in quality of life for our residents. The Housing Strategy for Reading 2020-2025 seeks to achieve this by delivering a sustainable supply of accommodation; improving the condition of our current stock; and reviewing the services needed to support people to live confidently in properties and areas that they are proud of. We know that by improving the environment in which our residents live, we will create a brighter future for communities across Reading. I am looking forward to our vision for decent and affordable housing being turned into a reality."

Introduction

Reading Borough Council is in the South East of England, 41 miles west of London, and is one of the six unitary authorities within the County of Berkshire. The urban area centred on Reading extends beyond the Borough boundaries into West Berkshire and Wokingham and has strong travel to work links with Basingstoke and North Hampshire along the A33 corridor. It is a densely populated urban area covering 40 square kilometres, a small geographical area in comparison to our neighbours.

The Thames Valley area has been highly successful in attracting key investment in sectors such as computing, research and development, business and financial services, telecommunications, pharmaceuticals and the automotive industry. Reading itself has seen a dramatic change in the structure of its economy over the past 30 years and is now home to the largest concentration of ICT corporations in the UK. It is the service and financial centre of the Thames Valley region and beyond. It has a large number of business parks and industrial areas with several more just outside its boundaries in adjoining districts. In economic terms, the Thames Valley is one of the most buoyant areas in the UK and is often seen as one of the key drivers of the national economy. An important factor in Reading's success is its connectivity, successfully acting as a regional transport hub and major transport interchange. Reading provides the main rail gateway to parts of the South West, Midlands and North of England with links nationwide and internationally. This connectivity has increase over the last 10 years as major improvement works were completed to junction 11 of the M4 and to the main railway station. Links to London will soon be further enhanced by the imminently open Elizabeth line connecting to the London tube network. For the last 10 years wages have remained high, and unemployment low.

However, the success of Reading with its strong resilient economy is not the complete picture and masks some wider social issues. Within a small geographical area, Reading combines some very affluent communities with more deprived neighbourhoods where poor health, lack of skills, unemployment and poverty are features. It is the Council's view that growth must be inclusive, and it is important that all parts of our community are connected and are able to thrive.

Published at a time where the full impact of the worldwide Covic-19 pandemic is yet to be understood, Brexit is in progress but not fully implemented and two significant white papers (Planning and Social Housing) are due by the end of the year, the delivery of the Housing Strategy for Reading 2020-2025 will need to adapt to the changing national picture. But the aims and ambitions of the Council in relation to housing in the town are clear, and they will continue to provide a steer for the strategic delivery of all housing related programmes and services until 2025.

Key facts about Reading



Estimated 159,864 residents in 65,307 households in 2020 - projected to rise to 161,804 residents in 68,621 households by 2040
(ONS 2018 projections)



Proportion people aged 65+ to increase from 8.3% to 12.4% by 2040
(ONS 2018 projections)



10 lower layer super output areas (LSSO) in worst 20% deprived nationally & 2 in worst 10%
(Index Multiple Deprivation 2015)



35% of the population identify as Black or Minority Ethnic.
(2011 census)



55% homes in Reading owned, 26% private rented & 16% social rented, 3% other
(Census 2011)



996 licensed HMOs & 200 new applications
(RBC – as at March 2019)



6,852 Council owned homes
(RBC July 2020)



Average property asking prices - 1 bed flat: £182k, 2 bed flat: £258k, 2 bed house: £266k, 3 bed house: £338k, 4 bed house: £462k
(Zoopla - as at July 2020)



Average asking rental prices - 1 bed flat: £692pcm, 2 bed: £1,214pcm, 2 bed house: £1,071pcm, 3 bed House: £1,296pcm, 4 bed house: £1,537pcm.
(Zoopla - as at July 2020)



547 affordable housing lettings in 2019/20
(RBC-July 2020)



3,417 households on the Housing Register
(RBC -May 2020)



1,066 households approached the Council at risk of homelessness in 19/20
(RBC- July 2020)

What do we want Reading to be?

The Reading 2050 Vision¹, developed by project partners Barton Willmore, Reading UK and the University of Reading, aims to establish Reading as an internationally recognised and economically successful city region. Developed through extensive consultation with the wider community, it envisages a place where the built environment, technology and innovation have combined to create a smart, dynamic and sustainable city, with a high quality of life and equal opportunity for all.

By 2050 it envisages that Reading will be a smart and sustainable city that

- Shares success to support and enable thriving communities;
- Delivers a real sense of place and identity;
- Thrives on cultural and cross-generational diversity;
- Is recognised for its heritage and natural assets;
- Embeds technology to deliver innovation and low carbon living for all; and
- Welcomes ethical and sustainable businesses who support Reading.

The Reading 2050 vision can only be achieved by the Council, businesses, local organisations, communities and people working together.

The overall vision for housing in Reading, linked to the Council's Corporate Plan 2018-21, is simple but ambitious. It is:

“For all our residents to have the opportunity to live in a good quality, sustainable home they can afford, within a thriving neighbourhood.”

Reading is a small, tightly constrained urban Borough with limited land available for new homes. We need to make the best use of existing housing and to do everything possible to increase the supply of housing, and particularly of affordable homes.

But we recognise housing is more than just numbers and more than just bricks and mortar – it supports the economy, prevents homelessness, helps create vibrant and sustainable communities and provides a foundation for the health and wellbeing of residents.

In addition to the documents referenced within the priorities below, this strategy should be read in conjunction with the following:

- Reading Borough Councils Corporate Plan 2018-21
- Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading 2019 – 2022

¹ <https://livingreading.co.uk/reading-2050>, access July 2020

How will we do this?

In line with the Council's Corporate Plan and our 'Team Reading' approach we recognise we can only make a real difference to our Borough and the people who live here if we work together – recognising what drives each of us and combining the strength and skills we all have as individuals or separate organisations into something far more effective.

To deliver that vision, collaboratively across services within the Council and beyond, we have identified 3 over-arching themes which were overwhelmingly endorsed by key partners from across the housing sector as part of the initial consultation on this strategy.

Under each theme we have identified 2 key priorities that were proposed by the Council and our housing partners as part of our Strategy consultation.

Supply of Accommodation

- **Priority 1:** Deliver high quality and sustainable homes and neighbourhoods.
- **Priority 2:** Facilitate a supply of housing that will meet the identified needs of all residents

Quality of Accommodation and Neighbourhoods

- **Priority 1:** Enhance the quality, safety and sustainability of existing homes
- **Priority 2:** Create attractive and connected neighbourhoods

Support to Residents

- **Priority 1:** Prevent homelessness and help people sustain their accommodation
- **Priority 2:** Enable residents to access support, maintain their independence and have a voice in respect of the services they receive.

Future national policy announcements and legislation changes, including potentially significant changes to the planning system and the Housing White Paper, may impact on the delivery of these priorities but will not change the overall ambition Reading Borough Council has for the town. Each year, working with our housing partners, we will carry out an annual progress review and agree an annual programme of work set against these themes and priorities within any new or emerging national framework.

Supply of Accommodation

Overview

This theme focuses on new supply across all tenures and the need to offer a range of sustainable housing in the Borough that meets the needs of existing and future residents and supports the continuing economic growth of Reading. It recognises the challenge of affordability and the need to look at who should have priority for social and affordable housing. It also confirms our aim to make efficient use of the Borough's current housing stock. All actions within this theme should be considered within the context of two overriding principles - high quality place-shaping and environmental sustainability, and actions for delivery will continue to be monitored and modified to reflect the changes to national policy and emerging Planning White Paper.

Priority 1: Deliver high quality and sustainable homes

Reading Borough Council recognises the importance and impact of high-quality homes and neighbourhoods on both the health and well-being of residents and the economic success of the town. Until the start of 2020 the housing market in Reading continued to thrive with strong competition for land and large-scale developments in progress predominantly within the town centre. Reading's location has always facilitated economic opportunities, and the imminent opening of the Elizabeth Line linking Reading directly to central London via the underground system has enhanced the town's connectivity further and led to an additional increase in the delivery of new homes.

Reading is, however, a small urban authority with limited land opportunities. Recent developments in progress or with planning permission have predominately been town centre flatted developments targeted towards young professionals and those that may look to commute to London for work; this includes the town's first 'Build to Rent' homes of which there are almost 2000 potentially to be delivered in the next 5 years. The challenge remains for the Council to ensure that a range of family sized homes is also provided to residents in Reading. Developers will be encouraged to promptly deliver the planning applications permitted in the town, as at August 2020 there were 2,765 homes across 125 approved developments that had not yet started. Remaining opportunities for new developments and regeneration within the town, including those owned by the Council, will be carefully managed to ensure effectively place shaping and the continuation of a high-quality built environment for residents to live and thrive in. The full impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economy and housing market is yet to be fully understood, and detail is still required in relation to the recent announcement of significant changes to the national planning system, therefore the Council and partners will remain flexible and will adapt their approach to ensure that priorities are delivered within any changes to the context and framework that new housing will be delivered within.

STRATEGIC HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENT

Housing demand and need was quantified through the Berkshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) which reported in February 2016. For Reading Borough that assessment identified a need for 16,077 new homes (699 a year) between 2013 and 2036. Of those new homes the SHMA identified the need for 58% (406 a year) of those new homes to be affordable – reflecting how far property prices and private rent levels are beyond the means of the ‘average’ resident.

LOCAL PLAN

Reading Borough Council’s existing Local Plan was adopted in November 2019. The local plan, and supporting supplementary planning documents, set out our planning policies for development in Reading up to 2036, and is the main consideration in deciding planning applications. It is a critical frame work for the Council and partners in terms of shaping the future of Reading, as it not only identifies the amount of development that will take place, the areas and sites where development is expected to be accommodated, but also how wider strategic objectives will be achieved. Reading has a buoyant and strong economy resulting in significant investment in the town, and it is critical that this growth continues in a way that is inclusive to all residents with a focus on skills and employment opportunities. Whilst protecting and celebrating the town’s historic legacy, development needs to ensure that Reading remains progressive and able to accommodate a diverse range of business, leisure and housing opportunities and needs. The Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019, and the local plan set out its commitment to work towards achieving a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.

Reading Borough Council notes the announcements in the Planning White Paper², published in August 2020, and its potential impact on an areas Local Plan and wider planning policies. At this time, due to the high-level nature of the white paper and the lack of clarity in respect to the detail, no immediate change will be made to local policy and practice. The Council has responded to the consultation and has highlighted the importance of ensuring the continued delivery of Affordable Housing and high-quality sustainable homes.

The Local plan has 9 key objectives, listed below are those that connect with our strategic approach to housing.

- Make the most efficient use of Reading’s limited land, particularly previously developed land, to ensure that as many new homes as possible are delivered to meet identified needs, particularly needs for affordable housing
- Improve the quality of life for those living, working, studying in and visiting the Borough, creating inclusive, sustainable communities with good access to employment, open space and water space, transport, education, services and facilities (such as sustainable water supplies and wastewater treatment, healthcare services, social and community facilities, sport and recreation, etc.) to meet identified needs
- Ensure that Reading is a healthy, clean, safe and socially inclusive community where the needs of all its citizens are met by high quality, cost effective services and outstanding levels of community involvement.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future> - accessed September 2020

Further detail can be found here: https://www.reading.gov.uk/media/10410/Reading-Borough-Council-Local-Plan/pdf/Local_Plan_Adopted_November_2019.pdf

THE READING CLIMATE EMERGENCY STRATEGY 2020-25

Following the declaration of a climate emergency in Reading in 2019, in March 2020 the Reading Climate Change Partnership launched a consultation on a Climate Emergency Strategy for Reading 2020-2025.

The draft vision for 2025 is for a Reading which is working rapidly towards:

- net zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2030 and
- being resilient to the impacts of a changing climate

Significant progress has been made on this agenda as Reading's per capita carbon emissions have fallen by 50% since 2005 – the largest reduction of any local authority area in south east England. But to reach the ambition of the town producing zero net carbon by 2030, further action is needed. Housing is a key part of delivering this strategy, with 40% of Reading's 'carbon footprint' arising from domestic sources (heating, lighting and appliances).

The first of the four priorities with the draft strategy is:

- Retrofitting and building new homes and other buildings to low/zero carbon standards

Pioneering net zero carbon standards for new homes have been enshrined in the Reading Local Plan which governs future development across the Borough, and leading schemes within the Council's own Local Authority New Build programme are to be built to Passivhaus principles resulting in a zero net carbon impact of the new, affordable homes in the town.

Further details can be found here: https://consult.reading.gov.uk/dens/reading-climate-emergency-strategy/user_uploads/reading-climate-emergency-strategy-2020-25---consultation-draft-for-rbc-policy-committee-9-march-20.pdf

EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

In 2019 there were 571 private homes registered as Long-Term Empty Homes (unoccupied and/ or unfurnished for over 6 months) on the Council Tax system within the Reading boundaries. Most have been unoccupied for less than a year with a few being empty for a decade. These properties are located throughout the Borough with the majority within the more densely populated areas. The number of Long-Term Empty Homes increased to 571 in 2019 from 387 in 2018, after previously showing a reduction, predominately due to a slower housing market that has resulted in the delay of some new build properties being occupied. Reading does, however, continue to have a prevalence rate of Long-Term Empties that is in line with most urban areas.

Reducing empty homes in the town has multiple benefits to the community. Ensuring all homes are utilised increases the supply available for households within Reading, and it also often resolves concerns raised by neighbours that include the unsightliness of derelict homes, fly-tipping, vandalism, damage to neighbouring property, squatters and fire-setting.

Reading Borough Council has recently published its most recent Strategy for reducing empty homes in the town - Empty Homes Strategy 2020 – 2026. This sets out how the council will reduce the number of Long-Term empty homes whilst achieving the following aims:

- Maximising use of existing homes
- Improving Neighbourhoods
- Solving Problems for Owners.

Further details can be found here:

<https://democracy.reading.gov.uk/documents/s10639/Appendix%20%20Draft%20Strategy.pdf>

Key outcomes for this priority:

- 15,433 new homes provided in Reading between 2013 & 2036 – 671 per year
- All major new-build residential development will be designed to achieve zero carbon homes as part of Reading's drive to be carbon neutral by 2030
- Reduction in long term empty properties in Reading

Priority 2: Facilitate a supply of housing that will meet the identified needs of all residents
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Research indicates that an annual income of £72k is required in order to be able to afford to buy an average three bed house in Reading, and a household income of £32k to be able to afford to rent an average 2 bed property.

Demand for Affordable Housing continues to outstrip supply, with pressures on all types of accommodation from specialist housing through to family homes. The number of council owned homes continues to fall a result of tenants purchasing their homes via the Right to Buy process, with 621 homes sold since 2001 and 4,188 sold since the Right to Buy was introduced.³ In June 2020 there were 3,417 households registered with the local authority for an affordable rented home.

At first glance, analysis of the Housing Register suggests that there is high demand for smaller homes, with 40% requesting a 1 bed property. However, when considering only those on the register that have an identified housing need (bands A-E on the Housing Register) the break down in requested homes is as follows:

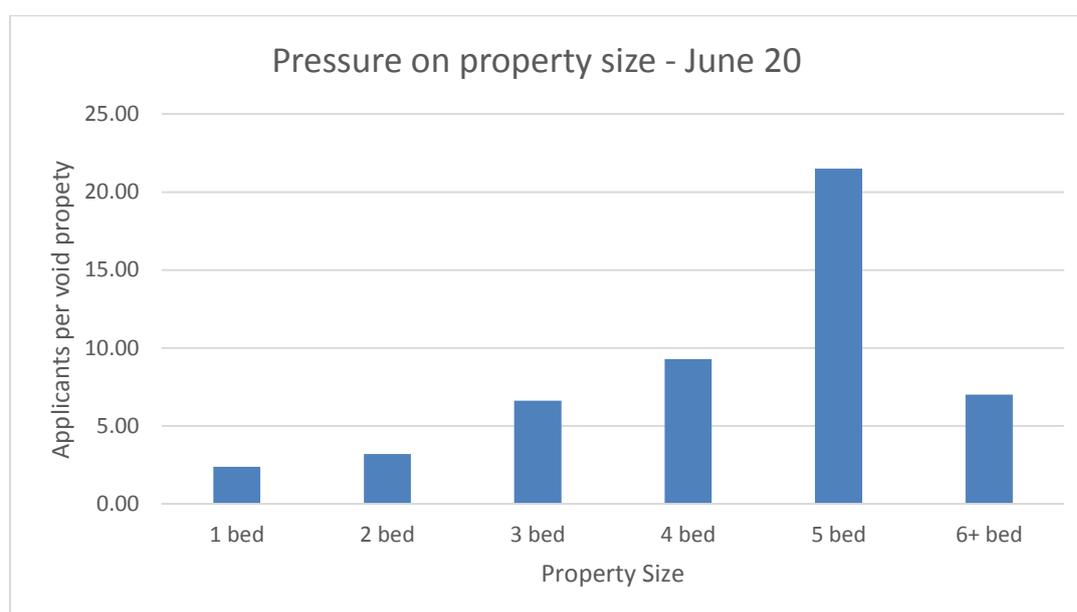
- 1 bed property - 31%

³ As of December 2019

- 2 bed property - 29%
- 3 bed+ property - 40%

In addition, when reviewing pressure on Affordable Housing, it is necessary to factor in the known supply. Churn in our existing Affordable Housing in the town has increased in the last 3 years, but only 20% of the available homes to let in the financial year 19/20 were family homes with 3 bedrooms or larger.

Therefore, when the demand for Affordable Housing is considered in terms of pressure on each sized property (number of applicants per empty property available) it highlights that there is an on-going challenge in Reading to meet the needs of households requiring larger family sized homes:



The location and style of the permitted new build housing developments in Reading also indicate that a high percentage of the affordable homes delivered via the planning process in the next 3-5 years will also be smaller homes, predominately flats. The council therefore continues to have a strategic objective to increase the supply of larger affordable homes through work with developers, partners and via our own delivery of new build council housing.

The delivery of new Affordable (Social) Housing is only one route to enabling accessible homes for low income households. The large private rented sector in Reading is an option for many households, and the Council will continue to work with partners to ensure a supply of quality homes within this sector, including via the Council's flagship Rent Guarantee Scheme⁴ and separate arm's length company - 'Homes for Reading'⁵.

In additional to households on a low income, specialist housing is also required for other sectors of our community, including key workers and adults with additional needs.

⁴ Details can be found here: <https://www.reading.gov.uk/rgs>

⁵ Details can be found here: <http://homesforreading.co.uk/>

AFFORDABLE HOUSING SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

Due to the high competition for limited land within Reading, the majority of new Affordable Housing in the town is delivered via the Section 106 process within the planning process. This process secures, subject to viability considerations, a percentage of properties of each new housing development as Affordable Housing. Depending on the type of developments the affordable units will either be sold to a Registered Provider (also known as a Housing Association) to manage as Affordable Housing or managed by a 'Build to Rent' landlord.

To support the Reading Borough Local Plan (adopted November 2019) in achieving affordable housing objectives and to provide a clear policy framework for the S106 process, a new Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) will be published. It will replace the previous Affordable Housing SPD, adopted in July 2013.

In line with adopted policies, the SPD applies to residential developments of one dwelling or more, except for:

- Replacement of a single dwelling with another single dwelling; and
- Conversion of a dwelling to self-contained flats where there is no new floorspace.

The policy will not be applied to student accommodation or proposals for serviced apartments, unless

- they are being developed on an allocated housing site or a site where residential development and affordable housing provision would have been anticipated; and
- in the case of an apart-hotel, arrangements for accommodation allow tenancies of more than 3 months.

Affordable housing provided in line with this SPD includes housing for those on low incomes, those defined as 'key workers' whose earnings are insufficient to enable them to afford market price housing, and households with special/supported housing needs such as those in need of NHS Care or other forms of community care. It will include the forms of housing for vulnerable people where such housing is being provided as affordable accommodation.

'Build to Rent' is a relatively new type for development for the UK, where developments of 50 units or above are retained by a single company and let to individual households. National guidance for the S106 requirements for these schemes enables the same landlord to retain and manage the homes which form the Affordable Housing offer, and the local policy framework for these developments will also be set out in the SPD.

Consultation on the draft Affordable Housing SPD will be launched in the Autumn of 2020 and will be available on the Reading Borough Council website.

LOCAL AUTHORITY DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION PROGRAMME

Reading Borough Council has a commitment to supporting the delivery of Affordable Housing in the town. In 2012 legislation changed which enable Local Authorities to again build or purchase properties to enable new Council Owned Affordable homes.

As part of this programme the Council has delivered 172 new Council owned homes, and c.200 further homes are in progress and are expected to be delivered by 2025.

All new build homes will be built on land owned by the Council, and further opportunities are being scoped and feasibility completed. These opportunities include both infill on existing sites owned by the Council, and opportunities for regeneration of homes and neighbourhoods to achieve an improved environment for all our communities. The regeneration and redevelopment of existing estates will include options for modernising Council owned Sheltered Housing properties linking in with needs of Adult Social care services, as although no additional homes of this type are currently required, we need to ensure that the offer remains attractive to future generations of older people.

The regeneration opportunities will link in with the Council's Asset Management Strategy, due to be published in 2021, which identifies opportunities for improvements and an increase in density to existing stock.

The Council has reached the position where most adhoc infill housing development opportunities have been completed, requiring a more strategic and interconnected plan for development for the short and medium term. A 20-year Development and Regeneration programme will be agreed by March 2022.

ALLOCATIONS POLICY REVIEW

Reading Borough Council's Allocations Scheme sets out the framework used to determine who gets priority for Affordable Housing in the town. It is a legal requirement for every Local Authority to publish an Allocations Scheme and regularly review it to ensure it is legally fit for purpose and meets resident's needs.

The Allocations Policy includes the framework for how residents in larger homes that they no longer require or that meets their needs, can be supported to move in to a more suitable accommodation. This will both support a person to remain living independently for longer and increase the supply of family sized homes for those that need them.

The Housing Service intends to review the current scheme within 20/21 to ensure it is clear and transparent, is in line with new legislation (such as the Homelessness Reduction Act) and contributes to the creation of sustainable communities. The Housing Service will work closely with Brighter Futures for Children to ensure that the needs of Foster Carers, Care Leavers and families with disabled children are adequately prioritised. Consultation on the proposed refreshed scheme will be completed with the final version published by Summer 2021.

ACCOMMODATION WITH CARE STRATEGY

Ensuring the availability of specialist accommodation for adults with additional needs, who are unable to remain in the own home, continues to be a priority for the Council and specifically Adult Social Care. There is no one option that fits all residents with a disability or

those requiring additional support; the options required within the town include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Nursing Care** – high level support including medical interventions.
- **Residential Care** – 24 hours support, including personal care, without individual tenancies.
- **Extra Care Housing** – Residents have individual properties and tenancies, support provided on site.
- **Supported Living** - residents live independently with support purchased separately.
- **Shared Lives** – Individuals live with approved carers.

In order to ensure that the right provision is available for the residents of Reading when they required it, a detailed needs analysis, gap analysis and market review is currently underway. This will feed in to a specialist 'Accommodation with Care' strategy due to be published in Spring 2021.

Key outcomes for this priority:

- *30% of all new housing developments of over 10 properties to be affordable*
- *Updated Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for Reading which provides developers and land owners with clear guidance on affordable housing requirements from new developments*
- *200 new rented affordable Council properties by 2025*
- *Opportunities identified on other Council-owned land for regeneration and intensification, captured in a clear 20-year development programme.*
- *Increase in existing family homes being available for those that need them*
- *Continued use of high-quality private sector housing for households seeking accommodation.*
- *Large-scale Build to Rent proposals in the town to have a positive impact on the local area and to be accessible for local people*
- *Delivery the Accommodation with Care Strategy*

Quality of Accommodation and Neighbourhoods

Overview

This theme focuses on our aim to improve the quality of existing housing and neighbourhoods. It confirms the need for us to work together to improve design, tackle poor standards of accommodation in all tenures, and ensure homes are safe, warm and sustainable. We intend to improve the quality of our estates including the public realm, and it also reflects our ambition to improve the quality of service provided by all housing providers, landlords and housing support services. Residents views will be central to shaping these services.

Priority 1: Enhance the quality, safety and sustainability of existing homes

The 2017 fire at Grenfell Towers highlighted the importance of safe, well maintained homes for resident's safety. Prior to that tragedy the impact of poor-quality housing nationally was evident. Each year hazards in the home result in unnecessary injuries, episodes of ill-health, and harm to mental health, and in many cases the occupiers do not link the poor condition of their homes with a potential negative impact on their well-being. The poorest housing stock can be found in the private sector, and in some cases residents who own their own homes are not able to maintain them and as a result hazards can develop.

The previous theme outlined the Council's commitment to reducing the impact of climate change in the draft Climate Emergency Strategy for Reading 2020-2025. The draft strategy also sets out the partnership's ambitions to complete a 'deep retrofit' of existing homes in Reading along-side a programme of education and support to residents to enable energy efficient lifestyles. This focus continues to run through all the content of this Housing Strategy. Any Carbon offset funds collected under the Council's 'Zero Carbon Homes' Local Plan policy will be ear-marked to support retrofit of carbon reduction measures to existing housing in the borough, one of the highest priorities identified in the draft Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25. The details of any scheme(s) to be approved by the RBC Climate Programme Board.

ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY – COUNCIL OWNED HOUSING

Reading Borough Council remains the largest social landlord in the town, with 6,852 homes (as of the 29th July 2020). 1,273 of these properties are managed and maintained by a separate organisation called Affinity Housing as a result of a 30 Year Private Finance Initiative (PFI) in 2005

To ensure the long-term standards of the properties a 30-year repairs and maintenance plan, which includes the properties currently managed by Affinity from the point that the PFI contract ends in 2035, forms part of the wider Asset Management Strategy held by the Housing Service. A refreshed Strategy is due to be publish in summer of 2021.

The new Asset Management Strategy 2021-26 will include the implications of the draft Building Safety Bill⁶ which takes forward reforms to the building and fire safety systems and includes wider recommendations of the inquiry into the Grenfell Towers tragedy in 2017. Retrofitting of sprinklers in Council owned high-rise flats has already started.

The Asset Management Strategy will also include an extensive climate-conscious retrofit programme of Council owned homes to support the delivery of the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25.

PRIVATE SECTOR STOCK CONDITION

Of the projected 65,307 households in Reading in 2020, 54.8% of the housing stock in Reading is owned by the occupier, and 26.1% is privately rented. The Government requires that private sector housing conditions are known, understood and duly acted upon on an ongoing basis. The Housing Act 2004 states that 'a local authority must keep the housing conditions in their area under review with a view to identifying any action that may need to be taken by them.' Good practice dictates that private sector house condition surveys are conducted every five years and no longer than every seven years. With the last Private Sector Stock Condition Survey completed in 2013, Reading Borough Council is in the process of completing an updated survey for 2020.

Once published the survey will enable the Council and wider partners to:

- Improve knowledge on the general condition of the private sector housing stock in the Borough to inform housing policy and enable targeted interventions.
- Identify the number, location and distribution of non-decent homes in the Borough
- To assess the extent to which the Council may need to exercise its powers in relation to private sector renewal to address non-decent homes, houses in multiple occupation, area improvement and group repair in relation to both the private rented and privately-owned tenures.
- To provide information on the energy efficiency rating of dwellings in the Borough to support the delivery (specifically the required retrofit of properties) of the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25.
- To provide information on the type of hazards present in dwellings within HHSRS hazard Bands A - D together with the social, economic and health characteristics of occupants. This will enable cross-referencing with other datasets to support strategic planning between the Council and partners on areas such as public health and community safety.

Running in parallel with the Stock Condition Survey, is the on-going cross tenure activity to implement the recommendations within Dame Judith Hackitt's Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety⁷ published in May 2018. This review was started as a

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/draft-building-safety-bill>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/independent-review-of-building-regulations-and-fire-safety-hackitt->

result of the Grenfell Towers tragedy in September 2017 and has influenced the Draft Building Safety Bill published in July 2020⁸.

The implications and requirements of both the Stock Condition Survey and actions required as a result of the new building safety legislation will be captured in a private sector action plan.

READING RENT WITH CONFIDENCE SCHEME

In 2018, Reading Borough Council launched the Reading Rent with Confidence (RRWC) scheme, which rates properties and their landlords based on clear criteria. The RRWC Scheme encourages landlords to work with Reading Borough Council to provide tenants with good quality accommodation and good property management services. The RRWC Scheme is based upon three tiers of banding: (1) Bronze; (2) Silver and (3) Gold. The tiers reflect the different levels of private sector standards each with different criteria, with Gold being the highest.

The scheme encourages, acknowledges and actively promotes good standards of privately rented accommodation with the aim of assisting Landlords, Letting Agents and tenants to undertake their respective responsibilities to each other. The scheme is accessed via the Reading Borough Council website also provides designated officer support to landlords, advice and information to both landlords and tenants, and lists properties that have met the criteria for each tier of banding.

Based within the Private Sector Housing Team is a specialist in the Consumer Rights Act to support tenants and landlords with their rights and responsibilities in relation to the management of deposits.

Further details can be found here: <https://www.reading.gov.uk/rrwc>

HOUSES OF MULTIPLE OCCUPATION (HMO) LICENSING

An HMO is a house or flat that is:

- occupied by three or more people forming two or more households who share – or the building lacks – a basic amenity such as cooking facilities, bathroom or toilet;
- occupied by more than one household (as above) and is a converted building but is not entirely self-contained flats (whether or not some amenities are shared or lacking);
- converted into self-contained flats, but does not meet the requirements of the 1991 Building Regulations, and at least one third of the flats are occupied under short tenancies;

[review#:~:text=The%20Independent%20Review%20of%20Building,regulatory%20system%20for%20the%20future](#)

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/901867/Draft_Building_Safety_Bill_Web.pdf

and is occupied by more than one household

- as their only or main residence; or,
- as a refuge by persons escaping domestic violence; or,
- during term time by students; or,
- for some other purpose that is prescribed in regulations.

In 2006 HMO licensing was introduced to ensure that the poorest and highest risk properties in the private rental market meet the legal standards and are properly managed. It helps to identify high risk HMOs and enables resources to be targeted at improving them. In certain circumstances the Council has the power to step in and take over the management of the property to protect the tenants and others affected by the operation of the HMO.

In 2018, Mandatory HMO licensing was extended to include any private sector HMO in which there are five or more occupiers. The only exception is if the HMO is a flat in a purpose-built block that contains three or more flats. At its introduction it was expected that this change would require a further 2,000-3,000 properties to be licenced, and the Council is still actively encouraging and pursuing over 200 landlords to support them to submit their licence application.

Further details can be found here: <https://www.reading.gov.uk/hmo>

Key outcomes for this priority:

- *Asset Management Strategy for Council owned stock to be published, with details of the carbon neutral retrofit require to meet the Council's Climate Change Emergency objectives, and any implications of the draft Building Safety Bill 2020.*
- *Increased amount of private sector properties retrofitted to improve energy efficiency*
- *All Private Sector landlords with properties with 5 or more occupiers are licenced.*
- *Increased take up of the 'Reading Rent with Confidence' scheme.*
- *Production of a Private Sector Action plan which will be informed by the Private Sector Stock Condition and will deliver the private sector implications of:*
 - *The Hackitt Report 2018*
 - *Draft Building Safety Bill 2020*
 - *Draft Climate Emergency Strategy for Reading 2020-2025*

Priority 2: Create attractive and connected neighbourhoods

In 2020 Reading has experienced the devastating impact of both the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, but also a horrific and violent attack in Forbury Gardens, a popular town centre park. Throughout both these events the importance of communities coming to together, connecting and supporting each other was evident. Reading as a community can be proud of how they responded to the challenges it faced, but there is still action to be done to ensure that all members of our community feel safe and respected.

Over the last decade it has been a necessary and impactful focus on ensuring all homes in Reading meet a 'decent homes' standard, that residents to have good quality homes to enable them to be healthy and thrive. However, the health and well-being of an individual or family is also impacted by the community and neighbourhood around them. The quality of the external built environment, open space within our estates and the shared communal areas all effect a person's enjoyment of their home.

COMMUNITIES COHESION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Inclusive growth remains a priority for Reading Borough Council, the economic success of the town needs to benefit all residents and all parts of our community. Equally the diverse demographic to the town is to be celebrated and enriches the wider community, and it remains a priority to ensure that all members of our society feel connected, and any barriers to social equality are identified and removed.

To ensure that this agenda has the focus it requires, a Social Inclusion Steering group is led by the Assistant Director of Housing and Communities. The aims of this programme are:

To build thriving communities by addressing inequalities (with a focus on responding to the Covid 19 emergency) by:

- reducing poverty (early intervention advice and assistance),
 - improving opportunities (access to work, education, skills and training),
 - connecting communities (understanding diverse communities and the barriers they face and actions to effect change),
 - meeting aspirations (access to arts and culture, green spaces and play),
 - building community resilience (facilitating small community groups to be productive as part of the fabric of communities,)
 - Keeping communities safe and well (tackling crime and access to services for wellbeing e.g. mental health, social isolation etc)
- To gather and analyse data to understand the levels of social exclusion in Reading with an emphasis on resident feedback and the lived experience of communities
- To have oversight of the social inclusion activity across the Council and the voluntary sector and a shared understanding of the interdependencies

- To help better co-ordinate the social inclusion activity across the Council and the voluntary sector and ensure there is good access to services and engagement opportunities
- To identify the gaps in activity and develop actions accordingly
- To develop, implement, oversee and monitor the delivery of a Social Inclusion Action Plan.

COMMUNITY SAFETY PLAN

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998, with further amendments in the Police Reform Act 2002, placed statutory obligations on Local Authorities and the Police to work in co-operation with Health Authorities and other relevant agencies. The objective is to develop and implement a Partnership Plan which would tackle crime and disorder in their area.

This legislation requires the Partnership to produce a three-year plan detailing how it intends to tackle crime and disorder. This allows for the development of strategies to tackle short, medium and long term priorities.

The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) is required to carry out a strategic assessment of crime for its area. This was carried out towards the end of 2018. A similar approach was taken as was used in the previous assessment and reflected the changing nature of crime. Rather than scanning crime types within the area to identify how the CSP is performing in relation to these, it identified priorities by an assessment against Threat, Harm and Risk to individuals and to Reading as whole.

The strategic assessment identified and proposed new priorities for the CSP and these priorities were agreed by the CSP on the 25th April 2019 are:

- Exploitation - incorporating both Adult Exploitation and Modern Slavery.
- Violent Crime and Serious Anti-Social Behaviour - incorporating increasing violence against the person, knife possession and high level anti-social behaviour that has a significant impact on communities.
- Class A Drugs - incorporating drug visibility, drug dealing activity from within and outside Reading, and drug related anti-social behaviour.

Reading's latest Community Safety Plan will run until the end of March 2022, further detail can be found here: [xxx](#)

This is supported by the latest Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy for Reading which will be published in 2021.

NEIGHBOURHOOD IMPROVEMENTS ON COUNCIL OWNED ESTATES

The Housing Service regular connects with residents to ask for feedback on their homes and services. A clear message received from households on council owned estates is that they are happy with quality of their homes, but that they would like to see improvements to their

wider neighbourhoods. Residents want to feel safe, to enjoy the public areas and to be proud of the area where they live.

In response a programme of work will be developed, in partnership with tenants, that will deliver neighbourhood improvements via three key routes:

- Physical improvements to the built up/ external areas
- Improvements to services in the areas to ensure they are coordinated and efficient (including cleaning, waste management and grounds maintenance).
- Communication campaign to encourage residents to look after their neighbourhood.

Key outcomes for this priority:

- *Development and delivery of the Social Inclusion Action Plan.*
- *Reduce the stigma felt by some affordable housing customers by identifying, consulting on and agreeing with residents' priorities for deliverable and affordable improvements to their neighbourhoods*
- *Delivering a refreshed Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy for Reading.*

Support to Residents

Overview

This theme focuses on the need for our homes and the housing services we provide to help and support those in the most need. It recognises the need for better prevention and early intervention and our continued challenge to tackle rough sleeping and homelessness. The Housing Service will work in partnership with Brighter Futures for Children to tackle the emerging issues of Youth Homelessness and the preparation of vulnerable young people, such as Care Leavers, for independent living. It confirms our aim to help people sustain their homes or tenancies and continue to live independently if they wish to do so. We will ensure that a tenant's view is listened to and that residents help shape the housing services in the town.

Priority 1: Prevent homelessness and help people sustain their accommodation

READING'S PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2020 – 2025

Reading's Preventing Homelessness Strategy sets out the borough's priorities and interventions, including the ways in which we propose to do things differently, to prevent and respond to homelessness in Reading.

The three priorities within the strategy are:

- **Priority 1 - Intervening early to prevent and reduce homelessness in Reading** is underpinned by our core themes to have universal approaches that provide advice and information for everyone and targeted upstream interventions that identify and address potential risk factors for homelessness.
- **Priority 2 - Supporting people who are vulnerable to recurring homelessness** is underpinned by supported sustainment to provide support and advice to any household at risk of losing their accommodation and pre-crisis interventions to prevent impending homelessness.
- **Priority 3 - Increasing access to decent, suitable accommodation** is underpinned by provision of accommodation and crisis interventions to help households secure suitable alternative housing when needed.

Further details on Reading's Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2020 – 2025 can be found here: [xxx](#)

ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2019 – 2024

A key focus in preventing homelessness is to reduce rough sleeping. Rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness and it affects some of the most vulnerable in society.

Reading has a separate Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 – 2024 which can be found at:

https://www.reading.gov.uk/media/10275/Rough-sleeping-strategy-2019-2024/pdf/Rough_Sleeping_Strategy_2019_-_2024_FINAL.pdf

Key outcomes for this priority:

- *Delivery of the Reading's Preventing Homelessness Strategy and 2020-2025 Action Plan*
- *Delivery of the Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024*

Priority	2: Enable residents to access support, maintain their independence and have a voice to in respect to the services they receive.
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Meeting Housing need is more than ensuring a supply of new homes. For many residents the home they want is the one they are in, they just require support to remain there whilst staying healthy and safe. Support may be required due to deteriorating or fluctuating health, financial crisis or long-term challenges to living independently.

Also, residents want to have some control over the areas they live. Alongside the building Safety implications of the Hackitt review, clear messages are heard about the importance of listening to tenants and allowing them to shape the services they receive from their landlord. Reading Borough Council is the largest landlord in the town, and it is committed to strengthening opportunities to tenants to co-regulate and shape the services they receive.

PRIVATE SECTOR RENEWAL & DISABLED ADAPTATIONS POLICY

The refreshed Private Sector Renewal and Disabled Adaptations Policy was launched in April 2020.

The benefits of adapting a home are recognised as an effective way to improve the health and wellbeing of older people, and disabled adults and children with a disability. A more accessible home environment can improve independence, reduce risk and reduce reliance on assistance. As the body of evidence demonstrating the benefits of home adaptations grows, so does the recognition that the sooner they are installed, the greater will be the preventative benefits. A common theme in legislation and policy across the UK is the need for a more preventative approach to interventions, including adaptations, for older people, disabled children and adults, to maximize health and wellbeing.

Home adaptations can prevent falls, reduce hospital admissions, reduce reliance on care, avoid the need to move into residential care and significantly improve quality of life and wellbeing for individuals, their families and carers.

In 2015 the government introduced the Better Care Fund (BCF) to bring health and social care together in an integrated way. The fund is a combination of government funding from the Department of Health and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and includes the grant allocation for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG). The 2017-19 Integration and BCF policy framework document lists the conditions that the BCF must be used to address. Funding must be used to contribute to the maintenance of adult social care services in each local authority, which also has a health benefit.

In Reading the Better Care Fund objectives are:

- Reduced admissions to residential and nursing care homes
- Reduce avoidable emergency admissions
- Assist disabled adults and children to remain in their own homes
- Prevent admissions to care and to assist with delayed transfers where possible.
- Falls prevention
- Cost avoidance of care
- Support for carers and families
- The assistance detailed in the refreshed policy has been designed to reflect these objectives.

The grants and services available within this policy are:

- Minor Adaptations (equipment provided and fitted)
- Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants
- Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant (Health & Wellbeing at Home Grant)
- Housing Assistance Grants and Loans
 - Housing Health & Safety Repairs Grant
 - Empty Homes Grant
 - Flexible Home Improvement Loan (Empty Homes)
 - Flexible Home Improvement Loan (over 60)
 - Flexible Improvement Loan for rented accommodation.

Further details on the policy can be found here:

https://www.reading.gov.uk/media/1505/Housing-Adaptations-Policy/pdf/Private_Sector_Renewal_Disabled_Adaptations_Policy_Sept_2019.pdf

Major Adaptations within council owned stock falls outside of the BCF funding so a separate budget is available within the Housing Service, allocated via the same DFG process.

WINTERWATCH AND TENANCY SUSTAINMENT SUPPORT

Reading Borough Council recognises that where some residents may need significant support from specialist agencies, organised often by Adult Social Care, to sustain their tenancies many require low level support to help them understand how to maintain and manage their home. Housing Services have a team of specialist support workers who provide visiting support to more vulnerable Council tenants, who will also provide guidance on accessing other services.

In addition, the WinterWatch scheme works across all sectors to help ensure residents live in warm, energy efficient homes. Support from the WinterWatch scheme can include small repairs to the property, support to access the Private Sector Renewal team to complete more significant repairs, liaison with energy suppliers and advice on energy efficient use of the home. The reduction of cold inefficient homes helps prevent excess winter deaths, reduces fuel poverty and directly helps implement the objectives of the Draft Climate Emergency Strategy for Reading 2020-2025.

TENANT ENGAGEMENT AND CO-REGULATION

All council and housing association landlords are required to meet the National Standards for housing services. Landlords are expected to share with residents how they perform against each of the standards and involve tenants in both shaping of how services are delivered and monitoring the outcomes achieved.

The standards are:

- The involvement and empowerment standard involves you in decisions about your home, neighbourhood and community, how we deal with and learn from your complaints and customer care
- The home standard looks after your home including day to day repairs and the quality of accommodation
- The tenancy standard manages your tenancies including allocating empty homes and collecting rent
- The neighbourhood and community standard manages your estate and community including neighbourhood management, local area co-operation and anti-social behaviour
- The value for money standard makes sure that the service we provide is effective and cost efficient

These standards may be reviewed within the expected Social Housing White paper but Reading Borough Council remains committed to ensuring the Housing Services performance is transparent to tenants and that they have a voice in how their service is delivered.

The aim of Tenant Involvement is to work in partnership with tenants to develop service design and influence how services are delivered in order to continuously improve and drive up standards and thereby increase tenant satisfaction.

For Tenant Involvement to be effective Housing Services needs to:

- Share information with tenants in a variety of ways
- Provide opportunities for tenants to express their views in a way that suits them

- Listen and act on tenants' views to improve the services provided
- Allow tenants to scrutinise performance
- Carry out robust and transparent evaluation of Tenant involvement to demonstrate the impact on services

The existing Tenant Participation Strategy ends this year and a new strategy, reflecting the requirements of the emerging white paper, will be published during 2021.

Key outcomes for this priority:

- *Effective use of Disabled Facilities Grant and other housing adaptation and intervention programmes to support independent living*
- *Utilisation of the Private Sector Renewal grants to improve the living environment for residents and prevent subsequent health issues.*
- *Provide advice and support, through the WinterWatch initiative, to over 250 households a year struggling to keep their homes warm.*
- *Publication of the replacement Tenant Participation Strategy*

Implementation, monitoring and review

Reading's Housing Strategy will govern our strategic approach to housing in Reading until 2025. During a period of emerging policies and economic change we will ensure that it remains responsive and reflective of legislative change.

The strategy pulls together activity that is been delivered through a range of teams and services within Council and by external partners, with delivery of the housing related actions being monitored by the Housing Strategy Steering group, chaired by the Assistant Director of Housing and Communities