

# Investing in Reading's Future



Reading Borough Council Corporate Plan  
2021/22



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
Working better with you

# Foreword

**from Cllr Jason Brock**

**Leader of Reading Borough Council**

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As we start this new financial year, we face a situation of unprecedented uncertainty. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought incredible challenges for our town, our communities and our economy. The crisis has kept us at home, prevented children from going to school, closed businesses and harmed the mental and physical health of thousands of people. And as with any crisis, the most vulnerable have been the hardest hit. We don't yet know how quickly we will bring the pandemic under control, how fast the economy will recover and the extent to which people will face long term harm as a result. But what we are certain about, is that Reading can and will recover.

Throughout the pandemic, and in the wake of the tragic attacks in Forbury Gardens last June, our communities, our people, and our town have shown they are resilient, innovative and compassionate. We now need to build on these strengths to make sure our recovery is more than successful – to make sure it is equitable and addresses the ways the pandemic has harmed the most vulnerable and deepened existing inequalities.

In the face of an uncertain context, we have chosen to create a one-year corporate plan for 2021/22. We will tackle the immediate challenges we face in ensuring our town recovers from the Covid-19 pandemic, and we will continue to make progress towards the

social and environmental goals from our last corporate plan. We remain aspirational for the future of Reading, and our vision is that the environment, the economy and the community are together at the heart of a more inclusive, more equitable town. We want everyone to be treated fairly; to have equal access to green space, clean air, skills, services, jobs and housing; and to benefit from Reading's success.

Over the coming year, we will also look ahead to our next three-year strategic plan. It will be a challenge. Covid-19 will be with us for a long time yet. We are committed to working with our partners across the town - including businesses and employers, major institutions such as Reading University and the Royal Berkshire Hospital, the voluntary sector and our residents - to lead Reading's recovery, to bring our vision to life and to create a better future for everyone in Reading.

We hope you will work with us to make this vision a reality.

**Jason Brock**



# Our town

## Welcome to Reading

Reading's population is

**161,780**<sup>1</sup>



4th in the country for **number of businesses**<sup>2</sup>



4th highest in terms of **wages**<sup>2</sup>



2nd **highest** for 'good growth'<sup>3</sup>



However...  
3rd **most unequal** city in terms of wealth<sup>4</sup>

**77**

**languages**

spoken in homes across Reading<sup>5</sup>



5 neighbourhoods are within the **10% most deprived** in the country<sup>6</sup>

Reading Borough Council has reduced its carbon footprint by **with £13 million saved**<sup>7</sup>

**63.5%**

**10%**

rise in social care referrals over the last five years<sup>8</sup>

**90%**

of council maintained schools rated good or outstanding...<sup>10</sup>

...but 10.4% of young people are not in education, employment or training – above the national average<sup>11</sup>

**Difference in life expectancy** between most and least deprived areas<sup>9</sup>



**8 years**



**7.2 years**

**10,503**

**Covid-19 cases**

and 301 deaths 1 Mar 2020 - 1 Mar 2021<sup>13</sup>



Unemployment **up** from 2.7% to 6.4% Jan 2020 - Jan 2021<sup>12</sup>



Footfall in Broad Street **down** 66.4% Feb 2020 - Feb 2021<sup>12</sup>

Reading rated one of the cities **best placed for post-covid economic recovery**<sup>14</sup>



<sup>1</sup> ONS 2019 mid year estimate <sup>2</sup> Centre for Cities 'Cities Outlook 2020' <sup>3</sup> Demos-PWC Good Growth for Cities Index 2019 <sup>4</sup> Centre for Cities, gini co-efficient 2017

<sup>5</sup> ONS Census 2011 <sup>6</sup> Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 <sup>7</sup> Reading Borough Council 2008/09 – 2019/20 <sup>8</sup> Reading Borough Council <sup>9</sup> Institute of Health Equity/PHE 2016-2018

<sup>10</sup> Ofsted <sup>11</sup> DFE 2020 <sup>12</sup> Reading UK <sup>13</sup> www.coronavirus.data.gov.uk <sup>14</sup> Irwin Mitchell, Nov 2020

# Our vision

***"To help Reading realise its potential – and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success."***

In 2018, the Council came together with local businesses, community groups and Reading University to plan for Reading's future. The result is the Reading 2050 Vision, an ambitious description of what Reading can be; a city of green spaces, smart technology and economic growth.

At Reading Borough Council we believe we can help Reading realise its potential – and ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success.

The Coronavirus pandemic has not changed this vision. It may have changed how we go about making a difference, and it may have made it more difficult. But we still believe in Reading's potential, and the right of everyone who lives and works here to have a stake in that future

**Within the Council, we are driven by the principles of TEAM Reading:**



These principles underpin the way we work day-to-day, and the major initiatives that are the foundation for modern, cost effective services that will improve the lives of local people set out in our themes on pages 6-9.

## Team

We work as one team with colleagues and partners to deliver great services.

# Our foundations

These projects and ways of working underpin everything we do at the Council.

- **People first:** our customer experience strategy puts our customers at the heart of service design and delivery, and we seek regular feedback through consultations and our residents' survey.
- **Digital transformation:** both internally and externally, we're transforming how we work using the power of digital technology. We're modernising services and harnessing new technology to make it easier for residents to interact with us. We're improving our website, streamlining processes and making more services available online.
- **Building self-reliance:** we work with others to build the ability of individuals and communities to solve their own problems and withstand the shocks that come their way. We provide support to those who need it – but our first priority is always to help people live independently for as long as possible.
- **Getting the best value:** we strive for value for money in everything we do, and we are focussed on delivering the Council's three-year Savings and Investment Programme. But the best deal is not always the cheapest – it's the one that protects people, jobs, the environment and the budget. So we're also evolving our procurement policies to find the social value in all we do.
- **Collaborating with others:** we are stronger in partnership and we collaborate with organisations from major corporations to local groups; with the business sector, charities, education institutions, health and social care, the police, faith groups, and the voluntary sector in Reading and across the Thames Valley to achieve our vision for Reading. We will build on the work done during the pandemic to consolidate partnerships and ensure a better network and stronger funding streams to support the most vulnerable.

## Efficient

We drive efficiency and value for money in everything we do.

## Ambitious

We are ambitious in our plans and in what we want to achieve.

## Make a difference

We are here to make a difference to the residents, communities and businesses of Reading.





# Our themes

We've listened to what residents, businesses and partners have said about their experience of Reading, and their hopes and aspirations for the town. In this year's residents' survey we heard that residents are satisfied with how the Council runs services in Reading, but would like to see more action taken on affordable housing, levels of crime, road conditions, congestion and climate change. Through consultation on our major change initiatives – such as the Local Transport Plan and the Climate Emergency Strategy – we know we have the support of residents and partners to make the changes we all want to see.

We will make this change happen by focussing on three inter-connected themes:







# Healthy environment

We are working towards a clean, safe town that is easy to travel around, and where people feel the benefits of clean air and active travel like walking and cycling. A healthy environment has a fundamental impact on the life of every resident – making Reading a nicer, greener, more attractive place to live, and having a tangible impact on physical and mental health and life expectancy. Locally we are investing in

walking, cycling, and public transport; tackling congestion; increasing recycling rates; and improving parks and open spaces. And at a global level we are promoting the climate ambitions of our residents, and of citizens across the country and the world. Our plans show a roadmap to a carbon neutral Reading by 2030, that will protect our residents now and in the future.

## We are:

**Making it easy for people to play their part through the choices they make about their home, their transport and their waste**

**Committed to playing our part in tackling climate change and working towards our goal of a carbon neutral town by 2030**

**Listening to feedback from our residents' survey and transport consultations, and making increased investments in green infrastructure**

## Key initiatives:

1. Reading Borough Council is a founding member and host of the Reading Climate Change Partnership.
2. Our Climate Emergency Strategy sets out a roadmap and investment towards a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.
3. Our Council Carbon Plan 2020-25 outlines a pathway to an 85% cut in the Council's emissions by 2025, including energy saving in our buildings, a greener vehicle fleet, and renewable energy initiatives.
4. Our Local Transport Plan outlines investments in walking and cycling initiatives, public transport, and electric vehicle infrastructure that will make it easier for residents to make healthy choices, and feel the benefits of clean, green neighbourhoods.
5. New weekly kerbside food waste collections, better information on recycling, reduction in size of 'residual waste' bins and increased enforcement will increase recycling rates, leading to lower carbon emissions.
6. Working with the NHS, our new Health and Wellbeing Strategy will tackle the issues residents tell us matter the most, including more support for mental wellbeing because of the pandemic.



# Thriving communities

It's the people of Reading who make our town an exciting and diverse place to live and work. After the devastating attacks in Forbury Gardens in June 2020, we saw people unite under the idea of #ReadingTogether to embrace diversity and community. We want to ensure that spirit is carried into every aspect of life in Reading, wherever people live and whatever their stage of life. In public consultations and in our residents'

survey, people have told us what is important, and we are prioritising the issues that matter – like good quality affordable housing, better roads and community safety. We will focus on the needs of the most vulnerable, ensuring young people, older people, those with long term health conditions or disabilities and those most affected by Covid-19 get the help they need to live successful, independent lives in vibrant, thriving communities.

## We are:

**Committed to tackling inequality in our society, to ensure everyone has an equal chance to thrive whatever their economic, social, cultural, ethnic or religious background**

**Investing in voluntary and community organisations, building relationships and strengthening the capacity and resilience of the sector**

**Prioritising the needs of the most marginalised groups and the most vulnerable adults and children in our communities**

**Tackling the effects of the pandemic, such as increased unemployment, long term health problems, mental health issues and social isolation**

## Key initiatives:

1. We're refreshing our Community Safety Strategy and introducing a new Housing Strategy that outlines plans to improve access to good quality housing (Council owned or privately rented), to create safe, inclusive communities with easy access to schools, services and green space.
2. We're investing £2.3 million in 40 homes with intensive support for people with a history of rough sleeping and more than £30 million to improve adult social care services, buildings and facilities.
3. The 'home first' approach in our Adult Social Care Transformation Programme means residents can make healthy choices, manage their condition and remain at home for as long as possible.
4. Brighter Futures for Children's business plan focuses on earlier intervention, partnership work, local care placements where possible, excellent teaching and learning, and more local school places for children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND).
5. Our leisure transformation programme will modernise facilities and create accessible, affordable services to improve the physical and mental health of residents.
6. To increase equality and inclusion within the Borough we have appointed a diversity champion, signed Business in the Community's Race at Work Charter and committed to working with others to promote social inclusion at the Council and across Reading.
7. We're working with families and communities affected by the Forbury Gardens attacks to remember the event and create a permanent memorial.





# Inclusive economy

We're working towards a town where everyone can access education, skills and training, good jobs, and decent housing. An inclusive economy isn't measured in pounds and pence, with wealth trickling down from the richest to those at the bottom. An inclusive economy enhances wellbeing and enables upward mobility,

with more opportunities for more people to participate in the growth and success of the town. We're ensuring economic growth goes hand-in-hand with achieving our climate goals, by harnessing new technology and investing in green infrastructure.

## We are:

**Creating education, skills and training opportunities**

**Investing in key infrastructure to keep Reading at the forefront of advances in technology**

**Building on our cultural heritage to enhance our tourist industry, creating an amazing place for people to enjoy**

## Key initiatives:

1. Delivery of sustainable transport schemes including Green Park Station, Reading West Station improvements, and the final section of the National Cycling Network 422.
2. Work with Reading UK to deliver the 'Powered by People' economic recovery strategy, building back a post-covid economy that is more inclusive, smarter and more sustainable, and tackles local unemployment.
3. Invest in employment skills and training through programmes such as KickStart and our new Skills and Employment Youth Hub at The Curious Lounge, Reading, run by Brighter Futures for Children, in partnership with JobCentre Plus and others.
4. Invest in the culture and heritage of our town including helping cultural venues recover after the pandemic, celebrating the 900th anniversary of our historic abbey, shaping the future of Reading Gaol and enhancing our heritage with High Street Heritage Action Zones.
5. Move Reading closer to being a 'smart city' through programmes such as the ADEPT Live Labs initiative and continued delivery of a £4.75 million grant trial to help futureproof roads and transport.
6. Facilitate deployment and investment in superfast broadband for all.





# Your services

We are committed to delivering high quality public services that meet customer needs and demonstrate value for money. The themes outlined on pages 6-9 include major projects that drive the change we want to see in Reading's future, but the services we provide for residents today, and every day, are no less important. We will continue to make services simpler, faster and better, including:

- Delivering Reading's biggest ever road repair scheme, a £9m investment in the quality of local roads and pavements.
- Maintaining more than 100 parks and open spaces – mowing the grass, tending plants and trees and maintaining equipment.
- Looking after streets and neighbourhoods, from emptying more than 18,800 bins a day to maintaining 18,500 streetlights.
- Continuing to rewild open spaces and park areas to enhance biodiversity and improve our environment.
- Developing our library network to provide innovative local services in person and online.
- Collaborating with partners to create a cultural programme for the whole community – including events, exhibitions and festivals as well as celebrating the 900th anniversary of our historic Abbey and shaping the future of the Reading's iconic Gaol.
- Providing housing advice and support to prevent homelessness.
- Helping people live independently at home for as long as possible and providing more than 36,000 homecare hours per week.
- Brighter Futures for Children (BFFC) provide children's social care, early help, fostering, adoption, the Youth Offending service and maintain more than 20 primary schools, as well as working with all schools to improve the educational prospects of young people.
- Delivering high quality education and training for adults through New Directions.
- Administering financial support from business support grants to Council Tax support.
- Responding to 250,000 enquiries a year through our customer fulfilment centre, from Council Tax enquiries to housing repairs.
- Administering important life events with around 8,000 registrations for births, deaths and marriages every year. Supporting 2,200 families to say goodbye to loved ones through our burials and cremation service.





The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic means we are working in an uncertain context. As with any crisis, the most vulnerable have been the hardest hit. We don't yet know how quickly we will bring the pandemic under control, how fast the economy will recover, the extent to which people will face long term harm as a result, and the future impact on Council services. From the outset, our priority has been to support the most vulnerable in our communities and to lay the groundwork for a strong economic recovery and this work continues, including:

- Ensuring safe and effective working conditions for Council staff, from technology for those working from home, to providing PPE and rapid testing to front line staff, to providing wellbeing advice and support.
- Continuing essential services by retraining and redeploying staff so that critical services from personal care to bin collections keep running smoothly.
- Continuing to visit, call and support the most vulnerable adults, children and their families, and adapting our commissioning of Adult Social Care services to meet the changing needs of service user as a result of the Pandemic.
- Hosting the One Reading Community Hub, a collaboration between the Council and voluntary sector partners to provide support to the most vulnerable.
- Running a local contact tracing operation to complement the NHS service, keeping contact tracing rates above 80%.
- Running a community testing programme for essential workers across Reading and working with the NHS to find venues for testing and vaccination centres.
- Implementing Government support schemes such as business support grants and business rates relief and, in partnership with Brighter Futures for Children, free school meals and winter fuel payments.
- Working with the Royal Berkshire Hospital, Prospect Park Hospital, and Berkshire West CCG to facilitate safe and timely hospital discharges and create options that enable people to return home.
- Ensuring key messages are understood by all local residents and businesses using audio, video, written word and translated materials.
- Delivering the Local Outbreak Management Plan to reduce transmission and the wider impacts resulting from restrictions.



## We'll know we're successful when...

- Relationships between partners in the town – businesses, local institutions, the voluntary sector and the Council – are strong and productive.
- Enough homes are being built to meet people's needs, including affordable houses.
- Our most vulnerable adults and children have the support they need.
- There is a reduction in the demand for children's services from Early Help and Social Care from Brighter Futures for Children.
- More people choose to walk, cycle and use public transport because it is easy, safe and convenient and a greener more attractive alternative.
- Carbon emissions continue to fall, and we hit our climate milestones.
- Reading's economy is recovering from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is more inclusive, and all local people can access the skills, training and jobs they need.
- Measures of inequality between groups and communities – such as life expectancy and unemployment - are declining, and the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic are no longer affecting vulnerable groups disproportionately.
- Our residents tell us they are more satisfied with Reading as a place to live, and with the services and value for money delivered by the Council.