

# Investing in Reading's Future



**Corporate Plan 2022-25**  
Annual update: March 2024



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
Working better with you



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# Welcome

from the Leader of  
Reading Borough Council  
Cllr Jason Brock

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Over the past year you may have read in the news about the financial difficulties that many councils are facing, and Reading is not immune to the challenges facing Local Government at this time.

High inflation has precipitated a cost of living crisis, which is in turn driving a sharp increase in demand for essential council services. During difficult times people turn to their local council for help. It is the fundamental role of any council to provide that support, and we do not shy away from it.

While several local councils are struggling badly in the current climate, our sound financial planning over a number of years means we are in a better position than many to absorb the pressures. Local government is about so much more than councils just keeping their head above water however, and in Reading we remain hugely ambitious for our town. We remain determined to continue to deliver better services and improved facilities for residents, despite the obvious financial challenges.

Our ambition is once again reflected in our refreshed Corporate Plan for 2024-25, which builds on the tremendous achievements of the last few years.

Those achievements are far too many to list here, but they include: the resurfacing of over 700 roads and 100 pavements, with another 200 sections of roads planned to be resurfaced over the coming year as part of Reading's biggest ever road repair programme; a £40 million investment in modern new leisure facilities, including the opening of the new Palmer Park and Rivermead Leisure Centres;

a continuation of our drive to reach net-zero with the Council once again recognised as one of only 119 cities in the world to make the 'A' list for bold leadership on tackling climate change; the creation of dedicated new cycle lines along the Shinfield Road, with more to come in the Bath Road / Castle Hill area; quicker, cheaper and more reliable bus services through our Bus Service Improvement Programme; new sheltered housing facilities for older and vulnerable residents, including on Battle Street at the old Central Pool site; and a continuation of the Council's investment to provide 400 affordable new homes between 2021 and 2025.

Over the next year there are many more exciting projects to look forward to, including starting work on significant improvements to our culture and customer offer with major works to the Hexagon and the Civic building where we will be providing a modern new Central Library and Civic Centre Reception, progressing the long-awaited regeneration of the Town Centre's Minster Quarter area, continuing our road repair programme, and Reading's biggest council house building programme in a generation.

At the same time, we will continue to provide the essential everyday services we know people rely on, including caring for vulnerable adults and children.

Our new Corporate Plan tells the story of what we have achieved and what we aim to achieve in the year ahead.

# Our Reading



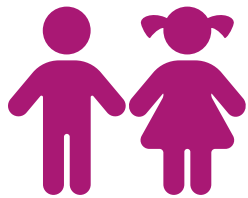
Reading's population is  
**174,200**<sup>1</sup>



Providing  
**5,114**  
children with Free  
School Meals<sup>2</sup>



**5**  
neighbourhoods  
are within the 10%  
most deprived in the  
country<sup>3</sup>



Relatively young  
population, with  
**17.7%**  
aged under 15<sup>4</sup>



**4<sup>th</sup>**  
Highest level  
of workplace  
earnings in the  
UK<sup>5</sup>



**3<sup>rd</sup>**  
most unequal city in  
terms of wealth<sup>6</sup>



**77**  
languages  
spoken in homes  
across Reading<sup>7</sup>



Ranked in the top **5** UK  
cities for good economic  
growth<sup>8</sup>



**6.8** years  
difference in life expectancy between  
most and least deprived areas<sup>9</sup>



**7.8** years



Unemployment  
up from 3.5% to  
**3.9%**<sup>10</sup>



**90%**  
of council maintained schools  
rated good or outstanding...<sup>11</sup>

... and **3.1%** of  
young people are not in  
education employment or  
training - below the national  
average<sup>12</sup>



Made fastest economic  
recovery and fastest  
growing economy over  
last 20 years<sup>13</sup>



# Our Vision

*“Our Vision is to help Reading realise its potential and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success.”*



*To make this vision happen, this Plan groups the Council’s work into three themes:*

- *Healthy Environment*
- *Thriving Communities*
- *Inclusive Economy*



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



## Together

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

# Our Foundations

Our foundations underpin how our services are delivered. They are:

- **Customers 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 practices to enhance 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 are building on the work done during the pandemic to consolidate partnerships and ensure a stronger network 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 Achievements

We are proud of the achievements and investments we have delivered over the past 12 months and will continue to build on these successes:



Resurfaced over 700 roads totalling over 1 million square metres over the last 4 years.



Caversham Court Gardens has been awarded the prestigious Green Flag award and Green Heritage Accreditation for 2023.



Secured £1.1m for adult social care services to apply cutting edge technology to help adults with health conditions live independently and safely in their homes.



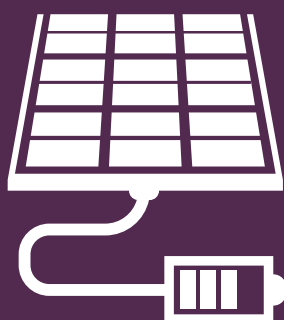
Opened the North Street Affordable Homes development, made up of 36 one and two bed flats, and one three bed flat.



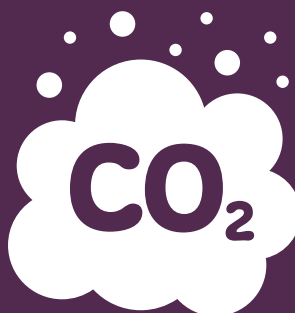
Opened Reading Green Park station, the first new train station in Reading in over 100 years.



Successfully launched digital residents' parking, making it quicker and easier to apply for and renew parking permits.



Helped 239 Reading households to benefit from cheaper electricity by having solar panels installed through the Solar Together initiative.



Reading Borough's carbon footprint has reduced by 51% since 2005 – the 8th largest reduction in the UK. The Council has cut its own carbon footprint by 74% since 2008/09.





New Directions College was awarded the 'Excellence in Apprenticeships' award by the Institute of Leadership and Management.



Opened the new Rivermead Leisure Centre – part of the Council's investment of over £40m in low carbon leisure facilities.



Approval to introduce six new bus lanes to ease congestion and improve air quality.



Delivered over 3,000 health checks in 2023, in partnership with the NHS.



Introduced 'Tap on Tap off' payment on Reading Buses, making your journey quicker and more convenient, and ensuring you only pay the cheapest on the day adult ticket price.



Opened 15 new affordable homes for key workers at the former Arthur Hill Pool site, as part of the Council's £110m investment in over 400 new homes between 2021 and 2025.



Secured Planning Committee approval for work to begin on the brand-new Central Library for Reading at the Civic Offices, primarily funded by Levelling Up funding from central government.



3 new playgrounds opened for play at Lulworth Road, Coley Recreation Ground, and South Whitley Recreation Ground.



Improved our approach to SEND provision, with 111 more places in local schools.

# Residents' Survey Results

In summer 2023, the Council undertook a survey with a representative sample of 1,000 Reading residents to gauge levels of satisfaction with the local area, the Council and the services it provides, in order to inform corporate and service planning. Here is a summary of the key findings:

60% were satisfied with the way Reading Borough Council runs things overall.

42% agreed that Reading Borough Council provides value for money.

52% felt Reading Borough Council acts on the concerns of local residents a great deal or a fair amount.

The residents' survey highlighted several areas for improvement. We set out below what we are doing in response:

- **Roads and pavements** - we have resurfaced over 700 roads totalling over 1 million square metres since the start of our programme of investment 4 years ago, along with over 100 pavements and footways. We are investing a further £8m between 2022/23 and 2026/27, with over 200 sections of roads planned to be resurfaced over the coming year.
- **Traffic congestion** - we are continuing to roll out incentive schemes in partnership with bus operators whilst delivering required improvements to infrastructure, such as bus lanes, as part of the £26 million Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) grant funding secured from Government. Building on the delivery of the new station at Green Park and the refurbishment of Reading West Station, other key infrastructure developments are being undertaken such as the investment in cycling improvements on Shinfield Road and Bath Road and enhancements for pedestrians.
- **Levels of crime** - the three year Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy has seven priorities including reducing community-based drug activity, reducing knife violence, and tackling violence against women and girls. The priority delivery groups are established and will deliver a number of actions through working in partnership across these key areas.
- **Affordable housing** - from 2021 to 2025 we are investing £110 million in the delivery of 400 homes.
- **Cleaner streets** - our Environmental Enforcement Team continue to investigate incidents of littering and fly-tipping and issue fixed penalty notices to act as a deterrent. CCTV coverage of recycling facilities has significantly reduced incidents of misuse and abuse. Our free bulky waste collection service continues to be popular, with booking slots being made available daily at 4pm, one week in advance. For Reading town centre and Oxford Road, our street cleansing and waste collection services are rescheduling their resources to ensure waste is cleared from the streets in a timely fashion, with dedicated resources allocated to the provision of enhanced cleansing standards.
- **Parking** - we continue to address smaller-scale parking issues raised or observed through the Waiting Restriction Review programmes and consider further rollout of resident permit parking schemes where there is demonstrable majority local support to do so. We have also commissioned a review of the Council's Town Centre Parking and Assets Strategy.



NEXT  
BEAUTY  
& HOME

NEXT  
BEAUTY  
& HOME

NEXT

BEACH BAR

FLAMBO BAR

THE RED GREEN



# Your Services

Reading Borough Council is committed to delivering high quality public services that meet the needs of our residents and businesses, and demonstrate value for money. The areas below outline some of the key work we do to provide services vital to Reading and its communities:

- 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 25,000 bins a day to maintaining 18,500 streetlights and illuminated signs.
- Continuing to rewild and plant trees in our 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 celebrating our rich history and heritage, including our historic Abbey.
- The Council owns just under 7,000 social housing properties which it rents to tenants at an affordable rent and continues to provide housing advice and support to prevent homelessness to over 450 households a year.
- Helping people live independently at home for as long as possible and providing more than 37,000 homecare hours per month.
- Providing the right help at the right time through Brighter Futures for Children, to support every Reading child to have a safe, happy, healthy and successful life by:
  - ◇ Delivering family help, children’s social care and youth justice services. We have worked with 3,800 children in the last 12 months and look after 280.
  - ◇ Delivering education services and support to schools, children and families, including special education needs and disability (SEND).
  - ◇ Supporting 1,971 children and young people (aged 0-25) with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- Delivering our strategy to reduce inequality through an innovative place-based approach and focus on skills, education and training.
- Delivering high quality education and training for adults through New Directions.
- Providing Housing Benefit and Council Tax support and delivering a broad range of advice and support for residents and businesses experiencing financial difficulties as a result of the current cost of living crisis, in conjunction with our VCS partners.
- Responding to 383,000 enquiries a year through our customer fulfilment centre, from Council Tax enquiries to housing repairs.
- Administering important life events with around 9,000 registrations for births, deaths, and marriages every year. Supporting 2,200 families to say goodbye to loved ones through our burials and cremation service.
- Processing over 700 planning applications a year, including major developments.



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
**Working better with you**

# Our Themes

We've listened to what residents, businesses and our partners and stakeholders have said about their experience of Reading, and their hopes and aspirations for the town.

In this year's residents' survey we heard that the majority of residents are satisfied with how the Council runs services in Reading, but would like to see more action taken on key issues. 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 focusing on three interconnected themes:





# Healthy Environment

We are working towards a clean, safe town where the need to travel by car is minimised, and where people feel the benefits of clean air and active travel like walking and cycling.

A healthy environment underpins the wellbeing of every resident – making Reading a nicer, greener, more attractive place to live, with a tangible impact on physical and mental health and life expectancy. We consider this in our town planning and built environment to ensure residents live close to services to enable active travel rather than reliance on cars.

We are investing in walking, cycling, and public transport; tackling congestion; increasing recycling rates; and improving parks and open spaces.

We are promoting the climate ambitions of our residents and have been making an impact in the global arena.

Our plans show a roadmap to a net zero, resilient Reading, that will protect our residents now and in the future.

## We are:

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

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

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

# Key initiatives:

- Reading Borough Council is a founding member and host of the Reading Climate Change Partnership and endorsed the Partnership's Climate Emergency Strategy which sets out a road map towards a net zero, resilient Reading.
- 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.
- In 2023 Reading was again named as one of 26 UK local authorities, and one of just 119 across the world, to make a coveted 'A' list for bold climate leadership and transparency. This accolade demonstrates our long track record of partnership working on climate change. We aim to maintain that status.
- Our priority for the coming years is to continue to reduce our carbon footprint and make our infrastructure and communities greener and more resilient.
- We are increasing our commitment to tree planting in the borough aiming to plant at least 3,000 'standard' trees by 2030 on Council land and increase overall canopy cover to 25% by 2030, as well as ensuring that all wards have at least 12% canopy cover by 2030.
- Our Local Transport Plan prioritises investments in walking and cycling initiatives, such as the Shinfield and Bath Road active travel schemes, as well as 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. Working with schools, we have already set up some School Streets in communities to ensure children can walk to lessons safely.
- We are investing in public transport and active travel measures which provide affordable and accessible options to access education, employment, health and leisure destinations, whilst reducing carbon emissions and congestion and improving air quality by taking more private cars off the road.
- We are working to ensure full compliance with simpler recycling legislation and attainment of the National Recycling Target by 2025, up from Reading's current performance of 49%. This will be achieved through continued roll-out of weekly food waste collections to communal properties and resident engagement to increase recycling rates. We have increased the number of fully electric vehicles in our refuse collection fleet from 5 to 12, contributing to our Carbon Zero pledge.
- We will tackle flytipping in the borough by monitoring sites using cameras and taking action against those that flytip. We are also working with our businesses to ensure they are legally disposing of their waste.



# Thriving Communities

It's you, the people of Reading, who make our town an exciting and diverse place to live and work.

Our aspiration is that this spirit of inclusivity and community is carried into every aspect of life in Reading, wherever people live and whatever their stage of life.

We will prioritise the needs of those most in need and excluded in our communities. We will continue to ensure that those who are older or living with disability, or physical or mental illness, are supported to live independently.

We will support families and ensure that vulnerable

children in Reading are protected and supported to be well and healthy.

We know that where there is greater connectivity in communities, residents feel safer and are more resilient against risk or harm. This connectedness also enhances a sense of belonging and wellbeing.

We also know that better health and wellbeing go hand in hand. That is why we are continuing to invest in new facilities like the new Rivermead leisure centre that help residents stay active, alongside working with health partners to improve take up of health services.

## We are:

Working with children and their families to meet their needs locally **and protect vulnerable children from harm, including looking after 280 children.**

Working with those who are older or **living with disability, or physical or mental illness, to support them to live well and independently at home.**

Working hard to **improve public health and prevent and reduce health inequality, enabling people to live a full and healthy life.**

Promoting community safety and cohesion and working to **reduce community-based drug activity, knife violence, and violence against women and girls.**



# Key initiatives:

- A £2m investment in temporary modular homes is allowing us to house people who had been found sleeping rough, giving them the opportunity to rebuild their lives and receive essential support.
- We are investing £8m in Adult Social Care services, in partnership with the Housing Revenue Account, to build new day services, supported living flats and respite services for our service users.
- We are working in partnership with the Department for Education in building schools and improving conditions to meet the future needs of our children and ensure access to education with £26m invested into our schools over the next three years.
- We are delivering a new Community Safety Plan in partnership with Thames Valley Police to focus on reducing serious violent crime and improving community engagement.
- The home first approach to our Adult Social Care provision means residents can be supported to manage their conditions and remain at home for as long as possible, including after discharge from hospital.
- We are increasing the range of Technology Enabled Care for residents to enable them to live independently in the community.
- Residents who are under the care of Adult Social Care are able to receive Direct Payments to allow them to commission their own care, which is tailored to their needs.
- The Council is funding its Children's Services provider, Brighter Futures for Children, to focus on earlier intervention; increase the number of local children's placements; support and promote inclusive education that improves levels of attainment; and create more local school places for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- £40m investment in leisure centres continues with the new swimming pool at Rivermead Leisure Centre, creating accessible, affordable opportunities for residents to improve their physical and mental health. In doing so we have significantly improved our leisure offer whilst reducing their energy use and carbon emissions through our low carbon investment programme. We are working to ensure that our cultural offerings are inclusive and engage all our communities.
- We are working with Health and Voluntary Sector partners to deliver Community Wellness Outreach in communities ensuring residents have access to health and wellbeing checks and associated advice and support.
- The implementation plans of the Berkshire West Health and Wellbeing Strategy will deliver a range of health improvement activity that aims to: reduce the differences in health between different groups of people; support individuals at high risk of poor health outcomes to live healthy lives; help children and families in early years; and promote good mental health and wellbeing. We work to maintain a focus on the determinants of health including access to housing, worthwhile employment, lifelong learning and community connectedness. We also promote improved access and take up of healthcare services for all communities in Reading.
- Our Compass Recovery Team will continue to offer free lower level mental health and wellbeing workshops for anyone who may be affected directly or indirectly by mental health or wellbeing challenges within the community.
- We are delivering the £2.2m Household Support Fund to residents to ease cost of living pressures for people and families in greatest need.



# Inclusive Economy

We want Reading to realise its economic potential and ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success.

We're investing in neighbourhoods to develop a vibrant, attractive, and economically successful town for residents to live in and for businesses to thrive.

Our vision is a Reading where everyone, no matter what their background, can access education, skills and training and good jobs – and where child poverty is eradicated.

An inclusive economy enhances wellbeing with more opportunities for more people to participate in the growth and success of the town.

Our town is dealing with the impact of the cost of living crisis. Our priority is to support the most in need in our communities and to lay the groundwork for a strong economic recovery.

## We are:

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

**Tackling inequality by enhancing access to education, skills, and training opportunities for everyone.**

**Supporting the development and economic success of the town, including building more affordable, sustainable homes.**

# Key initiatives:

- From 2021 to 2025, we are investing £110 million in the delivery of 400 homes to reduce the housing waiting list and provide affordable housing to Reading residents including the provision of sheltered housing, key worker housing and family homes.
- We are redeveloping the Minster Quarter, which sits in the heart of Reading town centre. This will create a major new residential led mixed-use urban and cultural quarter in the heart of Reading.
- We have listened to our vibrant Voluntary and Community Sector and awarded contracts worth £1.2m a year to support those most in need. We have also allocated £200,000 of funding for smaller, community-led activities supporting the Council's Tackling Inequality Strategy.
- Providing more training opportunities and building employment skills through programmes such as our Skills and Employment Youth Hub at The Curious Lounge, run by Brighter Futures for Children, in partnership with JobCentre Plus and others as well as putting additional funding into literacy and numeracy catch up lessons in schools.
- Increasing the number of apprenticeships and work experience placements within the Council and providing a new coaching and mentoring scheme for work experience students.
- Investing in the culture and heritage offer of the town including maximising opportunities created by screen industries in Berkshire; and transforming culture and community in Minster Quarter with a new Central Library, remodelled Civic Centre, and new Studio Theatre at the Hexagon, incorporating new low carbon energy systems, thanks to Levelling Up Funding.
- Embedding and increasing social value through our purchasing power to ensure that the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of Reading benefits through our contracts over and above the goods or services being procured. An example is the installing and improvement of the digital connectivity of our community buildings, with Wi-Fi and new schemes to lend and provide use of IT equipment.
- The Council has signed the Business in the Community's Race at Work Charter, and is committed to working with others to promote social inclusion at the Council and across Reading.
- We will deliver key improvements to our libraries: by focusing on supporting our communities, especially children and young people; improving access to online services; supporting improvements in health, wellbeing and literacy; and bringing arts, culture and heritage into our libraries.





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

- Our residents tell us they are more satisfied with Reading as a place to live as well as with the services and value for money that are delivered by the Council.
- Reading's economic success is shared more equally, 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Relationships between partners in the town – businesses, local institutions, the voluntary sector and the Council – are stronger and more productive.
- Adult Social Care services support more people at an early stage to remain independent.



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