

# A Sustainable Community Strategy for Reading

## Chapter 1: Reading 2020 Vision and Partnership

### 1. Reading – *energetic, surprising, inclusive and ambitious*.

We have much to celebrate and to build on as we look to meet the challenges of the future. The *Reading 2020 Partnership* brings together key partners from all sectors – public, private, voluntary, community and faith – to develop a long term Vision and Strategy for the town.

We are now at the mid-point of our original 20 year Vision, which is an appropriate time to:

- *take stock of where we are today,*
- *refresh our Vision, to take account of the changes of the past decade and the challenges of the future, and*
- *develop a new strategy to take us forward:*

#### **Some of our key strengths:**

- A vibrant and diverse population
- A strategic location, with strong local, national and global connections.
- Academic excellence in our University and many of our schools.
- An internationally important location for business, with a highly skilled workforce.
- High quality local and regional environment.
- A top ten UK shopping destination, complemented by varied and high quality restaurants, cafes and bars
- Reading Festival, attracting tens of thousands of young people every year

#### **Some of our key challenges:**

- The persistent gap between our most affluent and most deprived neighbourhoods, which fuels a range of social issues associated with poverty.
- Issues of sustainability linked to our high carbon footprint
- The high cost of housing
- The provision of accessible high quality education for all

For more information see [www.reading2020.org.uk](http://www.reading2020.org.uk) and [www.livingreading.co.uk](http://www.livingreading.co.uk)

### 2. The changing world we live in

Much has changed over the ten years or more since we developed our original Vision for Reading, which requires us to reassess where we are heading:

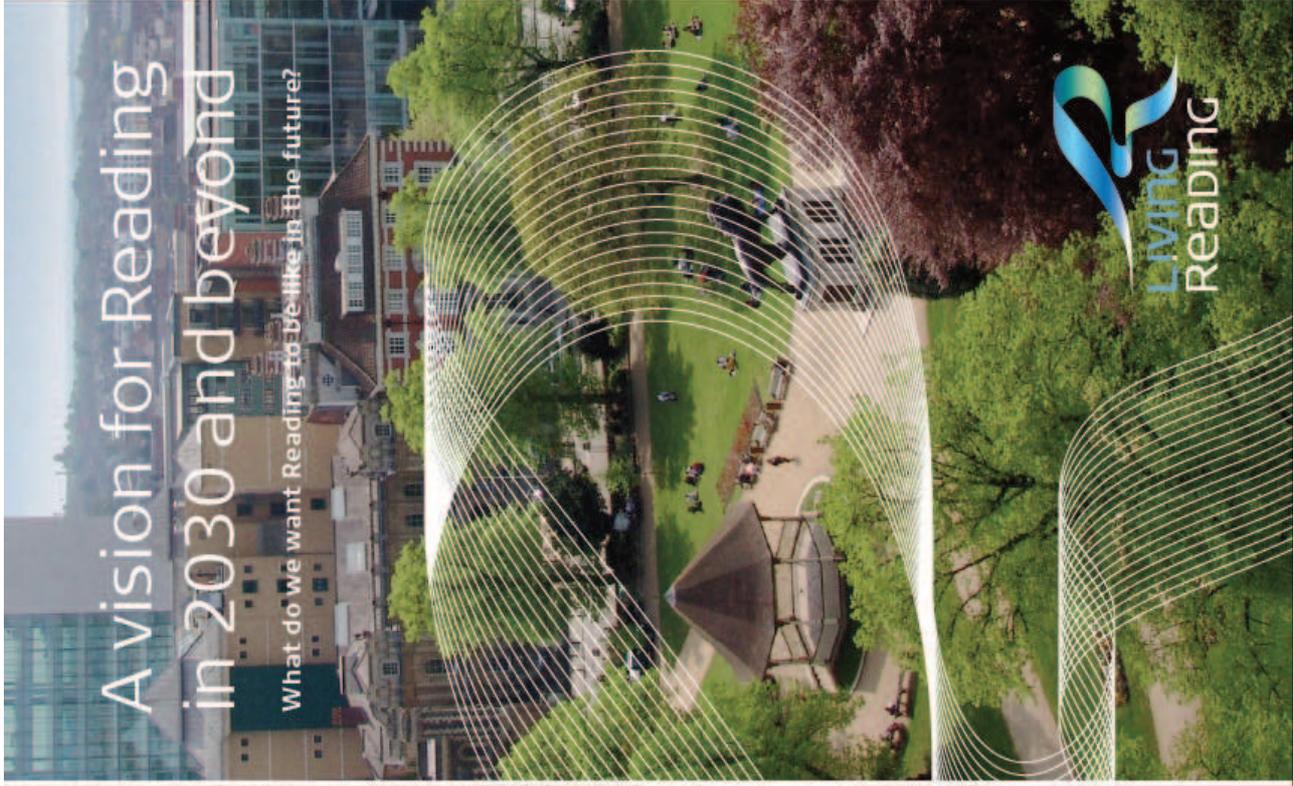
- Environmental issues, climate change and sustainability** have become the watchwords of a new era. Ten years ago there was limited awareness of these issues in the public domain; today they are pressing and urgent.
- The global financial crisis** and ensuing credit crunch, economic downturn, and escalating public sector deficits have transformed the economic outlook.
- Rapid advances in information technology and communications** provide huge opportunities with our strong links to the IT world in the Thames Valley.

### 3. Reading in 2030

Against this backdrop, we have developed a new Vision for Reading to take us forward over the next twenty years, with a strong emphasis and focus on our *People* as the primary basis for everything else that affects our *Place* and our *Prosperity*.



[reading2020.org.uk](http://reading2020.org.uk)



# A vision for Reading in 2030 and beyond

What do we want Reading to be like in the future?



# Reading in 2030: at the heart of the region

## PEOPLE

From respect to generosity  
A culturally rich family of communities  
We look after each other

## PLACE

From town to city  
Thriving, vibrant and sustainable  
We cherish our environment

## PROSPERITY

From benefiting some to benefiting all  
Driving a world-class economy  
We are ambitious

### Our place...

Reading is **attractive, thriving and culturally vibrant**, with a strong sense of **historic identity**. Reading is recognised for what it offers.

**Connections to and from Reading** with the rest of the UK and the world are **excellent**.

Getting around the town, however we choose to travel, is **easy and convenient**, with **great public transport services**.

Reading offers a **broad, diverse and inclusive cultural life**, attractive to all communities and ages by day and by night, encouraging **economic prosperity**.

The **parcs, gardens, open spaces, waterways and natural environments are highly valued and attractive**, in balance with the economic success and growth of the town.

There has been a **step-change** in the impact we have on the environment; we have led by example to achieve a **low-carbon Reading, resilient to the effects of climate change**.

### Our prosperity...

We have a **globally significant economy** that is successful and buoyant, and we are recognised as a **key business location in Europe**.

We are a **world-renowned centre of excellence for new, sustainable technologies** based on our green knowledge economy.

Businesses of every size and shape are attracted to and want to stay in Reading because of its **unrivalled location and connectivity**.

Sharing the benefits of our prosperity more widely has been achieved through **investment back into the local economy, quality schools and other education establishments**.

We have a **prosperous and thriving third sector**, which contributes increasingly to a broader sense of well-being and balance. Voluntary, community and faith groups harness the energy and skills of people in our wider economy.

### Our people...

We celebrate the **rich diversity of communities** across the town.

We feel **comfortable, safe, secure, and well-housed**.

As individuals and communities we are increasingly self-reliant, recognising our responsibilities to **care for each other and the area in which we live** as well as ourselves.

We are conscious of **minimising our impact**, at every level, **on the environment**.

We **take pride in our town**. We engage with and are involved in the decisions and activities that shape it. We value everyone for the contribution they make to the life and richness of the town.

There is **greater equality and inclusion across the town's communities**. We make **healthy life choices** to stay fit and well for longer and as we grow older.

As individuals across all generations we have every opportunity to realise our full potential: **the cycle of inter-generational poverty has been broken**.



## 4. Reading today

### People

#### ***A tale of two towns***

11 of Reading's 93 neighbourhoods are in the 20% most deprived areas in England. 9 of Reading's neighbourhoods are in the 10% least deprived. (Indices of Deprivation 2007)  
There is a 33% gap in educational attainment at GCSE level for young people from poorer backgrounds in Reading, compared with 27% in England as a whole.

[www.reading2020.org.uk/fairer-reading/](http://www.reading2020.org.uk/fairer-reading/)

#### ***Diversity in Reading***

Over 13% of Reading's residents are from outside the UK which makes Reading the second most diverse area in the South East (outside London). A rising proportion of schoolchildren in Primary Schools do not have English as their first language.

[http://oneplace.audit-](http://oneplace.audit-commission.gov.uk/infobyarea/region/area/areaassessment/pages/default.aspx?region=57&area=394)

[commission.gov.uk/infobyarea/region/area/areaassessment/pages/default.aspx?region=57&area=394](http://oneplace.audit-commission.gov.uk/infobyarea/region/area/areaassessment/pages/default.aspx?region=57&area=394)

#### ***Respecting each other***

82% of Reading's residents feel that people from differing backgrounds are getting on well and there is an improved perception of respect and consideration within our communities.

<http://www.reading2020.org.uk/fairer-reading/>

#### ***Living longer?***

Life expectancy for men in the most deprived areas is 7 years lower than in the least deprived areas; the gap is 6 years for women.

Over the last 10 years, the death rate from all causes and the rate of early death from cancer have fallen and are similar to the average for England.

<http://www.reading2020.org.uk/library/public/file47/>

### Place

#### ***Vibrant***

Alongside its thriving business sector, Reading also has a varied and colourful music scene including the Reading Festival, attracting over 80,000 people every year. The loss of the WOMAD festival after 2006 has left a gap that Reading is still trying to fill.

<http://www.reading2020.org.uk/culture-leisure-sport/>

#### ***Going Greener***

35% of Reading's household waste is recycled each year and, as this increases, the work of the Re3 waste partnership is gaining national recognition; the Smallmead Waste Park won the letsrecycle.com award for Civic Amenity Site of the Year in 2009.

[http://oneplace.audit-](http://oneplace.audit-commission.gov.uk/infobyarea/region/area/areaassessment/pages/default.aspx?region=57&area=394)

[commission.gov.uk/infobyarea/region/area/areaassessment/pages/default.aspx?region=57&area=394](http://oneplace.audit-commission.gov.uk/infobyarea/region/area/areaassessment/pages/default.aspx?region=57&area=394)

#### ***A good place to live***

Overall satisfaction with Reading as a place to live was over 75%. (2009 Place Survey)

<http://www.reading2020.org.uk/fairer-reading/>

#### ***Well-connected***

Reading has one of the UK's busiest rail stations and currently caters for around 18 million passengers every year.

The implementation of a high quality bus network has seen significant passenger increases over the last five years, some services recording 30% increases.

<http://www.reading2020.org.uk/transport/>

# Prosperity

## *Prosperous..*

Reading was again cited for its economic potency, achieving the ‘best micro-city in Europe for infrastructure’ in the Financial Times’ Foreign Direct Investment Awards.

<http://www.reading2020.org.uk/thriving-economy/>

## *... but not for all*

Reading’s level of unemployment has risen significantly in the recent recession, with particular impact on prospects for Reading’s 16-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training. Only 29% of young people from low income families go to university.

<http://www.reading2020.org.uk/fairer-reading/>

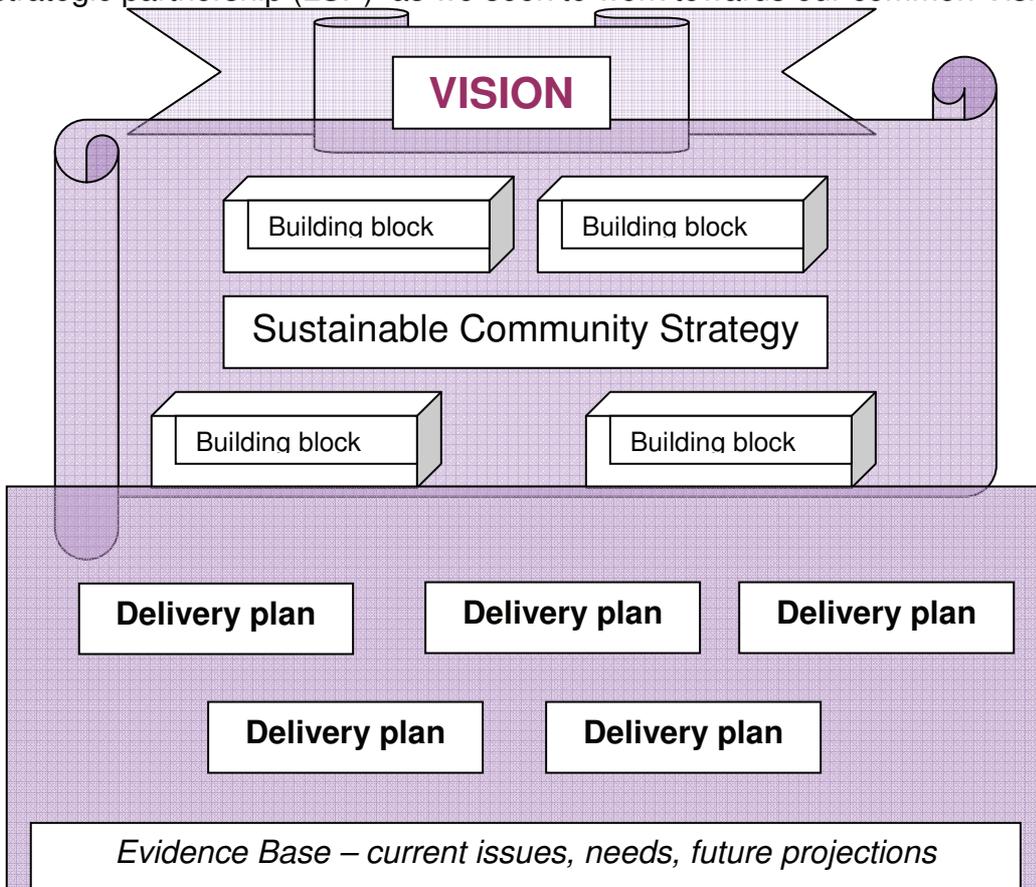
## *Thriving community life*

Reading has a thriving voluntary, community and faith sector, with almost 500 groups registered on the Reading Voluntary Action database and many more besides contributing to the wider prosperity of the town.

<http://www.rvadirectory.org.uk/home>

## 5 . Key features for Reading’s new SCS

The Sustainable Community Strategy links the Reading of today with our Vision for Reading in the future. It is not a detailed delivery plan; rather it provides a context for all of the plans to be developed by groups, organisations and businesses within the local strategic partnership (LSP)\* as we seek to work towards our common Vision.



\* Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are non-statutory, multi-agency partnerships, which match local authority boundaries. They bring together at a local level the different parts of the public, private, community and voluntary sectors with the aim of allowing different initiatives and services to support one another so that they can work together more effectively for the benefit of local people. The Reading 2020 Partnership is Reading’s LSP.

The next 3 Chapters outline some of the key strands of activity to help us work towards achieving the Vision, by addressing challenges and opportunities that relate to our People, Place and Prosperity.

***For each of these 3 Chapters a common format has been adopted:***

### ***Timescales***

We have set out the strategic areas to be addressed over 3 broad timescales:

- short term (up to 5 years),
- medium term (from 3 - 5 years plus) and
- longer term (from 7 -10 years plus).

The *short term* strategic areas have some common themes to do with:

- transforming engagement,
- re-prioritising based on local input and
- developing supporting structures to enable new ways of working

These elements are essential, given the scale of challenge and change we face. The current review of public expenditure emphasises the need to develop new models of service provision and forge new partnerships - more of the same simply will not work.

### ***Levels of impact***

The SCS must take account of 3 levels of impact if it is to be effective in bringing about the changes implied; these levels are:

- Individuals
- Families/neighbourhoods
- Reading, or wider geographical area beyond existing boundaries

### ***Cross-cutting themes***

The nature of the People, Place and Prosperity headings mean that some strands of activity will fit more naturally into them than others; for example, new buildings and physical infrastructure relate strongly to Place, whereas health, education and dealing with Climate Change cut across all 3 headings.

To avoid repeating information in each chapter therefore, we have, for the purposes of the new SCS, chosen one of the three chapters to be the main one for each of these cross-cutting themes. There is inevitably some cross-referral however.

## Chapter 2 PEOPLE

### 1. Introduction

Reading is at the heart of a successful sub-region with real potential to be an economic, environmental and cultural leader, driving innovation and change. It has a renowned and ambitious university, a highly skilled population, a diverse but cohesive society and on a national stage offers unparalleled opportunities for success and a high quality of life for its residents.

However, these opportunities need to be accessible to all the people of Reading in all spheres of life and across all generations. These aspirations are not only about material well-being but also about wellbeing (happiness), mutuality, having and achieving ambitions at a personal and societal level; owning our own destinies and supporting those around us to achieve to the best of their abilities and in their own terms. We must acknowledge and nurture the potential we all have within us and harness this to create the Reading of tomorrow we want to see.

In order to realise our vision of Reading in 2030 we will need to:

- **Reduce inequality;**
- **Create more capable communities; and**
- **Positively embrace diversity.**

### 2. Current challenges

#### a. Reducing Inequality

Reading is characterised by extremes of wealth and poverty in a small geographic area and widely varying outcomes in terms of educational achievement, income, life expectancy, health and well-being and exposure to criminal activity.

In many cases these impacts are inter-generational resulting in a persistent and pernicious cycle of deprivation passing from parents to children. Poverty is a key driver of these cycles and high levels of child poverty a key consequence. Lack of money is also correlated to poorer health and a propensity to be either or both a perpetrator and victim of crime.

Patterns of inequality are complex with consistently poor outcomes for: communities in some of our most deprived neighbourhoods; vulnerable groups such as ex-offenders or care leavers; and some of our ethnic minorities. (e.g. 35% of JSA claimants in Nov 09 were BME; the gap in attainment for BME young people in the key GCSE qualification is higher than in similar authorities)

Critically, and despite improving outcomes in most areas for the population as a whole, we are failing to close the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

#### **Key Challenges:**

- Almost 1 in 4 of Reading's children is being brought up in poverty.
- Outcomes for vulnerable groups are not improving quickly enough.
- Generating the capacity to invest in preventative services to improve life-chances, improve outcomes and over time reduce long-term costs.

## **b. Capable Communities**

On current evidence our existing model of service provision is not meeting the needs of the most vulnerable in society particularly well. As the number of people living in Reading increases and as resources tighten simply doing less of the same has potentially dire consequences for many, lessening our capacity to invest in tackling causes rather than symptoms and further widening inequality. The economic benefit of e.g. taking action on healthy lifestyles will be considerable.

We know that social support, within and between communities, is critical to physical and emotional well-being. The greatest resource base we have to develop this is the individual and collective abilities, capacity and skills within our communities. We need a new way of working across agencies and sectors and with the people and communities we are here to serve.

Everyone needs to support the development of communities across Reading, enabling people to take control of their own lives, collaborate with one another to share problems, to act individually and collectively to improve quality of life. From improving the environment to supporting our younger and older generations we all have something to contribute.

### **Key Challenges:**

- Resources for the public sector, and probably in other sectors too, will be highly constrained for the foreseeable future. We need to find ways of improving outcomes, especially for those with greatest needs, whilst spending less.
- As the role of the state reduces how can individuals, families and communities be encouraged or empowered to take greater responsibility for themselves, others and the environment they live in?

## **c. Embracing Diversity**

Reading has a global population, a vibrant mix of cultures, heritage and language that makes it the 2<sup>nd</sup> most diverse Borough in the whole of the South East (outside London). It also has both an ageing population as people live longer and a much higher proportion of young people than the national average.

This diversity is likely to grow with a far higher proportion of our young people from non-white British backgrounds than the population as a whole. Reading has a history of good community relations and has been able and willing to reach out to and embrace new communities. All our residents' surveys tell us that the vast majority of people think it is a place where people get on well together. A range of festivals and cultural events help us to celebrate the multi-cultural character of the town.

As diversity across age-groups, cultures and ethnicity increases into the future we need to ensure that services continue to meet the needs of a changing population. We need people to be not only comfortable with a changing population but to positively value and celebrate it; helping people to integrate as new members of communities and engendering empathy between all people regardless of age or background.

### **Key Challenges**

- Changing demographics with more young and old people as well as a more ethnically diverse population.
- Ensuring services are responsive to the needs of this changing population.

- Supporting a cohesive society through improving outcomes for disadvantaged groups with poorer outcomes across all cultures and age-groups.
- Proportional engagement from BME backgrounds into community roles (e.g. school governors.)
- Encouraging and enabling wider cross-culture and community contact. (e.g. through work and leisure and access.)

### **3. Addressing current challenges**

Creating the Reading of tomorrow we want to see will be neither straightforward nor quick to achieve. But, by being clear about where we want to get to, we can set-out a route map of short, medium and long-term actions or programmes that are mutually supportive and help us get there (these are set-out in the schematic on the following page).

#### **a. Reducing Inequality**

- Further development and delivery of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Programme to improve outcomes in our poorest neighbourhoods and reduce the inequality gap.
- Development and delivery of an anti-poverty strategy to focus on significantly reducing child poverty. A concerted and co-ordinated effort by all sectors and agencies to address the consequences and causes of poverty. Ultimately breaking the cycle of deprivation.
- Re-focus resources on preventative and early interventions that improve outcomes and reduce downstream costs, e.g. through tackling unhealthy lifestyles. Using evidence of risk factors to identify those at risk and intervening earlier to prevent more crisis interventions, be this in relation to educational outcomes for young people, preventing re-offending, reducing hospital admissions for the elderly, improving mental health.
- Recognise and value the importance of work for people with fewer skills so that they feel an equal part of society.

#### **b. Capable Communities**

- Increasing personalisation of services so that service users have greater choice and control over the services they receive and greater influence over what and how they are provided.
- Development and delivery of more holistic family support services designed around the needs of whole families irrespective of agency or provider.
- Further developing models of co-production where individuals, families and communities as a whole have greater and more direct influence and control over services that are provided.
- Developing the capacity for individuals, families and communities to take greater responsibility for their own lives and for others. Professionals as facilitators to encourage self-reliance, volunteering, peer support networks and mutual support.

#### **c. Embracing Diversity**

- Improving shared understanding of the changing nature of the population and developing appropriately responsive services that address age- specific, cultural or ethnic barriers.
- Continue to invest in and develop cultural activities that embrace and celebrate Reading's diversity whilst challenging all forms of discrimination.
- Celebrate and build on the contribution to society that all young people bring to Reading. The most diverse section of the population is our future generation that can embed tolerance, integration and cohesion.

Renewed focus on deprived neighbourhoods, anti-poverty work and vulnerable groups to widen employment opportunities  
WIDENING INEQUALITY HALTED



TACKLING INEQUALITY: CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN THE HAVES AND THE HAVE-NOTS

Increasing focus on early intervention and preventative services. All 0-3 year olds get best start in life  
INEQUALITY GAP NARROWED



INEQUALITY GAP MINIMISED



Service users increasingly exercise choice and control over the services they receive  
PERSONALISATION



CAPABLE COMMUNITIES: SHIFTING INFLUENCE AND CONTROL, ENCOURAGING COLLABORATION

Individuals, families and communities receive more holistic services and are more involved in determining and meeting their own needs  
CO-PRODUCTION



CAPABLE COMMUNITIES



Greater awareness of the changing population and development of responsive services that better meet evolving needs  
SHARED UNDERSTANDING

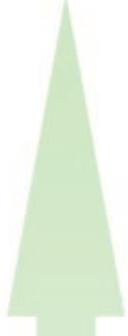


EMBRACING DIVERSITY: RECOGNISING AND MEETING THE NEEDS OF CHANGING POPULATION

Contribution of all young people is valued; the next generation increasingly embraces diversity  
EMBED RESPECT AND INTEGRATION



VIBRANT COHESIVE SOCIETY



NOW

5 YEARS

10 YEARS +

## Chapter 3 PLACE

### 1. Introduction & current challenges

Reading is the largest urban area within Berkshire, with a population of 146,000, and over 230,000 in the wider area. There has been significant expansion over the last 20 years, changing Reading from a market town to a vibrant city in the making.

Reading's character, with the Thames at its heart, is marked by its rivers. An historic place with a great heritage of buildings, the town has undergone a transformation in recent times with the arrival of the Oracle Shopping Centre, and 'the Blade'.

The home of many international IT companies, a transport hub and a leading UK retail centre Reading is a busy commercial town with excellent transport links and approval for the largest station re-development outside of a major city.

Despite its prosperity, however, Reading contains some of the most deprived wards in the country, There is a strong relationship between poverty, deprivation and poor health and education outcomes which can reduce opportunities for the local population.

The rapid development and high urban density of Reading gives it the highest **ecological footprint** (use of the planet's resources) in the South East.

Despite significant housing provision over the last three years, it remains a challenge to provide both affordable and larger family housing. There are many people on housing waiting lists and **the cost of housing** is a barrier to economic growth (see Local Economic Assessment <http://www.livingreading.co.uk/local-economic-assessment.html> ). Inequality results when house prices mean only some can afford to buy their own home.

**Housing condition** was highlighted as a problem in the 2010 review of the private rented sector. The health impacts of non decent housing include excess winter deaths, respiratory disease and heart disease.

Inward investment in Reading depends on reducing **congestion** to improve travel time for businesses and air quality and quality of life benefits for residents.

The guiding principles for development in Reading's Core Strategy are as follows:

*Reading's communities will be sustainable and have good access to a range of local facilities, services (including healthcare and education), housing and employment. The quality of the environment will continue to improve, and Reading will become a clean, safe and desirable place in which to live, work, study and visit.*

<http://www.reading.gov.uk/environmentandplanning/planning/localplanningpolicy/localdevelopmentframework/General.asp?id= SX9452-A7815E38>

## **2. Addressing current challenges**

### **a. ACTIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS**

#### ***PULLING TOGETHER***

*Everyone has a part to play in shaping the future of their local neighbourhood. Communities will take responsibility for their local Neighbourhoods, assisted by local public organisations.*

***‘The parks, gardens, open spaces, waterways and natural environments are highly valued and attractive’.***

Good quality neighbourhoods can make a significant difference to quality of life and health. Cleanliness is important for neighbourhoods and affects quality of life. Litter, fly-tipping, graffiti and fly-posting can be seen in many areas in Reading. Neighbourhoods, public services and businesses are coming together to improve areas. Examples of this are the long running environmental clean-up event, RESCUE and the work of Neighbourhood Action Groups. Further build on these approaches.

***‘A Low Carbon Reading that is resilient to the effects of climate change’***

Our Neighbourhoods are places where people can be proud to have a green lifestyle. They are supported to work together to offer stewardship of the local environment and help to tackle the urgent global challenge of climate change.

They are places where people re-use and recycle their waste, travel, locally, on foot, bicycle or public transport. Water and energy are conserved and householders and communities generate their own renewable energy and grow their own food. Local communities are improving their own health and building resilience to climatic events such as flooding and increased heat, which can have significant health impacts.

***‘Working together to reduce crime’***

Safer Neighbourhoods work together to prevent crime. Reading’s Community Safety Partnership and Neighbourhood Action Groups work to identify local priorities and monitor and tackle crime. Much good work has already been done in this area and Reading already has a strong tradition of good community relations with most people thinking that it is a place where people get on well together. To enhance our efforts, the partnership has identified the ongoing challenges as; alcohol and drug use, domestic violence, diversion and dealing effectively with young offenders, improving home security, to work effectively with challenging families and to continue to accept, respect and embrace our diversity. In response to these challenges the development of cross-service provision in working with individuals, families and communities will ensure a wider response to issues of safety in the community.

#### ***PLANNING TOGETHER***

Local communities will take responsibility for designing and improving their neighbourhoods, striving to provide inclusive, safe, accessible, healthy, sustainable communities. Working with their local authority, communities will determine priorities for their areas and be instrumental in determining how developers will be permitted to develop in their areas, ensuring benefits to local communities and the environment.

Neighbourhoods will come together to plan for the future of the area, ensuring an appropriate housing supply including the provision of sufficient affordable housing. Such plans will address the challenges of urban renewal and poor housing condition in parts of the Borough. They will seek to continue to promote and plan for the development of the Central Area of Reading. They will seek to strengthen district and local centres as attractive, amenable and accessible centres providing a range of services to serve their local population. Such plans will seek to provide more trees, protect wildlife, enhance the built environment and open space and waterways, provide renewable energy, and improve transport and other infrastructure.

### ***LIVING TOGETHER***

Reading's neighbourhoods of the future will have balanced the challenges of equality, environmental impact and prosperity. They will be inclusive neighbourhoods who pull together and work together to provide a high quality of life for all. Supporting the town through participation, stewardship and joint learning, Reading will be known for its strong neighbourhoods.

### **b. CULTURAL PARTNERSHIP**

***Creation and development of the biggest and most successful Cultural Partnership Reading has ever seen. Owned by the community - our priorities and future aspirations, will lead the future social change programme.***

Medium-term: Cultural values: recognising and rewarding the contributions individuals, groups and organisations make to improve Reading's Cultural life.

The Cultural Partnership is based on the concept that the values and identity of a place is inseparable from the behaviour of its citizens providing a number of incentives and rewards for individuals, groups, organisations and the private sector to positively engage to create the biggest community movement Reading has ever seen.

Long-term: Cultural Identity: where our Cultural life becomes a driving force behind the reasons why people stay, live, work, study and visit Reading from UK and Europe

Creating a Cultural Life in Reading that is inclusive, open to all and celebrates the diversity of our community;

- Where children and young people are entitled to enjoy positive self-esteem and good health and a cultural environment that encourages them to achieve their full potential
- Where cultural life in Reading provides protection and enhancement for the environment
- Where Reading people are entitled to a high-quality cultural experience that maximises opportunities through both local and national initiatives and encourages active participation
- Where cultural engagement in Reading should encourage participation and health benefits for all
- Where Reading's identity will provide place-shaping through diversity, cohesion and sense of place
- Where the cultural sector in Reading contributes to the economic and educational vitality of the town

### **c. SMART INFRASTRUCTURE**

#### ***A low carbon Reading resilient to the impacts of climate change with excellent connections and great public transport.***

Smart infrastructure will enable everyone in Reading to live comfortably, with access to resources, be able to make healthy travel choices, to their intended destination and have access to knowledge, culture, leisure and public services. They should be able to enjoy their local natural habitats and waterways and have access to clean energy, water and air.

#### ***Energy***

Power and heat for homes and businesses will be provided from local renewable sources and buildings will have smart energy monitoring incorporated to ensure that costs and energy use can be minimised, reducing carbon emissions and playing our part in reducing the impact on global climate change. The public sector will provide value for money services by improving its energy use and carbon emissions. Those least able to afford to heat their homes will have support in installing insulation and renewable technologies. *A low carbon Reading, resilient to the impacts of climate change.*

#### ***Transport***

Transport networks will serve local communities, supporting local journeys and minimising isolation. 'Smart' can be simple and cost effective, such as promoting active travel and supporting the needs of the pedestrian and the cyclist. Technology will be used to provide environmentally friendly, rapid, punctual public transport and improve the road network. *Smart transport networks that serve local people and business needs.*

#### ***Wildlife Corridors***

*Planned natural infrastructure*, such as rivers and woodland areas will be protected and enhanced to enable connected habitats for our wildlife. Tree canopy decline will be reversed and an increase of 10% from the current base of 18% achieved in line with the adopted Tree Strategy for Reading.

#### ***Information Highway***

Despite the wealth of knowledge intensive businesses innovation in Reading, improving access to digital technology for all is vital in order to modernise public services and enable the skills necessary to participate in our knowledge-rich economy. Broadband capacity remains a concern despite relatively dense networks of high-speed cable.

Wireless and mobile platforms can provide enhanced access to information and support community engagement - *a digital democracy to highlight local concerns and priorities.*

Public sector organisations and businesses will work together to ensure that Reading remains at the cutting edge of technological developments by installing ultra high speed fibre optic networks across the central and suburban hubs. This system will be combined with world-class hosting facilities and networks, which will be efficient and powered by renewable energy



**10 YEARS +**

**5 YEARS**

**NOW**

## CHAPTER 4. PROSPERITY

### 1. Introduction

The Chancellor's recently announced spending review in October 2010 undoubtedly impacts on our ability to deliver some of our short to mid term ambitions – however the opportunity arises to explore and develop new and innovative solutions that address our local challenges – including the emerging development of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Economic growth is needed to tackle debt, but at the same time embedding long term sustainable economic growth solutions is paramount.

Reading's ecological footprint is large with high consumption of resources by individuals and companies. If everyone on earth lived and worked as Reading does we would need more than three planets. Climate change is a global threat which Reading will focus on tackling. Many policies that would help mitigate climate change would also contribute to improved health, e.g. cycling, walking and green spaces)

The economic themes of this chapter will be developed from the Local Economic Assessment (LEA) of the Reading Diamond, completed by the University of Reading in September 2010 - <http://www.livingreading.co.uk/invest.html>. This will ensure that planned interventions are based on the needs of Reading's functional economic area – the 'Diamond' – rather than the artificial, administrative boundary of the borough. We now have confirmation that the proposal for a *Thames Valley Berkshire* Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) can be taken forward.

From this a detailed economic development strategy, informed by the LEA, can be developed, which dovetails with that of the LEP, thus ensuring a cohesive approach to the needs of the sub-region whilst recognising the specific needs of Reading and indeed its immediate neighbours, who, in economic terms, form one single area. However the Local Economic Assessment highlighted the key challenges facing our continued economic prosperity as skills, transport, congestion and affordable housing.

### 2. Current challenges and opportunities

Mindful of the above we have listed below our four **current key challenges** that we aim to address in the short term that will be key building blocks in the delivery of our vision.

#### **a) Redefining Prosperity**

We propose a new broad-based definition of prosperity - **where financial and social dimensions are sustainable - economically, socially and environmentally.**

Prosperity is not just about personal wealth and rising incomes. Whilst it has these undeniable material and financial dimensions it also has crucial health, social and psychological components, linked to health and wellbeing, enjoying self respect, the respect of peers, being able to contribute, either through work or volunteering and having a sense of belonging to and trust in our communities. In short it's about a sense of 'place' where things are going well for us, in line with our hopes, expectations and ambitions for the future.

#### **b) Improved quality of life**

An improving quality of life is an important aspect of prosperity. It is about Reading becoming a place that inspires and supports, with a vibrant culture that offers something for everyone. It defines those reasons why people will choose to live and work in

Reading in the future based on the meeting the needs of individuals, families and communities. It encompasses efficient utilisation of our resources to benefit us all and future generations.

Reading is a multi-cultural town made up of widely diverse communities and is the second most ethnically diverse town in the South East - one of our greatest strengths. We have the opportunity to become a cultural hub, attracting new talent, creating ideas where knowledge, creativity, enterprise, connectivity and the quality of life combine to create a dynamic knowledge economy, where people choose healthy, low carbon lifestyles that promote health and reduce inequalities and recognise the health benefits derived from employment and training.

As a community we need to build capacity and encourage greater engagement in shaping Reading's future. We want Reading to be a place where everyone has a role to play in shaping our future based on the concept that the values and identity of a place are inseparable from the behaviour of its citizens.

### ***c) Improve employment & skills outcomes***

The past two decades has seen Reading emerge as one of the UK's economic successes. Recent independent research, including by Centre for Cities rates Reading very well – with high employment rates, above average weekly earnings, and high levels of knowledge intensive businesses. However many in our community are unable to share in our prosperity due to various factors, including inter-generational low aspiration, low ambition, benefit dependency and low skills. Unemployment contributes to poor health. We still have one of the highest levels of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in the South East.

### ***d) Working beyond boundaries***

Detailed analysis and assessment of the characteristics of movements using the Reading Transport Model (which is multi-modal) shows that Reading attracts a large number of trips from communities in Greater London, Bracknell, Maidenhead, Wokingham, Slough, and Basingstoke with the town serving a catchment extending far beyond its administrative boundaries. In the morning peak period, 30,000 people arrive and 24,000 people leave the Reading area.

It is important that interventions are implemented at an appropriate scale (from household through streets and neighbourhoods up to our wider functional economic area) irrespective of administrative boundaries. This will require long term commitment from our neighbouring authorities and businesses partners to be effective.

## **3. Addressing current challenges**

### ***a) PROMOTING A DISTINCT SENSE OF PLACE***

Our aim is to encourage a renewed pride in Reading - a sense of place with a distinct identity: healthy, creative, self-reliant, ingenious and vibrant. A better connected, inclusive place where our people respect our environment, themselves and their neighbours, are ambitious and can access a range of employment options. Improving quality of life will support a wider sense of health and well-being and confidence across the community.

***Harness our community strengths*** in the short term:

- Focus on what really matters most to our communities, alongside creating rewards and incentives to communities wanting to make a difference

- Sharing resources, maximising the usage of our assets, devolving real responsibility, leadership and authority to individuals, groups and organisations with deliver shared ownership and responsibility. Encouraging self-organisation rather than direction from above will create ownership in solving the challenges
- Providing individuals groups and organisations with the skills, knowledge, expertise and tools to make a difference in their community

In the medium term we will **invest in collaboration** - Improve quality of life by investing in our people and communities and encouraging them to take responsibility for themselves and each other. We will;

- Collaborate on service delivery to provide life-long learning opportunities for all
- Engage communities in cultural activities to inspire future talent and social enterprise
- Place real power in the hands of every person in Reading through shared vision and values generated from active citizenship e.g. participation in volunteering, cultural and leisure or other local engagements.

**Shared prosperity** – in the longer-term physical and social development will build a sense of belonging for everyone. Knowing and socialising with the people around you, sharing experiences and swapping favours is all part of our strong and prosperous communities.

Bringing people together and active engagement with a role to play for everyone, will provide a sense of community, build good health, reduce inequalities and prevent social isolation. Reading will be the place with a distinctive character and identity where people want to live, work, visit, play and study. It will have a reputation at a local, regional, national and international level for cultural engagement and civic ingenuity.

#### **b) WORKING BEYOND BOUNDARIES**

We will support the development of the Local Economic Partnership serving Reading's wider functional economic area

**Extend transport links** - Transport is a key concern for local people and businesses – being both a reason for locating here and also a potential problem as congestion increases. In the short term the emphasis must be on delivering 'quick win' improvements to strategic and local transport connections focussing on:

- enhancing accessibility to employment opportunities and other facilities
- limiting the impact of congestion and extreme weather conditions to our transport networks
- embedding the use of reduced carbon travel options for individuals such as public transport, walking and cycling and extending the use of electric vehicles, and making it easier for goods are to be transported by low carbon means

**Invest in success** - Maintain inward investment by global businesses built around a high quality business, educational and cultural offer. In the medium term we must ensure that our existing business can thrive and that further inward investment in complementary industries is encouraged, with more opportunities for local people find suitable employment. We will;

- Promote Reading as a leading European business location with a world class 'offer'

- Develop a globally renowned Green Knowledge Economy cluster of low carbon businesses that attract people with relevant skills and expertise, creating a collaborative environment where innovation thrives
- Invest in young people to ensure they have the skills required to succeed in the global economy

**Sustainable growth** - in the longer term, Reading will be at the heart of a successful economy, attracting people, goods and investment due to its excellent connectivity, high quality education, cultural identity, globally recognised economy and welcoming community. Technology, innovation and infrastructure investment will ensure that a high quality transport system will continue to offer travel choice that is reliable, efficient and resilient in the face of the future challenges of climate change and energy resource shortages. A growing focus on digital and social innovation and on emerging green technologies with global importance will support a range of entrepreneurial local businesses, presenting employment opportunities across a broad skill base.

### **c) DIVERSIFICATION OF OUR ECONOMY**

We will support the diversification of our economy whilst encouraging a shared responsibility for the social and economic well-being of our communities.

**Balance aspiration and local opportunities** in the short term. Despite our economic success over the past decade we need to ensure that more local people are able to access jobs and employment, and that those in work have the skills required to prosper. Therefore we will focus our activities on;

- the development of skills for business to improve competitiveness
- creating the environment for business growth and job creation
- ensuring development offers opportunity for local people e.g. increase the number of apprenticeships offered by local employers.

**Invest in local business** - Support innovative, local, small business start ups in green technologies and knowledge economy. We will utilise the levers and influencers at our disposal in the medium term to 'rebalance' our local economy, especially in green and low carbon technologies. We will;

- Maximise public procurement to create local supply chains and opportunities and support incubation, R&D, product development and innovation.
- Work with our major corporates to ensure their continued presence thus creating local jobs and supply chains whilst embedding them in our communities
- Support innovative, entrepreneurial start-ups in practical, green technologies and the wider knowledge economy

**Reduced ecological footprint** –in the longer term, we will continue to develop the local economy to benefit all in our community: local jobs and global successes reinforcing Reading's identity as the hub of the UK's green knowledge economy, with a pioneering energy infrastructure, more awareness of high carbon and high consuming activities and more understanding of global impacts. Reading will benefit from the opportunities which arise from a new greener, sustainable way of life.

We will be a town renowned for decarbonised energy, with our businesses at the forefront of innovation. We will have reduced significantly our consumption of natural resources and will have developed a culture of environmental, self and mutual respect



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