

Labour's Green Record in Reading

Reading Labour Party fought the 2008 Council elections promising to work for a Greener Reading, and after those elections committed Reading Council to leading the fight against climate change. This report spells out what has been achieved since then.

Protecting our open spaces

- Despite the pressures of development, Labour in Reading has continued to add to public open space across the town, and in the last 20 years has increased it by over 30 acres
- The string of Thames Parks gives public rights of way along the southern bank on the Thames towpath from Kennetmouth to the Borough boundary at the Roebuck and on the north bank from Mill Lane to Caversham Bridge, making Reading almost unique among Thameside towns.
- For over 25 years Labour has been campaigning against gravel extraction and house-building on Kennet Meadows, the land between Reading and Calcot and the M4. Developers PRUPIM and their partners have now abandoned their plans to build 7500 houses there, and we are pressing for the area to become a trust to safeguard it from development in the long term.
- For 20 years Labour has been fighting off Conservative plans for a Cross Town Route which would devastate Kennetmouth, an area very precious to people in Newtown and across East Reading
- And for 14 years Labour campaigned against over-development on the Bath Road reservoir site in Reading. Last year Labour Councillors persuaded the Planning Committee to throw out plans for housing there.
- A new planning document put through the Council earlier this year includes commitments to protect the Bath Road reservoir site, Tilehurst Allotments, the playing fields at Crescent Road, and many other sites across the Borough.
- A Labour campaign persuaded West Berkshire Council not to consider the planning application for Pincents Hill until after they had agreed their Local Development Framework, which then provided a strong reason for rejection of the scheme.

This flows from Reading's Community Strategy which includes a vision that everyone in Reading will be able to enjoy high quality public open spaces that are clean, safe and well-maintained.

Recycling:

- Recycling rates are at an historic high in Reading - heading towards an initial target of 40%, twice the rate before alternate weekly collections were introduced
- The amount of waste being sent to landfill is down by a third and falling - saving the council - and Council Taxpayers - millions of pounds into the future
- The new Household Waste Recycling Centre at Smallmead has won a national award for excellence and offers an increasing range of options for residents to recycle - most recently household oil
- A co-ordinated and growing network of neighbourhood bottle banks has been put in place all over Reading
- Residents across the borough benefit from a dedicated green waste collection service (which would be under threat by a Tory controlled council obsessed by 0% council tax)
- A new doorstep collection service enables residents to recycle most old electrical goods free of charge
- Specialist recycling bins are being rolled out at neighbourhood shopping areas all over Reading
- Thousands of residents have been able to take advantage of subsidised Green Cones for their food waste
- Enforcement action is being stepped up against rogue landlords and residents who contaminate the recycling stream

Much of this is possible because the Labour-controlled council had the foresight nearly 10 years ago to enter into the RE3 partnership with Wokingham and Bracknell Councils and has struck a long-term deal with a private contractor WRG to deliver high-quality services at Smallmead now and in the future.

This will mean the amount we send to landfill will continue to fall, with thousands of tons per year (set to be 30,000 from 20,000 soon) being diverted to a waste to energy plant near Heathrow.

It will mean that as new technologies add up to good value for council tax payers, more and more will be recycled and re-used with food waste one of our priorities.

Promoting Public Transport, Cycling and Walking

- The Labour-controlled Council still owns Reading Buses, one of the few Councils still to own a bus company. That gives the Council significant influence over the company's strategy and services.
- The Council has made major investment in measures such as bus lanes intended to make bus travel quicker and more reliable
- A new contract for bus shelters has been signed, and real-time information about bus schedules is provided at many bus stops
- The Council has lobbied and obtained Government support for a £884 million upgrade of Reading Station, which will bring more and longer platforms, greater reliability of services, and greater passenger capacity
- The Council has worked with the Prudential to agree plans and obtain funding for a new station at Green Park
- A new network of premier cycle routes is being developed across the town
- A network of quality pedestrian routes is being developed in the town centre in particular, including one through Forbury Gardens and another through the planned Station Hill development
- The Council is expecting major Government funding through an Urban Challenge Fund (formerly Transport Innovation Fund) bid which will allow further investment in bus priority measures, lower bus fares (including fares for young people) and improved facilities for cyclists and pedestrians (including a new bridge across the Thames)
- These measures reduce congestion, reduce pollution and improve everybody's quality of life.

Climate Change

Labour is committed to Reading being a low-carbon city of the future and has led the way with a series of bold initiatives which have not been matched by neighbouring Tory-controlled councils.

- The Labour-led council signed up to the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change in 2006.
- Naz Sarkar and Anneliese Dodds, Labour's Parliamentary candidates for Reading, signed up to the 10:10 campaign, promising to reduce their carbon emissions by 10% in 2010, on the day the campaign was launched, the first parliamentary level politicians locally to do so
- The Labour-led council was also one of the first Councils to officially support the 10:10 campaign
- Labour has set up the local Climate Change Partnership to bring together the public, private and voluntary sectors together to meet ambitious targets for carbon reduction.
- Every household in Reading is being surveyed under the 'Heatseekers' scheme with those most in need receiving specialist and grants to cut energy bills through better insulation in their homes.
- As part of the TIF Bid, Reading is planning to introduce a "low emissions zone" in the borough, the first outside London.
- Reading council has adopted new planning policies which mean new homes have to meet rigorous standards on sustainability and energy efficiency.
- Labour's Anneliese Dodds was the first parliamentary politician to call for the Reading University wind farm at Rushy Mead to be endorsed by Wokingham Councils, but the record of Tory Councils on agreeing plans for wind turbines is actually appalling.

In government, Labour was the first country to appoint a minister to its cabinet specifically to tackle climate change and Ed Miliband led efforts to gain a legally-binding agreement internationally at Copenhagen. In Reading too, Labour has appointed a Cabinet member with responsibility for Environment and Sustainability. And under Labour Britain led the world in setting legally binding targets on reducing carbon emissions. Fuller information on the Labour Government's record is available at

www.labour.org.uk/energy-and-climate-change

Community Engagement:

Labour in Reading genuinely engages with the public on environmental issues:

- On the week-end of 13/14 March, we celebrated the 21st anniversary of RESCUE, an annual environmental clean-up event in which hundreds of local volunteers take part.
- The council also promotes a series of high-profile environmental themed events such as Forbury Fever, Home Energy Week and In Town Without My Car Week.
- The council hosts a quarterly Green City Forum which gives residents the chance to air their views and hear the latest on environmental projects.
- The Planning Committee and the Traffic Management Advisory Panel both provide for Councillors to be addressed by members of the public, and local Councillors, before any decision is taken.

In conclusion

Labour in Reading and nationally is pledged to deliver a new Green Deal for residents which will increase prosperity, meet our commitments to the battle against climate change and the environment, and protect the planet for future generations.