



# change that works for Reading

Reading Liberal Democrats' Manifesto for Reading Borough Council Elections  
May 6<sup>th</sup> 2010

## Objectives

After more than twenty years of Labour rule, it is time for change in Reading.

The Liberal Democrats are the only Party that offers an alternative to the waste, spin and complacency that has characterised the last two decades.

We want a town –

- o with clean, transparent politics that responds to the needs of local people.
- o which gives children the best possible start in life, and access to every opportunity, whatever their background.
- o where people are free from the fear of antisocial behaviour and crime, and from the worries that come with poor health and poor housing.
- o with clean streets and green spaces, a vibrant cultural life and a sustainable, growing economy.

This document describes how these ambitions will be achieved in practice.

A fair deal for everyone.

A Council that listens to local people.

Change that works for Reading.

## Environment

### The Issues

1 - Climate Change is the biggest challenge we face globally. Reading needs to play its part, and emphasise waste minimisation and recycling over landfill and incineration.

2 - Labour's fortnightly bin collections need change, particularly food waste collection and additional recycling of kerbside glass - to make them work. As it is, they have caused a nuisance to thousands of residents. Missed bin collections doubled under the new arrangements.

3 - There was no scrutiny of the Council's 25 year waste PFI deal - which appears to lock Reading into an inadequate waste deal – until the Liberal Democrats put it on to the agenda.

4 - The everyday local environment in many parts of Reading has been left to rot. We have a chronic shortage of public green space and what we have is often under-maintained or not protected from damage. Street cleaning and graffiti removal have been historic problems which, after Lib Dem pressure, have improved in some areas but there is still much work to be done.

5 - Fly-tipping, failure to clear up rubbish and graffiti are just a few of the environmental crimes which need tougher enforcement. We must make these a priority.

### Our Vision

Liberal Democrats are working for a cleaner, greener Reading that is pleasant and healthy to live in and which minimises its impact on the planet.

### Our Policies

- Undertake a full public review of the council's waste strategy – aimed at introducing weekly kerbside recycling of glass and food waste and based on a borough-wide Zero Waste Strategy.
- Progress towards making Reading a Carbon Neutral town. We would pursue a zero-carbon strategy for all council activities and apply for EMAS accreditation like other Lib Dem authorities. Also we would have made Reading's commitment to 10:10 more than just an aspiration, as it is under Labour
- Continue to oppose the expansion of Heathrow Airport.

- Promote sustainable construction and green homes. We will seek to pioneer new and innovative eco-construction techniques in any new council building projects. We would propose free planning applications for environmental and sustainable projects such as Eco-home construction or fitting solar panels.
- Supplement existing on-street rubbish bins with recycling “triple bins” with separate compartments for recyclable paper, cans and glass – especially in the town centre and around shopping parades. This has already been proven in Redlands ward.
- Provide residents in terraced streets and flats more flexibility over bin collections which currently cause much inconvenience. Food waste is one-third of the rubbish that goes into grey bins. It is compostable and should be collected separately each week. Reading should invest in an anaerobic digestion system to process food waste and turn it into a sustainable source of fuel, natural gas. Kerbside glass collection would eventually be introduced. We need a review of the current bin arrangements, starting with the most densely-populated urban areas.
- Invest in improved street-cleaning outside the town centre. This would be relatively cheap but would bring an instant and visible improvement in the local environment of our town. Graffiti removal from domestic properties should remain free.
- Get tough on fly-tippers and illegal dumping – improving resources for investigation and using fixed penalty powers more widely.
- Create a partnership with the non-profit sector to collect and recondition unwanted bulky items such as furniture and white-goods, ending charges for the disposal of bulky waste for people on low incomes.
- Set-up householder battery and fluorescent light bulb collection – and look into potential recycling opportunities.
- Look further afield for markets which can recycle all of our plastic waste output.
- Eventually, phase out the need for our waste to be sent to the Slough incinerator (which generates carbon dioxide) by improving waste mineralisation and recycling.
- Promote the creation of new public open space such as community gardens and allotments and invest in maintaining and improving our existing parks and green patches.
- Make advice on alternative energy and energy conservation available locally, and work much harder to improve energy efficiency, especially in private rented housing.

## Crime and Community Safety

### The Issues

1 – Crime in Reading is high compared with other towns – partly because of our position as a regional centre which attracts many people to pass through. While the police do a fine job in difficult circumstances, the council has often not played its part in engaging the community to help tackle crime.

2 – Fear of crime is crippling for many vulnerable people. Over half of all residents say they fear being a victim of crime. Young-person-on-young-person crime is at an all time high across the UK and teenagers are as likely to be victims of crime as to be its perpetrators.

3 – Anti-social behaviour is often characterised as much by actual crime – graffiti and fly-tipping – as by “kids hanging about”, although both can be equally intimidating. Again, a lack of community development, especially in deprived areas, means many people feel threatened by activities the “perpetrators” think are quite innocent and a lack of enforcement means criminal damage and disorder offences often go unpunished.

### Our Vision

We want communities in Reading where people work together to improve their local areas instead of being frightened of each other. We will be positive about people by providing opportunities for productive activities before trouble can set in and productive remedies when it does.

Local police and the council should provide clear frameworks for resolving problems that communities experience which they cannot resolve for themselves, so that people on the ground can understand and be part of the process. Instead of meetings behind closed doors, local forums will provide residents with an effective means to raise problems in their area.

We will campaign for a fair deal for local police both compared with other parts of the UK and with neighbouring authorities. We will campaign for a fairer deal for Thames Valley officers currently paid much less than those in the Met. We will support them in their work by using the powers of the council to put in measures that reduce crime in the first place.

## Our Policies

- We will offer communities the chance to have alleyways gated off to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour.
- We will replace inadequate street-lighting with new lamps which provide better light and are environmentally friendly.
- Scrap the council's little-used anti-social behaviour phone number and promote the police's own hotline to cut confusion.
- Make sure every neighbourhood in Reading remains covered by community policing and can always contact their local officers. We will seek to increase the numbers of community wardens to help give police officers more time on patrol.
- Appoint a dedicated youth officer within neighbourhood police teams.
- Invest in facilities for young people in the town centre and in neighbourhoods to provide opportunities to engage in productive activities rather than hang around or consume drugs or alcohol.
- Clamp down on shopkeepers who sell alcohol and tobacco to minors.
- Promote Acceptable Behaviour Contracts instead of ineffective ASBOs.
- Further investigate graffiti walls which have worked in areas such as Woodley to cut graffiti vandalism.
- Ensure licensed premises have an appropriate ratio of sitting and standing space, so as to tackle "vertical drinking" and the consequent problems it raises.
- Involve the local community in decisions on alcohol licences and support public drinking bans where appropriate and they are shown to have a benefit.
- Control the use of "mini motos" and other motorbikes on footpaths and open spaces, given the noise and disturbance these create for local residents.

## Housing

### The Issues

1 – Reading has a shortage of affordable homes of all sizes and what exists is of variable quality. The size of the waiting list is shocking. There is flood of planning applications for 14 flats each – just under the number at which developers must incorporate affordable housing here. Reading Council had no strategy to bring the roughly 600 empty residential properties in the borough back into use; it has only agreed one recently after pressure from the Liberal Democrats.

2 – Council tenants often complain of poor or no response from the council when they need repairs or renovations.

3- Reading provides very little in the way of services for homeless people. For a town of our size which is a regional centre in the Thames Valley this is unacceptable and leaves many vulnerable people at risk.

4-Poor housing is tied to a number of undesirable social outcomes, including poor health, re-offending and lack of opportunities for children. Some private rented housing is in poor condition and is not energy-efficient; standards for landlords have not been enforced owing to a lack of resources.

## Our Vision

A Liberal Democrat council would recognise its responsibilities as a landlord and provide the best possible deal for its tenants. We want to make sure Reading remains a vibrant, diverse town and that means making sure there is availability of the right kinds of accommodation and a fair deal for all.

## Our Policies

- Ensure the remaining Council housing stock continues in Council ownership, and maximise opportunities to create new affordable housing.
- Impose affordable housing requirements on all developments of 10 houses or more, and as it becomes possible, reduce that number to 2.
- Increase the supply of family-sized council-owned and housing association properties as a priority by looking at ways of extending existing council homes, utilising empty properties and reviewing the Council's under-occupancy policy to help address the serious problem of overcrowding which current affects hundreds of families across the Borough.
- Require high environmental standards on new housing developments.
- Develop a street homeless initiative in conjunction with voluntary sector partners and local community groups, supported by a centralised resource.
- Continue to work with social partners to develop low cost sustainable housing.
- Campaign both locally and nationally to return more house-building powers and opportunities to councils
- Make new developments in the town centre private-car-free with access to car club vehicles.
- Continue to resource and support the implementation of the highly-successful Empty Homes Strategy and look to extend it to include empty flats above shops
- Continue the successful Decent Neighbourhoods Fund (based on an idea put forward by the Liberal Democrats on the Council) to improve external state areas and improve the quality of life of residents living on estates in Reading.
- Improve levels of service to council tenants.
- Recent surveys revealed low satisfaction of many tenants with in-house cleaning services provided by the Council; we would review complaints and make changes to improve the service.
- Improve value for money for tenants and review the Labour Council's plans to levy new service charges for cleaning and lighting which will hit 30% of tenants who are not in receipt of benefits
- Consult with tenants on how to improve levels of service and repairs.
- Ensure formal service level agreements are in place with all housing providers and make sure they are adhered to and regularly reviewed.
- Bring forward the overdue Landlord Accreditation review and implement a scheme so that landlords are not able to treat tenants unfairly. Unfair treatment disproportionately affects students, immigrants and the very poor.
- Work with the Universities to ensure sufficient student housing continues to be provided on-campus, and to manage the impact of high concentrations of student accommodation that exists in some residential streets
- Prioritise help for families and individuals living in fuel poverty by promoting existing schemes more widely within Reading's private and social housing sector.

## Transport

### The Issues

1 - Congestion is currently an enormous problem in central Reading and many roads in other parts of the borough. This increases pollution and carbon emissions as well as being a huge inconvenience to local people and bad for the local economy.

2 – There is very poor provision in Reading for those who do not want to use a private car. Buses are expensive and while some services are frequent, others are not. The town's cycle network is woefully inadequate and many routes are perilous for pedestrians.

3 – The main rail line through Reading and our local stations are long overdue for an upgrade. First Great Western currently provides the worst service as measured by customer satisfaction of any UK rail operator and fares continue to rise.

4 - We fully support the upgrade and rebuilding works planned for Reading station and the line through the area and welcome the improved service, larger range of destinations and enhanced passenger experience this promises to bring. We do however note that as we are already poorly served and overcharged, Reading commuters should not be expected to pick up the bill through higher ticket prices.

5 - Cemetery Junction is the major bottleneck on the east side of town but there are only two ways of reducing congestion here. One is to reduce the number of cars using this junction and the Lib Dems will encourage the public transport alternative. The second involves building a bypass to connect the A3290, round the back of Newtown to join Napier Road. This may be feasible as a public transport corridor to get the buses and taxis moving much more freely but much work needs to be done on finding environmentally acceptable solutions for Newtown residents, without whose consent this scheme is not acceptable.

### Our Vision

We want to see a reduction in car use as people in Reading choose less polluting alternatives and we are determined to provide the right facilities to help them do this. We also understand the reality that some car use will always remain and we want to make our roads as free-flowing as possible.

### Our Policies

- We will keep Reading Buses in public ownership and will continue to work with them to develop and improve bus services in the town, while making them more affordable for families.
- Work to improve and develop the interchange between buses and rail at Reading Station as part of an integrated approach to transport, and will oppose developments that would limit this.
- We remain absolutely opposed to Labour's one-way IDR, having been the first party in Reading to come out in clear opposition.
- We will extend the existing cycle lane network, improve maintenance and signposting, and promote its use.
- Provide more secure cycle stores throughout the borough, combined with better security at key destinations, including Reading Station.
- Provide park and ride facilities for people coming into Reading and work with neighbouring authorities to do the same at outlying railway stations to reduce traffic coming into the town centre.
- Encourage car clubs instead of private car ownership – and have suggested including the council's car pool in such a scheme. This is particularly important in the many new developments in the town centre.
- Introduce charging for heavy lorries cutting through Reading on the way elsewhere. Short-cutting creates unnecessary journeys which worsen congestion and pollution in the town centre while adding nothing to the town. There are also concerns about road safety.
- Consult on introducing a new scale of prices for residents' parking permits based on the level of pollution the car generates, but leaving permits free for the first car in the household bar the most polluting vehicles. The principle must be that the more you pollute, the more you pay.

- Develop Oxford Road as a green transport corridor when the new road north of the railway line opens.
- We support the building of a third Thames crossing but believe it and any other new roads should only be approved if they will result in a real cut in congestion and are accompanied by giving public transport priority on existing routes.
- While councils currently have powers limited by the central Government to directly subsidise fares, we will do all we can to keep bus fares low to encourage public transport use.

We will introduce 20 mph zones where residents want them to improve road safety and prevent rat-running.

## Consumer Affairs

### The Issues

1 – Centralised retailing has made it harder and harder to shop without using a car and the rise of supermarkets has seen a huge increase in the use of plastic bags and over-packaging. This results in landfill, pollution and carbon emissions and is unsustainable.

2 – The expansion of supermarkets has been at the expense of local businesses and market traders that support local food producers. In turn this means people are no much further removed from the source of their food and it is easier to buy cheap processed food than cheap wholesome ingredients. This has knock-on impacts on the environment, the regional economy and public health.

3 – There is a gap in the provision of food-safety training available to restaurateurs and chefs. Training is often only provided weekdays during business hours making it inaccessible to many casual workers or those who work more than one job. This particularly affects food workers in the black and minority ethnic (BME) communities.

### Our Vision

We want to create a retail environment where businesses of all sizes can survive and compete. Residents should have access to a wide range of healthy and safe food and the opportunity to support local communities and producers. We will seek to minimize the environmental impact of our modern lifestyles.

### Our Policies

- Work with local traders to eliminate the disposable plastic bag – switching to durable multi-use bags.
- Encourage retailers to reduce the amount of unnecessary packaging they use and to provide customers with the opportunity to recycle at the checkout as happens in other countries.
- Create a Sustainable Retail Plan that protects the variety of shops in the town centre and local shopping parades.
- Provide cost-effective trading locations to support food co-ops and farmers markets that allow local people to buy healthy local produce especially in deprived communities.
- We will ensure that classes in food preparation and training are available at convenient locations to all who would benefit from them, at times they can attend
- Allow people to opt out from receiving fast-food leaflets. This is a nuisance and generates large amounts of paper waste.
- Oppose any further closures of post office counters and current moves that threaten local pharmacies and free banking.
- Hold public services (gas, water, electricity) to account to ensure they continue to make the required investment in our area.

## Community Care

### The Issues

1. In an aging population, Community Care of the elderly and disabled will become an increasingly important responsibility of local and national governments.
2. Neighbouring authorities, including Conservative-led Wokingham and West Berkshire offer only limited amounts of community care, ignoring all but the most needy residents.
3. Community Care is a service which is demand-led, rather than budget-led, and it is very difficult to estimate when and where pressures on expenditure may occur.
4. Improvements to the Council's older people's service have been achieved by Council officers only after the highly critical inspection report verdict delivered by CSCI (now the Care Quality Commission, CQC) in December 2008. However, more work needs to be done to bring Reading's service to older residents up to the expected level in a number of areas.

### Our Vision

All elderly or disabled persons or vulnerable adults should have access to Community Care appropriate to their needs, regardless of their financial status. They should be treated with kindness, courtesy and respect at all times.

### Our Policies

- Liberal Democrats will maintain the current eligibility criteria for social care. We will oppose any moves to restrict access to social care in the way the Tories have done in Wokingham and West Berkshire Councils, which have had disastrous results.
- Continue the process of re-ablement by providing physiotherapy and support to elderly residents to enhance their independence and reduce the need for care.
- Work to reduce health inequalities, with a view to ending the postcode lottery for healthcare and health outcomes.
- Reduce drug and alcohol abuse and related harms through partnership working with service providers and through education.
- Seek to increase life expectancy and quality of life, through encouraging the elderly to be more active, and providing a thought-through approach to clubs and events for the elderly.
- Improve Community Healthcare and care for Black and Minority Ethnic populations.
- Work to create a more joined-up approach by the Primary Care Trust and the Council to reduce delayed discharges and to give residents a more seamless service
- All clients should be made aware of the "Direct Payments" scheme and its implications and be encouraged to opt in to the scheme.
- Ensure that carers maintain the highest quality of care and respect for their patients, arriving at the required time and completing all tasks in a timely fashion.
- Provide more formal and informal support for Reading's army of unpaid carers and give them more opportunity to feed back on services provided by RBC and private providers.
- Raise the profile of everyone's 'Safeguarding adults' responsibilities both inside and outside the Council to ensure that risks to elderly residents are reduced.

## Children and Young People

### The Issues

1 - Reading has consistently poor academic attainment at secondary level compared with the national average and neighbouring authorities. Barely half of all students leave school with 5 GCSEs at grades A\*-C including maths and English.

2. There is a growing shortage of primary school places in central Reading, and demand for secondary school places exceeds supply in the south and west of the town. Many of the borough's primary schools are housed in Victorian buildings in desperate need of repair or replacement and are unable to expand.

3. Reading has two traditional selective grammar schools. The proportion of students from deprived backgrounds able to attend these schools is very low. Of the more than six hundred Reading children entitled to free school meals, only a handful attend grammar schools.

4. Just under one quarter of all children in Reading are classed as living in poverty. This is having a serious impact on children's health and their ability to achieve their full potential.

5. Reading's child protection services have improved since they were rated as "inadequate" by Ofsted in 2008. It is vital that this progress continues.

### Our Vision

The lives of too many young people are blighted by poverty or lack of opportunity.

All children should receive an excellent education to unlock their potential and to ensure that they can succeed in life. Every child should feel safe and supported.

Too many children are still leaving school without the knowledge and skills to be successful. We will seek to ensure that all pupils leaving primary and secondary education have the skills they need.

### Our Policies

- We remain opposed to student tuition fees and top-up fees.
- We will ensure the provision of a high quality school place near to every child by implementing the recommendations of the recent cross-party school admissions review and by working closely with neighbouring authorities
- Drive up primary school standards by focussing resources on early years literacy and language development
- Schools will be encouraged and supported to improve the way they work together to provide the best education across the board, to share facilities and offer jointly-run courses.
- While ensuring that excellent schools share good practice, and struggling schools receive the resources they need to avoid becoming failing schools, we will also ensure that schools that are "satisfactory" are challenged to become "good" or "excellent" schools.
- We will work with primary schools and the grammar schools to ensure bright pupils from less well off backgrounds and ethnic minorities are encouraged to consider applying to grammar schools while they still exist.
- Encourage the development of personalised learning, allowing students to access vocational as well as academic courses.
- Continue the expansion of early-years centres and develop them to be places where children learn and develop.
- Endeavour to integrate children with special needs or disabilities into the mainstream school system wherever possible.

- Encourage schools to develop links with the community and voluntary sector, to develop pupils' awareness and understanding of citizenship.
- We will ensure continued focus on improving Child Protection services, including measures to improve social worker retention
- We would prioritise programmes designed to target neighbourhoods where poor health is an issue and utilise Sure Start and the Thriving Neighbourhood programmes as a framework to improve health within families.
- We would use the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment to tie in the Primary Care Trust more effectively to working with the Council and other partners to deliver better health outcomes for children and families.
- Child health has recently been the subject of an in depth scrutiny review which made a number of cross-party recommendations. We would implement these recommendations in full.

## Culture and Sport

Cultural and sporting opportunities greatly contribute to quality of life.

### The Issues

1. Reading currently benefits from three performance venues, two museums, three galleries, seven libraries and the County Archive as managed facilities; over one hundred parks and playgrounds; seven sports and leisure centres.
2. Cultural services play a key role in the achievement of desired outcomes for children and young people, from childhood obesity to youth employment.
3. The energy and creativity that comes from a vibrant cultural sector will underpin future economic and social development in Reading.

### Our Vision

We believe that a decent quality of life requires all residents to have access to a full range of sporting and cultural facilities according to their interests and within their means.

### Our Policies

- We support the continued development of leisure facilities through partnerships with the private sector or other providers, where that is shown to create investment over and above what can reasonably be provided by the Council Tax payer.
- We shall insist that access to such facilities is open to all, irrespective of means, and in particular we shall maintain and where possible enhance the "Passport to Leisure" scheme.
- We support the replacement of the Hexagon on a town centre site to give Reading modern theatre and concert facilities worthy of the town's cultural aspirations.
- We shall ensure that Reading's library services develop to meet the changing needs of a diverse population, and in particular we shall look to further development of branch libraries and the mobile library service for those who cannot or who prefer not to rely on the town centre.
- Reading's vibrant and diverse communities are supported by a grant provision generous by comparison to other authorities, but less so in terms of places to meet. We want to see less time following Government fashions and fads, and more time providing the infrastructure that our communities need. One example is the Central Club, closed for two years and the subject of much mystery. We do not want to see such provision disappear.
- We will back the establishment of a contemporary art gallery for the town.

## A different approach to running the Council

We value open government and local decision-making. We want a Council which listens to local people and speaks up for them. We propose a radical set of changes to give people real power and a say in how the Council operates in decisions that affect local neighbourhoods.

The Council's finances are in jeopardy from short-term political interference. We want to see a responsible approach and to see Reading make full use of its assets.

### A Liberal Democrat Council would:

- Work to develop existing forums and action groups into decision-making Neighbourhood Forums which will involve local people directly in how money is spent in their area.
- Consult with local people and local groups on major projects to make sure Reading gets the best possible development.
- Allow any group of 100 local residents on the electoral register to "call in" any Cabinet decision for further scrutiny.
- Build partnerships with community-led organisations to keep within the local community money the Council spends.
- Investigate more joint procurement deals with other local authorities to save money.
- Disinvest in ethically dubious assets the Council has such as arms and tobacco.
- Run Reading the best way for local people, not just follow the latest government gimmick.

Labour and the Conservatives have spent decades taking power from local people...

- By denying them the right to choose their own priorities.
- By imposing unfair and painful taxes.
- By allowing violent crime and anti-social behaviour to rise, unchallenged.
- By ignoring the challenges of climate change.

This has to stop. It is time power came back to you and your neighbours.

It is time for change that works for Reading.

Vote for the Liberal Democrats on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2010.