ReadingCAN
Climate Action Network

Reading Climate Emergency Strategy

2025-2030

This document was prepared by Reading Climate Change Partnership on behalf of the Reading community and climate action network. It reflects the inputs of over 450 local people.

Contents

Reading Climate Emergency Strategy

Reading Climate Action Plan

The Reading Climate Action Plan is the companion piece to this Strategy document. Visit www.readingcan.org.uk/OurPlan25-30 to view the Action Plan.

Design and layout by Feelgood Creative, Reading, UK

Introduction

The *Reading Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan 2025-2030* is made up of two parts: The Strategy section you are reading right now and a related Action Plan. Together, they are a framework for collective action. The Strategy sets out a shared vision, relevant context and strategic priorities. The Action Plan sets out what local organisations plan to do by 2030 to work towards this shared vision and the objective of a climate-resilient and net-zero-carbon Reading.

It is the fourth in a series of strategies and actions plans that have been developed by the Reading Climate Change Partnership (RCCP), a community partnership established in 2008 to lead the response to climate change in the Reading area. Its Board includes representation from the community and voluntary sector, the statutory sector, the private sector, the health sector and academia. You can read about the make-up of the Reading Climate Change Partnership here.

When Reading Borough Council declared[1] a Climate Emergency in 2019 it recognised the Reading Climate Change Partnership as the organisation responsible for steering Reading's response to the climate emergency on behalf of the wider community. While the Council sits on the Board, the Partnership is an independent entity and its activities go beyond the Council's policies and strategies; however it cooperates closely with the Council to ensure a joined-up approach to reducing carbon emissions regardless of whether they fall within the Council's domain or the wider community. This Strategy and the accompanying Action Plan were adopted at the Council's Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee in November 2025. This means that they will form a policy of the Council, albeit the Council only has certain obligations as the framework is owned collectively.

If this framework for collective action is to succeed it needs to be 'owned' by every organisation, business and resident across Reading. We recognise that some are better equipped to act than others, and that people with limited resources, health challenges, or social disadvantages are likely to be the most adversely affected by climate change. We are also aware that many people and communities are not currently included in the conversations and activities around climate action, and we commit to working to expand the inclusivity of this Strategy and its associated Action Plan as well as ensuring that nobody is left behind in the transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient town. We also recognise that climate change presents opportunities as well as risks, which can help bring about social and economic benefits through creating a thriving, low-carbon economy with green jobs.

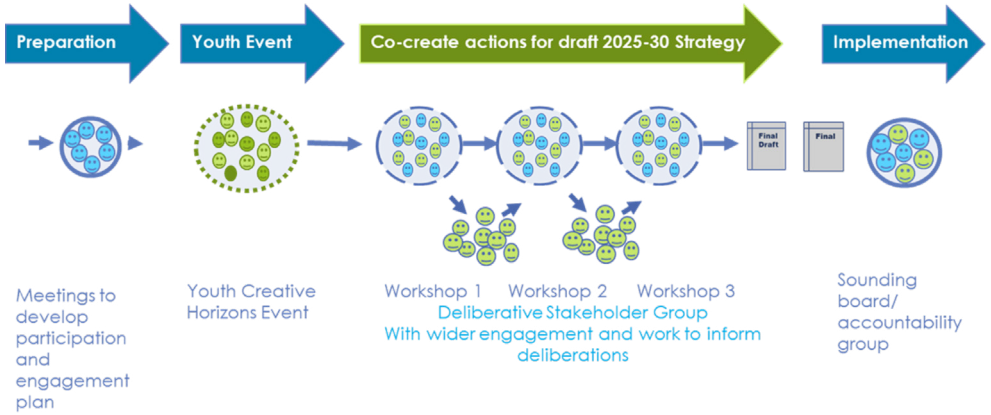
Carbon emissions have no borders and this Strategy recognises the necessity to work beyond the statutory boundaries of Reading in collaboration with like-minded people, places and organisations. Whether you live, work or study in Reading – even as an infrequent visitor – we encourage you to get involved. We have established (ReadingCAN) after Reading Climate Action Network to enable individuals, organisations and schools to become part of climate action in and around Reading, and you can find out more here.

[1] https://democracy.reading.gov.uk/documents/s3645/Item04%20Petition.pdf

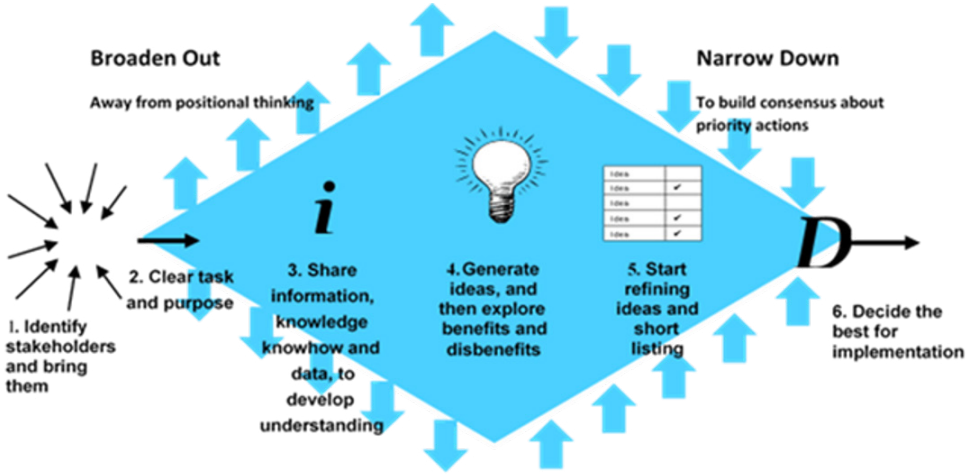
How the Strategy and Action Plan were developed

With financial support granted from Reading Borough Council, Dialogue Matters were appointed to oversee the process of involving the people and organisations of Reading in developing the *Reading Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan 2025 - 2030*.

Dialogue Matters is a UK-based company that specialises in designing and facilitating stakeholder dialogue processes. They created and delivered a process called the 'Year of Climate Engagement' that enabled participants to share understanding and knowledge, generate ideas and solutions, prioritise and plan action, and identity resources and enablers for change. The process, which won a CIEEM award for 'Best Practice Stakeholder Engagement' is illustrated below:



The participants were invited based on various criteria, some having relevant expertise or influence and others representing communities of interest, ensuring that the views of Reading's diverse population were represented, especially those from marginalised and under-served groups. This approach allowed a broad range of views and ideas to be considered before refining and prioritising them to inform the *Reading Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan 2025 - 2030* as illustrated opposite.



Narrowing down the priority actions required RCCP to consider their potential contribution to either carbon emissions or adaptation, the degree of influence the delivery partners held and who else might need to be involved to get things done. We also considered blockers and enablers including local and central government policy.

The result is this Strategy document, which is intended to stand for the full five-year period, and a companion Action Plan which will be subject to annual reviews and progress reports. Prior to final publication, this draft was offered up for final stakeholder review open to all who wished to participate; all feedback received was reviewed and considered for inclusion. Anonymised feedback was made available once the final consultation has been completed. In the interests of transparency the end point report containing all the outputs from the deliberative process has been published in its entirety and can be found here.

Foreword on behalf of Reading Climate Change Partnership

Early in 2025, the world's major climate science organisations announced that 2024 had been the warmest year on record, and that for the first time the global average temperature had reached 1.5 degrees warmer than pre-industrial levels for the entire year[2].

The Paris climate treaty[3], agreed in 2015, set out that we should aim to keep global temperature increases below the 1.5 degree threshold or risk severe climate change impacts, including more frequent and severe droughts, heatwaves and rainfall. Though we would need to see this increase in temperature being reached consistently over several years to conclude we have fully exceeded the 1.5 degree threshold, reaching this level for the first time was a sobering indicator that we are still on a trajectory towards further climate disaster.

News headlines in 2024/25 frequently highlighted events such as wildfires, floods and extremes of temperature with tragic consequences for lives and livelihoods. The World Meteorological Organisation's report on 2024[4] listed 151 unprecedented extreme weather events around the world, meaning that they were worse than any ever recorded in the region.

Never has there been more reason for concern about the changing climate and for greater resolve and commitment for action to address it. Yet this year we have already seen dramatic changes and significant volatility on the world stage, with some parts of the world retreating from their vital climate commitments.

It could be a moment to despair but instead, it should be a reminder that we all need to act to secure the future we want to see. And much of that work will need to be delivered at a local level, with people working together towards building low carbon and climate resilient communities.

Delivering Reading's ambition to be a net-zero, climate-resilient town continues to be a monumental task. One that can only be delivered through partnership. Thankfully, the Reading Climate Change Partnership has the support of a wide and growing network of local people and organisations who bring with them expertise from a wide range of sectors and backgrounds.

There is no single organisation in Reading that can do this alone. Partnership is the key to reducing emissions, building resilience, improving people's health, engaging stakeholders, reducing fuel and food poverty, protecting our rivers and growing and restoring our green spaces.

As you read through our shared Climate Emergency Strategy, we hope you will feel inspired by the ideas generated through our community engagement and empowered to become part of the delivery team for Reading's net zero ambition, as a project partner, funder of RCCP's work, convener, volunteer or innovator. We sincerely hope you'll join us in this important and rewarding endeavour!

Co-chairs of the Reading Climate Change Partnership

Heather Marshall
Outcomes Assurance Lead
Thames Water

Dylan Parkes
Director of Strategic Engagement
(Climate & Environmental Sustainability)
University of Reading

[2] https://wmo.int/news/media-centre/wmo-confirms-2024-warmest-year-record-about-155degc-above-pre-industrial-level
[3] https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf
[4] https://wmo.int/publication-series/state-of-global-climate-2024

Forewords on behalf of Reading Borough Council

Leader of the Council
Councillor Liz Terry

As we approach 2030, a renewed focus is required. There is little doubt our target is an ambitious one in the context of the challenges faced. We make no apologies for that.

Reading's early commitment to tackle the climate emergency, through our declaration and indeed through previous strategies, is clear. And while the figures show we have made significant strides locally, we know the hardest yards are yet to come.

This latest Climate Emergency Strategy is the culmination of over a year of engagement. I would like to thank all of you who have taken the time to contributed to it and, furthermore, your commitment to helping to deliver it.

The Council is of course a key player, but as we have always emphasised, the response to this most urgent of priorities needs to be a collective endeavour. We are fortunate in Reading to be home to so many individuals, organisations and partners who acknowledge it is our response today which will determine the environment we leave for future generations.

Lead Councillor for Climate and Transport
Councillor John Ennis

Addressing Global Climate Change is the defining challenge of our generation. The impacts are very real and they are already being felt locally. The people of Reading are exposed to ever more extreme patterns of weather driven by the changing climate.

The impact is felt most keenly by those who have contributed the least to the problem and those least able to protect themselves. In other parts of the world, whole communities are being swept away by floods, crops are failing, and ecological destruction is undermining the capacity of nature to correct the problem.

The burning of fossil fuels is the root cause of the changing climate. Reading has been reducing its emissions steadily as a borough and here in the Council we are proud of our record. Our waste is collected using electric vehicles, our buildings are being decarbonised and we have installed thousands of solar panels.

We will continue to lead by example and work with partners to help our communities to respond in their own way and feel part of this movement. In this way we hope that together we can put Reading at the forefront of the UK's global leadership in tackling climate change. I would like to thank our partners, networks and countless volunteers without whom this Strategy would not have been possible. I look forward to working together to deliver this next crucial stage in Reading's journey.

Understanding the challenge
National and global

Climate change is accelerating. Rising temperatures, extreme weather and environmental changes are already affecting people's lives—disrupting food supplies, damaging infrastructure, and increasing pressure on water and energy resources.

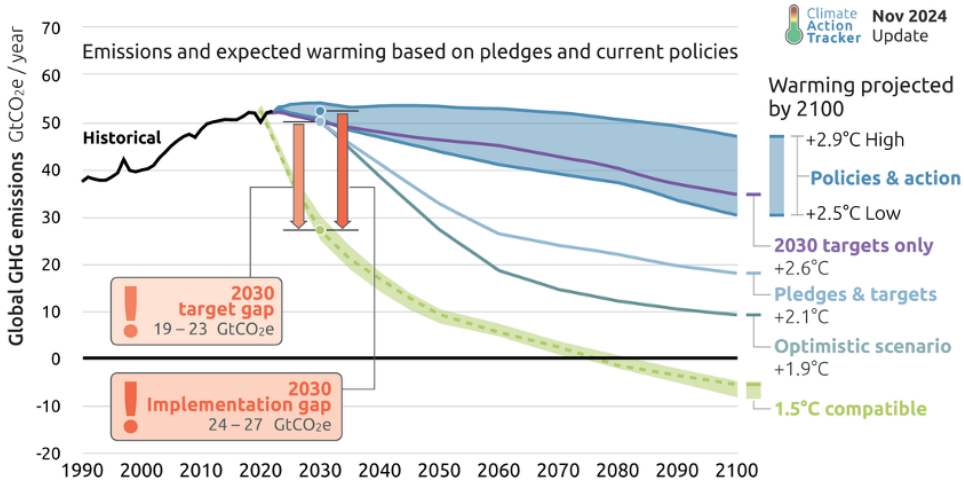
The UK is not immune. Our country is warming at a rate similar to the global average, and recent years have brought record-breaking heatwaves, more intense storms, and worsening flood risks. In 2022, the UK recorded temperatures over 40°C for the first time[5], and heavy rainfall has caused repeated flooding in many communities. These events are no longer rare—they are becoming the new normal.

At the same time, the UK has made important progress in cutting carbon emissions. Coal use has plummeted, renewable energy is now a major part of our electricity supply, and many businesses and households are making changes. But we are not moving fast enough. The Climate Change Committee (CCC) warns that without stronger policies and action, we will fall short of our climate targets and remain unprepared for the impacts already on the way.

The CCC has concluded that although the rate of emissions increase has slowed over the past decade warming will inevitably continue and global temperatures will continue to rise until the level of greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere begin to fall. Therefore, even if we take urgent action to reduce our carbon emissions, we must also prepare for increased impacts of climate change.

Recent political developments may have led to action on climate change being de-prioritised in some parts of the world, but scientists agree that curbing climate change is an existential imperative. While it is increasingly unlikely that the global temperature increase can be kept within the 1.5°C target set in the Paris Agreement, and the UN now considers we if current targets are met we would be on track for a ~3°C global temperature rise, every tonne of carbon emissions avoided contributes to limiting global warming, helping to ensure that our planet – and our town - remain a comfortable place to live for generations to come.

Emissions pathways to 2100



Emissions pathways to 2100

[5] https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/news-and-media/media-centre/weather-and-climate-news/2022/july-heat-review

The local context
Reading's climate change challenge

This will be easier for some categories of emissions than others, especially since the official data does not account for the emissions caused elsewhere by manufacturing the goods we buy and the food we consume (categorised as Scope 3 by the Greenhouse Gas Protocol). Developing a methodology for measuring, and a programme for reducing, these indirect emissions will be essential.

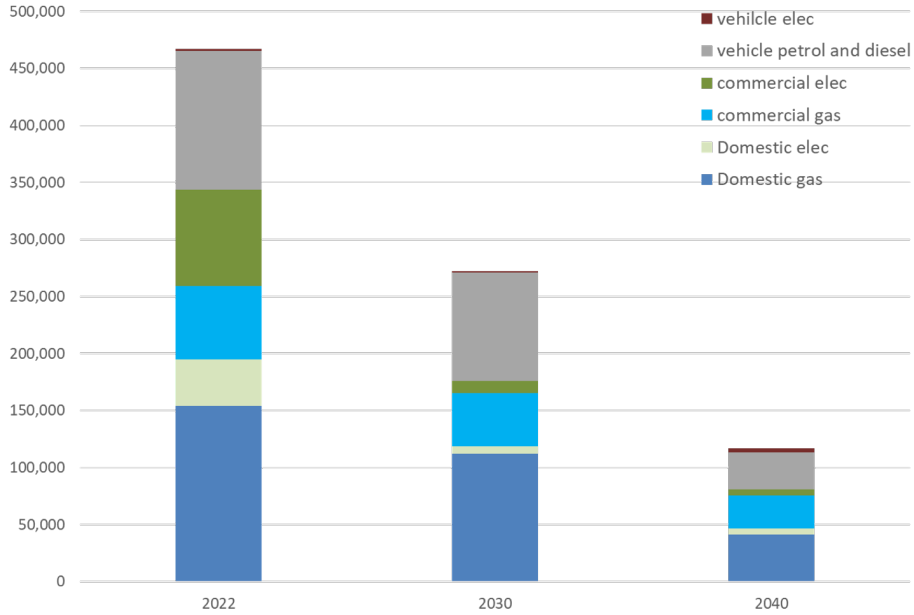
Emissions in the borough of Reading have continued to fall almost every year since the government data set was produced. The main reductions can be attributed to the decarbonisation of grid electricity although we cannot necessarily assume that this will continue under future governments. Due to decarbonisation of the grid, domestic gas has become a larger proportion of emissions and decarbonisation of heat will need to be prioritised in order to meet the 7th Carbon Budget.

The Carbon Budget, produced by the UK Climate Change Committee (CCC), sets the emissions reductions that will be necessary in order to achieve the UK government's targets. The 7th Carbon Budget was published in February 2025 and considers the period 2038-2042, based on an emissions reduction pathway from 2025 to net zero by 2050. It sets out a vision which includes the clean power plan, aiming to achieve a 95% decarbonisation of national grid electricity by 2030 and net zero by 2035 for grid electricity by 2035.

The zero carbon pathway for Reading has been aligned with the 7th Carbon Budget recommendations. On this foundation, Reading will then need to achieve targets set out in the pathway to 2040 to have half of the buildings in the Borough heated using heat pumps or other non-fossil fuel based systems and for the majority (75%) of cars to be electric.

By utilising renewable energy on the roofs of our buildings and harnessing heat from our aquifers and rivers we can decarbonise Reading and publish an estimate of what our maximised renewable deployment, coupled with above CCC recommendations, will deliver. It's worth noting that while local renewable energy generation is relatively insignificant compared to the scale of UK grid decarbonisation, creating additional renewal capacity will benefit the local communities and economy. While grid decarbonisation and the Council's own abatement activities will deliver a proportion of the emissions reduction needed, everybody in Reading has a part to play in minimising their own carbon emissions and progress in other sectors is likely to be slower leaving a gap that will need to be filled.

CCC targets applied to Reading Zero Carbon Pathway



The local context

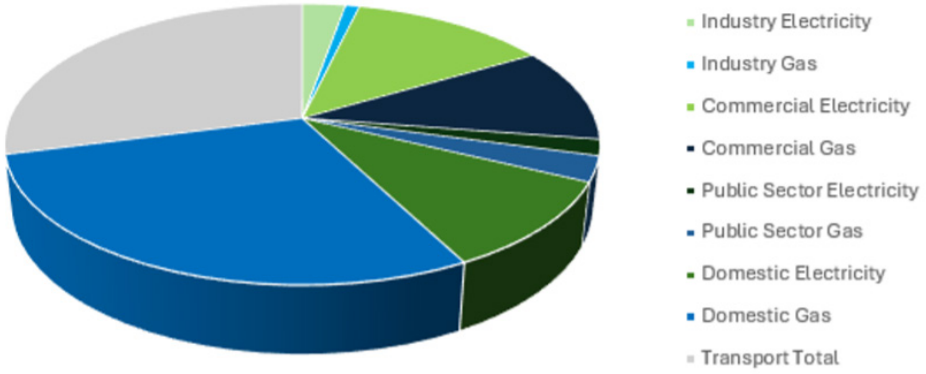
Reading's climate change challenge

The previous Reading Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan was launched in 2020 during the UK's pandemic lockdown. Other significant events since then include the formal separation of the UK from the EU, the energy price crisis and a change of government. The climate emergency declaration explicitly recognised that the ambitious target of net zero by 2030 'can only be achieved with substantial policy changes from national government'. Reading Borough Council is committed to this target, however it can only take policy as far as national government allows.

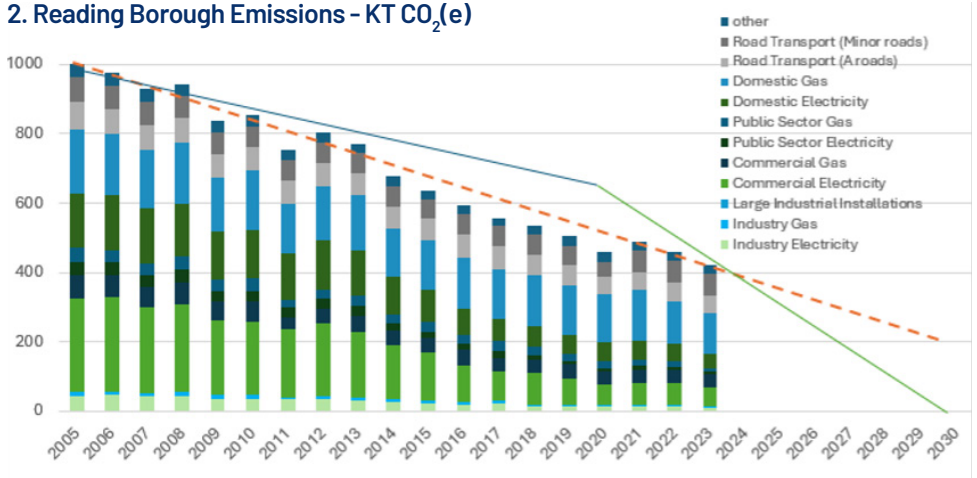
Pie chart 1 illustrates Reading's direct emissions – (categorised as Scopes 1 and 2 under the Greenhouse Gas Protocol), broken down by sector.

Graph 2 illustrates how Reading's emissions have reduced since 2005, based on the latest data available at publication. While many residents and organisations are attempting to reduce their own emissions, they can only do so if low carbon alternatives are affordable and easily accessible and to achieve net zero will require deeper and much more rapid decarbonisation than has so far been possible. Emissions reduction at pace and scale remains a systemic challenge that requires a large number of actors working collaboratively to deliver, including both technology and operational change. This new Strategy recognises that the work of making Reading a net zero, climate resilient town won't be finished by 2030, while simultaneously striving to deliver the largest possible emissions reduction in line with the UK government's commitment to net zero by 2050 at the latest.

1. Breakdown of 2023 Reading Borough CO_2 Emissions 427kt(e)



2. Reading Borough Emissions - KT CO_2(e)



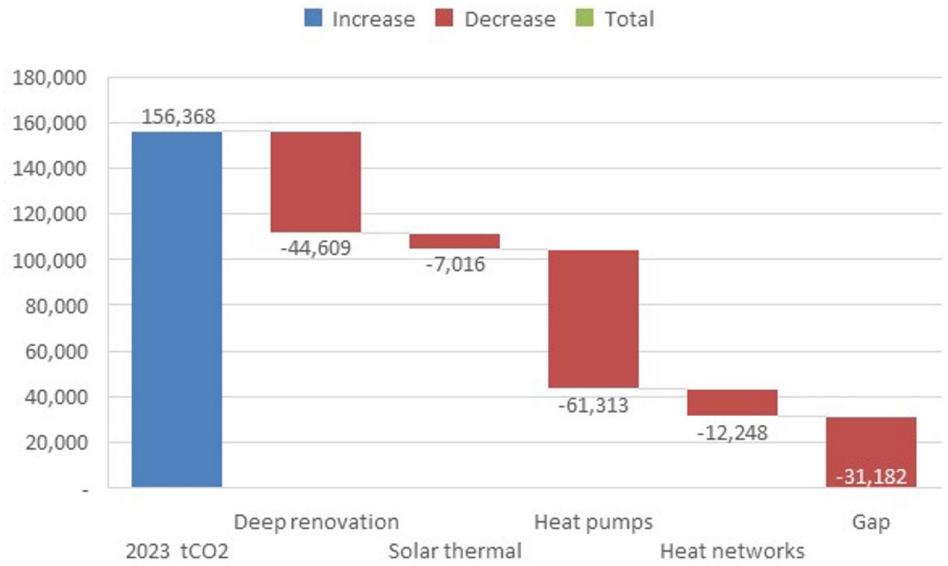
Blue line = target to 2020. Green line = Climate Emergency Objective. Dashed line = Trajectory

The local context

Reading's climate change challenge

Work with community energy leads shows that decarbonising domestic heat will be one of the most significant challenges, with anticipated technology solutions only able to contribute some of the required reduction in demand for gas, leaving a gap of just over 31 tCO_2.

Domestic Heat



Adaptation

Since 2020 we have begun to feel the impacts of climate change at a local level, particularly in extremes of heat and rainfall, making adaptation a more urgent requirement. The 18 months to March 2024 was the wettest 18-month period on record with rail services disrupted and multiple flood warnings raised for the Thames and Kennet. 2022 included the hottest day on record leading to power cuts caused by energy infrastructure overheating and an increase in heat related deaths. The 2020-25 Strategy was accompanied by Reading's first Climate Change Adaptation Plan and this Strategy includes adaptation as a core component.

While we continue to work towards reducing carbon emissions, we will also need to prepare ourselves for the changes to the climate and weather that are anticipated. We are already experiencing hotter, drier summers and milder, wetter winters and can expect to experience flooding from the Thames and Kennet, flash flooding from intense rainfall, heat stress and damage to infrastructure. This will require adaptation of the built environment and green spaces, both to reduce the impact of extreme weather and enable people to live comfortably.

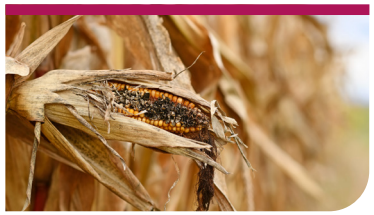
Image of The Oracle, taken while the River Kennet was in flood, illustrates how it was designed to accommodate the impacts of flooding while maintaining the ability to operate.

Risks and opportunities

If we do nothing, we'll experience

Regular flooding from our rivers, with resulting costs and disruption to our homes and businesses.

Increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather, including heatwaves and cold snaps, placing increased pressure on our health and social care services.



Higher food costs and less choice, as changing weather patterns and extreme weather reduces crop yields.

Damage to road and rail infrastructure caused by extreme weather, particularly intense rainfall, disrupting our journeys and causing expensive repairs.

Poorer health and higher mortality due to increases in heat and pollution related diseases.

Energy cost increases due to unmanaged consumption, poor insulation and energy insecurity.

Water insecurity caused by droughts.

An increasingly fragmented and disconnected community with more inequality, fewer opportunities and reduced quality of life"?

Risks and opportunities

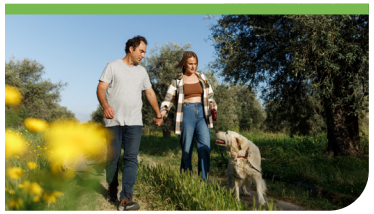
If we act together, we'll experience

A thriving, low-carbon economy with new, green jobs and a highly skilled workforce attracting good salaries.

Clean, renewable, local energy that benefits the community.

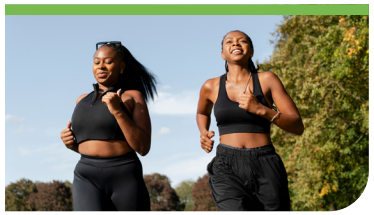
Improved air quality, leading to a reduction in respiratory diseases.

More opportunities to enjoy green and open spaces, improving resilience to heatwaves and providing a connection to nature that is proven to boost mental wellbeing and reduce stress.



A healthier, happier and more cohesive community with fewer people suffering poor health, food insecurity and fuel poverty.

Lower living costs due to more stable food supply and more energy efficient homes



More active lifestyles and better diets, leading to improved health outcomes

Protection from flooding and uninterrupted services

Shared vision of a climate-friendly Reading

Reading in the 2030s is greener, net zero and climate resilient and people feel happier, healthier and more connected.

Our inclusive approach to achieving deep cuts in emissions and planning for the effects of climate change has created stronger communities, new green jobs and a better quality of life for all.

Our communications activities help to create a sense of place and togetherness. Reading sees itself as a dynamic and diverse ecosystem, working together – in different ways – to make Reading a better place to live for everyone.

Residents are climate literate and have a strong sense of agency. This creates widespread support for ongoing climate action and generates innovative local solutions.

Local climate action is not just about technological fixes but includes actions that cut emissions by influencing everyday choices and enabling more people to adopt lower carbon options. Reading has new regenerative businesses, group buying schemes, community transition hubs, innovative funding platforms, place-based campaigns and more. Grassroots sports, walking groups and the arts have become massive levers for change.

Reading is a beacon for other towns and cities. We are positively affecting neighbouring areas through the skills, methodologies and entrepreneurship we develop. We also learn from our neighbours and develop collaborations. Climate innovation, community action and social entrepreneurship are nurtured here, making for a dynamic town that can respond and adapt quickly to a changing climate.

Change is socially just and inclusive and improves life for all. We value and design for diversity of all kinds and are especially sensitive to the needs of children and vulnerable people. Cleaner air and more shared green spaces have a positive impact on everyone's health and well-being. Reading's waterways and waterside are cleaner, and people make more use of them for leisure. Energy is affordable, transport is accessible, green spaces are safe and clean and wild places and natural assets are protected for current and future generations.

A shared endeavour

By 2030, this is a movement; a shared endeavour involving the whole town. There are staff and resources in RCCP to inspire, guide, support and celebrate this shared endeavour.

Young people have a significant role in shaping the town's future and its response to the climate and ecological emergencies.

Our vision

Expanding the vision by theme

Energy and heat

Renewable and community energy make a significant contribution to Reading's energy supply, with more of the benefits shared locally. The majority of buildings harness their own renewable energy using heat pumps and solar. Reliance on fossil fuels is much reduced. Homes and buildings are insulated and use much less energy. New housing development is very low carbon and contributes to retrofit programmes. Residents understand the role that energy consumption plays in the town's climate change challenge and have access to evidence-based advice and practical support.

Water

Water consumption and associated power demand is reduced through meters, reduced leakage and water conservation measures. Flooding is well controlled through nature-based urban drainage solutions, but flood and drought mitigation measures are also in place for added security. Our water is safe and clean, supporting biodiversity, carbon capture and health.

Travel and transport

Safe and accessible walking and cycling routes create opportunities for healthy, low-carbon leisure and travel. Walking, cycling, electric bus and rail routes, in Reading and beyond, are interconnected and easier to use, enabling people to replace some car journeys to popular destinations with active travel or low-carbon public transport. Cars and delivery vehicles are cleaner and quieter and there are fewer vehicles on the roads. EV infrastructure has been rolled out across Reading including for those without driveways.

Beyond waste

People and organisations are mindful about what they buy and consume, through awareness of its impact. They are careful in how they use and dispose of the things they buy, avoiding over-consumption and waste. Green tech and circular economy ideas are championed and adopted, creating economic opportunities for start-ups and community businesses that reduce emissions by minimising resource demand and wastage.

Our vision

Expanding the vision by theme

Nature and green spaces

Green spaces are numerous and available to all. They are diverse in life and nature, locking up carbon and benefitting both wildlife and people. Shady spots provide cool refuges for people and wildlife in heatwaves. Street trees and green walls help cool the town. In appropriate locations, wilder management reduces energy and costs and provides natural food and breeding sites for wildlife.

Food

People enjoy a healthy, low-carbon, plant-rich diet based on affordable, local, seasonal and home-grown products. Food waste is minimised and surplus is shared. More affordable growing space is available for local food growing in well managed allotments and community gardens to support a healthy local food system and their produce can be found in cafés and restaurants around the town.

Education, climate literacy and skills training

Climate is part of formal and informal education throughout Reading, leveraging national, regional and sectoral initiatives. Our University, colleges and workplaces deliver relevant skills training and support lifelong learning. Every job is a climate job. There is local support for businesses that want to explore more regenerative business models and refine their strategies for emissions reduction. A forum for local businesses and network organisers inspires and supports accountability, shared learning and facilitates system-wide transformation.

Cross-cutting topics

During the deliberative process, participants identified 7 cross-cutting topics which apply to all the Action Plan themes. To these we have added Planning and Development, which was originally proposed as one of the Action Themes but which cannot be effectively influenced by Reading Climate Change Partnership because it lies fully within the control of Reading Borough Council. Health and Personal Resilience was an Action Theme in the 2020-25 Strategy but further work is needed with health authorities to develop this work area so it has been moved to this section.

These eight cross-cutting topics have informed the development of the Action Plan as well as prompting the identification of a number of enabling conditions that will provide the context for future development of the Action Plan in subsequent years.

They are:

Planning and development

Training and capacity building

Health and personal resilience

Adaptation

Community engagement

Campaigns and communication

Innovation

Funding and resourcing

Cross-cutting topics

Planning and development

Local planning can enable change in all areas of climate change mitigation and adaptation to be more holistic, targeted and effective. It can ensure that climate priorities are taken into account when planning for other factors not directly relevant to net zero and climate adaptation (for example: noise and air quality, crime hotspots, youth support, needs of low-income households). Reading was one of the first councils to adopt zero carbon for new developments, and can build on this to support low-carbon development.

The strategic priorities for planning and development identified by stakeholders were:

- Ensure that all new developments in Reading meet rigorous energy, heat, and environmental standards – reinforcing climate and nature objectives
- Align planning policies with climate mitigation, adaptation, and environmental priorities to support integrated and long-term sustainability across Reading's built environment
- Acknowledge the importance of carbon capture in soil and planting, and maintaining biodiversity on new and existing sites.
- Facilitate a dedicated forum bringing together stakeholders who are seeking to find solutions to meeting net zero and adaptation targets required by planning
- Local Planning Authority to periodically review, identify and address enablers and blockers impacting the successful delivery of the 2025-30 Climate Emergency Strategy
- Work with other Councils to lobby for changes to national planning policy to allow greater ambition in local planning

Training and capacity building

Decarbonising infrastructure needs education and training to foster a skilled workforce. The service sector increasingly includes detailed consideration of climate impacts and shifting asset values. Everyone needs to understand how they can contribute to decarbonisation of their workplace. In this respect, every job is a climate job.

Excellent existing initiatives include the University of Reading's Climate Ambassador Programme for schools, HE and FE offers from the University of Estate Management and New Directions College, and Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce's work to develop Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs). While most formal training on decarbonisation is focused on school leavers, more needs to be done to focus on upskilling the existing workforce. REDA's Green Skills research report provides a framework and priorities for green workforce skills as part of the Reading Economic Development Framework.

Activate Learning and REDA have launched a programme of Sustainability Leaders and Managers courses for Reading businesses. Priorities identified are:

- Co-ordinate green skills activity targeted at business with REDA and the Reading Economic Development Framework
- Establish a cross-sectoral task force to align training initiatives in Reading, including REDA and the LSIPs
- Develop industry-based sustainability competency frameworks
- Strengthen partnerships between HE and FE, businesses, and public bodies to embed sustainability into professional training
- Create learning resources to bridge skill gaps in existing and emerging green industries
- Make Carbon Literacy training available to the general public and provide high quality guidance on how to decarbonise homes and lifestyles

Cross-cutting topics

Health and personal resilience

Health inequalities already exist in Reading and these are likely to be exacerbated by climate change with the very old, the very young, those with disabilities and those suffering hardship likely to be disproportionately affected by its impacts. According to the World Health Organisation's analysis of the health impacts of climate change there are three main categories of risk that are expected to significantly impact Reading – increased heat waves and related air quality issues, increased rainfall and associated flooding, and changing transmission patterns for infectious diseases. All of these have the potential to negatively affect the physical and mental health and wellbeing of Reading's residents. Alongside these are the underlying health issues associated with fuel poverty and poor diet, and the potential for mental health challenges associated with anxiety and stress caused by climate change and its impacts.

The good news is that many of the actions we need to take to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to climate change also have the potential to improve our community's health and wellbeing. Most of the themes in the Climate Change Action Plan include several actions that will make a direct or indirect contribution to health and wellbeing.

Additional priorities are:

- Appropriate communication on the potential health risks associated with climate change and how to minimise them
- Consideration of relevant health and wellbeing impacts when developing interventions for other climate change challenges
- Emphasis on the health and wellbeing co-benefits that can be delivered through action on climate change, to help increase engagement and participation

Adaptation

With the impacts of climate change already being experienced in the form of extreme weather, we need to ensure communities and infrastructure are resilient to both acute climate risks such as heatwaves and flooding and chronic risks such as drought. This can be done through sustainable urban planning and building design, green infrastructure, and nature-based solutions, all of which are covered in relevant sections of the Action Plan, but we also need to be ready to respond quickly in case of floods and heatwaves to ensure that people know how to keep themselves safe.

The University of Reading is undertaking research around improving the reliability of forecasting to help prepare for extreme weather events. Following the recent heatwaves, organisations and businesses have also started to plan for acute climate risks; this is evident in the new 'warm rooms' and 'cold rooms' at various community centres as well as passive climate control in newer office buildings, and SUDs schemes in business parks, housing developments and educational establishments.

Strategic priorities for adaptation are:

- Integrate climate risk assessments into urban planning and policy decisions
- Implement small-scale, community driven climate resilience projects alongside large-scale infrastructure adaptation
- Use technology including simulations and GIS mapping to enhance real-time decision making on climate risks
- Support decentralised surface water management and biodiversity to enhance community and ecosystem resilience
- Convene local utilities and other relevant bodies to ensure statutory adaptations plans are joined up and comprehensive

Cross-cutting topics

Community engagement

Climate change presents a threat that requires action on numerous fronts, at international, national, local and personal level. While efforts are necessary to decarbonise products, systems and infrastructure, we also need to create societal shifts towards sustainable lifestyles, to reduce consumption and ensure net-zero behaviours are embedded across all sectors.

Encouraging lifestyle change is not a simple task. People have to juggle a number of different priorities and people don't respond well to being told how to behave. While there is no shortage of information, people may not have the time or money to take the advised actions or there may be other barriers. Ability to take action is sometimes limited by external factors, for example people in poorly insulated rented homes suffering fuel poverty but prevented from improving insulation to reduce their fuel bills. Sometimes targets and incentive are perverse; for example Reading has had some success with increasing recycling rates but this doesn't help to reduce the production of waste.

Strategic priorities on lifestyle change are:

- Use behavioural science to design interventions that enable and encourage sustainable choices
- Integrate learning on climate change into school curricula beyond traditional subjects
- Use incentives and other economic models to drive sustainable behaviours such as circular economy principles
- Align public health and sustainability efforts to promote wellbeing and environmental responsibility
- Develop a Community Engagement and Participation Theme and associated Action Plan and communications programme.

Campaigns and communication

Inspiring and encouraging people to act requires a coordinated, multi-stakeholder communication Strategy that ensures inclusive climate messaging and delivers widespread engagement.

Creative and innovative ways to raise awareness are being championed by a number of organisations Jelly Reading Arts Collective, the BBC Creative Lives Project, Local Artists Awareness Creation, Reading Climate Festival, Nature Nurture and Commando Jugendstil; the Gaia Installation brought in a wide audience but these activities don't always translate into conversion to action. There are many communities in Reading that are not engaged in the climate conversation and we need more storytellers and messaging that resonates with more people, including in languages other than English; however budget does not currently exist for paid communications media.

Reading Borough Council and the University of Reading are essential partners in amplifying messages to reach a wider audience, and networking organisations like Ethical Reading, Connect Reading and business groups can inform organisations of all types and sizes.

Strategic priorities for communication are:

- Develop a climate communications alliance to streamline messaging across institutions
- Use digital platforms, apps, gamification, community outreach, and storytelling to make sustainability relatable
- Align climate communications with public health, economic, and social justice narratives
- Foster collaboration between businesses, local government, and civil society to amplify impact
- Develop a dashboard to illustrate progress

Cross-cutting topics

Innovation

Reading is a technology hub with a world-leading University and a high density of companies working in the information technology and communications space. It has already undertaken some innovative technology led projects, for example the Smart City Fund programme involving Reading Borough Council and Stantec. It has the opportunity to leverage data-driven technologies and artificial intelligence to enhance urban sustainability, resilience, and efficiency.

Technology can be used promote and reward lifestyle change, enable smarter choices and give early warning of acute climate risks; numerous examples exist of innovative systems from other places that could potentially be adapted for use in Reading. We already use technology to manage buildings dynamically in response to not just temperature and light levels but also occupancy and air quality. There may be additional opportunities for machine learning or the internet of things to help energy management or build virtual batteries for energy storage. Technology also allows green infrastructure and water flows to be mapped, and can support resource exchanges to contribute to a circular economy.

Proposed priorities are:

- Develop an integrated smart city framework that aligns digital innovation with sustainability goals
- Use AI and big data to optimise energy use, mobility, and climate forecasting
- Ensure ethical considerations, digital inclusion and data privacy safeguards in technologies, especially for AI
- Facilitate knowledge-sharing between places, businesses, industries, local policymakers, and research institutions
- Learn what prevents successful local projects from scaling
- Alignment of sustainable energy solutions with data centres

Funding and resourcing

Systemic change requires investment and unlocking funding is a fundamental challenge for delivery of Reading's net zero goals. Innovative investment vehicles will be needed to augment the funding provided by central government in the form of grants and loans. Currently, there is insufficient understanding of what the total cost would be of decarbonising the town and who will fund each element.

Reading Community Energy Society and Reading Hydro have already proven the value of community energy schemes and this concept could be extended to other types of intervention allowing local people to fund projects in return for a share of financial returns. Other interventions, such as solar PV and potentially EV charging points for households can be delivered more cost-effectively using group buying schemes.

Specific challenges to be overcome include the retrofit of rented and leased home and offices where the landlord would bear the cost of energy efficiency interventions but the tenant would reap the reward of lower energy bills.

Strategic priorities for funding are:

- Prioritise the identification of additional funding streams, especially with regard to communications resourcing
- Calculate the cost of the various actions required to make Reading net zero and identify funding options for each element
- Gain a full picture of all potential funding sources, including those detailed during the deliberative process, and identify how each might be applied to unlock actions in the Action Plan
- Establish a funding innovation work group to manage the process of identifying new funding opportunities and how they might be applied in Reading

Policy and regulatory drivers

The UK's regulatory framework for achieving net zero by 2050 is undergoing significant transformation in 2025, aligning policy with the urgency of climate action. The cornerstone legislation is the Climate Change Act 2008, which mandates legally binding carbon budgets and a net zero target. Supporting this, the Net Zero Strategy outlines sector-specific pathways, while the UK Emissions Trading Scheme (UK ETS) incentivises emissions reductions across heavy industries. A key provision of this act is the function of the Committee on Climate Change and the setting of 5 yearly carbon budgets. In February 2025 the CCC submitted its 7th Carbon Budget report detailing a balanced pathway to 2050 with bold objectives for 2038-2042.

A key plank of the government's approach to achieving net zero is through the introduction of the Clean Power Plan which will ensure that the electricity network all but eliminates fossil fuel combustion and/or captures emissions. This will enable the decarbonisation of heating, transport and industrial processes. The clean power plan will be delivered through Electricity Market Reform, major investments in renewable energy delivered through the market (including community energy), and obligations placed on the energy network and system operators.

There are updates to the building control regulations with the upcoming Future Homes Standard which will initially require an estimated 75% reduction in emissions from new buildings. Alongside this EPC ratings will be updated and landlords will be required to meet EPC C rating to be able to let their properties after 2030. Various incentives and grants are available to assist in these regulatory challenges set out in the government's Warm Homes Strategy, which aims to improve energy efficiency, reduce heating costs, and support the transition to cleaner energy in homes—particularly for low-income households and renters.

In 2025, a number of new regulations are reshaping the landscape. The Procurement Act 2023, effective from February 2025, embeds sustainability into public procurement, requiring environmental and social value to be considered in contract awards. Meanwhile, the Public Procurement Notice (PPN) 06/21 enforces the need for carbon reduction plans for suppliers to public sector.

The UK Sustainability Reporting Standards (UK SRS) will standardise ESG disclosures, enhancing corporate transparency. Additionally, Streamlined Energy and Carbon Reporting (SECR) continues to mandate large businesses to report energy use and emissions. These regulations will drive more organisations to manage and report on their carbon emissions, having an effect right along supply chains.

Climate-related financial disclosures are transitioning from the TCFD framework to the IFRS Sustainability Standards, ensuring continuity in climate risk reporting. Together, these evolving regulations signal a shift toward integrated, accountable, and enforceable climate governance—placing net zero at the heart of UK economic and environmental policy.

It should be acknowledged that UK decarbonisation faces rising opposition from some political parties and that it is possible that during the life of this Strategy document some of these regulations may be rolled back. Friends of the Earth is one organisation campaigning for bold and ambitious climate policy, as outlined in this report: https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate/fairness-test-mandate-bold-climate-policy

Reading Borough Council policy and strategies

Local Policy

Reading Borough is a Unitary Authority. This means the Council has responsibility for all local government functions in its area including transport, housing, planning, adult social care, education and public health although its decisions can be overturned by central government.

As such, the Council has a number of key policies which have the potential to significantly influence our response to the climate emergency. The Council Plan is the overriding Strategy setting out the priorities. The Local Transport Plan is one such key policy, which sets out how the local highways network will be run together with a suite of sub-strategies which sit under this including electric vehicles, cycling and walking infrastructure and public transport strategies to name a few.

The Local Plan sets out local planning policies in line with the National Planning Policy Framework, within imposed limits that may hamper ambition. Other relevant policies are; The Economic Development Strategy, the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Tree Strategy, the Tackling Inequality Strategy and Open Spaces Strategy.

Additionally, the Councils actions to reduce its own carbon emissions are set out in its Carbon Plan. This is not an exhaustive list.

You can find the strategies and policies of the Council here: Strategies and plans - Reading Borough Council.

While Reading Borough Council is committed to decarbonising the town, this also depends on system change in both policy and practice at national level; therefore we intend to work alongside other places to demand changes in national policy to support decarbonisation.

National policy asks

Ensure consistency

Climate change should not be a political issue, with different political parties holding widely differing views and policies, leading to regulations being overturned when the governing party changes.

We need certainty that long-term climate policy and targets will be maintained regardless of which party is in power, to provide confidence for investors and homeowners.

Deliver in Partnership

Swift, effective climate action requires partnership at every level of every sector. Reading's partnership has built a wide network of volunteers and brings together many key organisations to tackle the climate crisis. The partnership is almost entirely reliant on volunteer effort however and we call on Government to commit to direct resources to our Partnership and to work with equivalent Partnerships in other UK cities and regions, to deliver net zero resilient, healthy and just places where everyone benefits.

To ensure that local government reorganisation and devolution enables stronger regional partnership approaches to tackling the climate crisis.

Deliver a Fair and Just Transition

To deliver an environmentally sustainable economy through policies which protect the most vulnerable, create good jobs and deliver accessible, affordable public services, providing targeted support and funding to make sure that no one is left behind.

Deliver Sustainable Buildings

Commit to an urgent infrastructure investment programme backed up by the relevant mandated standards to improve the efficiency of all buildings to reduce emissions, make homes warmer and cheaper to run, make businesses more resilient, increase investment and create thousands of new jobs for local people. Ensure that:

- councils are empowered to set ambitious net zero targets for local development
- funding is made available for public and private housing and businesses alike to retrofit buildings.
- the gap between gas and electricity prices is quickly narrowed to support electrified low carbon heating solutions.
- skills are built in the sector with appropriate standards to help the market drive uptake.
- EPCs favour the lowest carbon option.

Deliver Clean Energy

Commit to finishing the task of decarbonising the national electricity networks by generating all our energy from renewable and sustainable sources, supporting smart grid solutions for households, removing barriers and creating investment frameworks that support community and local renewable energy initiatives alongside national renewable infrastructure. In addition Local Authorities should be given powers to direct and steer energy infrastructure investment.

Deliver Clean, Affordable Transport

Commit to comprehensively reshape personal and public transport, enabling people to make active travel the first-choice for short journeys by supporting local authorities and operators to develop local transport networks to support active travel, decarbonise public transport, and drive forward the national transition to electric vehicles.

National policy asks

Enable Sustainable Choices

Commit to measures which promote conscious consumer choices, enabling people to buy sustainably, repurpose, recycle more and throw away less through supporting Councils to provide local waste collection and management processes that materials to be recovered.

Support local businesses and in adopting circular economy approaches and supplying sustainable products to local markets as well as encouraging individuals to make climate conscious choices through national behaviour change programmes.

Ensure that national data monitoring standards are adopted for supply chain emissions.

Ensure high standards for food quality that include the climate impacts relating to their place or origin, import and processing.

Introduce labelling systems to inform the public of these impacts.

Help Us to Adapt

Commit to comprehensive support to reduce risk and build resilience against the present, unavoidable and intensifying impacts of climate change, including flooding, extreme temperature, intensifying storms and pressure on the supply of food, water and other vital resources.

Ensure key organisations are obligated to report and manage their climate based risks, costing these into long term investment decisions. Provide nationally funded programmes that address key climate risks including mechanisms to support ecological services investment alongside infrastructure planning.

Action themes

During the deliberative process, the contributions of the participants were grouped into action themes, each of which would have its own section of the Action Plan. The specific actions identified are outlined in the Action Plan, which will be updated annually to reflect what has already been achieved and allow new actions to be added in response to emerging needs and changing circumstances.

The six themes that emerged from the public workshops were:

- Energy and heat
- Travel and transport
- Water
- Beyond waste
- Nature and open spaces
- Food

Five of these themes are carried over from the 2020-25 Strategy and Action Plan, however food has been separated out from Beyond waste into a category of its own because it represents such a significant portion of carbon emissions and health and wellbeing, which was previously a theme, has been redefined as a strategic priority (see page 13).

The following sections provide additional context for the Action Plan, outlining what has been achieved up to this point, defining the current nature of the challenge and any anticipated trends or policy changes that will influence outcomes, and detailing which organisations are already active in the area and what they are working on.

Energy and heat

Travel and transport

Water

Beyond waste

Nature and open spaces

Food

Energy and heat

Carbon emissions from the gas and electricity used to power our buildings represent 72% of Reading's carbon emissions. The balance is primarily from transport emissions. While grid decarbonisation will make a substantial contribution to the reduction of emissions from electricity, gas emissions can only be reduced by switching to electricity for heating and cooking; however there are limits on the amount of electricity that the local grid can provide and this will need to be addressed by energy companies. At the same time, it is estimated that around 30% of energy purchased by households for heating is wasted due to poor insulation, therefore improving energy efficiency will help to reduce the load on the energy grid as well as cutting bills. This affords the opportunity for more community energy schemes and the development of local heat and energy networks. This is an area where Reading has already made good progress with two community energy companies established in the town including a hydro-electric scheme on the Thames at Caversham. Development of community energy will continue through this Strategy period, including rolling out domestic and commercial community solar schemes.

Our Action Plan also aims to address important social issues relating to energy and heat, such as fuel poverty and health risks. The energy price crisis highlighted the importance of reducing our reliance on volatile energy systems based on importing fossil fuels. It also put financial pressure on thousands of households in Reading, worsening fuel poverty and strengthening the argument for retrofitting homes and creating more renewable electricity capacity. While some funding has been provided by central government to incentivise the retrofit of low-carbon heating technologies and energy efficiency measures, there have been concerns about the suitability of some of the available interventions and the complexity of application processes. Helping people to make the right choices involves ensuring that the right information and consumer protections are in place and there are easily accessible options for all from the fuel poor to the able to pay.

Additionally, if we are to use electricity to decarbonise, how much we pay for it, relative to gas is crucial. Minimising the load on the national grid at peak times will allow us to meet the extra demand for electricity to supply the heat and transport which are so pivotal to decarbonisation. Energy storage will play a role in levelling out demand, and ground source heat – potentially taking advantage of nearby aquifers - could provide an alternative source of renewable energy in addition to solar and hydro. Embracing 'smart energy' technologies will allow us to choose the lowest carbon, cheapest times to draw power from the grid, further reducing both costs and carbon.

Reading was one of the first towns in the UK to adopt zero carbon for new developments. The proposed Future Homes and Building Standard would ensure that new homes built from 2025 produce 75-80% less carbon emissions than under previous regulations. Meanwhile, the Council takes all steps permitted under current planning regulations to minimise the emissions of new developments, which fall short through its net zero carbon homes policy. There are additional challenges relating to both commercial and domestic tenanted buildings, where the responsible party for energy efficiency measures is not usually the bill payer. The MEES regulations enforcing improved EPC ratings for leased properties will also ratchet up during the life of this Strategy.

Travel and transport

Travel and transport is responsible for 26% of Reading's carbon emissions.

The key objectives identified by stakeholders involved in the deliberative process were:

- Reduce reliance on private cars by enhancing accessibility, safety, and convenience of alternative travel modes – including walking, cycling, and public transport
- Develop and maintain a comprehensive EV charging network to support the transition to electric vehicles and low-emission transport options across Reading
- Drive a marked shift away from 'business as usual' by embedding sustainable policies, procurement, and operational changes on travel and transport across businesses and organisations.

In terms of the transport infrastructure for Reading, this is covered by Reading's Local Transport Plan which has already been the subject of extensive public consultation and will inform Reading Borough Council's Strategy regarding provision for vehicles in the town. This Strategy and Action Plan therefore focuses on what can be done by individuals and organisations, and how the Local Transport Plan can be supported and augmented by additional interventions.

Emissions from vehicles contribute both to global warming and to local air pollution, therefore there are public health considerations regarding both the need to minimise pollution from vehicles and to protect those choosing active travel options from its harmful effects. Reducing congestion can make a significant contribution to air quality as well as emissions reduction, as can the adoption of EVs in preference to petrol and diesel vehicles. However, not everybody can afford an EV – especially since road tax advantages have been withdrawn – and there are challenges in providing charging points for motorists without off-street parking. Here companies can contribute to EV adoption through their fleet procurement policies and by taking advantage of programmes such as salary sacrifice which enables tax-efficient purchase of EVs and installing charging points in workplaces, for which funding is available from central government. Within the centre of Reading there is the opportunity for cargo bikes and last-mile pooled transport solutions.

Companies can also support active travel, through the provision of Cycle to Work schemes which provides tax incentives and interest-free credit for the purchase of bikes, including ebikes. Additionally, having a Low-carbon Travel Plan can help staff make better choices for business travel, support car sharing, incentive the use of public transport and encourage the use of remote meeting technology in place of some face to face meetings.

Active travel can have health benefits in terms of increasing activity levels and this can be an incentive for some people. Some of the things that discourage cycling are safety concerns and lack of secure bicycle storage and these are issues that can be addressed through the Action Plan, alongside initiatives promoted by the Council.

Reading already has an award-winning bus company that has pioneered the use of alternative fuels to reduce carbon emissions, and 19.5 million bus journeys were made in the borough during 2023/4 – and 11.4% rise and 54% above the national average. This amounts to 109.4 bus journeys per head of population a 9.8% increase on the previous year and 74% above the England average. During the life of this Strategy Reading Buses will begin electrification of its fleet, supported by community energy generation alongside other funding.

Water

The connection between water and carbon emissions might not be immediately obvious, but purifying and distributing water and treating sewage requires the use of equipment that consumes energy, and therefore minimising water consumption and reducing waste helps to cut emissions. From an adaptation point of view the connection is more obvious; we are all aware of the changing weather patterns caused by global warming and some of us will have been directly affected by the flooding experienced from the Thames, Kennet and Loddon rivers in recent years. This is projected to get worse as global average temperatures increase and therefore it's important to be prepared for these impacts, both in terms of the built environment and infrastructure being adapted to cope better with deluges and also for households and businesses to be prepared for flooding that might occur. We also need to consider the health impacts associated with flooding, both in terms of the stress of having to deal with the aftermath but also the potential for disease due to sewers discharging into watercourses during heavy rainfall.

While flooding is becoming a more frequent occurrence, Reading is also in the most water-stressed part of the UK and, while winters are likely to become wetter due to climate change, summers are predicted to become drier which will increase the potential for extended periods of drought. Conserving water and protecting our green and open spaces from the effects of drought is therefore an additional priority, which also involves ensuring that what rainfall we do receive can be harvested and stored to support demand in times of shortage. Green and open spaces can also play a part in reducing the impact of flooding and helping to conserve water so there is a strong relationship between these two themes of the Strategy and Action Plan.

Beyond waste

This section of the Action Plan has been renamed, from Resources and Consumption to Beyond Waste to reflect the importance of not just finding end of life solutions for waste but also consuming more thoughtfully and designing products and services that use fewer resources. This approach, often referred to as the Circular Economy, aims to meet society's needs with the least possible amount of resources and then ensure that those resources are returned to the economy at the highest possible value and can play a significant role in meeting emissions reduction targets (see report).

The goods we buy and use in our homes, communities and organisations require raw materials to be mined or harvested, transported to a factory to be manufactured and then distributed to their point of sale. Each of these processes causes carbon emissions – especially when the raw materials or finished goods are transported from one continent to another. Then when we are finished with the item, further emissions are caused by recycling or disposing of it. Many of those impacts are experienced by those in the global south, who are already experiencing the greatest effects of climate change.

The emissions data published for Reading by central government agencies doesn't take into account its consumption of goods and services but to achieve net zero will require all emissions sources to be minimised, not just those from energy directly consumed in the town. Planned changes to recycling regulations in 2027 will require further improvements to Reading's recycling facilities, but alongside increasing the percentage of waste that is recycled, our Action Plan also seeks to reduce the amount of waste that is produced. We are fortunate that there are already great repair and share initiatives to build on.

Nature and open spaces

Reading is a largely urban environment, but still contains substantial areas of nature and open spaces including public parks, woodland, water meadows and private gardens. While nature deserves preservation in its own right, our Action Plan focuses on aspects that contribute directly to the reduction of carbon emissions and adaptation to climate change. This includes ensuring that people feel connected to nature and understand their place in the ecosystem, so that the effects of climate change are more readily understood.

In this context, the three key objectives identified by stakeholders were:

- Ensure well-managed and accessible green and open spaces across Reading to enhance environmental and social wellbeing and encourage active lifestyles
- Implement robust conservation and management strategies to increase biodiversity, support habitats, and improve ecosystem resilience in Reading
- Enhance the role of nature and open spaces in the long term capture and storage of carbon through rewilding, street tree planting, restoring water meadows and wetland, and applying sustainable land management practices.

Reading Borough Council's management of public spaces is determined by its own Tree Strategy, Biodiversity Action Plan and the new Nature Recovery Strategy for Berkshire, so the Action Plan avoids duplicating this work, instead focusing on what people and organisations might do for themselves, building partnerships that can enhance the council's own activities and ensuring a joined up approach that creates synergies between the council's activities and those undertaken by other organisations.

Food

Globally, food is one of the three greatest contributors to carbon emissions, hence its introduction as a separate theme in the Action Plan. What we eat, where it is produced, how much it is processed and how much of it we waste all have significant impacts on climate change, both through the fuel consumed, the land used and the emissions caused by decomposition of food waste. At the same time, a proportion of households in Reading are experiencing food poverty, many people have unhealthy diets and we have already seen how extreme weather can affect food security and increase food prices.

Reading has already implemented kerb-side food waste recycling, which helps to reduce the emissions from food waste by turning it into fertiliser and energy, and is increasing the reach of food waste collections in line with "Simpler Recycling" policy from central government.

It also has a number of charities and community projects ensuring that surplus food is distributed to those in hardship and the establishment of Reading Food Partnership provides a great opportunity.

While food waste forms part of the Action Plan, it is primarily focused on four key objectives:

- Significantly expanding local food production and consumption, embedding it as a core part of Reading's culture and lifestyle
- Increasing universal access to affordable, nutritious food and supporting healthier, more sustainable diets
- Implementing circular food systems that prevent waste at every stage – production, distribution, and consumption – while maximising food recovery and redistribution.
- Leveraging community food initiatives to foster stronger social connections and resilience to climate change.

Governance, funding and resourcing

Current Status

The Reading Climate Change Partnership is an unincorporated, non-executive partnership. Each of its board members volunteers their time, either independently or as part of a related salaried role in the organisation they represent. The Partnership is independent in terms of decision-making but is not a separate legal entity and is hosted by Reading Borough Council which serves as 'accountable body' for the Partnership. We have only one paid member of staff, a part-time coordinator, hosted by Reading Borough Council but working exclusively for the partnership. This new 5-year plan brings with it an opportunity to review RCCP's governance structure and purpose, and related roles. In reality, we have evolved beyond the remit on which we were founded, having developed several assets that are primed for growth, including an annual Reading Climate Festival, a website, newsletter and social media channels, and a de facto role as an orchestrator and convener of new delivery vehicles for our latest Climate Emergency Strategy.

As part of our process to finalise this Strategy, we will also be reviewing and updating our governance and purpose so that we can support the delivery of this plan over the next five years. Our board members represent different sectors of Reading's community, including Reading Borough Council, The University of Reading and Royal Berkshire NHS Trust who between them account for around one-fifth of the town's carbon emissions. Others represent groups of organisation or specific interest areas, some also serve as Theme Leads holding a section of our Action Plan. You can see our board members here.

The partnership's sole source of funding to date is modest feed-in tariff payments from solar panels purchased with a grant. This is sufficient to fund our co-ordinator, host our website and contribute towards Reading Climate Festival and an annual Model COP event for local schoolchildren, however securing additional funding is critical if we are to achieve the delivery of our Strategic Priorities and Action.

Recommendations

The author was asked to consider how the effectiveness of the partnership could be enhanced in terms of its ability to deliver its Action Plan. These fall into two key areas:

Funding enhancement

The current level of funding is not sufficient to invest in the scale of activities required in order to deliver all the necessary actions to achieve the partnership's goals. Securing additional funding could be transformational for the partnership, as evidenced by similar organisations in other places (eg Bristol, Manchester and Oxford).

With all board members acting in a voluntary capacity, time commitment can be inconsistent and activities are always at risk from other priorities, making it difficult to maintain momentum. While the breadth of expertise and representation offered by the board is excellent, nobody has personal responsibility for executing the Action Plan. Securing the funding to appoint a full-time project manager to oversee delivery of the Action Plan could be transformational.

In addition, communications and engagement is a critical component of the Action Plan, to ensure that good information is provided to diverse audiences in a timely fashion. A full-time communications professional to oversee the communication and engagement elements of the Action Plan – ideally supported by a communications budget for paid-for media would extend the content and reach,ensuring that messages cut through and are well received.

There are a number of different funding avenues that the partnership could explore to support these two roles:

- The National Lottery Fund regularly offers grants for community action on climate, often of significant value up to 7 figures.
- Other trusts and foundations invite applications for climate-related community action which might be suitable for funding individual projects or programmes.
- Large corporations based in and around Reading could be invited to commit some of their CSR/ESG budget to either sponsoring a role in the partnership or a specific project or theme area.

Governance, funding and resourcing

Alternative ways of generating revenue might be considered on a more transactional basis. Some examples are offered below but these should not be considered exhaustive:

- Restaurants might offer diners the opportunity to round-up the cost of plant-based meals with the balance being used to fund related activities in the Action Plan
- Companies requiring to include a Social Value element in a bid might be encouraged to collaborate on delivery of relevant actions from the Action Plan
- Climate Bonds could be offered to local residents as occurred in West Berkshire

It should be noted that some funding options are only available to certain types of organisation, and the partnership's unincorporated status could prove a barrier. Establishing a charitable company, a CIC or a CIO might expand the range of funding opportunities available, although this would also increase the governance overhead.

Operational enhancement

It is sometimes difficult to achieve secure linkage between activities being led by external organisations or groups. It has also been difficult to retain theme leads, due to the significant workload associated with a volunteer overseeing delivery of a programme of actions alongside other commitments.

For this reason it is recommended that the partnership consider having co-leads for all themes in the Action Plan, pairing a relevant council representative with a counterpart from civil society as has been done with the new Food theme. This would help to coordinate actions as well as reducing individual workload.

In addition, the model followed in the Nature and Open Spaces theme which includes a working group to support the theme lead(s) brings both additional expertise and added resource. Ideally this should be comprised of both independent subject-matter experts and representatives of delivery partners.

Finally, applying for grants is a specialised activity requiring excellent bid-writing skills as well as extensive knowledge of what funding opportunities exist and how to qualify for them; many of the larger funds have extensive application processes which are both time consuming and deadline-bound. It may be worth the partnership considering whether this skill should be outsourced on a commercial basis. Alternatively a dedicated bid-writer as a volunteer on the board or a sub-group of board members could be established with responsibility for funding applications.

Measuring and reporting progress

To ensure transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in delivering Reading's Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan, we will adopt a robust framework for measuring and reporting progress. Reporting will be overseen by the Reading Climate Change Partnership (RCCP), which will coordinate with key stakeholders across sectors to:

- Establish a baseline and methodology for measuring Scope 3 emissions
- Agree and update annual targets and milestones, aligned with Reading's net zero targets.
- Coordinate data collection and analysis across sectors and partner organisations.
- Publish regular progress reports and case studies.

As part of our drive for continuous improvement, we will place greater emphasis on establishing clear objectives and KPIs to track our progress in delivering the Climate Emergency Strategy. These may include, for example:

Carbon emissions: Annual Reading CO_2 emissions, sector-specific emissions (e.g., transport, buildings, waste).

Energy: Renewable energy generation and consumption, energy efficiency improvements.

Transport: Modal shift statistics, EV uptake, public transport usage.

Green infrastructure: Tree canopy coverage, biodiversity indicators, proportion of green space, increase in SuDS.

Community engagement: Number of organisations and residents engaged, climate literacy metrics.

Progress will be reported through:

Annual Reports: Detailing progress on delivering Reading's Climate Emergency Strategy and progress against carbon budgets.

Case studies: Highlighting achievements, challenges and community initiatives from across Reading.

Updated Action Plan: The Action Plan will be reviewed and updated annually, indicating progress against previous actions and ensuring that actions remain relevant in light of changes to national and local policy and other external factors.

All reports will be made publicly available via the Reading Borough Council and ReadingCAN websites, ensuring transparency and encouraging civic engagement. While we will be able to report what has been done, it is also important that we are able to measure the impact of those actions in terms of emissions reduction and progress towards our net zero target.

Measuring emissions across an entire town is challenging – although data is readily available regarding Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions, Scope 3 data is much harder to obtain and the reporting methodology is less well established. We are fortunate to have the support of the University of Reading in the development of our reporting framework and will continue to work towards improving the quality of data across all emissions sources throughout the life of this Strategy and Action Plan. Through the Council we will also continue to work with CDP, which promotes transparency on climate reporting and has rated Reading A for the past four years.

Partnerships and collaborations

Our vision is of a healthier, happier, climate-friendly and climate-resilient Reading — with walkable neighbourhoods, clean air, thriving local businesses offering good jobs, warm and energy-efficient homes, affordable energy, safe cycling routes and a public transport system that works for everyone.

The Reading Climate Change Partnership (RCCP) sets the city's climate vision and targets, working collaboratively to drive forward Reading's Climate Emergency Strategy.

Alongside our partnership, we are committed to embedding climate action into local policy and decision-making, promoting the need for urgent and equitable action at pace and scale, while highlighting the many co-benefits for health, wellbeing and the local economy.

We actively seek funding to support climate initiatives in Reading and bring together local expertise to co-design practical, community-led solutions to the climate crisis.

We champion best practice across our partners and lead campaigns to inspire and empower residents, businesses and organisations to take meaningful action.

We position Reading as a climate-conscious town, engaging with regional and national networks to accelerate change and share our learning.

Together, our work helps shape an inclusive, positive vision for a zero carbon, climate-resilient Reading — and brings together the people, knowledge and resources needed to achieve it.

Our board members represent a wide range of businesses, organisations and institutions- you can find out who they are here - but that is only a fraction of Reading's community and our stakeholders include everybody who lives, works, studies or spends leisure time in Reading. To implement system change across an entire town requires collaboration on a massive scale and our Action Plan includes a number of actions that are aimed at convening organisations to address some of the challenges that are not within our current sphere of influence.

We are grateful for the support of Delivery Partners who have agreed to work with us on shaping and delivering programmes and projects; you can find them mentioned against individual actions in our Action Plan. But success also depends on organisations of all sizes committing to reducing their own emissions and supporting our communications and engagement activities to help inspire lifestyle change in the wider community.

At a local level, Reading Borough Council is collaborating with adjoining local authorities both individually and through membership of The Sustainable Prosperity Board. Regionally, Reading is a member of the Greater South East Net Zero Hub, the Covenant of Mayors, Race to Zero (a global campaign to rally businesses, cities, regions and investors) and UK100, the cross-party network for climate leaders in local government.

By working with other places and national organisations, we aim to share knowledge and expertise and also to work together to influence national policy change to remove obstacles we have in common.

How to get involved

Individuals

Climate change is an issue that effects everybody, but we understand that it may not be everybody's top priority. Health, money, work and other topics can feel much more critical in many households, yet many of the individual actions that can reduce carbon emissions can also have benefits in other areas of life. Our vision is a healthier, happier, town that offers a stronger, more connected community and better quality of life for all.

You can often save money, improve your health or sometimes both by changing the way you heat and insulate your home, the way you travel, what you eat and what you buy. Our aim is to provide the information to help you to make better choices, and also to work with local businesses to make the climate-friendly options easier and cheaper to buy. Once you've decided to take action, we want to make sure you have good quality information on what to do and where to get help – whether that's how to decarbonise your heating or where to get your water bottle refilled. That's why the first question on the ReadingCAN website is "What can I do?".

We've created a Climate Pledge for individuals who want to adopt a more climate-friendly lifestyle, providing handy prompts for some of the actions than can have a large impact on emissions. Signing up means you've made a commitment to do what you can towards our shared vision for Reading and allows us to keep in touch to update you on new services and resources that might be of interest. You can find out more about it here.

Organisations

Whatever size your organisation, you probably already feel some pressure from customers to take action on climate change. Many large businesses already fall in scope for legislation that makes emissions reporting mandatory, including both carbon emissions and climate risk reporting, and smaller businesses are finding that this cascades down to them as suppliers. Carbon Reduction Plans are now compulsory for many public sector contracts. This makes emissions a strategic issue, and one that more organisations will have to get to grips with as time goes by.

Navigating the regulations and standards can be a challenge, especially for SMEs and micro businesses who are less likely to have the time and expertise – yet these organisations are responsible for more than half of the town's carbon emissions. Your efforts are certainly important when it comes to achieving our target of a net zero, climate resilient town, both in terms of your own actions and the influence you have over your stakeholders, including suppliers and staff.

The ReadingCAN Business Pledge sets out some simple commitments that organisations of all sizes can make that will contribute to reducing carbon emissions in a way consistent with common reporting standards. You can find it here. We have also established Reading Business CAN, a growing network of businesses and other organisations on LinkedIn, with the aim of sharing expertise and best practice, and a dedicated schools area on the ReadingCAN website to help with climate curriculum here.

Acknowledgements and thanks

The development of the Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan would not have happened without the support of a large number of individuals who, independently or on behalf of their organisation, took part in our deliberative process by attending one or more of our workshops. We are also indebted to Dialogue Matters who guided the process and documented the insights and ideas that contributed to this final Strategy and the Action Plan that accompanies it. We would like to thank you all for your contribution.

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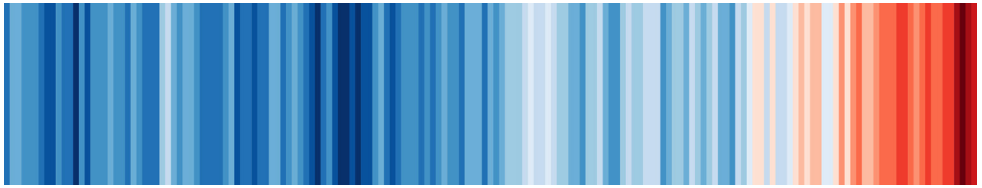
A special thank you to Professor Ed Hawkins, University of Reading for his permission to use his climate stripes imagery for our branding. The progression from blue (cooler) to red (warmer) stripes portrays the long-term increase in average global temperature for Berkshire from 1850 (left side of graphic) to the present day. #showyourstripes



Glossary of terms

Adaptation	Climate change adaptation is the process of adjusting to current or expected effects of climate change.
Biodiversity	The variety of plant and animal life in the world or in a particular habitat, a high level of which is usually considered to be important and desirable and which is under threat from the effects of climate change.
Carbon	Commonly used as shorthand for carbon dioxide (CO_2).
Carbon baseline	The year against which target decreases in emissions are measured.
Climate Change	A pattern of change affecting global or regional climate, for example average temperature and rainfall, or an alteration in frequency of extreme weather conditions. This variation may be caused by both natural processes and human activity, including emissions of greenhouse gases.
Carbon dioxide (CO_2)	Carbon dioxide is a gas that occurs naturally in the Earth's atmosphere and is also a by-product of human activities such as burning fossil fuels. It is the principal greenhouse gas produced by human activity.
Carbon dioxide equivalent (CO_2e)	Seven greenhouse gases have been associated with climate change are subject to emission limits under the Kyoto Protocol; each has a different global warming potential. The overall warming effect of this cocktail of gases is often expressed in terms of carbon dioxide equivalent, i.e. the amount of CO_2 that would cause the same amount of warming.
Carbon footprint	The amount of carbon emissions caused by an individual, organisation or geographic area or during the manufacture of a product in a given period of time.
Carbon neutral	Carbon neutrality is a state of net-zero carbon dioxide emissions. This can be achieved by balancing emissions of carbon dioxide with its removal (including through carbon offsetting).
Carbon offsetting	A way of compensating for emissions of CO_2 by participating in, or funding, efforts to take CO_2 out of the atmosphere. Offsetting often involves paying another party to save or remove emissions equivalent to those produced by your activity.
Carbon sequestration	The process of storing carbon dioxide. This can happen naturally, as growing trees and plants turn CO_2 into biomass (wood, leaves, and so on). It can also refer to the capture and storage of CO_2 produced by industry.
Circular Economy	In a traditional linear economy, the process goes 'make, use, dispose of.' In a circular economy, we try to retain resources in the economy at their highest possibly value, designing out waste from processes and business models and prioritising re-use of whole products, components and materials. Typically, this prioritises the use of renewable energy and natural resources, eliminates the use of toxic chemicals (which impair reuse).
Climate Emergency	A situation in which urgent action is required to reduce or halt climate change and avoid potentially irreversible environmental damage resulting from it.
Decarbonise	To reduce the amount of CO_2 released into the atmosphere.
Fossil fuels	Natural resources, such as coal, oil and natural gas, containing hydrocarbons. These fuels are formed in the Earth over millions of years and produce carbon dioxide when burnt (often in power stations to generate electricity).

Glossary of terms

Greenhouse gases (GHGs)	A greenhouse gas (GHG) is a gas that absorbs and emits radiant energy within the atmosphere, causing the greenhouse effect and leading to climate change.
Just transition	A 'just transition' means moving to a carbon-neutral society that's fair to everyone, leaving no one behind y developing an environmentally sustainable economy that supports good quality jobs and decent livelihoods.
Net zero	The term net zero means achieving a balance between the greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere, and the carbon removed from it. Unlike carbon neutrality, this cannot be achieved using offsetting.
Per-capita emissions	The total amount of greenhouse gas emitted by a country or region per unit of population.
Science-based targets	Science-Based Targets refer to emission reduction goals that align with the necessary level of decarbonisation to keep the global temperature increase below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, as outlined in the Paris Agreement.
Scope 1, 2 & 3 emissions	From the Greenhouse Gas Protocol, which is the world's most widely-used greenhouse gas accounting standard. Scopes 1 & 2 refer to the emissions that are owned or controlled by an organisation, typically from their use of fuel. Scope 3 emissions are caused by the activities of the company but occur from sources not owned or controlled by the organisation. One organisations' Scope 3 emissions will be another's Scopes 1&2.
SME (Small to medium enterprise)	An organisation with fewer than 250 employees and a turnover of less than €50 million or a balance sheet total less than €43 million. In 2022 there were more than 5.7 million SMEs in the UK.
Stakeholder	Any person or group who is affected by, or can influence, the activities of another group. For a company, this typically extends to employees, customers, suppliers, communities, governments and NGOs, but could also include 'hidden' stakeholders such as poor or marginalised groups, or the environment.
Stakeholder engagement	A process of consultation and discussion with stakeholders to understand their views and to ensure that their needs and concerns are properly considered in policy and action.
Supply chain	A network of facilities and distribution options that perform the functions of procurement of materials, transformation of these materials into intermediate and finished products, and the distribution of these finished products to customers, ie the chain of suppliers inputting to a final product.
Sustainable development	The most frequently quoted definition of sustainable development is from the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development 'Our Common Future', 1987 (also known as The Brundtland Report): 'Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.
Systems thinking	An approach to problem solving, by viewing 'problems' as parts of an overall system, rather than reacting to specific part, outcomes or events and potentially contributing to further development of unintended consequences.
Waste hierarchy	The relative benefit of different ways of dealing with waste, based on its environmental impact. Typically defined as a pyramid with the best processes at the top and worst at the bottom, ranging from waste avoidance all the way down to landfill.
Water stress	Occurs when the demand for water in an area significantly outstrips that which is available.

Acronyms

CAB	Citizens Advice Bureau
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
BNG	Biodiversity Net Gain
EPC	Energy Performance Certificate
ESG	Environmental Social and Governance
FE/HE	Further Education/Higher Education
GBA	Get Berkshire Active
GECOP/GECoP2	Green Events Code of Practice
GIS	Geographic Information System
GRFGN	Greater Reading Food Growing Network
GSENZH	Greater South East Net Zero Hub
GTG	Green Theme Group
LGA	Local Government Association
LSIPs	Local Skills Improvement Plans
LEP	Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership
NEU	National Education Union
PPA	Power Purchase Agreement
RBC	Reading Borough Council
RCAN/ReadingCAN	Reading Climate Action Network
RCCP	Reading Climate Change Partnership
RCES	Reading Community Energy Society
REDA	Reading Economic Development Agency
RISC	Reading International Support Centre
RVA	Reading Voluntary Agency
SSEN	Scottish and Southern Energy Networks
SuDS	Sustainable Urban Drainage Schemes
TPO	Tree Preservation Order
TTR	Transition Town Reading
TVLRF	Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum
UoR	University of Reading
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector

Index of international and national policy instruments

The Paris Agreement 2015 - A legally binding international treaty on climate change adopted by 195 Parties at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, France, on 12 December 2015 which entered into force on 4 November 2016. Its goal is to hold "the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels" and pursue efforts "to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels."

The Climate Change Act 2008 (as amended) - Cornerstone legislation setting legally binding carbon budgets for the UK to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Establishes the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) to advise and monitor progress. Seventh Carbon Budget is the latest carbon budget set by the CCC and contains ambitious targets for 2038-2042.

Net Zero Strategy (2021, updated 2025) - Outlines how the UK will meet its net zero target. Focuses on clean energy, transport decarbonisation, green finance, and innovation. Updated in 2025 to align with the global goal of tripling renewable energy capacity by 2030

Third National Adaptation Programme (NAP3) - Covers 2023–2028 and outlines how the UK will adapt to climate risks. This was criticised in the 2025 CCC progress report for being piecemeal and lacking effective delivery

Environment Act 2021 - Provides a legal framework for environmental governance post-Brexit. Introduces long-term targets for air quality, water, biodiversity, and waste. Establishes the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP).

Planning and Infrastructure Bill (2025)- Aims to accelerate green infrastructure and housing development. Supports the UK's ambition to become a "clean energy superpower"

Energy Security Strategy (2022, with 2025 updates) - Focuses on reducing reliance on fossil fuels and boosting domestic energy production. Includes investment in offshore wind, nuclear, and hydrogen.

UK Emissions Trading Scheme (UK ETS) - Replaced the EU ETS post-Brexit. Cap-and-trade system for carbon emissions with tightening caps over time.

Green Finance Strategy - Encourages private investment in sustainable projects. Includes mandatory climate-related disclosures for large companies.

Road to Zero Strategy (2018) - Long-term policy framework to reduce emissions from road transport and transitioning to zero-emission vehicles.

Minimum Energy Efficiency Regulations (MEES) 2015- Regulations introducing measures to improve the energy efficiency of certain private rented property in England and Wales.

The Energy Performance of Buildings Regulations 2012 -A set of regulations that aim to improve the energy efficiency of buildings. The regulations require Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) to be produced when a domestic or non-domestic building is constructed, sold or let.

The Building Regulations approved documents – A set of documents that provide guidance on ways to meet the building regulations.

The Future Homes Standard – due to be implemented in Autumn 2025 and fully enforced by 2028, this will ensure that new homes will produce 75-80% less carbon emissions.

The Warm Homes Strategy – Provides funding for local authorities to deliver energy performance and low carbon heating upgrades to low-income homes in England

The Home Energy Conservation Act - Require local authorities to submit reports every two years on the energy conservation measures they have taken to improve the energy performance of residential buildings

The Energy Act 2023 - a wide-ranging piece of UK legislation designed to reform the energy market to ensure greater security, affordability, and independence. It primarily focuses on enabling the transition to a net-zero energy system by providing regulatory frameworks and funding mechanisms for new, clean energy technologies.

Heat Network Zoning Regulations - Identifying and designating zones where heat networks provide the lowest-cost, low carbon heating option.

Reading Climate Change Partnership

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Reading Climate Change Partnership (RCCP) convenes and produces Reading's 5-year climate emergency strategies and action plans, convenes related annual reports, runs the annual Reading Climate Festival, and manages the ReadingCAN website, social media accounts and newsletter. RCCP's volunteer Theme Leads convene Action Plan Working Groups.

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