

Cover page – graphics to be developed

Reading Climate Emergency Action Plan 2025-2030

Reading Climate Change Partnership

10th June 2025

Introduction

This action plan accompanies the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2025-30 and sets out local climate action priorities across six action areas: energy and heat, travel and transport, water, waste, nature and open spaces, and food.

These actions will be shaped into delivery projects by various groups and organisations over the next five years to help (1) reduce our town's emissions and (2) to strengthen our town's resilience to the negative effects of climate change, such as heat waves, flooding, damage to resources and infrastructure, supply chain disruption and water shortages, among other things.

The actions were crowd-sourced and co-created by local experts, community representatives and +200 residents during Reading's Year of Climate Engagement 2024, with the support of expert facilitators. They represent current local thinking about barriers that need to be shifted to unlock net zero for Reading and opportunities for significant collective climate impacts.

Reading Borough Council has introduced numerous actions to mitigate climate emissions in its strategies and plans over the last decade and national government has introduced initiatives too; our action plan is designed to be complementary to these. In some cases the actions aim to enhance or influence a policy or project that is already 'owned' by our local Council or national government. In others the action is additional – e.g. an action that must be taken voluntarily by citizens, householders or businesses, or an action that aims to fill an information gap or mobilise local responses.

There is no single delivery body in Reading whose role it is to understand and set out our town's specific pathways to net zero, or to guide and mobilise people around climate action priorities – although the LGA is consulting to petition national government to empower local authorities to do this. That is why RCCP was formed in 2008 as a volunteer-led partnership, aiming to fill at least some of this gap. RCCP is not staffed however, apart from a part-time co-ordinator, and it was not set up to be a delivery body. These action plans can be seen as opportunities for climate action that require local organisations to come together to form delivery vehicles.

You will see that some of the actions have delivery partners attached to them; i.e. people or organisations who have stepped up to adopt an action into their own organisation or oversee delivery of it. Other actions do not yet have delivery partners, but they have nevertheless been identified as important levers for achieving net zero. In these cases RCCP volunteers will attempt to mobilise relevant delivery partners, or they may dedicate volunteer time towards bringing these opportunities to life. Please get in touch if you are able to adopt or oversee any of these actions or support existing delivery partners. We see this as the beginning of a delivery plan – a framework for collective climate action that local people and organisations can rally around.

Unlike the strategy, which will remain fixed for the period it covers, the action plan is intended to be a dynamic document. This will enable it to adapt to changing circumstances such as new central government policy, emerging science or technology innovations and changing local priorities, as well as allowing new actions to be added as opportunities emerge. Progress against the plan will be reported annually.

Each of the 6 themes has its own vision, an outline of the challenge and a summary of key barriers and enablers; these have been kept deliberately brief for readability. You can find further information in the strategy document on what has already been achieved for each of the themes and what activities are already occurring or planned. The strategy document also contains details of the cross-cutting strategic issues which have informed the action plan.

We have categorised each of the actions: Delivering, Convening, Communicating or Influencing. Where actions are dependent on additional funding being secured or other barriers for which we haven't yet identified a solution we have noted this requirement.

Energy and Heat

Vision



Renewable and community energy make a significant contribution to Reading's energy supply, with more of the benefits shared locally. Targets for low carbon heating and cooling have been set and met. Energy infrastructure is decarbonising rapidly and reliance on fossil fuels is much reduced.



We live in homes and work in buildings that use less energy. Through leveraging public and private finance, building retrofit has increased markedly. New housing development is very low carbon and future proofed for net zero with contributions being made to retrofit programmes. Buildings are increasingly well insulated, including sympathetic retrofit of Reading's heritage buildings. Local 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.

The Challenge

We rely on energy, primarily in the form of gas and electricity, to heat and light our homes and businesses and power our technology. Grid electricity is decarbonising but our homes and businesses were designed with heating systems that rely on fossil fuels. In order to move away from these energy sources we need to both reduce our energy consumption and switch to lower carbon technologies. This needs to happen on an unprecedented scale, but switching can be unaffordable and many people don't feel confident about technology choices. Inconsistent government policy, complicated incentive schemes and rogue operators all contribute to uncertainty about what measures to adopt and who to trust to provide them. Even new homes and commercial buildings aren't equipped with renewable heating and cooling because central government policy prevents local authorities from insisting on highest environmental standards as a condition of planning permission.

Basic energy efficiency measures such as draught proofing and loft insulation can be adopted by most people at low upfront cost. In these cases an engaging, targeted communications and behaviour change campaign could achieve good results. Other changes, like wall insulation or replacing heating systems with low carbon heat pumps, would require people to make substantial investment, potentially at the expense of other priorities such as a holiday or new car. For many this level of climate action may be totally financially out of reach and out of mind in which case, the most fruitful climate actions may involve removing barriers to action through grant support for example.

Funding is particularly important where household choices are restricted due to poverty and where the choice to 'heat or eat' for example may be very real. The refurbishment through retrofitting of existing homes seeks to address the multitude of social and health issues associated with underheated homes whilst also future proofing homes to use less energy and to decarbonise them.

Enablers and Barriers

Through public workshops we identified a number of barriers to decarbonising energy and heat in Reading, and some corresponding enablers.

Barriers

Renewables:

- Lack of government incentives and financing options for renewables
- Red tape makes local energy networks difficult
- Conflict between PV panels and trees, especially with TPOs

Decarbonising energy, heat and transport:

- Grid capacity limitations cannot support increased electricity demand to displace other fuel sources
- Lack of government/tax incentives for decarbonising of heat
- Relative expense of electricity compared to gas for heating
- Immature EV charging infrastructure and high vehicle costs
- Lack of skilled installers and maintenance personnel
- Lack of incentive/penalties for private or commercial landlords to improve insulation or decarbonise property
- Government support for energy price crisis rewards energy suppliers rather than funding energy efficiency measures
- Inconsistent government policy regarding phasing out of high carbon technology, e.g. gas boilers
- High cost of adaptation of the energy infrastructure and built environment

Enablers

Renewables:

- Reading has two well-established community energy companies that could help deliver solutions (although these rely on volunteer hours)
- Street-scale programmes can help make solar PV systems affordable and easier to access
- Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) could help provide finance for creating new renewables capacity

Decarbonising energy, heat and transport:

- Aquifers provide opportunities for ground source heat at scale
- Reading has access to a highly skilled workforce, particularly in technology, and good educational institutions
- Green leases could help accelerate decarbonisation of commercial buildings
- Government schemes are available for decarbonising the homes of those on lower incomes with healthcare needs
- Novel finance schemes from other places could be emulated (for example Future Leap in Bristol)
- Reducing household poverty/providing grants for change

Barriers

Behaviour Change:

- Lack of confidence in technology
- Uncertainty around choice of technology and reputation of installers
- Low take-up of over-complicated government schemes interpreted as lack of interest, leading to fewer incentives being offered
- Concerns over insulation scams (e.g. examples of issues with solid wall insulation causing damp issues)
- People tend not to value free advice as much as paid-for (even though there is increasingly helpful information and data available for free)
- Lack of resources to run behaviour change campaigns
- Lack of consistent oversight and maintenance of relevant data and information to enable targeted behaviour change campaigns.
- Information alone is usually not sufficient for collective behaviour change, live examples and targeted campaigns are more effective

Enablers

Behaviour Change:

- Various communications platforms and channels exist in Reading that could host, maintain and disseminate up-to-date information about what local residents, schools and businesses can do to reduce demand and decarbonise
- Targeted campaigns like the University of Reading's Climate Ambassadors for Schools Scheme have been established
- Open houses and champions schemes can help inspire and build confidence
- Reducing household poverty can be a powerful incentive for interventions that reduce energy bills, especially when this involves providing grants for change

#	Action name	Category	Description	Targets & milestones	Led by	Involving	Limiting factors
Renewables							
E1.1	Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs)	Convening	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Further projects delivered using 'private wire' where there is an on-site demand that can be met. 2) Work with electricity networks and other third parties to develop 'sleeving approaches' that enable Reading's community energy societies to develop solutions for PPAs using large scale commercial roofs 	Bring forward 5MWP of solar installed capacity over strategy period	RBC	Reading Hydro, RCES, commercial rooftop owners, REDA, SSEN	
E1.2	Supporting skills development	Convening	Work with local HE and FE providers to Integrate climate sustainability into local education and workforce development, including those already in employment, fostering a skilled local workforce for renewables, retrofit and climate adaptation. Utilise resources from the Regional Skills Pilot for the Southeast.		REDA	HE and FE providers, trade associations, local contractors, Greater South East Net Zero Hub (GSENGH)	
E1.3	Solar Panels	Delivering	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Make reverse auction available to householders to allow low priced solar installations and batteries. 2) Investigate reverse auction approaches for heat pumps 	Bring forward >50 installations per annum	IChoosr (RBC)		

Decarbonising energy, heat and transport							
E2.1	Green leases	Convening	Bring together relevant stakeholders to establish a set of criteria for green leases in Reading to unlock energy efficiency measures for commercial tenants		Reading Borough Council	REDA, LEP, large commercial landlords	
E2.2	Retrofit funded programmes	Delivering	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Progress funded Retrofit programmes for the fuel poor and those eligible for grant funding. 2) Establish an Insetting scheme to enable retrofitting using Zero Carbon Homes funding. 3) Develop tools and information to guide the 'able to pay market'. 4) Review and bid for relevant central government funding schemes to decarbonise heat and improve energy efficiency, balancing fitness for purpose with wide access and prompt roll-out 	TBC	RBC (Anita Purser)	TBC	
E2.3	Retrofit grant funding programmes	Influencing	<p>Gain commitment from RBC to work in partnership with community groups to set up a private homeowners retrofit service e.g. 'Superhomes' via NEF or similar</p> <p>Work in Partnership to bid for funds to provide services for free to those in hardship but not eligible for government grants</p>	TBC	Reading Hydro	RBC, RCCP (Energy), Go Renewables, local contractors	

E2.4	Retrofit offer	Delivering	Develop and market an offer to provide fairly priced, expert advice on the most appropriate measures for individual homes and small businesses.	TBC	Reading Hydro	RBC, RCCP (Energy), Draughtbusters, other subject matter experts, local contractors	
E2.5	Fuel poverty	Communicating	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Clear signposting of free services such as the Warmer Homes Service, Draughtbusters, alongside online information services to help gain information and funding options to improve energy efficiency and reduce energy costs, via the ReadingCAN and RBC websites 2) Deliver Warm Homes funding through Portsmouth Consortium in the borough, Supplement the programme with other funding such as Zero Carbon Homes. 	<p>Published by end of 2025 and updated at least annually</p> <p>Retrofit homes – targets to be confirmed</p>	RBC	RCCP (Comms), CAB	
E2.6	Landlord Retrofit	Delivering	Seek funding for and deliver Low Carbon Housing Strategy for RBC Housing	Maximise EPC C and above based on Warm Homes Funding. Net Zero Housing plan to be developed by end 2026.	RBC	Landlords	Availability of funding?

E2.7	Landlord Retrofit	Influencing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Support Private Landlords in seeking grants and carrying out works on their properties to improve the EPC levels before 2030. 2) Enforce EPC levels required by UK law by 2030 	EPC C rating by 2030 (government proposal)	RBC	Landlords	
E2.8	Adaptation	Influencing	Feed into the Supplementary Planning Document in the New Local Plan to ensure that the Adaptation Framework is fit for purpose	2026	RBC		
E2.9	Funding decarbonisation	Convening	Establish a working group to investigate novel ways of funding decarbonisation and energy efficiency that have been successful in other places and develop suitable solutions for Reading	TBC	RCCP (Energy)	RBC, University of Reading (School of the Built Environment), Reading Hydro, RCES	
E2.10	Designing equitable approaches to decarbonisation	Planning	Bring together energy professionals, policy makers and local community groups to develop an ambitious, equitable, inclusive proposal for decarbonisation, with an initial focus on heat networks.	TBC	Just-Systems (UKRI funded research project)	RBC, University of Reading (Just Systems project), Royal Berkshire Hospital, Maid Energy, RCCP	
E2.11	Heat networks	Delivering	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Complete the Detailed Project Development stage for Reading Heat Network. 2) Apply for Green Heat Network Fund for Reading 	Dec 2025 Dec 2025	RBC		

			<p>3) Procure an Energy Service Company to build and operate Reading’s heat network.</p> <p>4) Establish a Zone Coordinator for Reading</p> <p>5) Construction of heat network clusters</p> <p>6) Consider options to link Royal Berkshire Hospital to University of Reading Networks/town network.</p>	<p>2026 - 2027</p> <p>2026</p> <p>2027 – 2030</p>			
E2.12	Develop Local Area Energy planning tools for Reading	Influencing	RBC and community energy groups to use the LENZA and Pathways tools to plan local projects and inform network decisions	<p>Access to LENZA by the end of 2025. Access to ‘Pathways’ to be maintained continuously when funding ceases in April 2025</p>	RBC	Reading Hydro, RCES	<p>Availability of funding to renew the CoreLogic Pathways tool when GSEnz funding ceases. Agreement by RBC for community energy groups to access the tools</p>
Behaviour change							
E3.1	Community Energy Hub	Communicating	1) Establish a single source of reliable consumer advice on renewables and retrofit decarbonisation measures, including signposting to funding options and reputable suppliers using a suitable accreditation.		RBC	RCCP (Energy), RCCP (Comms), Reading Hydro, Trading Standards,	Promotion of the online hub through paid-for media and creation of the physical hub both subject to

			<p>2) Reading Net Zero Transition Hub to target segmented audiences through a range of suitable media, enabling actions, community engagement and behaviour change campaigns</p> <p>3) Explore the potential for a physical hub.</p>		RBC, UoR, Reading Hydro	<p>accreditation providers</p> <p>RCCP (Comms)</p>	<p>availability of funding to deliver</p> <p>Expertise and resource to design and deliver appropriate campaigns that enable action</p>
E3.2	Energy Champions	Communicating	<p>Compile a list of businesses and homes prepared to host “open house” sessions to demonstrate solutions and promote via the ReadingCAN website and RBC comms e.g. ‘A House Like Mine’ - exemplars of retrofit for common housing archetypes.</p>		RCCP (Energy)	RCCP (Comms), RBC	

Travel and Transport

Vision



Safe and accessible walking and cycling routes, both new and improved, create opportunities for healthy, low-carbon leisure and travel. Walking, cycling and electric bus and rail routes, in Reading and beyond, are interconnected and easier to use, enabling some people to replace some car journeys to some 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.

The Challenge

Like most urban places, Reading has a well-developed transport infrastructure yet still suffers from traffic congestion and air quality issues. Reading Borough Council has a number of relevant strategies and policies which outlines its priorities regarding transport infrastructure, in particular its Local Transport Plan; these were developed with public consultation and with consideration of the ambition for a net zero, climate adapted town by 2030. The role of this action plan is not to duplicate or rehash those strategies but to outline how Reading Climate Change Partnership can support and enhance the Council's activities, and also encourage the behaviour change that will be needed from both individuals and organisations to help reduce carbon emissions from the transport of both people and goods in the town.

There are three main ways that emissions from travel and transport can be reduced at a town level:

- Reducing the number of journeys that need to be made by vehicles
- Switching to less polluting vehicles, in particular public transport and electric vehicles (EVs)
- Encouraging active modes of travel such as walking and cycling

We are building on strong foundations as Reading has an excellent bus fleet and extensive rail connections, although there are affordability and access issues for many people. Affordability is also a factor for adoption of EVs, as is access to charging points for those without off-street parking. Infrastructure changes need to take these challenges into account while also encouraging those who can adapt their travel habits to do so. Organisations also have a part to play in developing their own plans to minimise the need for travel by their staff and customers and by finding ways to decarbonise their own fleet and business travel.

As we make these changes, we need to prepare for increased disruption to transport systems arising from climate impacts and ensure that people can still travel safely and comfortably in a changing climate. Air quality issues will be exacerbated by higher temperatures and therefore reducing pollution from vehicles will be an important benefit, as will the health and fitness improvements that come from active travel.

Enablers and Barriers

Through public workshops we identified a number of barriers to supporting nature and biodiversity to help reduce emissions and improve adaptation to climate change in Reading, and some corresponding enablers.

Barriers

Encouraging Active Travel

- Lack of secure cycling storage
- Lack of funding for cycling provision
- Few bike repair stores
- Narrow Victorian streets
- Concerns over the safety of cycling, wheeling and walking
- Upfront cost of bikes, ebikes and essential accessories
- People and organisations are not always aware what facilities are available to them
- People and organisations aren't always aware of how much their travel choices contribute to carbon emissions

Reducing vehicle emissions

- Cost of providing EV charging facilities – both public and private
- Difficulty of providing EV charging for those without driveways
- High cost of EVs in comparison to ICE vehicles
- Grid restrictions on supplying electricity for EV charging
- Need to protect provision for those with impaired mobility

Low carbon transport infrastructure

- The risk /of damage and injury to cyclists caused by poorly maintained surfaces
- Increased rainfall and higher temperatures due to climate change are likely to be a disincentive to active travel

Enablers

Encouraging Active Travel

- Safe walking and cycling routes
- Low traffic neighbourhoods and 20mph zones
- Secure bike storage, including for e-bikes
- Cycle to work schemes
- Potential for using technology to support and incentivise active/low-carbon travel
- Health benefits of active travel are a motivator
- Established local groups already providing effective support
- Promotion of RBC funded schemes such as Reading Bike Kitchen to provide affordable bike repairs and parts

Reducing vehicle emissions

- The opportunity to expand car clubs
- Potential for last mile delivery centres and low-carbon town centre delivery vehicles
- Funding received for electrifying Reading's buses
- Grants available for in-home and office charging points
- Health benefits of cleaner air
- Potential for b-directional EV charging for local energy storage

Low carbon transport infrastructure

- Reading's award-winning bus service
- Reading's Tree Strategy aims to green cycle routes

#	Action name	Category	Description	Targets & milestones	Led by	Involving	Limiting factors
Encouraging active travel							
T1.1	Travel plans for schools, organisations and business parks	Communicating	Develop and share resources to support organisations, particularly schools, SMEs and charities, to develop low carbon travel plans, including guidance on best practice and a template for creating travel plans	Resources published to ReadingCAN website by 2027	RCCP (Business)	REDA, RCCP (Comms)	Requires investment in resource to deliver
T1.2	Cycle to work schemes	Communicating	Develop explainer for businesses and signpost Cycle to Work schemes to increase take-up.	Published to ReadingCAN website by March 2027	RCCP (Travel)	RCCP (Comms)	
T1.3	Integrated ticketing	Communicating	Work with Reading Borough Council to promote integrated ticketing as a means of making public transport cheaper and easier to use	Ongoing as part of ReadingCAN comms programme	RCCP (Comms)	RBC	
T1.4	Responding to national government policy	Convening	Work with Reading Borough Council to support policy development in response to future changes to government policy to encourage active travel – for example with relation to e-scooters	As and when required	RCCP (transport)	RBC	
T1.5	Smart City Pilots	Convening	Set up a working group to leverage the relevant Smart City pilots being delivered by Stantec around making public transport more accessible for the elderly, and encouraging sustainable travel to schools, with a view to broadening the reach of the programmes	Working group set up by March 2027	RCCP (transport)	Stantec, RBC	Requires investment in resource to deliver

T1.6	Active Travel information hub	Communicating	Work with relevant providers to develop a comprehensive information source on all the organisations and services in Reading to promote and support active travel, including empowering organisers to enter their own information into the ReadingCAN events calendar	Information hub launched by 2027	RCCP (Comms)	Transition Town Reading, Reading Bike Kitchen, Reading Cycle Campaign, others	
T1.7	Active Travel for health	Influencing	Support active travel actions by advocating for these to be included in Physical Activity alliance and healthy weight system planning with RBC Public health	TBC	Get Berkshire Active (Nick West-Oram)	RBC (public health and wellbeing)	
Reducing vehicle emissions							
T2.1	Last mile delivery	Convening	Convene a working group on last mile delivery to explore the opportunities for establishing last mile delivery centres in Reading to reduce the number of commercial vehicles and, where possible, switch to low carbon alternatives	Working group set up by xxxx	REDA	Pedal and Post, other suitable providers	Requires investment in resource to deliver
T2.2	Car clubs	Convening	Bring together relevant interested parties to unlock the use of private spaces as sites for car club providers and develop a suitable offer for Reading	Offer developed by xxxx	RCCP (Transport)	Landlords/property managers, car club operators, RBC	Requires investment in resource to deliver
T2.3	Car sharing and community transport	Communicating	Check what car sharing services and community transport services are active in Reading and ensure they are included on the ReadingCAN website	Resources published by xxxx	RCCP (Comms)	RBC (which department?), RVA	

Low carbon transport infrastructure							
T3.1	Adaptation measures	Convening	Convene group for knowledge sharing on adaptation e.g. permeability of road surfaces, shading for walking and cycling	TBC	RCCP (Transport)	University of Reading, RBC	Requires investment in resource to deliver
T3.2	New infrastructure	Influencing	Work with Reading Borough Council to prompt consideration of how existing infrastructure can be adapted to ensure maximum environmental benefit when new infrastructure is adopted, for example with respect to possible new Thames road bridge	As and when required	RCCP (Transport)	RBC	
T3.3	Road repairs	Convening	Convene the relevant stakeholders to explore more sustainable ways of maintaining roads and determining priorities for repairs based on use by cyclists and other wheelers	TBC	RCCP (Transport)	RBC, Road Innovation Group (Sam Shean), Tarmac	Requires investment in resource to deliver

Water

Vision



Water consumption and associated power demand is reduced through meters and water conservation measures. Flood and drought mitigation measures are in place ready for when needed. Our water is safe and clean, supporting biodiversity, carbon capture and health.

The Challenge

The River Thames, which winds through Reading, is more than just a waterway; it's a source of pride, a place of recreation and a vital natural resource. The River Kennet is a valuable wildlife habitat, and its flood plain helps protect Reading from flooding. As our climate evolves, we have a unique opportunity to adapt and thrive by embracing smarter, more sustainable ways of managing water. While we can expect more varied weather—wetter winters, drier summers, and extremes like floods or droughts—these changes also present a chance to build a more resilient and water-wise Reading community. Reading is located in one of the more water-stressed regions of the UK, with water availability per person comparable to some of the driest places in the world. Yet, we are fortunate to have strong foundations: the River Kennet and the chalk aquifer beneath the Berkshire Downs provide a reliable water supply. By using this resource wisely through improved water efficiency, rainwater harvesting, and leak prevention, we can ensure it continues to support our growing town, even during dry spells.

As rainfall becomes more intense and unpredictable, we have the chance to enhance our flood resilience by protecting and managing our green space, including flood plains, carefully and safeguarding them from development. To stay ahead of the curve, we can invest in smarter, greener solutions—like sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), green infrastructure, and permeable surfaces—that help water soak into the ground naturally and reduce pressure on our drains. These improvements not only reduce flood risk but also bring added benefits like greener streets, cooler urban spaces and more vibrant habitats for wildlife.

We've already seen how surface water can affect our homes and streets, and now is the time to empower every household and business with the knowledge and tools to prepare. Simple actions—like checking flood risk, creating a flood plan, or using drains responsibly—can make a big difference. While national action is needed to fully address issues like sewage overflows, we can all play a part by keeping our sewers clear and supporting local water initiatives. Together, we can build a community that's ready for whatever the weather brings—stronger, safer, and more connected through our shared commitment to water.

Enablers and Barriers

During public workshops, we identified several challenges that make it harder to improve flood resilience, conserve water, and reduce the impact of sewage in Reading. We also explored practical solutions that could help overcome these barriers and support efforts to cut emissions and adapt to climate change.

Barriers

Flood resilience and mitigation

- Climate change is already causing more extreme rainfall events
- Reading is based at the convergence of several rivers, all with the potential to flood during heavy rainstorms
- Impermeable surfaces are the default in hard landscaping
- Encroachment of development into flood plains and water meadows
- Cost of maintaining surface water drainage systems
- Lack of flood risk awareness and what to do in case of flooding
- Lack of investment by the EA in river system management

Water conservation

- Lack of priority given by water companies to fixing leaks – also reduces personal motivation to conserve water
- Water efficiency is not seen as a priority for many people and organisations
- More local food production could increase demand for water

Water quality

- Release of sewage into waterways remains an issue with insufficient penalties imposed by central government
- People don't always know what they can and cannot dispose of into domestic sewers

Enablers

Flood resilience and mitigation

- Sustainable Urban Draining Schemes (SuDS)
- Flood alerts available from the Environment Agency
- The ability of green infrastructure to mitigate flood risk
- Expertise available from the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum and the University of Reading
- Opportunity to learn from other places with well-developed flood prevention programmes
- Flood mitigation programmes could be developed as “carbon insetting” opportunities

Water conservation

- Existing guidance available on how to use water efficiently can be amplified
- Rainwater harvesting and greywater collection technologies can help reduce demand
- Water meters can help promote efficient water use
- Making “water neutrality” a planning requirement
- Low-cost water saving solutions, e.g. water butts

Water quality

- Existing information on how to avoid sewer abuse can be amplified

#	Action name	Category	Description	Targets & milestones	Led by	Involving	Limiting factors
Flood resilience and mitigation							
W1.1	Flood risk awareness	Communicating	Increase awareness of the flood risk for Reading and how to access flood alerts and warnings by sharing the online tool available via Defra: Where do you want to check? - Check your long term flood risk - GOV.UK	Published on ReadingCAN by 2025.	RCCP (Comms)	RCCP (Water), Defra, Environment Agency	Online tool requiring access to a computer and the internet.
W1.2	Flood preparedness	Communicating	Raise awareness of flood risk by engaging with the community. This includes sharing information with individuals and organisations on what to do in case of flooding, based on publicly available information.	Published on ReadingCAN by 2025. Support TVLRF with local engagement from 2025 to 2027.	RCCP (Comms)	RBC. Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum (TVLRF)	Requires volunteers to support delivery of engagement activities.
W1.3	Guidance for schools and community groups on flooding	Communicating	Develop guidance based on best practice from other places and share locally.	Develop and share guidance by 2027.	RISC (Kirsty Dabbs)	Other councils	
W1.4	Guidance for developers on SuDS	Communicating	Develop guidance based on best practice from other places, including SUDS marketplace in London, and share locally	Develop and share locally relevant guidance for developers by 2027.	GTG	Local landscape architects, engineering firms	Need to ensure alignment with existing SuDS guidance documents.
W1.5	Natural Flood Management	Influencing	Investigate the use of green infrastructure to reduce flooding and develop recommendations for	By 2030.	RCCP (Water)	GTG, Thames Water, RBC, local catchment	Requires investment in resource to deliver

			Reading; focusing on opportunities for Natural Flood Management.			partnerships, and the Environment Agency.	
W1.6	Rainwater harvesting and reuse	Influencing	Facilitate a knowledge sharing session with Waltham Forest Council on the risks and rewards from rainwater harvesting (e.g. water butts).	By 2025.	RCCP (Water)	Elizabeth Rapoport, Flood Ready London Partnership Waltham Forest Council	
W1.7	Kennet Meadows	Influencing	Ensuring that Kennet Meadows, as Reading's primary natural flood defence, is defended from development	Ongoing	GTG	RBC	
W1.8	Protecting Reading's network of green spaces	Delivering	Maintain and enhance green spaces and Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) to support river health and biodiversity.	Increase area of green coverage from 17% baseline	RCCP (Nature)	RBC	Requires investment in resource to deliver
W1.9	Enhance sports pitch resilience	Convening	Partner with local grassroots sports organisations to improve water stewardship and protect pitches from flooding and drought and unlock new opportunities for NbS and SuDS at sports grounds.	Sports projects delivered collaboratively through a place-based approach. Target 2028 for pilot project.	RCCP (Water)	Football Association (FA), Get Berkshire Active, RBC	Requires investment in resource to deliver
W1.10	Enhancing local flood plains	Delivering	River and flood plain initiatives to slow and store water and support river health by reducing runoff and	Deliver one community flood plain	RCCP (Water)	RCCP (Nature) and local	

			improving local biodiversity through community involvement.	initiative by 2030.		community groups	
Water conservation							
W2.1	Advice for gardeners	Communicating	Design and deliver a local behaviour change campaign to enable more water-efficient gardening, using up-to-date info on water butts, green shed roofs, watering strategies etc.	Published by 2026. Workshops and knowledge sharing sessions to be delivered.	RCCP (Nature)	GRFGN, Allotment groups/IER Partner with Our Rainwater.	
W2.2	Water conservation in development	Convening and Influencing	Work with planning team to encourage water conservation measures (including greywater/rainwater harvesting) and/or water neutrality to be made mandatory in all new planning applications. Socialise and encourage uptake of Thames Water incentives for water neutral developments.	Guidance prepared by Thames Water.	RCCP (Water)	Our Rainwater, local plumbers and trades people, developers, Thames Water, and RCCP (Nature).	
W2.3	Greywater collection	Delivering	Pilot greywater collection solutions in Reading, e.g. local depots and offices.	By 2030.	RCCP (Water)	Thames Water, Mott Macdonald, Our Rainwater, RBC	
W2.4	Water information hub	Communicating	Create/signpost information on water efficiency for individuals and organisations, including the carbon emissions associated with	Published by 2027.	RCCP (Water)	Rivers Trust, Thames Water, local catchment partnerships	

			water use/treatment and heating water for cooking/washing etc.				
W2.5	Educate the public about Reading's water situation	Communicating	Share and explain water efficiency and per capita consumption targets (set by government) and how this compares to current consumption. Develop Comms Strategy for engaging public, including schools.	Available material published on RCAN website. New material prepared and published. Published by 2026.	RCCP (Water)	Thames Water, Environment Agency	
W2.6	Educate businesses about water use, efficiency benefits, and dry weather preparedness /response	Communicating	Share the Thames Water Drought Plan. Signpost relevant information and case studies from reputable sources. Create industry-specific advice and case studies. Run a drought exercise with Local Resilience Forum (LRF), partners and businesses. Communicate the Environment Agency 'incident management' approach to drought.	Information resource compiled and published. Industry-specific guidance available. Drought exercise and incident management response.	RCCP (Water)	Thames Water, Environment Agency	
W2.7	Leadership and Influence	Influencing	Lobby MPs and Defra to strengthen building regulations and planning process, to drive water efficiency within all new developments and procurement schemes.	Update to building regs and planning. Implementation of Schedule 3.	RCCP (Water)	Thames Water, Environment Agency, Local ENGOS, Rivers Trust	
W2.8	Promote drought-tolerant landscaping	Convening	Promote drought-tolerant landscaping in urban planning and public spaces.	Engage with local businesses, community	RCCP (Water)	Local community groups, and	

				groups and landscape architects to educate and promote drought-tolerant landscaping.		RCCP (Nature)	
W2.9	Pilot time-of-use pricing models for water services	Delivering	Pilot time-of-use pricing models to shift demand away from peak periods	Work with Thames Water to deliver tariff trials for time of use pricing	RCCP (Water)	Thames Water, RBC	
W2.10	Offer free or subsidised plumbing checks	Delivering	Offer free or subsidised plumbing checks for vulnerable or low-income households	Work in partnership with energy and heating initiatives to support vulnerable customers to address leaks in their home (customer side leaks and plumbing losses)	RCCP (Water)	Local plumbers and trades people, RBC, a funding delivery partner such as HACT	
Water quality (including Sewage and pollution)							
W3.1	Reducing herbicide use	Influencing	Protect water quality by minimising chemical runoff into rivers and streams. Work with local businesses, community groups, and landscape architects to	Establish baseline for number of uses or sites where herbicide is	RCCP (Water)	GRFGN, Allotment groups/IER	

			minimise herbicide and other harmful chemicals and fertilizers.	used and reduce herbicide use by 50% by 2030			
W3.2	Improving run-off from roads	Influencing	Identifying new opportunities to improve green infrastructure on roads and pavements. Support implementation of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) and new planting areas to manage flood risks and enhance natural filtration.	Current infrastructure projects. Integrate green and blue infrastructure in 50% of new transport projects by 2030.	RCCP (Water)	In partnership with RCCP (Transport)	
W3.3	Educate the public about sewer abuse	Communicating	Publish sewer abuse and the impact on water quality, messages and content to RCAN website. Education and awareness campaign delivered with local partners including drainage companies.	Content published. Local partnerships with drainage companies established.	RCCP (Water)	Thames Water, Environment Agency	
W3.4	Educate and regulate chemicals that enter the river - pets	Communicating	Educate the public and increase awareness of the impact of different chemicals (used in everyday life) on river health. Work with local veterinarian clinics to support education for dog owners on the impact of flea collars.	In partnership with local businesses and veterinarian clinics, engage with 10% of dog owners in Reading.	RCCP (Water)	Local community groups, veterinarian clinics, and pet owners.	

Beyond Waste

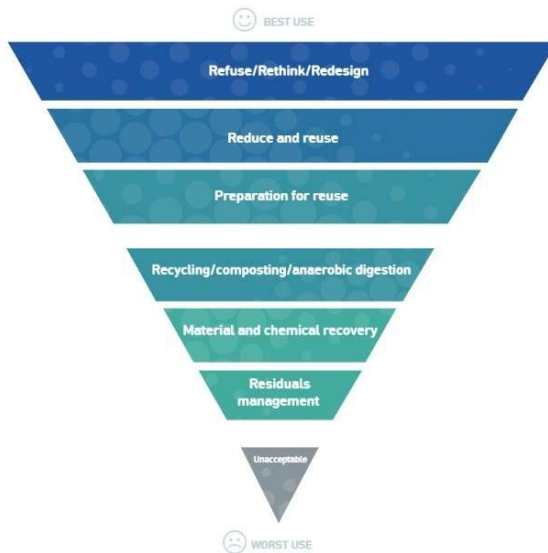
Vision



People and organisations are mindful about what they buy and consume, how they use and dispose of it, 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.

The Challenge

Our modern economy is built on consumerism and easy access - if we have enough money we can easily buy whatever we want, whenever we want it. This generates a great deal of waste, which causes carbon emissions not only when it is processed but also through the raw materials, manufacturing processes and transport of the goods. Even services and virtualised products, such as streaming music and entertainment, emit carbon through data storage and transmission, as well as the manufacturing, transport and disposal of the devices used to enjoy them. Live entertainment is just as impactful, causing significant emissions from the infrastructure needed to put on an event or festival and the food and drink prepared and consumed on site. We need to reduce emissions but we also want to preserve our ability to have fun.



One way to frame this challenge is through an approach called the circular economy. To provide the goods we need we take materials from the Earth, make products from them, use them and eventually throw them away as waste – the process is linear. To try and reduce the impact of waste we adopt end of life solutions like recycling, but the amount of materials we consume doesn't really change. A circular economy is a system where materials never become waste and are kept in circulation through processes like maintenance, reuse, refurbishment, remanufacture and composting, and recycling. The circular economy can help reduce carbon emissions and also address other global challenges, like biodiversity loss, waste, and pollution, by breaking the link between the provision of goods and services and the consumption of finite resources. By designing better products and services, and re-imagining business models to rely less on ownership of physical products, we aim to stop waste being produced in the first place. This is illustrated by the new hierarchy of waste developed by [Zero Waste Europe](#); you can read more about the Circular Economy and find useful resources at the [Dame Ellen Macarthur Foundation](#).

Like many of the changes needed to reduce carbon emissions, the Circular Economy is a system intervention requiring organisations and policymakers to work together to develop better systems and processes that enable consumers to make low-carbon choices.

Enablers and Barriers

Through public workshops we identified a number of barriers to creating a more circular economy in Reading, and some corresponding enablers.

Barriers

Waste prevention and management:

- Recycling provision is different at home, work and school, causing confusion and leading to contamination of waste streams (including kerbside bins) that prevent recycling
- Fines for incorrect treatment of waste are not high enough to work as a deterrent
- Market demand for recycled materials is variable and prices not always attractive
- Facilities for waste processing aren't sufficient
- Public investment in waste and recycling is limited
- No kerbside collection of glass in Reading

Innovation:

- Funding for innovation is difficult to access
- Difficulty in demonstrating the value of innovation to funders

Behaviour change:

- Lack of understanding of the link between resources, waste and carbon emissions
- A busy curriculum in schools leaves little time for messaging
- Lack of resources – people, time and money
- Lack of consistency in communication of what good looks like
- Limited/hard to access information about what's available
- Language barrier in some communities

Enablers

Waste prevention and management:

- Planned changes in waste legislation will help improve systems
- Various media exist that can communicate better information about recycling facilities, including future changes e.g. The ReadingCAN website, Reading Borough Council publications
- Better recycling provision for people who can't drive to facilities
- More instore recycling of WEEE, batteries and other waste

Innovation:

- Funding might be available from government, innovation funds or private funders to develop circular economy solutions
- Reading has access to a highly skilled workforce, particularly in technology, and plenty of innovative, agile organisations
- Circular design guidelines and principles already exist
- The relevance of circular economy across themes

Behaviour Change:

- Various media exist that can communicate better information about recycling facilities, e.g. The ReadingCAN website, Reading Borough Council publications
- The Climate Ambassadors programme for schools
- Some resource exchanges already exist in the area, plus charities etc – improved comms and funding needed
- Guidance published in various languages

#	Action name	Category	Description	Targets & milestones	Led by	Involving	Limiting factors
Waste prevention and management							
W1.1	Improving waste data	Influencing	Lobby for a local waste dashboard for both domestic and commercial waste with the correct metrics to promote improved performance	TBC	RCCP (Waste)	RE3	
W1.2	Working group on problematic waste streams	Convening	Assemble a working group to agree and implement policies to reduce waste /improve recycling rates for specific waste streams, including (but not limited to) demolition waste, clothing, glass, soft plastics, WEEE, PV panels, EV batteries (kerbside & centralised)	Group set up by xxx	RBC (Waste Services)	RE3, RCCP (Waste), REDA	
W1.3	Bokashi for Business	Delivering	Develop an offer to help small organisations including schools and 3 rd sector in scope of new food waste regulations to comply cost-effectively through the use of Bokashi bins to store waste. Deliver pilot and roll out.	Develop offer by mid 2026; pilot 2027-8	GTG	RBC, Waste Contractors	Requires minor funding for resource to deliver
Innovation							
W2.1	Design Guidelines	Communicating	Create a set of design guidelines covering all the Climate Emergency Strategy themes to support alignment with circular economy principles	Guidelines published by xxx	Design Matters, Studio Technical Nature (Erica Purvis)	Paul Ducker (Organisation ?)	
W2.2	Food waste innovation	Convening	Convene the RE3 councils and gain agreement to developing a data-backed programme of actions to optimise management	TBC	GTG	RBC, RE3, University of Reading	

			of food waste based on climate impact, considering home-based methods as well as door to door collection and out of area processing.				
Behaviour change							
W3.1	Circular Economy information hub	Communicating	Create a definitive information source on Circular Economy, waste hierarchies and a directory of recycling, re-use, repair and sharing facilities available in the Reading area and promote widely via social media	Published on the ReadingCAN website by xxx, updated annually	RCCP (TRC)	Studio Technical Nature, Paul Ducker/RCCP (Waste), Connect Reading, RISC (Kirsty Dabbs), REDA, RBC TTR (transition town reading): bicycle kitchen, library of things, repair cafes)	
W3.2	Schools	Convening	Develop a network of green reps to support schools to improve resource efficiency	TBC	NEU/Schools Joint Forum (Kate Gumbrell)	Design Nature - Links to Let's Go Zero	
W3.3	Businesses	Convening	Develop an offer for businesses to promote Circular Economy principles and support the development of innovative business practice, with the aim of encouraging them to eventually	Convene first meeting by xx	RCCP (Business)	REDA, Studio Technical Nature	

			develop, publish and promote their own circular economy action plan.				
W3.4	Festivals and Events	Convening	Build on the Green Events Code of Practice to share best practice and develop a partnership offering for to support a more sustainable approach for Reading's festivals and events	Launch partnership offer by xxx	Paul Ducker	Reading Borough Council culture team, Reading Independent Festivals Forum, Festival Republic, Julie's Bicycle	Requires investment in resource to deliver
W3.5	Success stories	Communicating	Collect and write up success stories about circular solutions and promote widely on ReadingCAN website and in social media as well as sharing with other media outlets	TBC	RCCP (Comms)		

Nature and Open Spaces

Vision



Green spaces 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.

The Challenge

Although Reading is a largely urban environment, it has numerous public parks and open spaces and opportunities for greening the built environment, as well as private gardens, school playing fields and water meadows. Nature has a role to play in both emissions reduction and adaptation; soil, trees and other plants store carbon dioxide that would otherwise be released into the atmosphere and all green plants photosynthesize, taking in carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen. Conversely, rotting vegetation releases carbon dioxide as well as methane which is a potent global warming gas so it's important to avoid land which is prone to flooding from drying out. From an adaptation point of view green spaces help water to drain more quickly, helping to reduce flooding from heavy rainfall, and trees provide welcome shade, making active travel more comfortable in heatwaves as well as helping to keep the air cooler for everybody. While protecting biodiversity is important in its own right, this action plan prioritises actions that contribute to either emissions reduction or avoidance or adaptation to climate change.

Most people are aware of the benefits of nature for health and wellbeing, and are generally supportive of activities that create pleasant open spaces for recreation and improve walking and cycling routes. However, many are unaware of the contribution they can make through their own actions, particularly with regard to the way they manage their own gardens.

Some activities that are in scope of this theme are covered already by Reading Borough Council strategies and policies and these are not individually duplicated here. However, this plan does include actions which can support, leverage or inform the Council's activities.

Enablers and Barriers

Through public workshops we identified a number of barriers to supporting nature and biodiversity to help reduce emissions and improve adaptation to climate change in Reading, and some corresponding enablers.

Barriers

Managing green spaces:

- Reading Borough Council has limited funds and people
- Best practice expertise is not always available in house
- Land management is not always joined up which can lead to conflicting activities
- Hard to influence management of privately owned open spaces

Carbon storage:

- Complexity of gaining consensus from numerous stakeholders for measures to prevent water meadows drying out in summer
- Completing research, running pilots and developing recommendations is time-consuming and costly
- Lack of funding for expertise and pilot projects
- RBC cannot enforce planting on private land to assist in reaching canopy cover targets of the Tree Strategy

Biodiversity:

- People don't always know the best way to promote biodiversity in their own green spaces and gardens
- There is no list of suitable projects available for developers to meet their Biodiversity Net Gain obligations
- Insufficient resources for the council to develop and manage sites to sell biodiversity units to developers

Enablers

Managing green spaces:

- Specialist expertise is available from outside the council
- Volunteers support management of council green spaces. and assist in review of management strategies
- The existing community groups in Reading, such as Econet, Reading Tree Wardens, Friends of Fobney Marsh, GRFGN

Carbon storage:

- The University of Reading is already undertaking research on carbon capture in soil
- Biochar has been well researched and a pilot is ready to begin subject to Council agreement
- Factsheets developed to encourage householders to process waste food/green wastes at home and store in their own garden
- Tree and hedge planting and natural regeneration of woodland all adds to carbon storage although available space is limited

Biodiversity:

- The Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy provides a framework for improving biodiversity
- Biodiversity Net Gain provides a mechanism to increase biodiversity as a requirement for developments
- Good information exists regarding best practice on biodiversity within Reading CAN, that can be amplified

#	Action name	Category	Description	Targets & milestones	Led by	Involving	Limiting factors
Managing green spaces							
N1.1	Encouraging tree planting in gardens	Communicating	Refresh tree planting information sheet and ensure it's widely available to residents	End 2026	GTG	RCCP Comms	Funds needed for printed leaflets and posters
N1.2	Help identify sites for RBC tree planting	Delivering	Work with Reading Borough Council to improve the facilities for people to identify potential sites for tree planting via the council website	Change RBC website end 2026	Reading Borough Council (Sarah Hanson)	RCCP (Nature)	
N1.3	Mini-forests	Delivering	Identify potential sites for mini-forests and work with Reading Borough Council to identify suitability and work with volunteers, sponsors and charities to get them planted	Continuous throughout plan period	GTG	Reading Tree Wardens, Reading Borough Council (StreetScene), local businesses,	
N1.4	Tree mapping	Influencing	Continue work to ensure that trees planted by volunteers are added to tree maps and then made available to the public	End 2026 public access, continue adding through plan period	RBC (GIS and Planning)	RCCP (nature) Reading Tree Wardens, Econet	
N1.5	Reporting issues	Communicating	Help increase awareness of the RBC app for reporting issues in public spaces through RCCP comms channels.	Continuous	RCCP (Comms)	RBC (Comms)	
Carbon storage in nature							
N2.1	Research value of carbon	Delivering	Establish a research project to calculate how much carbon is captured in different habitats in	By mid 2027	University of Reading (Dylan Parkes)	University of Reading (PhD students)	Requires funding for

	capture in nature		Reading and how much it can contribute to Net Zero target				resource to deliver
N2.2	Best practice management of private sports fields	Communicating	Develop and share recommendations on best practice for managing non council-owned sports fields for carbon storage and biodiversity	End 2027	Keep Berkshire Active (Nick West-Oram)	RBC (Active Reading), ECONET, Tree Wardens	
N2.3	Retaining water on Kennet Meadows during dry months	Convening	Bring together Reading Borough Council, the Environment Agency, Thames Water and relevant landowners/tenant farmers to explore measures that would retain water on the parts of Kennet Meadows during dry months to avoid releasing methane.	End 2028	RCCP (Nature)	RBC (Property), Environment Agency, Thames Water, Friends of Fobney Meadows	
N2.4	Biochar	Delivering	Secure an MSC to write up work already done on biochar for carbon storage and explore opportunities with Reading Borough Council for a biochar pilot	End 2027	GTG, University of Reading (Agriculture)	RBC (Street scene), Local tree surgeons	
N2.5	Hedgerows	Communicating	Update and share advice for landowners, including schools and residents, on the importance of hedgerows hedgerow trees and how to plant and maintain them; offer advice on access to stock and practical help with planting	end of 2026	GTG	RCCP (Comms), ECONET, Reading Tree Wardens, Tree Council	
N2.6	Support Council with expertise on carbon storage in nature	Delivering	Provide expertise to advise the Council on best options for managing land to store more carbon	Briefing paper end 2026 and ongoing	GTG	Reading University	

N2.7	Reviewing the Council's management of public open spaces	Delivering	Providing expertise from conservation bodies and others in the Nature working group to work with the Council to review or develop the management plans for parks and woodlands and hedgerows and suggest options for improvement to increase carbon storage and biodiversity. Discuss with other major park user bodies	Minimum four areas a year	RBC (Street Scene)	Econet GTG. Reading University	
N2.8	Ranking options for change in management of open spaces and identifying budgetary implications	Delivering	Rank options for changes in management and assess impact on climate emissions/ adaptation requirements. Develop outline revenue and capital costs for implementing management changes. Implement changes possible within current budget Rank other options for change and feedback into lists for planning offsets and BNG options	Minimum 4 sites a year	Reading Borough Council (Street Scene)	ECONET, GTG, Reading University	
N2.9	Management of highway edges (mainly roadside verges and roundabouts) and park surrounds	Delivering	Continue and increase current "rewilding" programme to allow longer growth. Consider additional planting of wildflowers in verges, or rotavating and sowing of new seed mix	Ongoing	Reading Borough Council (Street Scene and Highways)	GTG	
N2.10	Enable suggestions from the public for new	Delivering	Provide suggestion link for new sites and sign up for growing/planting wildflower plugs on RBC website "rewilding" page	Mid 2026	RBC (Street Scene)		

	or improved rewilding areas						
Supporting biodiversity							
N3.1	Offsets for urban development	Influencing	Work with Council to identify the potential and set outline budget for projects using wildlife habitat creation as offsets for urban development, and calculate the cost of change, link with management change on public land (previous action) Priority would be given to increasing carbon storage and resilience to climate change.	ongoing	RBC (Planning) to maintain the list	Contributions from RBC (Planning, Parks, Street Scene, and Highways), Ethical Reading, ECONET, other wildlife groups (Tree Wardens, RISC, Tree Council)	
N3.2	Biodiversity net gain in development	Delivering	Assist Planning Department to develop a potential project list to guide developers in providing useful biodiversity net gain such that the BNG provided is also beneficial for carbon storage and resilience.	Ongoing	RBC (planning), RCCP (nature)	RBC (Street Scene), suitable biodiversity consultant	Requires funding for resource to deliver detailed and costed projects, potentially done for RBC sites
N3.3	Greener gardens	Communicating	Expand and share existing guidance on wildlife/climate adapted gardens and garden buildings to store carbon, assist with urban drainage and resilience and support biodiversity.	2 new factsheets a year on RCAN website, with wider publicity	GTG and RBC (Planning) for content, RCCP (Comms) for dissemination	RISC, Food 4 Families, IER, Reading Food Growing Network	May require funding for printed leaflets/posters if required

N3.4	Advice service for adaptation	Delivering	Provide tailored free advice to schools/ community groups/SMEs for wildlife friendly gardening/ water efficient gardening/recycling in the garden	Up to 8 organisations advised per year from 2026	ECONET		Funds may be required for implementation
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Food

Vision



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.

The Challenge

The combined emissions from food production, processing, distribution, cooking and waste account for between a quarter and one-third of all the World's carbon emissions, second only to energy generation. Considering what we eat is therefore an important component of any Net Zero plan. Food is also the fuel that sustains life, and therefore both a hugely emotive subject and inextricably linked with health and wellbeing. In fact, our modern diet doesn't seem to be particularly good for us; in March 2025 a study by [The Lancet](#) predicted that by 2050 half of the World's population over 25 will be living with obesity, which in turn brings risks of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and reduced life expectancy. Many convenience foods are ultra processed which is both carbon intensive and can also result in reduced nutritional value combined with high flavour appeal, leading to overeating. However, these foods are typically inexpensive and require little time to prepare, so many busy people rely on them to feed their family economically. You can find out about the relative impacts of different dietary choices, and calculate our own dietary carbon footprint, [here](#).

Many people are now aware that meat, especially beef, has high environmental impact. This is primarily because it's much less efficient calorifically to feed plants to an animal to grow meat than it is for humans to directly consume the plants. However, the use of land for cattle grazing also leads to deforestation which removes a valuable carbon store. That doesn't mean that all-plant-based food is good because we also need to take into account the emissions caused by growing out of season, preparing, packaging and shipping food and the associated use of other resources such as water. As a general rule, a low carbon diet could be described as plant-rich, minimally processed, local and seasonal. Even in our urban environment there are opportunities for growing food locally, often as a communal activity that can contribute to mental wellbeing and reduce isolation.

And then there's food waste. It's estimated that up to two thirds of food produced in the world is wasted – half of that before it reaches market through poor growing conditions, lack of people to harvest it, rejection of “ugly” produce and poor handling, and the other half after we have bought it. The production losses drive up prices and food waste at home represents a direct cost to our households. Food waste, like beef and dairy farming, is a leading source of methane which is one of the most potent global warming gases, so the challenge is not just reducing food waste but also improving how it is dealt with. While it is not the aim of this strategy to police anybody's diet, it's important to improve understanding of the environmental impacts of producing different foods in order to make an informed choice that can both reduce environmental impact and benefit health and could also save money.

Enablers and Barriers

Through public workshops we identified a number of barriers to supporting a low carbon diet and reducing food waste:

Barriers

What we eat:

- The influence of advertising
- Lack of understanding of the relative health and environmental impacts of different food choices
- Time and financial pressures
- Restricted or no access to a kitchen, poor cooking conditions
- Cultural norms and habits
- Marginalisation of plant-based options on menus
- Lack of knowledge of how to prepare food from scratch

Local food production:

- Long waiting list for allotments
- Perception that local food and farmers markets are expensive
- Lack of “real food” outlets showcasing local produce
- Insufficient funding for local food growing groups

Food waste reduction:

- Food waste recycling targets don't encourage food waste reduction
- Kerbside food waste collection can reduce motivation to minimise waste or use leftovers
- Offers such as economy packs and buy one get one free
- Managing food waste is expensive for small organisations
- No food waste collection in some types of home

Enablers

What we eat:

- Existing community kitchens and food co-ops
- Shared kitchens made available at low or no cost
- Existing learning resources that could be amplified
- Carbon labelling on menus e.g. Wahaca, Clever Cuisine at UoR
- Integrating sustainable food into the education curriculum
- Use of social media to share quick and easy recipes
- Reducing poverty can be a co-benefit
- Improving access to food outlets in under-served areas
- Encouraging food outlets to offer healthy options

Local food production:

- Potential to establish community gardens on derelict land
- Establishing community gardens as part of new developments
- Celebrating in-season and local produce
- Seed exchanges and support for grow your own
- Helping people grow their own food in their gardens
- Adequate long-term funding for community food growing

Food waste reduction:

- Community fridges and food redistribution networks
- Expansion of food waste collection to flats by 2026
- Training around meal planning and how to use up leftovers
- Potential for bokashi-based solution for small organisations

#	Action name	Category	Description	Targets & milestones	Led by	Involving	Limiting factors
What we eat							
F1.1	Community Kitchens	Delivering	Develop a model for creating hubs to explore diet, meal planning and food preparation in community settings. Offer free or low-cost, beginner-friendly cooking classes focusing on healthy, affordable, low-carbon meals. Work with different cultural groups to incorporate ethnically diverse recipes and reach under-served communities including refugees. (Drawing on examples from Brighton and Hove/, St Lukes and Nourish in London)	TBC	Reading Food Partnership	RISC/Food4Families, Reading Community College, RBC (Social Inclusion and VCS Partnerships), RBC (Community Partnerships Services)	Requires funding for resource to deliver
F1.2	Making menus inclusive	Convening	Work with restaurants in the town to integrate plant-based choices into all menus, so that all dietary choices are available to everyone	TBC	RCCP (Food)	REDA, restaurateurs	
F1.3	Sustainable menus for organisations	Convening	Host an event/series of events showcasing best practice in creating healthy, low-carbon menus and procuring sustainable produce. Develop guidance for venues and festivals.	TBC	REDA	University of Reading	Requires funding for resource to deliver
F1.4	Food carbon pilot	Delivering	Explore ways of introducing carbon labelling on menus (similar to Wahaca), making it easier for people to make low carbon choices	TBC	TBC		Requires funding for resource to deliver

F1.5	Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF)	Delivering	Develop a content offer for Reading's HAF provision that focuses on nutrition, food growing and cookery to help develop practical skills for healthy eating	TBC	Reading Food Partnership with RISC	Brighter Futures, schools	Requires funding for resource to deliver
F1.6	Advertising moratorium	Influencing	Work with RBC to influence policy on fast food advertising in the town, including on buses	TBC	RCCP (Food)	RBC (Department?)	
Local food production							
F2.1	Community Gardens	Delivering	Establish shared gardens in vacant plots, schools, community centres to create opportunities for local food growing and help teach regenerative growing skills.	TBC	Reading Food Growing Network	Incredible Edible Reading, RISC/Food4Families, RBC (Social Inclusion and VCS Partnerships), RBC (Community Partnerships Services) (also for community centres)	Requires funding for resource to deliver
F2.2	Improving access to allotments	Convening	Establish a group to explore ways to improve the use of allotments in Reading. Include ways to reduce allotment waiting times (e.g. Brighton model offering smaller plots for new growers), growing skills for allotment holders (how to best utilise space, reduce pesticide use, regenerative growing)	TBC	Reading Food Partnership	RBC (Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee Leisure Environment and Commercial Services)	

Food waste reduction							
F3.1	Circular Economy for Food	Delivering	Run a hackathon applying circular economy principles to design out food waste at point of sale by improving the systems for redistribution via food banks, community fridges and pantries and charities.	TBC	RCCP (Food)	Technical Nature, charities, supermarkets, restaurants.	Requires funding for resource to deliver
F3.2	Schools Food Waste Challenge	Delivering	Create resources to run a food waste challenge for schools linked with Food Waste Action Week	TBC	Technical Nature		Requires funding for resource to deliver
F3.3	Food Waste Research	Delivering	Analysis of GHG produced by food waste in Reading	TBC	University of Reading (Eugene Mohareb)	University of Reading (Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutritional Sciences)	
F3.4	Food Sharing Resources	Communicating	Produce a comprehensive guide to food sharing resources in Reading, e.g. Olio/Too Good to Go, refill cafes, community fridges and food banks etc., on Reading Services Guide	Publish by end of 2025 and update at least annually	Reading Food Partnership	RCCP (Comms)	