

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	11 MARCH 2020		
TITLE:	READING, PLACE OF CULTURE, YEAR TWO EVALUATION		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR ROWLAND	PORTFOLIO:	CULTURE HERITAGE RECREATION
SERVICE:	CULTURE	WARDS:	ALL
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report updates on the activity and outcomes delivered in year two of 'Reading, Place of Culture', which ran from December 2018 to December 2019. The report outlines plans for the final year of the programme, December 2019- 2020, the current partnership working arrangements and indicative plans for the future.
- 1.2 Reading, Place of Culture, was one of 16 Great Places Schemes funded by Arts Council England, Historic England and the Heritage Lottery. It is jointly led and delivered by Reading Borough Council, Reading UK CIC and Reading University. The scheme runs from 2018-2020. A grant of £558,400 was awarded to deliver four core strands of work over three years.
- 1.3 Reading, Place of Culture aims to make Reading a better place to live, work and visit, fostering a culture of collaboration across sectors, and where caring for and engaging people is achieved in partnership between the public, private and voluntary sectors. The scheme supports Reading to enhance its cultural offer, drive economic growth, and improve the quality of life for people in Reading.
- 1.4 There are four core strands of delivery:
 - **The Cultural Commissioning Programme** empowers local organisations to develop cross-sector partnerships to engage marginalised or hard-to-reach communities in arts, culture and/or heritage programmes. Year two saw the culmination of three commissions and the funding of three new ones. Other activity included a pilot around ageing and young people and a new Ageing Well Partnership.
 - **The Research Programme** is co-produced by the University of Reading and the Whitley Researchers, an active research partnership between Whitley Community Development Association and local residents. It aims to develop best practice for borough-wide engagement, geared towards the needs of Reading's diverse communities.

- **Reading Thames Festival** is an annual festival which celebrates Reading's unique identity, showcases new work and reveals Reading as a place of 'parks and rivers' and 'culture and diversity'.
 - **Culture and Business Engagement** aims to further develop the relationships between the business community and cultural organisations in order to support key economic development objectives for 'good growth' and delivery of the long-term 2050 Vision for the town.
- 1.5 The final year of the programme will focus on delivery and research completion, dissemination of information, training, networking, and building a sustainable legacy.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Committee notes the progress made in delivering 'Reading, Place of Culture' in its second year, as set out in section 4.
- 2.2 That Committee notes the proposals to further develop the programme of work in the third and final year of delivery as set out in section 5.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2018 - 2021 sets out the key priorities for the Council. Reading, Place of Culture supports:
- Securing the economic success of Reading
 - Promoting health, education, culture & wellbeing
- 3.2 A stronger arts, culture and heritage sector enhances quality of life and brings economic value to the town. It can impact on place making and inward investment, and therefore, the future of Reading as a whole.
- 3.3 Reading's Culture and Heritage Strategy runs from 2015 - 2030 and was produced by Reading's Cultural Partnership. The strategy is due for review in 2020, which will also include reviewing the terms of reference of the Cultural Partnership, to continue to meet the needs of the cultural sector in Reading.
- 3.4 The Reading 2050 Vision, developed by Barton Willmore, Reading UK and the University of Reading, aims to excite and engage with people from across Reading to support Reading's economic growth and evolution as a smart and sustainable city. It has two core themes that Reading, Place of Culture supports: A city of culture and diversity, and a city of rivers and parks.
- 3.5 Reading, Place of Culture reports quarterly to its three national funders via progress report updates and presentations in person; they have approved the current plans.

4 THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Over the last year, Reading, Place of Culture has:
- Increased overall engagement by reaching new audiences and better understanding barriers for harder to reach audiences.
 - Established strong new strategic partnerships.
 - Developed new models for including community voice in cultural activity
 - Changed people's perceptions of Reading by increasing belonging, sense of community and pride in Reading.
 - Enhanced belonging and connectivity among Reading's communities.
 - Strengthened the Arts, Culture and Heritage sector by increasing their skills, confidence and knowledge and developed new networks and partnerships.
 - Created evidence, tools and models to demonstrate the added value of culture.

4.2 It has done this through its four core delivery strands:

The Cultural Commissioning Programme, led by Reading Borough Council

4.3 The purpose of the commissioning programme is to empower local organisations to develop cross-sector partnerships to engage marginalised or hard-to-reach communities in arts, culture and/or heritage programmes. It aimed to mainstream the commissioning of cultural activities for social outcomes in two ways:

- Increase awareness of public service commissioners of the potential for arts, culture and heritage organisations to deliver effective interventions around their priority outcomes.
- Enabling the arts, culture, heritage and voluntary sectors to better engage with public sector commissioning.

4.4 Year two has delivered:

- The culmination of the first three commissioned programmes (June 2018-June 2019).
- The commissioning of three more programmes, funded for a total of £75,000 - including £30,000 'partner' funding from Berkshire Community Foundation and Brighter Futures for Children - to be delivered July 2019 - July 2020.
- The commissioning of three final programmes, for a total of £70,000, with match funding from Berkshire Community Foundation and Brighter Futures for Children once again.
- Two Ageing Well Pilot programmes which explore the barriers faced by older people when accessing Arts Culture and Heritage.
- A Young People's Mental Health Pilot to explore how the sector can meet the needs of young people with mental health issues.

4.5 Year one commissions included:

- Alana House and Photovoice delivered a photography project for female offenders and women at risk of offending leading to a reduction in anxiety and an increase in self-esteem.
- Museum Partnership Reading worked with Royal Berkshire Hospital and in their museum settings to deliver reminiscence, dance and other creative activities for older people to improve their health and wellbeing.
- Reading Rep created drama projects for young people unable to participate in mainstream education to encourage group working and build confidence.
- Reading Rep also delivered reminiscence and theatre projects for adults in Prospect Park Hospital living with dementia and acute mental health illnesses.

4.6 Year two commissions include:

- Rosetta Life are delivering a dance, music and spoken word project for long term conditions such as living with the effects of stroke, dementia or Parkinson's to widen the approach for living well with neurological disability.
- Reading Rep, Jelly and other partners are delivering theatre for young people with SEND to develop confidence and independence, develop skills and decrease social isolation.
- Sport In Mind and Junction Dance are working with Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, schools and community settings to use dance in the treatment, management and prevention of mental illness.

4.7 Year three commissions include:

- Mustard Tree, Real Time and Cranbury College are delivering a creative employment project based around film for young people with SEND to build confidence and key skills.
- Alana House, Rahab and Reading Rep are delivering theatre for women at risk to enhance communication and conflict resolution skills.

- Age UK Berkshire and Museum of English Rural Life are delivering a storytelling and reminiscence project for older people at risk of loneliness and social isolation to improve wellbeing.
- 4.8 Further detail on each year of the Cultural Commissioning Programme are in section 13, Appendix 1. Full case studies are available from year 1 via the link below: <http://readingplaceofculture.org/greatplaces/culturalcommissioningprogramme/>
- 4.9 **The Research Programme, led by University of Reading**
The Whitley Researchers are a participatory action research partnership between the Whitley Community Development Association, local residents and the University of Reading. The aim is to engage and involve communities in conducting their own research. The team are piloting innovative ways of exploring local residents' lived experiences of culture and heritage, as well as understanding their views on health and wellbeing. This then informs the cultural commissioning, festival programmes and evaluation frameworks.
- 4.10 This year, through research interviews/surveys/focus groups, 450 participants and representatives of organisations have been engaged with directly.
- 4.11 A 'Young Researchers' team has also been developed at John Madejski Academy and other local schools. They create visual methods and interactive community events to explore young people's ideas around art, heritage and place. The Young Researchers have engaged with a further 50 people.
- 4.12 A growing body has been developed of shared learning and findings illustrating what local communities think about art, culture, heritage and civic pride with a focus on ageing well and diversity. This includes knowledge on community engagement with art, culture, heritage, barriers to partnership working between groups in the sector and service providers, and an assessment of the diverse social needs of Reading's older residents and BAME communities. They also supported with the data analysis and evaluation of the 2019 Reading on Thames festival.
- 4.13 **Reading Thames Festival, led by Reading UK**
The Festival took place 26-29 September 2019 and built on the work in 2018 by supporting, producing and presenting creative projects that foster social engagement and new artistic experiences in Reading. The Festival continued to celebrate Reading's unique identity and present new works of performing arts, design, literature, moving image, visual arts and popular culture. It developed engaging, participatory, multi-sensory events for all ages that utilised a range of venues and outdoor sites, culminating in the Cirque de Bijou performance in the Abbey Ruins, which was unfortunately affected by bad weather. Other examples of activity include 'Acid Brass', the brainchild of Turner Prize winning artist Jeremy Deller, which took place in the Town Hall and fused Acid House anthems with the sound of a traditional British Brass Band, and 'Art After Dark', where over 20 Reading artists and organisations were brought together for a free one-night event which presented art and performances in public spaces across Reading.
- 4.14 Audience feedback was collected via 127 questionnaires:
- 60% strongly agreed they had a good time, with another 27% agreeing. Enjoyment was felt across demographic groups.
 - 88% of attenders were new to the festival in 2019, with 66% of these having been unaware of it - showing that it is still reaching new audiences in its third year.
 - Among attendees, the Reading Thames Festival led to a sense of togetherness and pride. 78% strongly agreed or agreed that it increased their pride in Reading, and 82% strongly agreed or agreed that it brought communities together.
- 4.15 For 2020, the festival has been reviewed and reshaped in order to successfully deliver further impact and to create a lasting legacy beyond the Great Places scheme.

Through evaluation, we learned that targeted work is needed to realise a shift in perceptions of Reading from potential visitors and local audiences. As such, a clear set of audience targets and outcomes are being developed to inform the marketing strategy and planning. Additional learning from audience feedback identified improvements in venue facilities, and information flow by providing: (1) better publicity; (2) accurate and detailed information on the web; (3) on-site signage. Reading UK, Reading Borough Council and representatives from the directors of Reading's Festivals are working in partnership to transition the 2020 festival to create a sustainable legacy.

4.16 The Culture and Business Engagement Strand, led by Reading UK

This strand aims to further develop the relationships between the business community and cultural organisations in order to support key economic development objectives for 'inclusive growth' and delivery of the long-term 2050 Vision for the town.

4.17 Reading UK commissioned a piece of research to build on survey feedback to date and explore in a more qualitative and evaluative way the links between Reading businesses and cultural organisations. The work is intended to better understand Reading's profile as a cultural hub and emergent potential as a centre of excellence; why businesses get involved; and how this engagement might be nurtured and promoted into the future. Appendix 2 provides further findings from the research and initial plans for 2020.

4.18 A cultural project manager and consultant have been employed by Reading UK to implement the recommendations from the year two evaluation report.

5 Options Proposed

5.1 December 2019 - 2020 is the third and final year of Reading, Place of Culture. The focus is on creating a sustainable legacy of the scheme with the following plans:

- Deliver year two and three cultural commissions and their associated action research, data collection, social impact measurement and case studies.
- Further training to upskill the sector; e.g. RBC have commissioned MBAssociates to deliver evaluation and social impact measurement training for the cultural commissions; RBC are bringing CC Skills to Reading for creative employment training for cultural organisations working with children and young people.
- Deliver a conference aimed at local cross-sector organisations and commissioners to take place in November 2020 to disseminate learning from the research and commissioning strands.
- Following research carried out by the Whitley Researchers and feedback from grassroots BAME arts culture and heritage organisations, the University will coordinate a BAME grassroots cultural organisation exchange to provide more opportunities for networking, peer support and exchange.
- Complete Ageing Well pilot programmes and support Cultural Champions to advocate for older people's engagement.
- Continue to advocate the role of arts, culture and heritage with commissioners from other sectors, creating and publicising research and case studies to illustrate impact.
- Set up a Business Ambassadors programme to link more local businesses to the arts culture and heritage sector.
- Use the Reading Thames Festival as a transition to prepare for a larger celebratory year in 2021. This will support Reading's existing festivals and provide them with an infrastructure, which is sustainable beyond this grant funding.
- Expand the Young Researchers programme to three new schools in Reading.
- Build on the existing partnerships that have developed organically, to create a strategic cultural development partnership for Reading that focuses on supporting the development and growth of the arts, culture and heritage sector in Reading.

6 CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 6.1 The Reading, Place of Culture programme will contribute to the following Corporate Plan priorities:
- Securing the economic success of Reading and provision of job opportunities.
 - Ensuring that there are good education, leisure and cultural opportunities for people in Reading.
 - Ensuring every vulnerable person can achieve their potential and aspirations.
- 6.2 The broad and varied programme also contributes to the Council's strategic aims of:
- To establish Reading as a learning City and a stimulating and rewarding place to live and visit.

7 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 The cultural commissioning and research strands have community engagement and information at their core. They both undertake research to ascertain what different community barriers to engagement are and how partnerships can be built in order to use creativity to overcome key issues for a given community.

8 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 There is no requirement for an Equality Impact Assessment; however, Reading Place of Culture prioritises and positively benefits a number of groups with protected status as well as vulnerable populations of Reading.

9 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no direct environmental implications for the council as a result of this report or the activity being delivered.

10 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Council will continue to comply with the Great Place Scheme 'Standard Terms of Grant'. These mirror those of the Heritage Lottery Fund with which the Council is familiar through its management of other HLF funded projects. There are no additional conditions in respect of the project beyond these standard terms.

11 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 A grant of £558,400 was awarded by Arts Council England, Historic England and the Heritage Lottery Fund to deliver four core strands of work over the three years. We claimed and received so far £222,882. We are in a process of submitting another claim for the period covering July to December 2019.
- 11.2 The Great Place Scheme bidding guidelines stipulated that a minimum of 10% of direct project costs should be provided by cash contributions from delivery partners. The Council and Reading UK have each committed to provide £30,000 over the life of the programme to meet this requirement. The council's contribution is contained within existing budget allocations for the Culture Service.
- 11.3 £56,000 worth of matched funding has been generated for the Cultural Commissioning Programme from Brighter Futures for Children, Berkshire Community Foundation and the University of Reading.

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- GREAT PLACE SCHEME: Reading-on-Thames - HLF grant award letter 13th April 2017.
- GREAT PLACE SCHEME: 'READING-ON-THAMES' - Report to Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee 5th July 2017.
- 'READING, PLACE OF CULTURE' (GREAT PLACE SCHEME) - Report to Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee 14th November 2018.

13 Appendix 1: Cultural Commissioning Programme - further detail

13.1 Year 1 Commissions, June 2018-June 2019:

13.2 **Alana House with Photovoice, £15k:** Enabled female offenders and women at risk of offending to represent their experiences and perspectives through photography and digital storytelling. 14 women took part resulting in a reduction in anxiety around meeting new people and an increase in self-esteem. The project developed a strong group dynamic and embedded wrap around support for the participants. It explored what a creative model of rehabilitation could look like.

13.3 **Museum Partnership Reading, £15k:** The Museum of English Rural Life (The MERL) and Reading Museum trialled and evaluated different forms of cultural projects to improve the health and wellbeing of older people. They sought to assess their impact, including how they contributed to a reduction in loneliness and social isolation. The project delivered 44 activities using reminiscence, gardening, dance and knitting, involving 173 participants aged between 52-94. It gave the museums a stronger understanding of how they can evaluate and communicate the successes of their work and developed strong links with new Health and Voluntary sector staff. Partners in these sectors, such as the Royal Berkshire Hospital, acknowledged the benefits of museum collections in supporting wellbeing and their partnerships continue.



Reminiscence and Dance at MERL

13.4 **Reading Rep Theatre, £15k:** Reading Rep worked with young people unable to participate in mainstream education and with adults in Prospect Park Hospital living with dementia and acute mental health illnesses. They used drama to encourage group working and confidence building. Equitable partnerships developed enabling hospital staff to understand and advocate for the benefits of cultural activity for their patients.

13.5 The partnerships developed in year 1 have enabled the funded organisations to continue growing their cultural offer for vulnerable populations. For example:

- Alana House participants were consulted on what other cultural activities they would like to participate in. Feedback showed they were interested in drama, leading to a partnership with Reading Rep, who have successfully secured funding as part of the third round of Cultural Commissioning. They plan to use this to continue to demonstrate the value of cultural work to other commissioners.
- As a result of their commission, MERL partnered more closely with AGE UK Berkshire and Younger People with Dementia and continue to deliver across artforms due to trialling other activities as part of their cultural commission.
- Reading Rep were inspired by the rigorous social impact measurement, which the Commissioning Programme trained them in and have implemented this across their entire programme of work.

12.6 Year two commissions, July 2019 - July 2020

13.6 Elderly Care, £15k: Rosetta Life are delivering dance, spoken word and performance with older people living with the effects of stroke and developing a Stroke Ambassadors programme. In addition, it delivers a participatory action research programme considering how to widen the approach for living well with a neurological disability, such as dementia. They will be taking performances to care homes, hospitals, GP surgeries and other locations. The service is developing a strategy for wider work and ambassadors across Reading.



Rosetta Life dance workshop

13.7 Cultural Short Breaks, £30K: Reading Rep Theatre are working with Jelly, Reading College and five further organisations to engage children and young people with moderate and severe Special Educational Needs. They are working with arts and non-arts partners to deliver workshops and activities, which develop confidence and independence, develop skills and decrease social isolation.

13.8 Mental Health and Wellbeing, £30K: Sport in Mind working with Junction Dance and Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust to use dance in the treatment, management and prevention of mental illness. Using dance as a unique form of therapy, strengthening emotions, cognitive skills, physical abilities and social connections, and a proven effective remedy for depression and anxiety.

13.9 Year 3 Commissions, December 2019 - December 2020:

13.10 Creative Employment, £30k: Mustard Tree with Real Time and Cranbury College are delivering a series of creative workshops and work placements to build young people's confidence and key skills and empower them to create their own film production company. Working with young people aged 15-24 who are (or who are at risk of becoming) not in education, employment or training (NEET), in particular those with significant additional needs, to see the 'art of the possible' through the world of film production.

13.11 Women at Risk, £20k: Alana House with Rahab and Reading Rep are working with vulnerable, at-risk women with complex needs to explore their feelings and improve their self-confidence. The women will be able to enhance their communication and conflict resolution skills by expressing their feelings through performance.

13.12 Older People at Risk of Loneliness and Social Isolation, £20k: Age UK Berkshire, in partnership with Younger People with Dementia Berkshire and The Museum of English Rural Life are engaging older people at risk of loneliness and social isolation to reminisce about their lives and bring common interests together through storytelling. The activities will be designed to benefit the wellbeing of the participants.

13.13 The commissioning programme has fostered new connections between public, private and voluntary sector organisations; supported existing organisations to increase their capacity; delivered new services and fostered new relationships with funders, partners and other organisations. Highly valuable research has been gathered from local people about their thoughts and feelings, engagement and participation in arts, culture and heritage in their town. Research on connectivity, belonging and pride of place has been used to shape the specifications for each year of commissioning, the smaller pilot funds and the delivery of the Reading Thames Festival. Feedback on barriers for older people directly led to the University of Reading Ageing Well research pilot. Similarly, young people stating that they do not feel they have enough

access to arts culture or heritage has led to a large-scale funding bid to add delivery in this field of work.

14 Appendix 2 - Further findings from Business Engagement Research

- 14.1 Reading UK commissioned a piece of local qualitative research by freelance researcher Grant Thornton in 2019. It analysed the 2019 business surveys undertaken by Reading UK, sought the views of new businesses in Reading about their perceptions of the town and its cultural scene, analysed the 2018 Christmas festival visitor survey and surveyed a sample of local businesses and cultural organisations on their perception and experience of engaging with culture/businesses and the nature of these relationships. A range of potential mechanisms for further enhancing business engagement with cultural organisations emerged, such as a need for helping organisations to overcome time constraints, improving mutual understanding, raising awareness, opportunities for meaningful dialogue and developing good practice.
- 14.2 The research found that there is a strong recognition among local businesses of the value of a strong cultural offer in recruitment and retention of high-quality staff. People place culture relatively high in terms of what Reading has to offer new businesses, with many people seeing a positive trajectory in terms of their perceptions of the sector over the last few years. The businesses involved in the study felt they could and should do more to support culture in Reading.
- 14.3 Based on report recommendations, Reading UK will set up a Business Ambassadors programme to link more local businesses to the arts culture and heritage sector.



Cultural Commissioning Programmes:

Photography with Alana House, Reminiscence with Museums Partnership Reading, Drama with Reading Rep