

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

<b>TO:</b>	<b>HOUSING NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE</b>		
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>15 DECEMBER 2020</b>		
<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>READING 2021 ANNIVERSARY PLANS</b>		
<b>LEAD COUNCILLOR:</b>	<b>CLLR KAREN ROWLAND</b>	<b>PORTFOLIO:</b>	<b>CULTURE HERITAGE AND RECREATION</b>
<b>SERVICE:</b>	<b>CULTURE</b>	<b>WARDS:</b>	<b>ALL</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>DONNA PENTELOW</b>	<b>TEL:</b>	<b>07921 941 075</b>
<b>JOB TITLE:</b>	<b>ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR CULTURE</b>	<b>E-MAIL:</b>	<b>donna.pentelow@reading.gov.uk</b>

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the committee on the plans to mark 2021, a year of culturally significant anniversaries in Reading. 2021 marks the 900th anniversary of the founding of Reading Abbey as well as the 250th anniversary of the Thames Conservancy, 150 years of Reading Football Club, 75 years of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, 70 years of MERL, 50 years of Reading Festival and 30 years of the Rising Sun Arts Centre. Given these significant anniversaries the council and these organisations have been working together to develop a programme of activity during 2021 to celebrate these special milestones. Covid19 has had a profound impact on the ability to finalise plans, so, these should be considered in light of this and the need to remain agile should the situation with covid19 change.

**2. RECOMMENDED ACTION**

- 2.1 The committee is invited to note the plans set out in the report to celebrate the various anniversaries being celebrated in 2021.

**3. POLICY CONTEXT**

- 3.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2018 - 2021 (refreshed in June 2019) sets out the key priorities for the Council which include and 'Promoting health, education, culture & wellbeing'. The plans and recommendation set out in this report directly contribute to these priorities by creating covid19 secure events and activities that promote and celebrate Reading's culture and contribute towards its sense of place and economic recovery in response to covid19. It is likely that some of the social restrictions currently in place will remain in 2021 which may impact on the way the live events are delivered. The council and its partners also recognise 20 June 2021 will be the first anniversary of the tragic events that took place in Forbury Gardens. All plans for events in Forbury Gardens will be considered in light of this. There is work taking place to recognise and mark this important date next year and we are looking at ways to engage and consult with the community on the most appropriate way of marking the anniversary.

## 4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Since January 2020, the council has convened a small working group of partners to share plans and ideas to celebrate 2021. Covid19 continues to create uncertainty in terms of scheduling, availability of external funding opportunities, and any ongoing social restrictions, which impact on organisations' abilities to plan. Therefore, a working principle of digital first has been adopted alongside live events. Unfortunately the loan of the original transcript of *Sumer is Icumen*, which is one of the earliest recorded pieces of music from England and believed to have been written at Reading Abbey, won't be visiting Reading in 2021 due to the impact of covid19 on the British Library. However, we are continuing to work with the British Library on future collaborations.

### Options Proposed

- 4.2 Covid19 creates ongoing uncertainty in terms the ability to plan therefore plans need to remain agile and adaptable. Therefore, this programme remains subject to change. The programme has a strong digital presence, with the expectation of some live events. One of the highlight events will be the celebration of the 900th anniversary of the founding of Reading Abbey, which is scheduled to take place on Saturday 19 June 2021, in Forbury Gardens, Abbey Ruins and along the Kennet in the town centre. This event will showcase the Abbey, the story of its founding and build on the successful reopening event of the Abbey Ruins that took place in 2018. On the same day, Water Fest will be held which showcases the significance of the Kennet and Avon Canal in Reading. The size and format of the two events will be dependent on the restrictions in place at the time. We may need to look at delivering the event in a more Covid compliant way, for example, by using staggered arrival times and ticketing entry - which will allow us to restrict numbers and track and trace all visitors to the event. All plans for Saturday 19 June will be sensitive to any commemorative events taking place on the Sunday and will be foremost in the minds of everyone in the shaping of this day.
- 4.3 A year long programme of events and activities focusing on the Abbey is being developed and will be promoted alongside the main event in June. This programme includes the carving of one of the uncarved finial head stops on the eastern elevation of the Abbey to represent a figure from the gateway's post dissolution history. The previous sculptures added in 1861 and 1900 depicted either ecclesiastical or historical figures from the abbey's medieval history.

The proposed shortlisted figures are:

- Queen Elizabeth I
  - Jane Austen
  - Sir George Gilbert Scott
  - Dr Jamieson Hurry (who gifted the 1900 carved head stops)
  - A modern stone mason
- 4.4 It is proposed to put this shortlist to a public online vote early in 2021, after which the winning design will be carved and unveiled by autumn 2021.
- 4.4 Museums Partnership Reading (MPR) are planning an exhibition, provisionally titled '1971' that will display historic photography of the first Reading Festival, drawing on the Jill Furmanovsky's Rockarchive, alongside material from both Reading Museum and the Museum of English Rural Life exploring life and times in 1971. With support from the Arts Council Cultural Recovery Fund, the Museum of English Rural Life will mark its 70th year through 51 Voices, a digital project that will draw on its Festival of Britain and other collections from 1951.

- 4.5 Berkshire Record Office will celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Thames Conservancy. From 1771 this body managed the river from its source until its tidal reach in Teddington. It built the river that we know today, including the locks, weirs and towpaths. It also had responsibility for flood management and controlling pollution - functions now inherited by the Environment Agency and Thames Water. The archive is of national importance and officers will create an online exhibition with highlights from it. This exhibition will launch in May 2021.
- 4.6 The Hexagon's resident orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra are planning both digital and live performances throughout the year to mark their 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Reading Football Club are planning various activities and events, including a dedicated microsite, to mark their 150<sup>th</sup> season.
- 4.7 Reading Culture Live will be the key delivery platform for the digital content. Activities will be joined together under an umbrella heading, which is to be finalised, but will reflect Reading remembering and celebrating as part of its economic recovery in response to covid19. This will enable other activities that are organised throughout the year, particularly in the Abbey Quarter, but aren't yet able to confirm their plans, to be part of the programme.

#### **Other Options Considered**

- 4.9 In light of covid19, a purely digital offer could be delivered, however, this would limit the reach and opportunity for celebrating these special anniversaries. Instead it is proposed to plan for a blend of both digital and live, with digital being the fall back position in the event that covid19 restrictions prevent live events.

#### **5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

- 5.1 The plans set out contribute towards the council's Corporate Plan priority of ensuring that there are good education, leisure and cultural opportunities for people in Reading. They also contribute towards the Council's strategic aim of to establish Reading as a learning City and a stimulating and rewarding place to live and visit.

#### **6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no environmental or climate implications as a result of this report.

#### **7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

- 7.1 The plans set out have been developed by representatives from MERL, Royal Philharmonic, Rising Sun Arts, Reading UK and Reading Football Club with representatives from the council including Reading Museum, and Berkshire Records Office.

#### **8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 8.1 The plans set out above do not have any adverse or differential equality implications.

#### **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 No relevant legal issues identified by the report

#### **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The service will be seeking to secure external grant contributions to fund the planned Abbey 900 celebrations, if these bids are unsuccessful then activities will be scaled back accordingly, however, there may be a need to drawdown on the Reserve created

in 2019/20 which has £62k set aside in 20/21 and a further £85k in 21/22. These funds will not be required until January 2021 at the earliest.

**11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

11.1 None