

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	10 MARCH 2022		
TITLE:	READING, PLACE OF CULTURE EVALUATION REPORT		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR ROWLAND	PORTFOLIO:	CULTURE HERITAGE AND RECREATION
SERVICE:	CULTURE	WARDS:	ALL
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Reading's Great Place Scheme - 'Reading, Place of Culture' -was jointly led and delivered by Reading Borough Council, Reading UK Community Interest Company (CIC) and the University of Reading.
- 1.2 Running from 2018 to 2020 (and extending into 2021 because of Covid), it aimed to foster a culture of collaboration across sectors.
- 1.3 The Great Place Scheme was a collaboration between Arts Council England, Historic England and the Heritage Lottery - and Reading was one of 16 areas to be awarded 'Great Places' status in England.
- 1.4 The Programme included almost 500 events and reached a total audience of over 43,000 people, despite delivery being heavily affected by the Covid 19 pandemic in the last year. It was delivered through four key strands: The Festivals Strand, The Cultural Commissioning Programme, The Research Programme and The Culture and Business Engagement Strand.
- 1.5 The report assesses the findings in five key areas, and presents some conclusions and recommended legacy action that have been used to create an action plan that can be found in section 5 of this document. These findings include:
 - Developing strategic partnerships explores how arts, culture and heritage are represented in Reading at a strategic level.
 - Increasing arts, culture and heritage engagement looks at the targeting of new audiences and barriers to engagement.
 - Changing pride and perceptions of Reading's cultural offer addresses how the Programme developed a sense of belonging among Reading's communities.
 - Strengthening the arts, culture and heritage sector considers the ways in which the Programme helped develop the sector.
 - Creating evidence, tools and models to show the value of culture demonstrates how research was central to Reading, Place of Culture and its legacy.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 To note the successes of the Reading, Place of Culture project (Great Places Funding) set out in paragraph section 4
- 2.2 To agree the action plan set out in section 4.9 and to delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Culture in consultation with the Lead Member for Culture, Heritage and Recreation to incorporate the actions within existing or emerging delivery plans.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 Reading was awarded £558,400 through the Great Places Scheme for delivery of outcomes from 2017 to 2021 of the Reading, Place of Culture project (RPoC). The project aimed to foster a culture of collaboration across sectors - where caring for, and engaging, people is achieved in partnership between the public, private and voluntary sectors, and specifically targeting health and mental wellbeing and employment outcomes. In doing this, the Programme would enable Reading to enhance its cultural offer, drive economic growth, and improve the quality of life for people in Reading.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Current Position

4.2 The Festivals Strand: This strand was initially delivered through Reading Thames Festival a programme of events developed to celebrate Reading's waterways. It built on its successful debut in 2017 with two years of autumn Programme delivery in 2018 and 2019.

Successes and Outcomes:

- Celebrated Reading's unique identity, encouraged community engagement and presented new works of performing arts, design, literature, moving image, visual arts and popular culture.
- Following a review in 2019, the decision was taken to support Reading's existing festival offer rather than simply run one Festival. This led to the set up of the Reading Festivals Group (now Reading Independent Festivals Forum or RIFF), 17 existing festival organisations in Reading.
- The Reading Culture Live website developed in response to Covid 19. Funding and collating online activities and events with the local arts sector.
- Conducted research was done on the impacts of Covid 19 on the Reading Arts, Culture and Heritage (ACH) sector, and funding was allocated to develop the RIFF.

4.3 The Cultural Commissioning Programme: The Programme encouraged local organisations to develop cross-sector partnerships to engage communities in the most deprived areas of Reading in arts, culture and/or heritage programmes. It aimed to demonstrate the ability of culture to deliver key social outcomes, (including Health and Wellbeing, Employment, Social Inclusion) in two ways:

1. Making public service budget holders more aware of the potential for ACH organisations to deliver cultural activities that met their strategic priorities.
2. Enabling the ACH and voluntary sectors to better engage with these public sector services.

Below are two case studies that demonstrate how this was achieved:

CASE STUDY 1: Action Media: Untold Stories

Partners: Starting Point, Real Time and ToolShed.

Participants: Young people who are (or who are at risk of becoming) NEET - not in education, employment or training - and/or neurodiverse.

What happened:

Work experience within a creative industry - creative workshops, work placements, documentary production. Partnership working with ToolShed. Online learning.

Successes and outcomes:

- Real-world work experience for participants helped increase workplace readiness - they learnt new skills and used existing strengths in new ways
- Easier for participants to get the experience and evidence to undertake the accreditation in a non-formal way
- Enabled participants to reflect on their growth and develop a sense of achievement on a regular basis
- Opportunity to learn from peers led to growth in confidence, levels of motivation and work-ready skills

CASE STUDY 2: Life Stories

Partners: Age UK Berkshire and the Museum of English Rural Life.

Participants: Older lonely and socially isolated residents.

What happened:

Share stories in groups, and one-to-one, using photos, art, music, crafts etc. Used as a way of furthering engagement.

Covid 19 context meant adapting by running a small virtual group, one-to-one activity and moving workshops online.

Successes and outcomes:

- Taking part has increased the quality of discussions the participants are having with family and friends
- Demonstrated strong communication links among the partners based on underlying shared values on approaches and techniques
- Staff and volunteer upskilling

4.4 The Research Strand: This University of Reading led on this strand, setting up the Whitley Researchers and co-producing the research. It aimed to create a way to engage the whole community, but particularly geared towards the needs of Reading's diverse communities.

Success and Outcomes:

- Engaged and involved communities in conducting their own research.
- Piloted innovative ways of exploring local resident's lived experiences of culture and heritage, as well as understanding their views on health and wellbeing.
- The research informed the cultural commissioning, festival programmes and evaluation frameworks.
- Developed a 'Young Researchers' team at John Madejski Academy and other local schools. They created visual methods and interactive community events to explore young people's ideas around art, heritage and place.

4.5 The Culture and Business Engagement Strand: This strand aimed to further develop the relationships between the business community and cultural organisations to support key economic development aims and delivery of Reading's long-term 2050 Vision.

Success and Outcome:

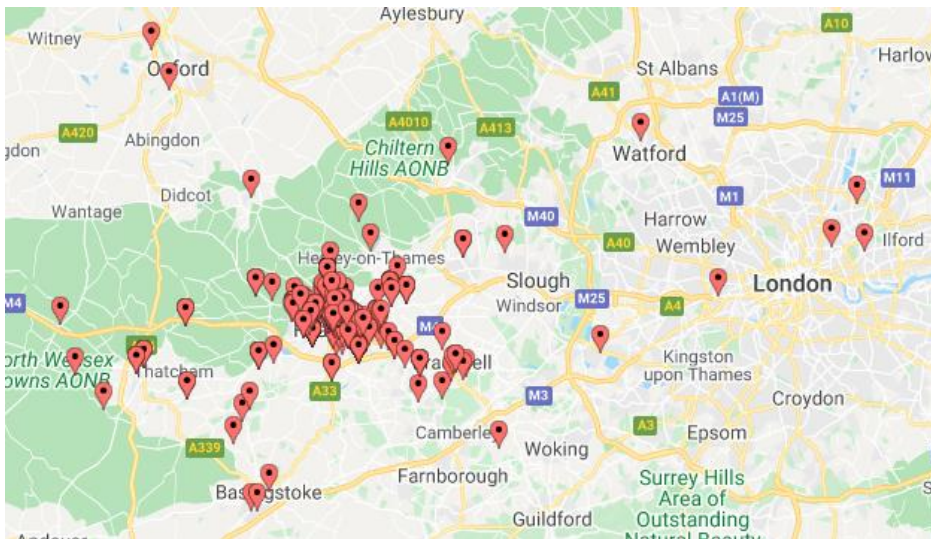
- The winter 'Twilight Trail' started in 2020 to support community and business engagement and to responsibly drive footfall to the town centre. It will return in 2021 to support economic recovery and engagement with arts organisations.

4.6 Reach and Engagement

The reach and engagement of the project broadly reflects Reading's population which at the 2011 census which was 75% White British or White Other. The audience and participants were mainly adults aged between 20 and 50, although the proportion of children will be inaccurate due to difficulties in collecting data from children. This reflects the intentions of the programme in focusing on Reading but also changing perceptions more widely.

Successes and Outcomes:

- 25,000 People were reached through the live events programme.
- 18,796 people were reached online.
- Audiences were 57% female, 41% male.
- Half the audience were White British, with another 28% white other and just under 10% each of Black or Black British, or Asian or Asian British ethnicity.
- As can be seen from the map below most audience members came from Reading, but with wider reach into the surrounding counties. This reflects the aim of the programme to focus on Reading but change perceptions of the town more widely.



4.7 Overall Outcomes and Successes of the Project: Despite the logistical, social and economic impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic - which has seriously affected delivery of every Strand of the programme - there have been outcomes across five different theme areas:

- **Developing strategic partnerships:** Programme partners have strengthened their commitment and knowledge of how to build partnerships in ACH. Strong partnerships have formed and are already showing their value. An effective approach to including local voice in commissioning has been modelled.
- **Increasing arts, culture and heritage engagement:** A high-quality cultural offer for the town has been produced, shared and promoted. Extensive research has identified barriers to engagement and how to overcome them, which has fed into action plans and strategies. Communities are better connected to cultural organisations, institutions and service providers in Reading, and empowered to better shape social outcomes.
- **Increasing pride and perceptions of Reading's offer:** Extensive research and trialling of approaches has highlighted the potential for changing perceptions of Reading's ACH offer among local businesses and visitors. This can be built on through partnerships developed through the Programme.
- **Strengthening the arts, culture and heritage sector:** The sector has gained skills, networks and confidence in engaging with non-arts commissioning, as well as developing lasting partnerships between ACH and non-arts organisations which will continue.
- **Creating evidence, tools and models to show the value of culture:** The Programme has developed skills, models, tools and evidence of the value of ACH in delivering on broad agendas, creating buy-in from many sectors for ACH approaches and partnerships.

- **The benefits of cross partner and cross-project working:** It is particularly notable how the outcomes of each Strand interrelate. The greatest benefit comes when the delivery and aims of more than one Strand, or more than one partner, come together. The Programme experience has given the partners more confidence and inspiration for new partnerships and projects and has developed wider cross-sector partnerships. These build on the local arts, culture and heritage offer as a driver for placemaking and social impacts in Reading.

4.8 Project Legacy and Learnings: The learnings from this project will be fed into a culture and heritage action plan to ensure that they are not lost and can be used to inspire future partnership projects and commissions.

- **Involving the whole community:** A large amount of the value has arisen from the involvement of both smaller arts, culture and heritage organisations and organisations working in health, social care and training. Alongside core project partners and larger ACH bodies, these smaller and non-ACH sector organisations are crucial partners for the future delivery of a strategic approach to culture in the town.
- **Listening, adapting and building in diverse views from the start:** The projects and activities which had most traction in reaching diverse audiences, or in sustaining delivery through the pandemic, were built on solid foundations of shared trust, respect and listening. Coupled with reflection and evaluation, this will develop lasting partnerships for delivery and change.
- **The value of a research-led approach to planning and strategy:** As well as supporting evaluation and consultation, the work of the Whitley Researchers within the Programme has highlighted how research can be used in planning and effecting change.
- **Time and support to shift approaches and attitudes:** Despite the huge value of the new models of co-commissioning, co-delivery and evaluating impact to the sector, it shouldn't be forgotten how much time this takes. This is hard to resource in a normal project cycle. Funding and advice will be needed to ensure that the whole ACH sector is able to implement the extensive learning from the project.
- **Information sharing is a necessity:** Research has shown a need for improved information sharing. This could be organisations networking and sharing plans to facilitate co-programming; making sure audiences know what's on and are aware of the value and relevance of the offer; sharing successes and good practice; and facilitating greater engagement. This should include individuals and organisations knowing what opportunities are available - such as commissioning and funding pots - as well as how they can get involved.
- **A town-wide approach would create clarity:** The most useful way to frame 'Reading, Place of Culture' is as a catalyst for wider change. This recognises the wider agendas and pressures - understanding the aim is to be putting processes in place for change rather than achieving all the changes desired. There is also a need for a clear strategy for culture for Reading, one that is an integral part of the wider placemaking, economic growth, environmental, health and social needs of the town.

4.9 Options Proposed

Reading, Place of Culture has clearly had a lasting impact on Reading, with legacy likely to remain and impact development of the sector for several years. This is an important point for the Programme, as with commitment to embedding learning and continuing the elements which work, there is potential for a step change in how Reading perceives itself and is

perceived as a Place of Culture. Below is the proposed Action Plan based on Reading Place of Culture Legacy Outcomes.

Theme	Action	Priority	Timeline
Strong strategic legacy	1. We will collaborate with a range of strategically aligned sectors and organisations to shape the future 3 year delivery plan 2022-25 for Reading's Culture and Heritage Strategy. As part of this development we will restructure the Culture and Heritage networks, partnerships and panels, and listen to the local voices that they represent.	High	2022/23
	2. We will continue the commitment to partnerships, particularly ensuring these include sectors responsible for delivering against health and wellbeing and social inclusion outcomes. These social outcomes will be embedded across all culture projects and events within RBC and standard evaluation will be fixed to measure success against these outcomes.	High	2022/23
	3. We will include community voices in cultural commissioning and consultation – building on what has been achieved – and publicise the work already done to build more confidence around community involvement.	High	2022/23
	4. We will work with partners to better understand the barriers to engagement in ACH and identify actions to overcome them through Culture Networks, Groups and Partnerships.	High	2022/23
Legacy delivery approaches	5. Promote Reading as a place where culture is valued as part of the overall place marketing, particularly by capitalising on the power of the Reading Festivals Group and the festivals 'brand' and ensuring that culture has a place at 'the table' when borough wide strategies are developed.	High	2022/23
	6. We will share information and promote networks across all communities through a variety of channels including social media, What's On Reading and other one-stop information sources.	Medium	2022/23
	7. Subject to funding, develop an ongoing programme of co-commissioning of cultural projects to deliver social impact. Partner with funders and strategic delivery partners from non-ACH sectors to deliver on multiple priorities. Move beyond current partners into new communities and groups.	High	Subject to funding

	8. Further publicise and share learning locally and nationally – for example, through conferences, workshops, accessible case studies and 'how-to' guides – to further support Reading's placemaking agenda.	Medium	2022/23
Legacy of research and learning	9. Build requirements to evidence impact into all future cultural commissioning to build further on the legacy and continue the learning process.	High	Subject to funding
	10. Subject to funding, commission further research on the value of the sector in the town – for example an economic impact or a social return on investment study –to broaden potential interest and the range of funders for ACH. Ideally working with the Whitley Researchers to develop this research.	Low	Subject to funding

4.10 Other Options Considered

Now the project has concluded one option is to continue working in the way we have since the funding started, however this risks the legacy of the project not being embedded and further development of the sector and how it can contribute to wider agenda not happening in a planned or sustained way.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The purpose of this section is to ensure that proposals contained in reports support the Council's vision and Corporate Plan priorities:

Reading Borough Council's vision is:

To help Reading realise its potential - and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success.

5.2 How the project contributed to the Corporate Plan Themes:

Healthy environment

- N/A

Thriving Communities

- This project researched the barriers to engagement in arts and culture that our diverse communities face these will be carried across to inform future culture projects.
- Captured the voice of underrepresented members of the community and built commissions around their needs.
- Delivered projects with social inclusion and employment outcomes.
- Reached diverse communities' representative of the makeup of Reading as of the 2011 Census.
- Invested funding in the voluntary and community sectors to deliver against strategic targets.
- Prioritised the needs of the most marginalised and vulnerable groups of our community.
- Developed projects around the effects of the pandemic, specifically health and mental wellbeing outcomes.

Inclusive economy

- The continuation of many of these projects has led to further training and development opportunities for SEND and NEET young people.
- Develop legacy actions from Reading: Place of Culture project and produce financially sustainable delivery plan.
- Work with strategic leaders of Reading's creative industries to Shape the future 3 year delivery plan 2022-25 for Reading's Culture and Heritage Strategy to align with the funding approach of ACE/HLF/HE and the council's cultural placemaking ambitions and incorporate legacy actions from Reading, Place of Culture⁴. Covid Response and Recovery

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no environmental or climate implications arising from this report. However it is worth noting for future projects that sustainability is now a prominent theme in most funders' funding criteria. This will become an important thread to include in future outcomes and ensure that it is embedded into the deliverables of any culture project.

- 6.2 In addition page 35 R13 of the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy states ‘Plastics: Zero waste and circular festivals’ as an action with the associated target ‘All of Reading’s festivals to have a statement or page describing their approach to sustainability on their website’. This will form part of the Reading Independent Festivals Forum Action Plan.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 The key priorities have been developed through research led by local arts and community organisations, as well as the Reading University. This research was collated and analysed by MBA Associates.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 *Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—*

- *eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;*
- *advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;*
- *foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.*

- 8.2 *The recommendations arising from this report will not have a differential impact on: racial groups; gender; people with disabilities; people of a particular sexual orientation; people due to their age; people due to their religious belief; and the Armed Forces community.*

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 No legal implications arise from the recommendations in this report.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 No financial implications arise from the recommendations in this report. Future developments in this area would be subject to funding approval.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 There are no background papers for this report.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TEMPLATE

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications arising from the proposals set out in this report are set out below:-

1. Revenue Implications

Use this Table in the report or as an Appendix to set out the revenue implications:

	2021/22 £000	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000
Employee costs (see note1)			
Other running costs			
Capital financings costs			
Expenditure			
Income from:			
Fees and charges (see note2)			
Grant funding (specify)			
Other income			
Total Income			
Net Cost(+)/saving (-)			

The net cost of the proposal can be funded from (specify service and approved cost centre budget).

Note 1: Specifying any one off early retirement and redundancy costs. With regard to early retirement costs set out capitalised pension cost and pay back period in a separate paragraph.

Note 2: In a separate table/appendix set out detailed fees and charges proposals and sensitivity analysis.

2. Capital Implications

Capital Programme reference from budget book: page line	2021/22 £000	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000
Proposed Capital Expenditure			
Funded by			
Grant (specify)			
Section 106 (specify)			
Other services			
Capital Receipts/Borrowing			
Total Funding			

Note: where more than one option /proposal is being made it may be easier to set out the above information in an Appendix.

3. Value for Money (VFM)

Given the continuing need to demonstrate VFM please include evidence that the proposal offers VFM (e.g benchmarking data)

4. Risk Assessment.

Include relevant comments around any key financial risks associated with the proposal(s)