

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	9 MARCH 2023		
TITLE:	READING'S CULTURE AND HERITAGE STRATEGY STATEMENT OF INTENT 2023-26		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR ADELE BARNETT-WARD	PORTFOLIO:	LEISURE AND CULTURE
SERVICE:	CULTURE	WARDS:	ALL
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#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the HNL Committee on progress to date and seek approval of the 3-year Culture and Heritage Action Plan that will deliver the strategic priorities set out in the Culture and Heritage Strategy that runs until 2030.
- 1.2 Through the evaluation of partnership projects run over the last 5 years, the Cultural Sector have expressed a desire for a set of shared cultural aspirations and objectives for Reading. It was originally thought that an action plan would be an appropriate outcome for this work, however, through consultation with the sector, a Statement of Intent was found to be more appropriate at this stage. This statement will be a 'living' document, that will evolve with Reading Borough Council's relationship with the sector.
- 1.3 The statement is a shared document and will not be the sole responsibility of any one organisation. However, Reading Borough Council is leading the development of the document and is facilitating, but not solely responsible for its delivery. **It is not committing the council or any partner into spending money to deliver these intentions, it's intended as a direction of travel and set of aims for the sector to coalesce around.**

#### 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 To note progress to date and the achievements of Reading Borough Council's partnership projects over the last 2 years.
- 2.2 To approve the shared Statement of Intent in Appendix 1 and proposed next steps.

#### 3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The intention to create a Culture and Heritage Strategy for 2015 to 2030 was brought to committee on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2014. It is now in its seventh year of delivery.

Produced by the now dormant Cultural Partnership it is focused around three strategic objectives of Enhance Identity; Increase Opportunity; Celebrate.

- 3.2 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2021 HNL Committee Report recognised that at the end of the Reading Place of Culture funding period, the intention had been to bring forward a three-year delivery plan. However, given the ongoing uncertainties relating to covid19 and the recovery of the sector this was felt to not be prudent. Instead, a one-year delivery plan, was agreed which set out tangible yet aspirational goals to provide focus on the response and recovery of the sector post covid19.
- 3.3 This delivery plan was drawn out of the achievements from the previous year and embodied in key strategic priorities for 2021-2022.
- 3.4 At the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2022 HNL Committee meeting, a summary of outcomes from the Reading Place of Culture, Great Places Scheme Project was shared alongside this proposed one-year delivery plan. This plan was based on learnings and evaluation from the project. It was agreed to delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Culture in consultation with the Lead Member for Culture, Heritage and Recreation (now Leisure and Culture) to incorporate the actions within existing or emerging delivery plans that the action plan set out in section 4.9 of the report.
- 3.4 One of the key actions from this plan was to:

*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.*

## **4. THE PROPOSAL**

### **4.1 Current Position:**

- 4.1.1 In January 2022, officers commenced the collaborative development of a Culture and Heritage Action Plan to deliver against the strategic priorities of the Culture and Heritage Strategy 2015 to 2030.
- 4.1.2 In July 2022, with the support of Arts Reach, a series of workshops and focus groups were held. Through the engagement and collaboration process 42 organisations and individual creative practitioners fed back on the following questions:
  - Looking back
    - Where have the Culture and Heritage Strategy Themes worked well?
    - What still needs addressing?
    - Strategic Cultural and Heritage Group: how do we develop this? What is its remit?
    - How do we define Culture and Heritage for Reading? What does it include/not include?
    - How can the Strategy support development journeys of individuals and organisations?
  - Looking forward
    - How can Culture and Heritage respond to the Climate Emergency?
    - How can Culture and Heritage respond to the Young Person's Mental Health Crisis?
    - How can Culture and Heritage contribute towards Placemaking? (thinking about the regeneration initiatives to take place)

- How can Culture and Heritage celebrate Diversity and address Social Inclusion?
- What are our Post-pandemic reflections for Culture and Heritage?

4.1.3 Notes from the engagement were circulated to attendees, further follow up with the Arts and Heritage Forum was also completed in December 2022.

4.1.4 However, through the engagement process it became clear that an Action Plan was not the most useful form of development for the sector at this time.

4.1.5 The Culture Sector are still recovering post pandemic, and an Action Plan, it was felt, may add additional work on top of the tight capacity and resource that the sector is experiencing. The Action Plan would therefore potentially act as an inhibitor rather than enabler, which is not the intention. As a result, the decision was taken to create a 'living' statement of intent, that outlined a shared set of objectives and aspirations for the sector, that may turn into an action plan at a later stage, that celebrates the power of cross sector and cross service collaboration and partnership, is inspired by the 3 strategic priorities of the Culture and Heritage Strategy 2015-2030, recognises the opportunities that the Levelling Up Funding now present and the importance of Culture, Creativity and Heritage in the following areas of work.

- Placemaking
- Physical and Mental Wellbeing
- Celebrating the diversity of Reading's communities
- Economic Development
- Sustainability

4.1.6 Through successful partnership projects and shared aspirations Culture, Creativity and Heritage have had the most profound social impact, it is recognised that this joint working towards the shared objectives, we are greater than the sum of our parts. Example case studies include:

1. The High Street Heritage Action Zone Cultural Consortium: Through HSHAZ community engagement project and model the grant application process was simplified and updated to make it more accessible and relevant to organisations at the beginning of their cultural journey. Further catalysing engagement from organisation who had traditionally not engaged.
2. Anniversaries Celebrations: Catalysing the community around a shared objective, further developing a sense of place and identity. Celebrating Reading's biscuit heritage and the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Abbey Ruins.
3. Gaia for Reading Climate Festival: Partners working together to bring an internationally renowned art installation that speaks to the values of Reading, further enhancing the town's story and identity.
4. Reading Abbey Revealed: Developing and sharing the Abbey's history and story with partners.
5. Children and Young People Mental Wellbeing through Culture: Engaging cross sector organisations in Cultural delivery to help improve young people's mental wellbeing.
6. Reading Libraries and Reading Rep have had a longstanding partnership, through several successful Arts Council England funding bids, they have delivered shows together and engaged audiences via libraries in the leadup, by incorporating library Rhyme time audience into creative processes.

#### 4.1.7 Next Steps

An initial Statement of Intent has been drafted and circulated to all those who took part in the July workshops and focus groups, it can be found in Appendix 1 of this report. Officers will set up small strategic group to manage and develop the statement of intent. This group will start delivery against year one aspirations and objectives and report back in March 2024 on progress.

### 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 *Explain how your recommendations contribute to the Corporate Plan Themes:*

#### Healthy environment

- Statement of intent supports Reading's sustainability ambitions and actively delivers against the climate action plan.

#### Thriving Communities

- Looks to create and deliver against the Arts Council's EDI targets. Also ensures the creation of a platform for Reading's diverse and underrepresented communities.
- Aims to create partnerships that strengthen the resilience of the voluntary and community sector, through partnership projects and joint funding bids.
- Aspires to embed youth voice and create opportunities young people in the borough.
- Highlights the importance of culture in tackling the effects of the pandemic, including increased unemployment, long term health problems, mental health issues and social isolation.

#### Inclusive economy

- Aims to create education, skills and training opportunities in partnership with cultural sector organisations.
- Builds on Reading's cultural heritage to enhance the tourist industry, creating an amazing place for people to enjoy.

5.3 Full details of the Council's [Corporate Plan](#) are available on the website and include information on the projects which will deliver these priorities.

### 6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 *This report outlines the ambitions for culture, heritage and creativity to support and inform climate action, alleviate climate anxiety and help Reading achieve its objective of being a net zero carbon town by 2030. In addition, the statement of intent has incorporated the RCAN Action Plan points that directly relate to Culture and Heritage.*

- 6.2 *Specific projects include bring Luke Jerram's Gaia to Reading Town Hall for the Reading Climate Festival. To help broaden the audiences engaged in the climate conversation and inspire climate action.*
- 6.3 *It is recognised that cultural activity can and does generate additional travel and waste. This statement of intent recognises that Reading's desire to become more of a tourist hub must be balanced with the town's sustainability ambitions.*

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

- 7.1 The Statement of Intent was created through engagement with the community in July 2022. There was one workshop held at the Whitley Community Centre, followed by 4 focus groups. These were all facilitated by Arts Reach.

## **8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 8.1 *This decision will not have a negative 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*

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 *It should be noted that the proposals in this statement of intent do not commit the Council or its partners to funding, provision or delivery. The recommended intentions will be used as a guide, to set a direction of travel and provide shared aims for the sector to coalesce around. Any actions that require funding will be dependent on budget being secured via external funding partners and approved as part of the annual budget-setting process.*

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 11.1 *N/A*

## APPENDIX 1

### Culture and Heritage Statement of Intent 2023-2026

Reading's Culture and Heritage Statement of Intent has been created in collaboration with the Culture, Heritage and Creative sectors as well as key stakeholders. We recognise that Culture and Heritage has always been a conduit for delivering positive social benefit but that it has become even more important since covid19. This Statement of Intent recognises the importance of Culture, Creativity and Heritage in the following areas of work.

- Placemaking
- Physical and Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Celebrating the diversity of Reading's communities
- Economic Development
- Sustainability

Culture, Creativity and Heritage both drives and contributes to the above areas through innovative partnerships and co-produced projects but also recognises the importance of creating cultural events, activities and experiences where the main driver is not social benefit, but enjoyment, shared experiences, experimentation and celebration of practice.

The shape of the Statement is derived from the Culture and Heritage Strategy's 3 Strategic Priorities; these have formed the main headlines of the document.

The objectives have been developed from the Place Branding project completed in partnership by REDA, University of Reading and Reading Borough Council in consultation with key stakeholders and 1600 members of the community. The outcome of the work can be seen [here](#).

The place branding project recognises the importance of culture in creating a sense of place, as such it is placed front and centre in the [toolkit](#) under the theme 'Cultivating Tomorrow's Culture'.

This is a living document and will be updated on a yearly basis to ensure that it remains relevant to the partners who work together to deliver each intent. It should be noted that the proposals in this statement of intent do not commit the Council or its partners to funding, provision or delivery. The recommended intentions will be used as a guide, to set a direction of travel and provide shared aims for the sector to coalesce around. Any actions that require funding will be dependent on budget being secured via external funding partners and approved as part of the annual budget-setting process.

What we mean when we say Culture, Heritage and Creativity:

We use 'culture' in this Culture and Heritage Statement of Intent as an umbrella term. *It includes the creative industries, arts and cultural organisations, and sectors from visual and digital art, to theatre, film, music, dance, literature and fashion.*

Cultural organisations play a key role in defining the character and identity of the places we live, work and visit. They bring us together, help us to enjoy our cities and flourish personally. They also foster creativity and innovation, provide jobs and celebrate heritage. <sup>1</sup>

We use ‘creativity’ to describe ‘the process by which, either individually or with others, we make something new: a work of art, or a reimagining of an existing work.’<sup>2</sup>

We use ‘heritage’ to describe ‘all that has been passed to us by previous generations. It is all around us. It is in the houses we live in, our places of work, the transport we use, our places of worship, our parks and gardens, the places we go to for our sport and social life, in the ground beneath our feet, in the shape of our landscape and in the placing and arrangement of our fields, villages, towns and cities.

Heritage is also found in our moveable possessions, from our national treasures in our museums, to our own family heirlooms, and in the intangible such as our history, traditions, legends and language.

Whilst everything we inherit is strictly our heritage, the term has become synonymous with the places, objects, knowledge and skills we inherit that are valued for reasons beyond their mere utility. In other words, they have a value to us that is over and above their functional use.’<sup>3</sup>

Strategic Priority One: Enhance Identity – Being Reading/Made in Reading								
Objective	Intent	Partners	Cross reference with other strategic plans	RBC Corporate Plan			Arts Council Let’s Create Strategy	
				Thriving Communities	Healthy environment	Inclusive Economy	Creative People	Cultural Community
<b>Community of</b>	<b>Year 1</b>							

<sup>1</sup> [improving places - culture and business improvement districts.pdf \(london.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Our vision | Arts Council England](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Introduction to the Heritage Protection Guide: Heritage Conservation Defined | Historic England](#)

<p><b>Communities</b></p> <p>A place powered by its people, built of vast, diverse communities, rich with culture and stories.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase participation and engagement in culture and heritage by celebrating Reading’s diverse arts, culture and heritage.</li> <li>• Recognise the demand for cultural hubs and cultural spaces and advocate for Cultural Organisation occupation of empty or new spaces as opportunities arise.</li> <li>• Develop the HexBox in partnership with the cultural sector.</li> </ul>		<p>Reading 2050 Vision</p> <p>Tackling Inequalities Strategy</p>						
	<b>Year 2</b>								
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the development of capacity within our diverse cultural sector through Shared Prosperity Funding.</li> <li>• Consult on the creation of a sector wide EDI intention inspired by the <a href="#">Arts Council Creative Case for Diversity</a>.</li> <li>• Develop advocacy work and endeavor to place arts, culture and heritage within key strategic discussions and strategies, including but limited to; devolution, health and wellbeing, employment skills, education, sustainability and other key placemaking strategic developments.</li> </ul>		<p>Social Inclusion</p> <p>Reading 2050 Vision</p>						
<b>Year 3</b>									

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create an action plan based on HSHAZ legacy, learnings and evaluation to be incorporated into existing practices and shared strategies.</li> <li>• Consult on barriers within Reading to the Creative and Cultural Life (e.g. music venues struggle because of proximity to London) to help inform future project developments.</li> </ul>								
<b>Strategic Priority Two: Increase Opportunities Through Working Together</b>									
Objective	Intent	Partners	Cross reference with other strategic plans	RBC Corporate Plan			Arts Council Let's Create Strategy		
				Thriving Communities	Healthy environment	Inclusive Economy	Creative People	Cultural Community	Cultural Country
<b>Forward Focused</b>	<b>Year 1</b>								
A place always looking ahead, positively seeking to build a better future for all that call it home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with creative sector and regional partners to identify local skills gaps linked with the development of the screen industries in Berkshire.</li> <li>• Create opportunities to share best practice and learning locally and nationally – 1 workshop</li> <li>• <b>Develop an external funding bid</b> to create an ongoing programme of co-commissioning of cultural projects to deliver social impact. Partner with funders and strategic delivery partners</li> </ul>		Brighter Futures for Children  Cultural Education Partnership Strategy						

	<p>from non-ACH sectors to deliver on multiple priorities. Move beyond current partners into new communities and groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embed genuine youth voice into organisations and projects.</li> <li>• Deliver the Children and Young People’s Mental Wellbeing Through Culture Project. As part of the legacy of the project, document the existing offerings in this area of the sector.</li> </ul>								
<b>Year 2</b>									
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support creative skills development in our town from pipeline in schools through to apprenticeships and work in partnership to create schemes bridging skills gaps in the Creative Sector.</li> <li>• Share best practice and learning locally and nationally – 2 workshops.</li> <li>• Complete delivery of the CEP 2020-2023 Action Plan and consult on the next 3 year action plan.</li> </ul>								
<b>Year 3</b>									
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Develop an external funding bid</b> 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</li> </ul>								

	<p>broaden potential interest and the range of funders for ACH. Ideally working with the Whitley Researchers to develop this research.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commence delivery of the CEP 2024-2027 Action Plan.</li> </ul>		CEP						
<p><b>Custodians:</b> A place proud to look after its people, its heritage and its landscape. Carefully protecting today, so we all have a tomorrow.</p>	<p><b>Year 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete a sustainability audit of local Reading Festivals funded through the Shared Prosperity Funding to support RCAN’s target of zero waste and circular festivals (<a href="#">please see R13 of RCAN strategy for more detail</a>).</li> <li>• Work in partnership with key partners to bring Luke Jerram’s Gaia to the Town Hall for the Reading Climate Festival, to help inspire Climate Action and demonstrate the power of Culture to support positive change.</li> <li>• Deliver Climate Anxiety training to embed learnings and understanding into our cultural programming.</li> <li>• <b>Develop an action plan to meet the expectations of Let's Create in relation to climate action and sustainability.</b></li> </ul>		Reading Climate Change Partnership Strategy (R13)						

	<b>Year 2</b>								
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a statement of intent in partnership from sustainability audit.</li> </ul>								
	<b>Year 3</b>								
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Sustainability is a fast paced, fast moving topic. With new learnings and best practice making it a constant changing landscape. Bearing this in mind year 2 and 3's intentions will be set in partnership in line with relevant learnings and new research.</i></li> </ul>								
<b>Strategic Priority Three: Celebrate Reading</b>									
Objective	Intent	Partners	Cross reference with other strategic plans	RBC Corporate Plan			Arts Council Let's Create Strategy		
				Thriving Communities	Healthy environment	Inclusive Economy	Creative People	Cultural Community	Cultural Country
<b>Connected</b>	<b>Year 1</b>								
A place connected in every sense of the word – physically, emotionally,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connect people with each other and Reading through anniversaries and local history to help create a sense of identity and celebrate what makes Reading Reading. Create a shared story of Reading's cultural, heritage and</li> </ul>								

<p>culturally. Rooted in its heritage, its history, its people</p>	<p>creative landscape and the organisations and individuals that contribute to its vibrancy, but also that celebrates the power of culture to deliver social impact outcomes. Share data that enhances and evidences this power and story.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and action the Abbey Quarter Business Plan.</li> <li>• Create a Strategic Cultural Network that manages the statement of intent, supports delivery of the statement and compliments the Arts and Heritage Forum by providing a platform for organisations that are planning three to four years into the future.</li> </ul>								
<b>Year 2</b>									
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop What's On Reading in line with feedback from the community, to improve joint marketing opportunities, transparency within the sector and further develop online resources including guidance on EMP/RAMS creation.</li> <li>• Complete audit of current networks and forums to ensure that they meet the needs of the creative sector.</li> </ul>								

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create mentoring opportunities and support networks for new and emerging organisations.</li> </ul>								
<b>Year 3</b>									
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Develop an external funding bid</b> to improve signage of culture and heritage assets to raise awareness. Including wayfinding.</li> </ul>								