

Appendix 2

Guide for Busking and Street Performance in Reading

Busking and street performers are a long-established tradition which add to the attractiveness and vibrancy of Reading town centre. However, on occasion some performances have been viewed as disruptive to those who live and work in the town and this guide has therefore been created to ensure street performances remain engaging and welcoming for all Reading visitors.

The terms “busking and street entertainment” in this guide refers to performances of music, art and theatre intended to entertain or engage with the public.

Street Preaching

The principle of the guidance also applies to other activities which may have a similar impact in the town, including street preaching. Preachers should be respectful of others in the town centre and in particular follow the guidance regarding noise levels.

These guidelines have been written and agreed by Reading Borough Council and Reading Business Improvement District (BID) to support a culture of cooperation between buskers, street entertainers, local businesses, members of the public and the council.

This guide has been created to:

- Foster a vibrant street culture whilst making provisions for premises owners, Reading BID and the local authority to resolve issues that may occasionally arise around busking and street performances.
- Provide clarity around what is reasonable in relation to busking in Reading.
- Promote a positive relationship between buskers and those who share public spaces with them.
- Give people confidence that most disputes can be resolved amicably through community consideration and negotiation.
- Find a balance between the value that live street performances add to our town centre, while respecting the rights of people who live and work there.

Advice to buskers and street performers

Complaints tend to apply to a small number of groups and performers and usually relate to noise levels, repetitive performances or obstruction of the street and doorways. Buskers and street performers should consider their intended presence, performance and location carefully to avoid generating unnecessary complaints. Songs should not be repeated, and performers should be considerate with the volume used.

Before performing, buskers and entertainers should:

- Anticipate the impact that the act will have on other users of shared spaces and for people in the buildings around you.
- Where possible, introduce yourself to nearby businesses, traders and other users of the space near to where you intend to perform. By letting them know about your performance in advance you will reduce the likelihood of complaints.
- Ask businesses to speak to you directly if they have a problem or need to ask you to make any adjustments to your act.
- Try to establish a positive, co-operative relationship between you and the people around you. This will also help to make any future communications good-natured.
- Always be courteous to members of the public, members of the local business community and public officials (Thames Valley Police, Reading BID Wardens or officers from Reading Borough Council). Being calm and polite will help promote positive relationships on the street.

Choosing a pitch location

As there are no fixed performance pitches in Reading, careful consideration should be given when choosing a location. As a busker or performer, you should:

- Think about how much space your equipment will take up so that you don't cause an obstruction for the public. Ensure there is plenty of space for people to walk past or around you and factor in additional space if your act is likely to draw a crowd.
- Take care not to obstruct highways or shop entrances and allow space for people to move past you with prams, wheelchairs, or emergency service vehicles.
- Be aware of the time of day and nature of the space you intend to perform in and be prepared to change location if it becomes clear your act is unsuitable for that space.
- Always choose your pitch with consideration for other buskers and allow at least 50m between you and another busker or street performer.
- Change locations after a maximum of two hours and avoid returning to the same location for three hours. A culture of sharing and swapping pitches with other performers is encouraged.
- Never use any existing street furniture as part of your act.
- Never perform your act in such a manner that could be considered dangerous, inappropriate, or likely to cause alarm, distress, or offence to members of the public. Naked flames, pyrotechnics, fireworks, knives, sharp objects, or anything similar deemed to be a risk to the public should not be used as part of the performance of your show. You should have appropriate insurance cover for your performance.

Setting your noise level

The performance noise level should be set just above the level of background street noise so you can be heard, but not cause undue interference to others. Your performance should not be audible in nearby shops and offices and there should be no spill-over of noise to other buskers. As a performer, you should:

- Avoid repetition of songs as this is often a cause of complaint.
- Be aware of the acoustic context of the pitch you choose as every pitch has a different acoustic dynamic. Increasing the volume can sometimes distort the sound which may cause annoyance.
- Avoid the use of amplifiers, loudspeakers, megaphones, or any similar equipment in your activity as this may cause a nuisance. If you do have small portable amplification equipment and you are asked to turn the level down by an authorised officer, then you must comply with those instructions.
- Consider the way instruments are played as noise from louder instruments can carry further. We recommend using brushes and damping with your drum kit and dampers/mutes with brass instruments.
- Avoid using generators or large public address systems.
- Avoid running backing tracks when you are not performing.
- Avoid any amplification after 9pm - Under the Control of Pollution Act 1974 section 62, no amplification is allowed in any public street after 9pm and before 8am.

Resolving Issues – Businesses/Residents

Please remember that Reading town centre is a public space, and buskers are permitted by law to perform so long as they are not doing so in a way which causes a detriment to the quality of life of the local community.

From time to time, buskers and street entertainers can cause disruption to businesses and members of the public. If you are disturbed by a busking performance, please follow the steps below:

- First make yourself known to the performer and politely let them know. It is important to wait for a suitable interval in the performance before introducing yourself to them. Interrupting performances is unlikely to lead to productive dialogue.
- Try to reach a compromise, if possible. For example, could the busker adjust their location, or could you both agree a time period for their performance duration?
- Feel free to refer a busker to the best practice guidance which provides examples of what is expected and reasonable. It may help to resolve the issue by referring to the relevant section.
- If no agreement can be reached, please gather details of the busker and evidence of the nuisance and contact Reading BID to discuss what next steps could be taken.

[Meet the team - Business \(visit-reading.com\)](http://visit-reading.com)

- Where disputes occur, buskers and performers are also encouraged to contact Reading BID to help resolve the issue. If a busker or performer feels threatened or subject to harassment, they must decide if it is appropriate to call the Police.
- In serious cases, where the performance causes a statutory nuisance, or has a detrimental effect of a persistent or continuing nature on those in the locality, Reading Borough Council may be able to take formal action against those responsible. In such cases, the council will always endeavour to be reasonable and proportionate in balancing the rights of local businesses, residents, buskers and shoppers/visitors.
- The Council and Reading BID will investigate complaints that are received about the activities of buskers and street performers and carry out spot checks on performers to ensure that they are complying with the guide.

Busking or street trading

While we welcome buskers and street traders in Reading town centre, the following guidance must be respected and adhered to:

- Busking must not involve a formal sales transaction as donations are given to buskers by members of the public on a voluntary basis only.
- Members of the public should be able to engage with your act/performance without any obligation to donate.
- Buskers should not sell merchandise such as CDs, t-shirts, posters etc without an occasional street trading consent. These are available on a daily rate and details of how to apply can be found on the Reading Borough Council website.
<https://www.reading.gov.uk/>

[On reverse]

This guide has been written and produced by Reading Borough Council and Reading Business Improvement District (BID), part of Reading's Economy & Destination Agency (REDA), to encourage a culture of cooperation between buskers, street entertainers, local businesses, members of the public and the Council.

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