



10 March 2026

Title	Roman Britain - Reimagined in Reading
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report	Emma Gee, Executive Director Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services
Report author	Christelle Beaupoux, Culture and Heritage Projects Manager
Lead Councillor	Cllr Adele Barnett-Ward, Lead Councillor for Leisure & Culture
Council priority	All
Recommendations	<p>That the committee</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Notes the £714,785 National Lottery Heritage Fund delivery grant and the commencement of delivery activities, including procurement and recruitment. 2. Grants spend approval and notes the use of £236,808.50 match funding. 3. Notes the project governance and reporting process.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The *Roman Britain - Reimagined in Reading* project has secured a £714,785 delivery grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, following two years of intensive work by the project team and successful completion of all three competitive application stages.
- 1.2. This transformational investment unlocks significant match funding of £236,808 that will enable Reading Museum, through the redevelopment of its Roman Gallery, to care for and improve access to its nationally important Roman collection from the town of Calleva Atrebatum at Silchester and to provide an activity programme for a wide range of audiences.
- 1.3. The project will transform Reading Museum's outdated Silchester Gallery into the new Discovering Calleva Gallery, redisplaying its nationally significant Iron Age and Roman collections in an accessible, engaging and inclusive way. The redevelopment draws on 30 years of University of Reading research and extensive community consultation to deliver updated, accessible interpretation.
- 1.4. The project's objectives are to enhance collection care and environmental sustainability, embed cocreation with priority audiences, deliver a comprehensive four strand activity programme, and strengthen organisational resilience. The strands: Telling the Story, Animating the Gallery, Creative Calleva, and Engaging Schools, will widen participation, support skills development and deepen connections to local Roman heritage.
- 1.5. Key deliverables include a fully redeveloped multisensory gallery with tactile interactives, recreated Roman spaces, 3D printed handling objects, conservation grade cases, low energy lighting, new interpretation and digital resources, and a refreshed

schools programme. The project will also recruit two part time specialist posts, offer two paid internships and create 52 volunteer roles, increasing workforce capacity and community involvement.

- 1.6. Expected outputs include an expanded programme of public events, talks, workshops, community outreach and learning activities, shaped by engagement with disabled people, low income families, young people and Sanctuary Seekers.
- 1.7. The project's outcomes include significantly improved access, inclusion and participation; a more accurate and relatable interpretation of the cultural and ethnic diversity of Roman Calleva; and strengthened organisational sustainability through enhanced environmental conditions, increased footfall, stronger partnerships and improved skills across staff and volunteers. It also supports Reading's net-zero 2030 ambitions and ensures long-term care of the museum's Roman collection.
- 1.8. The Council signed the Grant Acceptance Letter on 9 January 2026, and the award was publicly announced on 27 January 2026. [Reading Museum Secures Heritage Fund Grant to Reimagine Roman Britain for the 21st Century | Reading Borough Council News](#). Officers have now completed the Permission to Start paperwork with The National Lottery Heritage Fund. The project will receive scheme approval as part of the Budget monitoring report presented at Policy Committee on the 16 March 2026.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. The project strongly aligns with the priorities and principles of the Council Plan 2025–28 to secure Reading's economic and cultural success by delivering quality cultural services and facilitating exciting improvements to our cultural offer through grant-funded projects.
- 2.2. The project is a strategic priority in the Museum's Forward Plan 2025–2030, endorsed by this Committee in March 2025, recognising the need to replace failing infrastructure, update outdated interpretation and improve access to the Silchester Collection.
- 2.3. The project also delivers key ambitions of Reading's Culture & Heritage Strategy 2015-30, celebrating Reading's unique Roman heritage through a renewed, research led redisplay. It widens participation by embedding inclusive design, creative engagement, volunteering and skills development, while strong partnerships with the University of Reading and local organisations strengthen Reading's cultural infrastructure and support sustainable cultural growth.
- 2.4. In alignment with the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019–2036), the redevelopment adopts a sustainable, low-impact approach within the existing gallery footprint by reducing waste, reusing materials where practicable, and incorporating low-energy systems and conservation-grade display cases that reduce long-term energy demand. This contributes directly to the Council's commitment to achieving net zero carbon by 2030.
- 2.5. At a national level, the project reflects the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Investment Principles, particularly:
 - *Saving heritage* through improved conservation and secure long-term care of nationally significant objects;
 - *Protecting the environment* through low-impact design and more efficient climate control;
 - *Inclusion, access and participation* through co-created interpretation and targeted programming;
 - *Organisational sustainability* through workforce development, volunteer training and strengthened long-term resilience.
- 2.6. Finally, the project reinforces Reading's wider cultural, economic and tourism ambitions, complementing Museums Partnership Reading (Arts Council England funded National Portfolio Organisation) programmes, contributing to a stronger, more visible cultural

offer across the borough, and contributing to the visitor economy and placemaking (REDA's Economic Development Framework).

3. **The Proposal**

- 3.1. The project has secured a £714,785 National Lottery Heritage Fund delivery grant, £236,808.50 from other match-funding sources and a further £28,172 non-cash contribution, making a grand total project budget of £979,765.50. This will enable the commencement of the delivery phase, following successful completion of the project's development stage.
- 3.2. The project will transform Reading Museum's Roman gallery into the new *Discovering Calleva Gallery*, redisplaying Iron Age and Roman objects through immersive, multisensory and accessible interpretation shaped by an extensive community consultation. It will connect more people with Reading's Roman heritage through updated storytelling, tactile interactives, recreated Roman spaces and 3D-printed handling objects. A comprehensive activity programme with four themes: Telling the Story, Animating the Gallery, Creative Calleva and Engaging Schools, will widen participation, strengthen partnerships, expand volunteering and paid placements, and enhance learning opportunities for diverse audiences. Outcomes include improved access, inclusion, skills development and long-term cultural value. For more information about the project, please visit the project's page: [Roman Britain Reimagined in Reading | Reading Museum](#).
- 3.3. To progress the delivery phase, the committee is asked to note the use of £236,808.50 cash in match funding, comprising contributions from project partners and donors including the Earley Charity, Friends of Reading Museum, private donors, and non-cash support, and up to £100,000 from the Council through the Sustainability Fund. Officers are continuing to work on alternative sources of funding to reduce the need for Council match-funding. Furthermore, the Committee is asked to grant Spend Approval for the scheme, this spend approval will allow officers to finalise the remaining financial and contractual arrangements necessary for the project to commence.
- 3.4. Finally, the Committee is asked to note that strong project governance will be maintained through a dedicated project management structure that meets regularly to oversee delivery, budget, risks, and compliance with both National Lottery Heritage Fund requirements and the Council's project management standards. Regular updates will be provided through established Council reporting routes, including HNL Committee reports at key milestones, ensuring robust oversight, transparency, and alignment with organisational priorities.

4. **Contribution to Strategic Aims**

- 4.1. The Council Plan has established five priorities for the years 2025/28. These priorities are:
 - Promote more equal communities in Reading
 - Secure Reading's economic and cultural success
 - Deliver a sustainable and healthy environment and reduce our carbon footprint
 - Safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children
 - Ensure Reading Borough Council is fit for the future
- 4.2. In delivering these priorities, we will be guided by the following set of principles:
 - Putting residents first
 - Building on strong foundations
 - Recognising, respecting, and nurturing all our diverse communities
 - Involving, collaborating, and empowering residents
 - Being proudly ambitious for Reading
- 4.3. The project strongly aligns with the priorities and principles of the Council Plan 2025–28. By removing long-standing barriers to cultural participation, the project supports the aim of developing fairer communities. Extensive consultation with disabled people,

low-income families, young people and Sanctuary Seekers has shaped a gallery that is multisensory, accessible and relevant, ensuring more residents can benefit from Reading's heritage offer.

- 4.4. The project contributes to securing Reading's economic and cultural success by transforming a key cultural asset into a high-quality, research-led visitor experience. The redevelopment will increase footfall, enhance cultural tourism, strengthen local partnerships and support creative skills, volunteering and community participation.
- 4.5. The project also helps deliver a sustainable and healthy environment. All works occur within the existing gallery footprint, minimising waste and avoiding new construction. The installation of conservation-grade cases, LED lighting and improved environmental controls reduces long-term energy demand, contributing to the Council's commitment to achieving net-zero carbon by 2030. The project will improve the long-term care and management of the museum's nationally important Silchester Collection.
- 4.6. By expanding learning programmes, creative activities, and intergenerational engagement, the redevelopment directly supports the health and wellbeing of adults and children. Finally, the project strengthens organisational resilience, improving skills, digital resources, volunteer capacity, paid internship placements and long-term sustainability, helping to ensure the Council remains fit for the future.
- 4.7. The project embodies the Council's principles by putting residents first, using extensive community consultation and mindful engagement exercises with a wide range of community groups to shape an accessible, multisensory gallery experience. It builds on strong foundations by revitalising a long-established cultural asset with updated interpretation grounded in leading academic research. The project recognises and nurtures Reading's diverse communities by reflecting the cultural diversity of Roman Calleva and today's Reading. Through co-creation, volunteering, partnerships, including the University of Reading's Archaeology Department, Care4Calais, Autism Berkshire, Berkshire Vision, Jelly Arts, New Directions College and the Museums Partnership Reading, each contributing specialist expertise and supporting inclusive consultation activities and targeted outreach, it involves and collaborates with residents. Overall, the project is proudly ambitious for Reading, enhancing its cultural building and strengthening its heritage offer for future generations.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 5.2. The project is aligned with Reading Borough Council's cultural and environmental priorities, delivering a low-impact redevelopment within the existing Silchester Gallery. By avoiding new construction, reusing infrastructure, and upgrading displays and accessibility, it supports the sustainability goals of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019-2036). New conservation-grade cases stabilise microclimates, reducing reliance on whole-gallery HVAC systems, while a cloud-based monitoring system ensures efficient control of environmental conditions. With no transport-intensive works required, the project minimises waste and carbon impact while ensuring the long-term preservation and accessibility of the Silchester collections.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1. Extensive meaningful consultation and community engagement were undertaken during the Heritage Fund supported development phase of the project. More than 300 people across Reading contributed through surveys, focus groups, outreach events, interviews and testing sessions. This included 192 online survey responses from visitors to the Silchester Gallery, over 100 participants from 11 community groups such as Berkshire Vision, Care4Calais, Autism Berkshire, British Islamic Gardens and Museum Studies students, and 13 families engaged through Museum on Wheels outreach in Southcote and Whitley libraries, areas of higher deprivation in South Reading. A paid focus group with low-income parents from South Reading provided further insight into barriers and

motivations for visiting museums. Additional consultation included the Museums Partnership Reading Youth Panel, five Museum volunteers, interviews with 11 strategic stakeholders, and feedback from teachers via interviews and an eight-school online survey.

- 6.2. Across all groups, people consistently expressed that the current gallery felt too dark, text-heavy, dated and difficult to navigate. Families, young people and disabled visitors overwhelmingly requested a more immersive, sensory and hands-on experience, wanting smells, sounds, tactile objects, reconstructed spaces and low-tech interactives such as dressing up and mosaic-making. Visually impaired visitors asked for tactile maps, 3D objects, better lighting and audio description. Low-income families highlighted the need for more interactivity and relatable storytelling, while Sanctuary Seekers asked for clear introductions, context, and stories reflecting diversity and migration. Teachers asked for Calleva-focused learning, more handling material, and improved SEND-friendly resources and pre-visit support.
- 6.3. This feedback directly shaped the new Discovering Calleva Gallery proposal: a lighter, more spacious and accessible environment with multisensory elements, tactile and low-tech interactives, 3D printed objects, improved seating, layered interpretation, a stronger focus on diversity and daily life, and a comprehensive activity and schools programme shaped by and co-produced with the communities who helped design it.
- 6.4. The redevelopment is grounded in over 30 years of archaeological research by the University of Reading's Archaeology Department and shaped through meaningful collaboration with Reading's diverse communities to create an inclusive, interactive visitor experience.
- 6.5. This continuous engagement demonstrates that the project has been genuinely shaped with local communities and key partners. The strength of these partnerships and the quality of engagement were praised by the National Lottery Heritage Fund Committee panel. The project team also worked closely with audiences who rely on museum services, including those facing barriers to participation, ensuring that the proposals for the gallery significantly enhance access, inclusion and opportunities for cultural participation across Reading.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1. 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.
- 7.2. An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is not relevant for this decision. The project will deliver enhanced inclusion through:
 - Multisensory interpretation suitable to all, specially developed with the support of neurodivergent visitors and people with visual impairment.
 - Co-created content with under-represented groups.
 - New accessible tours, object handling and informal learning sessions.
 - Proactive outreach through *Museums on Wheels* and community partnerships.
 - Volunteering and paid internship opportunities
 - The gallery will better reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of Roman Calleva, mirroring the diversity of modern Reading.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1. The Committee is being asked to acknowledge the National Lottery Heritage Fund Delivery Phase grant and authorise the start of delivery activities for the Roman Britain Reimagined in Reading project. The Council has the legal power to do this under the Localism Act 2011 and its constitutional decision-making framework. Committees can delegate actions to officers, enabling decisions to be implemented within approved budgets and policies.
- 8.2. All procurement will follow the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and relevant procurement legislation (including the Procurement Act 2023), ensuring transparency, competition, and value for money. Officers will use the InTend e-tendering portal and frameworks where appropriate.
- 8.3. Grant drawdown depends on The National Lottery Heritage Fund Terms of Grants and requirements, including Permission to Start, ongoing monitoring, reporting, and evaluation.
- 8.4. Legal Services have reviewed and confirmed that the proposed actions and delegations comply with Council powers, the Constitution, and procurement rules.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1. Project budget costs are £951,593.50 and these are met through grant income of £714,785 and match funding of the remainder.
- 9.2. The financial position of the project is strengthened by the significant level of external trust and investment the project has already attracted. The award of a £714,785 National Lottery Fund Delivery Phase grant reinforces strong confidence from a major national funder in both the quality of the project and the Council's capacity to deliver it successfully.
- 9.3. Alongside this national support, the project has secured £236,808.50 in match-funding from external partners, including the Friends of Reading Museum, private donors, the Earley Charity, and valued non-cash volunteer contributions totalling £28,172. The diversity and depth of this funding reflect well-established relationships and demonstrate broad external buy-in across community, charitable, and philanthropic partners.
- 9.4. Together, these contributions mean that almost 90% of project funding comes from outside the Council, significantly reducing the level of direct Council investment required and reinforcing that partners recognise the cultural, social, and community value of the project.
- 9.5. In addition, officers are continuing to develop and implement a fundraising strategy aimed at securing further external contributions as the project progresses. This proactive approach is designed to further reduce the financial pressures on Council budgets, ensuring that any remaining commitments are minimised wherever possible and aligned with the Council's overall financial planning.
- 9.6. The strength of this financial position is further supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund's rigorous financial framework, which requires compliance with detailed grant conditions, ongoing monitoring, milestone-based claims, and clear evidential submissions to ensure accountable use of public money. These assurance processes provide an additional layer of oversight, giving further reassurance that the project will be delivered within robust, transparent, and well-regulated financial controls.
- 9.7. Overall, the combination of substantial national grant funding, diverse partner match-funding, strong oversight mechanisms from the funders and the Council and ongoing fundraising efforts demonstrates a shared support in the project's value. It also provides strong reassurance that the project represents a financially responsible and well-supported investment for the Council, built on trusted external partnerships and sustained community confidence.

10. Timetable for Implementation.

10.1. Project delivery key timeline and milestones from January 2026 to March 2029:

- Spring 2026: Anticipated start of the project
- Summer 2026 and Summer 2027: Recruitment of new staff
- Autumn 2026: Procurement of Interpretation Design Consultants
- Late 2026 to early 2027: Tender procurement of main contractor
- 2027: Gallery works (RIBA stages 5 to 7)
- Spring 2028: Gallery launch
- Spring 2028 to Spring 2029: Delivery of the Activity Plan

11. Background Papers

11.1. None.