

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	13 MARCH 2019		
TITLE:	'READING, PLACE OF CULTURE' (GREAT PLACE SCHEME)		
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update on progress in delivering year 1 of 'Reading, place of culture' funded through the 'Great Place Scheme'. The Council learned in April 2017 that the bid it had submitted had been successful (one of only 16 grants awarded across England and the only urban area to receive a grant in the South-east region). The amount of grant awarded was £558,400 to deliver a range of programmes over three years linked to the objectives of the Great Place Scheme and complementing cultural activities and initiatives already underway in the Borough. The Council received formal 'permission to start' from the funders on the 12th December 2017 and this report summarises progress in delivering the programme over the first year and updates Committee on planned activities for year two. The report is succinct as there is a related presentation to Committee to bring the year's activities to life.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Committee notes the progress made in delivering 'Reading, Place of culture' over the first full year of implementation as set out in paragraph 4.1.
- 2.2 That Committee endorses the proposals to further develop the programme of work in the second year of delivery as set out in paragraph 4.2.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 A new Cultural and Heritage Strategy 2015-2030, developed under the auspices of the Cultural Partnership, was endorsed by the Council's Policy Committee in November 2015. The Culture and Heritage Strategy clearly sets out an aspirational vision for culture and heritage to play a key role in the town's future, enhancing the quality of life for residents and increasing the attractiveness of the town for visitors and investors. The Strategy envisages Reading's profile and reputation as a cultural

destination being transformed over the coming years, building from a strong base of arts and heritage organisations and assets and catalysed by a Year of Culture in 2016. 'Reading, Place of Culture' is strongly aligned with and directly contributes to achieving the strategic ambition of the Culture and Heritage Strategy.

- 3.2 A new 2050 Vision was launched on the 18th October 2017 following an extensive period of development and consultation by the three lead organisations: Reading UK, Reading University and Barton Willmore. The Council has endorsed this Vision and, in its role as community leader, to work alongside other agencies and organisations to realise the Vision's ambitions. A thriving and renowned cultural offer is a key component of this vision.
- 3.3 The Economic Development Plan led by Reading UK, "Growing Opportunity", has the three key objectives of: raising Reading's profile; growing opportunities to strengthen the local economy; and employment for local people. The further development of arts, culture and digital economy to contribute to these objectives is at the heart of the plan.
- 3.4 The Great Place Scheme is a new joint funding initiative by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), Arts Council England (ACE) and Historic England (HE). The aim of the Scheme is:

'To put arts, culture and heritage at the heart of the local vision for 12* places across England, making a step change in the contribution of culture in those areas and embedding them in the places' plans for the future. Four of these places will be rural. It will fund projects in areas where there is already a strong local partnership approach and a commitment to embed arts, culture and heritage as a core part of local plans, policies and strategies - cementing partnerships across the public, private and voluntary sectors'.

The stated ambition of this pilot programme is to support local areas to:

- Inspire a vision of how culture can change your place;
- Connect culture with new partners to help change places for the better;
- Incorporate a vision for culture into ambitions for your place;
- Build and share learning.

(* This is quoted from the original bidding guidance. At the end of the bidding process funding was sufficient to award grants to 16 places across England).

The Great Place Scheme provided a timely opportunity to build on significant development of cultural and heritage initiatives in the town including, for example, the Year of Culture 2016, the Abbey Revealed project and the emergence of three new National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs).

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Current Position:

Following the formal 'permission to start' from the funders significant progress has been made across all strands of the programme in the first year overseen by a Steering Group of the three core delivery partners leading on particular aspects of the programme:

Reading Borough Council - cultural outreach and commissioning, overall evaluation, partnership development, the accountable body and programme management;

Reading UK - the Reading-on-Thames Festival, economic development and business engagement;

Reading University - participatory research with communities to inform the development of the programme, including cultural commissioning and the Festival, leading on the work with the 'Whitley Researchers' and 'Young Researchers', supporting evaluation.

Whilst it would be impossible to detail every aspect of delivery in this short report, or indeed the linked presentation, it is perhaps worth providing an overview against key strands of the programme and highlighting, in particular, how the programme is beginning to address the needs of Reading's more vulnerable communities.

Research and Evaluation

Set within the context of a national evaluation across all 16 Great Place Schemes, Reading has appointed evaluation consultants, developed a local framework and begun to embed this in all activities so that programme level evidence of impact can be identified. To supplement baseline data three student interns at the University have undertaken research on civic pride in Reading, carrying out over 260 face to face interviews. This work has also been augmented by a Festival survey of attendees.

The participatory research led by Reading University, initially in South Reading, working with the 'Whitley Researchers' and newly established 'Young Researchers' has included mapping health needs and cultural assets in South Reading and young people's well-being. Not only will this developing programme of work help create a 'cultural needs analysis', it also significantly supports the development as individuals of those involved and builds community networks. The funders are particularly interested in this area of work as a potential national exemplar.

Cultural Commissioning

Following extensive preparatory work, including widespread cross-sector engagement and workshops, three cultural commissions of £15k have been awarded and currently being delivered. These involved a rigorous outcomes focused procurement process fully compliant with public sector Procurement Regulations so that both commissioners and cultural organisations could better understand the process and potential value of cultural commissioning. The commissions were particularly focused on engaging those less likely to access cultural opportunities and where engagement could have a significant positive impact on their well-being. The three successful organisations were as follows:

Reading Rep. - the theatre company delivering a series of performing arts workshops, building to short performances to boost self-esteem, provide confidence building and life-skills. They are targeting work with more disadvantaged communities including older people in care homes, adults with mental health illness or learning disabilities and disadvantaged young people.

Parents and Children Together (PACT) - an organisation supporting troubled families, are delivering through their Alana House project which supports women with multiple and complex needs. They are using photography to give marginalised and vulnerable women a voice, using shared experience to raise self-esteem and communication skills. Outcomes are being rigorously evaluated.

The Museum of English Rural Life and Reading Museum (Museums Partnership) - working with older people to combat loneliness and isolation. The museums partnership will offer reminiscence activities including old photos, film and artefacts as well as gardening and dance to promote positive health and wellbeing.

In addition to these a creative employment pilot was also commissioned with Real Time Video's successful proposal to increase work experience opportunities within the creative industries for young people. The young people involved gained new skills, confidence and a chance to contribute practically to major creative projects in Reading, including the Reading-on-Thames Festival and the cultural commissioning programme.

All of the successful commissions are ongoing and are committed to thorough evaluation and the pilot year will help inform how the cultural commissioning programme develops over the three year period. In addition, a Community Steering Group and an Ageing-well Partnership have recently been established to inform the development of and to contribute directly to the future development of the cultural commissioning programme and associated decision-making in years two and three.

A 'Cultural Commissioning Symposium' was also held on the 29th November at Reading Town Hall to share national and local best practice. The event was designed to showcase how commissioners and cultural practitioners are working together to effect change and share how local research is shaping understanding of Reading's needs and priorities. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive.

Reading-on-Thames Festival

The 2018 Festival has built on the pilot in the previous year with a high calibre programme involving more artists and cultural organisations (including 40% of the programme by Reading based organisations), 19 new commissions, with most events sold out and positive feedback from those attending. Interestingly over a fifth of attendees came from outside Berkshire and 3% from overseas.

Significant effort was expended in advance of the Festival to engage with potential community partners and to develop an outreach programme working with festival artists and organisations. Over 600 free tickets were donated to the community groups that were engaged and tickets were heavily discounted (50%) for those on low incomes. Evaluation of the Festival is yet to be fully completed but there is evidence that these initiatives enabled more disadvantaged local residents to experience the Festival than would otherwise have been the case and that the experience for many was positive and impactful. The full evaluation of this year's Festival will enable these initiatives to be extended in future years.

Economic Development and Business Engagement

Led by Reading UK this area of work is inextricably linked with the Festival and the work of the economic development company to promote Reading to businesses and inward investors. Over £24,000 of cash investment in the Festival by the private sector was secured with a range of 'in-kind' contributions including the use of both major shopping centres (Oracle and Broad Street Mall) as venues. In parallel, Reading UK delivered the 2018 Culture & Heritage Awards with business sponsorship and strong private-sector attendance. There has also been a strong focus on culture & heritage in business facing publications such as the 'Reading Relocation Guide'.

4.2 Options Proposed

The plans for year two of the programme are already in-train and are seeking to build from the foundations of the 1st year whilst strengthening connections between the various components and further developing networks and collaboration. Across the programme the aim is to develop and deliver sustainable change and impact by the end of the three year period (accepting that this is a challenging outcome to achieve).

For example, the approach for cultural commissioning in year two has already been further developed so that there is a greater emphasis on co-commissioning and the Great Place Scheme grant funding already secured will be match funded by other resources to build towards sustainability. The commissions for year two will focus on mental health and well-being with match funding from Berkshire Community Foundation (BCF), elderly care and long term conditions, and short breaks provision for young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND) with match funding from Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC). It is anticipated that these commissions will be awarded in May. In addition three smaller pilot programmes will be commissioned: one on ageing-well under the auspices of the newly established Ageing-well Partnership; one on young people and mental health (building from the year 1 research); and one for community led cultural commissioning focused on local needs in Whitley.

The ongoing work on research and evaluation will be continued and strengthened with additional resources from Reading University linked to community networks and developing stronger connections with the Festival and local commissioning as referred to above. The work will also tie in with a summer festival involving local partners Aspire 2, the Whitley Excellence Cluster and Whitley Community Development Association.

Similarly, long term sustainability and impact is the objective for the Reading-on-Thames Festival with the Director, Anna Doyle, re-appointed for year two and planning for 2019 is already well underway. Following learning in year one, the Reading-on-Thames Festival will take place slightly later in the year to enable better and more extensive engagement with communities and schools and be shortened to provide focused impact. The Festival will take place from the 26th - 29th September with a headline programme trailed in late April.

Business engagement will be further developed and potential significantly enhanced by both the 'Great West Way' initiative and the establishment of a new Business Improvement District focused on the Abbey Quarter. This engagement will include one to one business meetings as well as inward investment publications that build on place making with culture and heritage being a main driver for economic success. Cross-sectoral links will be further encouraged by a business led 'Funding Panel' event for local cultural organisations to learn best practice models when approaching businesses for support or investment.

4.3 Other Options Considered

The award of grant is clearly tied to the 'Approved Purposes' for which the funding has been awarded and whilst there is a degree of flexibility to enable adjustments over the 3 year delivery period the grant can only be utilised in accordance with these 'Approved Purposes'.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The ambition to raise Reading's cultural profile and reputation is about both the outcomes for Reading as a place and delivering better quality of life for residents. The delivery of culture and heritage contributes to achieving the following Corporate Priorities:

- Keeping the Town clean, safe green and active
- Providing the best life through education, early help and healthy living
- Providing infrastructure to support the economy.

- 5.2 A new Cultural and Heritage Strategy 2015-2030, developed under the auspices of the Cultural Partnership, was endorsed by the Council's Policy Committee in November 2015. This strategy has an over-arching ambition that:

'By 2030, Reading will be recognised as a centre of creativity with a reputation for cultural and heritage excellence at a regional, national and international level with increased engagement across the town.'

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 There are specific requirements and guidelines for publicity for Great Place Scheme Projects and in particular the funders are keen that the public know how they have contributed towards putting arts, culture and heritage at the heart of 16 places across the country by playing National Lottery games.
- 6.2 Community engagement and information is at the heart of plans for delivering Reading's Great Place Scheme proposals. In particular the research and commissioning strands of the programme and Festival delivery have involved, and continue to require, extensive community involvement and incorporate community led research models. Much of this engagement and involvement is focused on more vulnerable or deprived groups and communities. More broadly, information, marketing and engagement are central to audience development across much of the cultural sector, including the many community based culture and heritage delivery organisations.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 It is not considered that an Equality Impact Assessment is relevant with regard to the content of this report.
- 7.2 A particular focus of the proposals is to enable widespread access to cultural opportunities and to address the needs of more vulnerable groups through a programme of participatory research, cultural commissioning and festival outreach. A full evaluation of Great Place Schemes has been commissioned nationally and is complemented by local evaluation and action research. Collectively these will enable an assessment in relation to the effectiveness of engagement activities and inform the development of practice as the three year programme progresses.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Council will be required to comply with the Great Place Scheme 'Standard Terms of Grant'. These mirror those of the HLF with which the Council is familiar through its management of other HLF funded projects. There are no additional conditions in respect of the project beyond these standard terms.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Great Place Scheme bidding guidelines stipulated that a minimum of 10% of direct project costs should be provided by cash contributions from delivery partners. The Council and Reading UK have each committed to provide £30,000 over the life of the programme to meet this requirement. For the Council this amount can be contained within existing budget allocations for Economic & Cultural Development Services.

9.2 It is anticipated that over the course of the Scheme's implementation additional match-funding will be generated through business sponsorship and commissioning activity.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 GREAT PLACE SCHEME: Reading-on-Thames - HLF grant award letter 13th April 2017.

GREAT PLACE SCHEME: 'READING-ON-THAMES' - Report to Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee 5th July 2017.

'READING, PLACE OF CULTURE' (GREAT PLACE SCHEME) - Report to Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee 14th November 2018.