

Policy Committee

15 June 2026



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	Draft Reading Town Centre Vision and Delivery Plan
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report	Emma Gee, Executive Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services
Report author	Sam Rackham, Acting Director of Infrastructure, Economy & Capital Projects
Lead Councillor	Cllr Liz Terry, Leader of the Council
Council priority	All
Recommendations	<p>That Policy Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Endorses the Draft Reading Town Centre Vision attached at Appendix 1 for the purposes of undertaking wider public and stakeholder consultation as the overarching place-shaping framework for Central Reading.2. Endorses the Draft Reading Town Centre Delivery Plan attached at Appendix 2 for the purposes of undertaking wider public and stakeholder consultation as the Council's approach to prioritising, coordinating and enabling town centre delivery.3. Agrees that, subject to consultation, the Draft Vision and Delivery Plan may be used on an interim basis alongside existing policy documents to inform decision-making, investment priorities, regeneration activity and partnership working within the town centre.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Central Reading (as identified at CR1 in the Local Plan) is undergoing one of the most significant periods of change in its recent history. Major regeneration schemes, rapid growth in town-centre living, evolving travel patterns and changing retail, business and cultural activity are collectively reshaping the role of the town centre as a place to live, work, visit and invest.
- 1.2. The draft Reading Town Centre Vision (Appendix 1) has been prepared to provide a clear, long-term place-shaping framework for this transformation. It sets out a shared vision for Central Reading over the next 20 years and defines what success should look like for the town centre as a liveable, inclusive, economically resilient and climate-resilient place. It does not replace statutory planning policy but instead brings together existing plans and strategies into a single, place-specific narrative that is easier to use, communicate and apply in decision-making.
- 1.3. The Vision is supported by a draft Town Centre Delivery Plan (Appendix 2), which moves from vision to action. The Delivery Plan identifies key strategic projects that have already been delivered, are currently underway, or are proposed for the future, and clarifies the role of the Council and its partners in delivering them. It also establishes

criteria to prioritise investment, coordinate activity across services and partners, and focus limited resources on projects that deliver the greatest civic, social, environmental and economic benefit.

- 1.4. Together, the Vision and Delivery Plan provide both a clear direction of travel and a practical framework for delivery. Endorsement of the draft documents for consultation will allow the Council to align future decisions, investment and partnership working within an agreed spatial vision, and to progress priority feasibility work and funding bids from the financial year 2026/27 onwards.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. The Reading Town Centre Vision and Delivery Plan sits within an established policy and strategy framework and is intended to complement, not replace, existing statutory and non-statutory documents. Key relationships include:

- a. **Reading Local Plan** (including Policy CR1 – Central Reading, and the emerging Partial Update to 2041)

- which provides the statutory planning framework for development. The Vision adds a place-specific narrative to help interpret how Local Plan policies should work together on the ground in Central Reading.

- b. **Reading Town Centre Public Realm Strategy** (proposed for adoption June 2026)

- which sets design standards and principles for public realm. The Town Centre Vision and Delivery Plan identifies where and why those standards should be applied to support town-centre living, movement and identity.

- c. **Reading Transport Strategy 2040**

- which provides the borough-wide transport framework. The Town Centre Vision and Delivery Plan focuses this at a town-centre scale, identifying priority routes, gateways and spaces where walking, cycling and public transport should be prioritised.

- d. **Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2025–30**

- which establishes borough-wide climate commitments. The Town Centre Vision and Delivery Plan embeds climate mitigation and adaptation into the area of highest growth, footfall and visibility, ensuring climate action is delivered where it has the most impact.

- e. **Reading's Culture and Heritage Strategy 2015-30 and the Reading Economic Development Framework**

- which set strategic objectives for economic growth, cultural participation and heritage protection. The Town Centre Vision and Delivery Plan brings these together spatially, strengthening links between cultural anchors, regeneration sites and public spaces.

- 2.2. In summary, the Town Centre Vision and Delivery Plan acts as an integrating framework. It aligns multiple strategies and policies around a single geography, helping members, officers, developers, businesses and partners understand how different priorities come together in Central Reading and providing a consistent basis for coordinated decision-making.

3. The Proposal

Current Position

- 3.1. Central Reading is already changing rapidly. Major regeneration schemes such as Station Hill, the Civic Centre and Library, upgrades to the Hexagon and Studio Theatre, riverside development along the Kennet and Thames, and substantial town-centre residential growth are reshaping the physical form and daily life of the town centre.

Many of these projects have been delivered successfully, with others well advanced or coming forward through the Local Plan.

- 3.2. However, the pace, scale and cumulative impact of this change presents new challenges. Without a clear, shared place shaping framework there is a risk that individual projects, while successful in isolation, do not collectively deliver a cohesive, inclusive and high quality town centre. There is increased pressure to ensure that:
- a. infrastructure, public realm and services keep pace with a rapidly growing residential population;
 - b. public and private investment is aligned around common priorities;
 - c. movement, accessibility and safety are improved as footfall increases;
 - d. climate resilience, greening and long-term management are embedded consistently rather than project by project.
 - e. the right conditions are created to encourage business investment, growth and relocation into central Reading;
- 3.3. The draft Town Centre Vision responds to this need by setting out a clear definition of what Central Reading should become and how change should be shaped over the long term.

The Town Centre Vision

- 3.4. The draft Reading Town Centre Vision is a long term, non-statutory place shaping document covering Central Reading over the next 15–20 years. Its purpose is to provide a clear and accessible framework that explains how growth, regeneration and investment should contribute to a successful town centre, rather than simply identifying development capacity or individual sites.
- 3.5. The Vision is structured around:
- a. a robust understanding of Central Reading's context, including population growth, movement patterns, heritage, cultural and natural assets;
 - b. seven place shaping principles that articulate the qualities the town centre should deliver, such as healthy and connected communities, active travel, climate resilience, culture and heritage, and support for growth and innovation;
 - c. spatial priorities for the Core, Station & River, West Side and East Side Opportunity Areas identified in the Local Plan.
- 3.6. Importantly, the Vision does not introduce new planning policy or supersede existing documents. Instead, it provides a shared reference point for members, officers, developers and partners when considering development proposals, infrastructure investment, public realm schemes and partnership initiatives. It sets clear expectations about design quality, inclusivity, movement, public space, and long term management, helping ensure that individual decisions contribute to a coherent whole.
- 3.7. The Vision is intended to be used alongside existing policy documents to inform decision making, investment priorities, regeneration activity and partnership working within the town centre.

The Delivery Plan

- 3.8. The Delivery Plan:
- a. groups projects into delivered, current (in development) and future interventions, providing visibility over progress and the pipeline of change;
 - b. clarifies delivery roles, distinguishing between Council led projects, shared delivery with partners, and partner led schemes where the Council plays an enabling role;

- c. applies transparent prioritisation criteria, including impact, feasibility, funding, inclusivity and visibility, to guide how resources and attention are focused;
 - d. identifies a small number of priority projects for early feasibility and investment that can deliver visible improvements and help unlock wider regeneration.
- 3.9. This approach allows the Council to focus its resources on high impact, high visibility interventions that are critical to creating a successful town centre, such as public realm improvements, active travel connections and family friendly spaces.
- 3.10. The Delivery Plan is intended to be a live document, updated as projects progress, funding opportunities emerge and priorities evolve. It will support future funding bids, business cases and annual reporting, and will be the primary tool for coordinating and monitoring town centre delivery across services and partners.
- 3.11. A programme of public realm improvements is proposed to create safer, more welcoming and family-friendly streets in Central Reading. Feasibility work will assess opportunities for greener, more comfortable spaces; improved play; better pedestrian-vehicle balance; accessibility; and proportionate security measures. This phase will identify capital options and ensure future investment delivers the resilient town-centre spaces outlined in the delivery plan.
- 3.12. Options Appraisal
- a. Option 1 - Endorse the draft Vision and Delivery Plan for wider public and stakeholder consultation (recommended): Provides clarity, alignment and confidence for investment and delivery, supporting coordinated regeneration and improved outcomes for residents, businesses and visitors.
 - b. Option 2 - Do not endorse the documents for consultation: Would risk fragmented decision-making, reduced confidence among partners and missed opportunities to align funding and delivery.
- 3.13. Endorsing the draft Vision and Delivery Plan for wider public and stakeholder consultation is recommended as the most effective way to guide the next phase of town-centre transformation.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1. The Vision and Delivery Plan support all five Council Plan priorities by strengthening economic resilience and competitiveness within the town centre, growing and diversifying Reading's economy, improving quality of life for residents, enhancing environmental performance within the town centre environment, supporting the health and wellbeing of our communities, businesses and visitors, and ensuring the Council is fit for the future through coordinated, value for money investment.
- 4.2. 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

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 Vision embeds climate resilience, low-carbon movement, greening and sustainable drainage as core principles. Specific projects in the Delivery Plan prioritise active travel, greener streets and low-carbon infrastructure. Endorsement has positive environmental implications by guiding future schemes toward climate-aligned outcomes.

- 5.3. The Reading Town Centre Vision gives practical effect to the Climate Emergency Strategy 2025–30 by embedding climate action into the area of highest activity, growth and visibility in the borough.
- 5.4. It supports carbon reduction by prioritising walking, cycling and public transport, reducing car dependency for a largely car-light town centre population, and setting clear expectations for low-carbon, energy-efficient development, including heat-network readiness in major regeneration areas.
- 5.5. It also addresses climate adaptation by integrating green infrastructure, SuDS (national standards for sustainable drainage systems) and tree planting into streets and public spaces, improving resilience to heat, flooding and extreme rainfall, and strengthening the role of rivers and parks as cooling and flood-management infrastructure.
- 5.6. By aligning planning, regeneration and public-realm investment with Reading's climate targets, the Vision helps deliver a low-carbon, climate-resilient and healthier town centre, supporting an equitable transition that improves quality of life while accommodating growth.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1. Approval is sought to undertake a programme of public and stakeholder consultation on the draft Vision and Delivery Plan. This will provide an opportunity for residents, businesses and partners to comment on the vision, strategic priorities and proposed interventions. The consultation will include online access to the draft documents, supported by targeted engagement with key stakeholder groups, including businesses, landowners, community organisations, older people's and disabilities working groups, the University and REDA. Feedback received will inform the refinement of the Vision prior to its finalisation.
- 6.2. The Vision to date has been informed by internal officer, councillor and partner engagement, alongside analysis of town-centre demographics, needs and trends. Further engagement will continue to accompany individual projects and future phases of the Delivery Plan.
- 6.3. Previous community engagement for the first iteration of the Vision explored how Reading town centre could be more sustainable, inclusive and liveable. A network of local partners informed this work, championed by REDA (Reading's Economy and Destination Agency) supported by Reading Voluntary Action, the University of Reading and ACRE (Alliance for Cohesion and Racial Equality). Workshops with Councillors, undertaken through the Reading Economic Development Framework, explored priorities for town centre placemaking. Insights from these sessions have directly informed the Vision and its proposed approach.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1. The Vision places strong emphasis on inclusive design, accessibility, town-centre services, play provision and equitable access to public space. The proposals are expected to reduce inequalities in access and participation. A full Equality Impact Assessment is not required at this stage; Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken at project level where appropriate.

8. Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1. None

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1. The Council has powers under the Local Government Acts to promote economic, social and environmental wellbeing. Endorsing the Vision does not in itself create binding obligations but provides a framework to inform future decisions.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1. Endorsement does not commit the Council to specific expenditure beyond agreed budgets. The Delivery Plan supports value for money by prioritising schemes, aligning funding streams and de-risking investment into town centre projects. Project specific Business Cases will be brought forward on a case by case basis to unlock relevant funding.

11. Timetable for Implementation

- 11.1. Subject to approval, public consultation on the Town Centre Vision and Delivery Plan is proposed to commence in July 2026 and run for a period of ten weeks.
- 11.2. Following the close of consultation, responses will be analysed and used to inform revisions to the Vision and Delivery Plan. It is proposed that the final Vision is brought back to Committee in December 2026, allowing sufficient time for the review of representations and preparation of the final documents prior to adoption.
- 11.3. Following approval to proceed to consultation, the Vision will begin to be used as a material guide to inform decision-making where appropriate. In parallel, priority feasibility work identified within the Delivery Plan is proposed to commence during 2026/27.

12. Background Papers

- 12.1. There are none.

Appendices

1. Appendix 1 – Draft Town Centre Vision
2. Appendix 2 - Draft Town Centre Delivery Plan