

Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee

21 July 2026



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

Title	Hexagon Theatre Investment
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report	Emma Gee, Executive Director Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services
Report author	Sarah Cox, Reading Arts & Venues Manager Donna Pentelow, Director of Culture, Leisure and Skills.
Lead Councillor	Councillor Lanzoni, Lead Councillor for Leisure and Culture
Council priority	Secure Reading's economic & cultural success
Recommendations	1. That Committee notes the successful grant from Arts Council England of £2.068m for investment in the Hexagon Theatre. 2. That Committee notes the update on the Studio Theatre build due to open in spring 2027.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Council has successfully applied to Arts Council England's (ACE) Creative Foundations Fund for £2,068,000 of grant funding with match funding of £230,500 being provided by the Council (consisting of: £109,000 in-kind contribution, £71,500 fundraising and £50,000 capital funding). The bid seeks funding to make improvements to the Hexagon Theatre seating, drainage, fire stopping and fire door remedial works.
- 1.2. In line with the Council's constitution and the report to Policy Committee on 13 April 2026, the Director of Culture, Leisure and Skills has accepted the grant offer. The Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Director of Legal and Governance and the Director of Finance, will progress the procurement and enter into the necessary contracts to carry out the works.
- 1.3. The first phase of work will complete in winter 2026/27 with other works concluding in autumn 2027.
- 1.4. Work is progressing in earnest on the new Studio Theatre at the Hexagon in accordance with the construction programme. The Studio Theatre is expected to open to the public in spring 2027, providing circa 200 seating flexible theatre (circa 300 standing) with step free access, accessible toilets on all floors, and bar and catering facilities.
- 1.5. Work to install the new ground source heating system in the Hexagon is progressing with the aim for full operation by October 2026. This will replace the existing gas boilers to help meet the decarbonisation aims of the Council.
- 1.6. The operational and business planning to programme the Hexagon and Studio Theatre from 2027 as complementary venues has started.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. The Hexagon is Reading's cultural flagship venue, the largest in the region, welcoming over 150,000 visitors annually and hosting more than 160 performances and 80 community events. It plays a central role in Reading's cultural life, driving footfall, supporting the local economy, and providing a vital platform for community engagement.
- 2.2. The venue is currently undergoing transformation, supported by a funded decarbonisation programme and a multi-million UK Government (Levelling Up Fund) award to deliver a new studio theatre. Together, these projects will create a multi-space arts campus at the heart of a broader regeneration scheme.
- 2.3. The Hexagon is the cornerstone of Reading's cultural life — a space where professional touring work, community performance, and local participation come together. This investment will address operational issues inherent in a 50 year old venue, and secure the venue's ability to continue delivering a rich programme for audiences, artists, and community groups. The funding enables essential capital works including replacing seating, updating drainage, and carrying out fire stopping work.
- 2.4. The Council Plan has established five priorities for the years 2025/28, one of which is to secure Reading's economic and cultural success by delivering quality cultural and leisure services and facilitate exciting improvements to our cultural offer through grant-funded projects. Delivering improvements to the Hexagon aims to deliver against this priority.

3. The Hexagon

- 3.1. The Council has successfully applied to Arts Council England's (ACE) Creative Foundations Fund for £2,068,000 of grant funding with match funding of £230,500 being provided by the Council (consisting of: £109,000 in-kind contribution, £71,500 fundraising and £50,000 capital funding). The bid will fund improvements to the Hexagon Theatre seating, drainage, fire door and associated fire stopping remedial works.
- 3.2. The project is a programme of works designed to address the 50 year old heritage systems within The Hexagon Theatre, ensuring its continued safe operation, long-term sustainability and increasing access for audiences. The works includes replacement of the retractable seating system, fixed balcony seats and loose seating. This will improve accessibility and enhance audience experience. The venue's drainage system will be upgraded to meet future demand requirements, and fire doors and associated fire stopping will be improved and replaced, ensuring public protection and building resilience.
- 3.3. Work is progressing to implement the first phase of works to improve the auditorium flooring in summer 2026 and replace the seating in the Hexagon arena and stalls areas this winter 2026/27. The other works are being planned for 2027, to be coordinated with the theatre's established show programme.
- 3.4. **Studio theatre update**
- 3.5. Work is progressing in earnest on the new Studio Theatre at the Hexagon in accordance with the construction programme. The main structural elements of the building have been installed including the timber frame which helps meets the sustainability requirements of the design. During summer 2026 further works will continue to be undertaken to complete the building envelope. External works will also take place to install the new pedestrian footbridge that links the studio theatre with Queens Walk. This will provide step free access to the studio theatre.
- 3.6. Work to install the new ground source heating system in the Hexagon is progressing as planned with the aim for full operation by October 2026. This will replace the existing gas boilers to help meet the decarbonisation aims of the Council.

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. Full details of the Council Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the Council's website - [Council plan - Reading Borough Council](#). These priorities and the Council Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.

4.4. Delivering improvements to the Hexagon aims to deliver against the priority of securing Reading's economic and cultural success through grant-funded projects and seeks to ensure the theatre can continue to operate effectively.

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. This project demonstrates a strong commitment to environmental responsibility by integrating essential capital works with a wider decarbonisation programme already underway at the Hexagon as part of the Studio theatre works. By replacing outdated and inefficient infrastructure such as the 50-year-old retractable seating, failing drainage system, and fire doors, the Hexagon's environmental footprint is reduced through improved energy efficiency, reduced waste, and lower maintenance-related emissions.

6. Community Engagement

6.1. Formal consultation is not required. The project has been directly shaped by extensive user and stakeholder feedback, highlighting the need to improve accessibility, and comfort within the Hexagon. Through surveys sent to bookers, the Hexagon has had numerous comments in the past two years relating to audience experience, accessibility, and condition of seating. Feedback consistently identified the seating and outdated handrails as major barriers to comfort and access. The improved seating will benefit all users including those with disabilities, mobility needs, and visual impairments.

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. There are positive equalities implications arising from this project. An access review was carried out by an accredited access consultant and highlighted the inadequacy of the existing seating in meeting guidance and expectations on accessibility.

7.3. The project is rooted in a commitment to ensuring the Hexagon remains accessible, welcoming, and responsive to the needs of its diverse community. Informed by

audience feedback, the project directly addresses barriers to participation particularly for disabled, and older audiences through improved seating, handrails, and accessible facilities.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1. On 13 April 2026, Policy Committee approved the following recommendation:

"If the Arts Council England bid is successful for £2,068,000 of grant funding with match funding of £230,500, that Committee grants spend approval and delegates authority to the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Director of Legal & Governance and the Director of Finance to enter into all necessary contracts to deliver the outputs of the bid." [Agenda for Policy Committee on Monday, 13th April, 2026, 6.30 pm - Reading Borough Council.](#)

- 8.2 According, spend approval and delegated authority having already been granted, this report is for noting only following the successful outcome of the bid. Nevertheless, the planned programme of works will need to proceed in accordance with the provisions of the Council's [Constitution](#), including its Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules, and any conditions of the ACE grant funding.
- 8.3 The terms and conditions of the grant include the requirement for the Council to enter into a Deed of Covenant (the Deed) which will restrict any disposal, leasing or change of use of the Hexagon as a theatre, without the prior consent of ACE, for a period of 20 years. It will also include provisions enabling ACE to recover all or part of the grant in the event of a breach, such as an unauthorised disposal or cessation of the funded use. The Deed will be secured against the Council's interest in the property, thereby binding successors in title. Members should note that these obligations may limit the Council's future flexibility in relation to the Hexagon and will need to be taken into account in any future decisions affecting it.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1. As an information only report there are no direct financial implications arising. The successful grant award allows for this development to proceed in full and budgets have been built into the approved MTFS for both revenue and capital.

10. Timetable for Implementation

- 10.1. The table below shows the projected major milestones over the coming 12 months for the ACE grant and new studio theatre works.

Autumn 2026:	Hexagon ground source heating system installed
Winter 2026/27:	Hexagon arena and stalls new seating installed
	Studio theatre works envelope and interior works complete
	Studio theatre works fitout and commissioning starts
Spring 2027:	Studio Theatre opens
Autumn 2027:	Hexagon fire doors and associated remedial works
	Hexagon drainage works
	Hexagon theatre balcony area new seating works

11. Background Papers

- 11.1. None.