

# REDA Annual Report

2024-25



R·E·D·A™

Reading's Economy & Destination Agency



Our mission is to boost business  
and enhance visitor experiences  
in a way that improves quality of  
life for all in the Reading region

# Contents

## 01 |

### Corporate update

- Chairman's Introduction
- Chief Executive Update
- REDA Highlights 2024-25
- Strategic Marketing
- Shaping a Better Reading
  - The REDA Team
  - The REDA Board

## 02 |

### Boosting Business

- Reading BID
  - Reading BID Strategy
  - Partnership working
  - Supporting town centre businesses
  - BID Highlights 2024-25
- Business Growth and Skills
  - Outreach Sessions
  - Collaboration with Rotary
  - Job Fairs
  - Reading Business Network
  - Supporting South Reading communities
  - Landscape for creative and screen skills
  - Case Study: Creative Pathways
  - Case Study: S106 Skills Plan - Construction

## 03 |

### Enhancing the visitor experience

- Leisure Tourism
  - Reading Walks Festival 2024
  - St James' Way
  - HOD 2024
  - Jane Austen 250 Celebrations
  - LVEP
  - Station Ambassadors: Third Anniversary
  - Growing reach of Visit Reading
  - Visit Reading this Summer – 2024 Campaign
- Business Tourism
  - Meet Reading
- Town Centre Events
  - Events 2024-25
  - Glow! Reading Lantern Parade
- Christmas 2024
  - Christmas Festivities
  - Christmas in Reading – 2024 Campaign

## 04 |

### Reading UK CIC Trading as REDA

- Financial summary 2024-25
- REDA head count at year end
- Governance and continuous improvement



*Paddington Bear statue, Reading*

# Corporate Update

# A message from the chairman



**Scott Witchalls**  
Chairman  
REDA

“It has been a privilege to witness first-hand the remarkable progress and resilience of REDA (formerly Reading UK) over the past decade. I was truly honoured to be invited by my fellow Board Directors to take on the role of Chair earlier this year.

I would like to personally thank former REDA Chair, Adam Jacobs, whose committed and visionary leadership has guided REDA from strength to strength over several years. My sincere thanks also go to our Chief Executive and the wider team for their ongoing hard work, energy and impact which drives REDA's success.

Reading is a place of real strength and promise, home to a talented workforce, outstanding connectivity, a dynamic natural and cultural environment, and a vibrant business community. It is no surprise that Reading continues to be a desirable place to live, work, and invest - but there is still more to do.

Looking ahead, it's vital that we continue to strengthen Reading's business offer by working closely with the Council and our wider partners. By aligning our resources, attracting external investment, and focusing on practical solutions, we can ensure that Reading remains one of the most compelling places to do business in the UK. REDA's core priorities will keep us on track, while the Reading 2050 Vision provides the long-term inspiration for building a smart, sustainable, and inclusive city of the future.

Personally, I am especially passionate about championing economic growth through our sector cluster strengths; investing in our powerhouse town centre;

supporting local people into well-paid, sustainable employment; and pushing forward toward a net zero carbon economy in a way that is responsible and achievable.

The year ahead undoubtedly brings both opportunities and challenges, but I am confident that, with our shared ambition and collaborative spirit, REDA will continue to play a leading role in securing Reading's position as the capital of Berkshire and the heart of the Thames Valley.



“

2024-25 has been another successful year for REDA. Thanks to the certainty provided by a five-year funding commitment, voted for by town centre businesses through our BID services, we’ve been able to plan confidently for the future.

Our priorities reflect our contractual responsibilities, our areas of expertise, and the evolving needs of Reading’s economy.



Nigel Horton-Baker  
Chief Executive,  
REDA

## Chief Executive Update

This progress is a credit to the REDA team. Winning a fifth (Reading Central) a second (Abbey Quarter) BID ballot were major milestones. Yet we didn’t stand still. Over the past year, we’ve expanded our support for local businesses, delivered compelling marketing and events to attract visitors, and continued to strengthen BID services.

Behind the scenes, REDA has been awarded a silver CSR accreditation, received awards and nominations for our town centre work, and supported Reading’s communities - offering guidance and signposting to help individuals access training and employment opportunities.

REDA has also contributed significantly at a Berkshire-wide level. We played a central role in shaping the Berkshire Economic Strategy and supported the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, alongside four other unitary authorities to develop a

successful Local Visitor Economy Partnership bid which will put Reading firmly on the visitor map.

As Chief Executive, I’m proud of the meaningful contribution we continue to make to Reading’s economic wellbeing - supporting businesses, residents, and young people alike.

Throughout our work, REDA is guided by its values:

- Collaborative** – powering positive change together
- Inclusive** – celebrating diversity and openness
- Authentically Reading** – proud custodians of the place brand
- Progressive** – ambitious and future-focused
- Purposeful** – a small but resourceful team making a big impact

Looking ahead, I’m optimistic. New team members are bringing fresh ideas and skills, and together we remain

committed to learning and evolving to meet the challenges and opportunities ahead.

This Annual Report offers a snapshot of what REDA has delivered in 2024-25 as we continue our mission to grow business and improve the visitor experience for the benefit of Reading.



# REDA Highlights 2024-25

## Business Growth

-  £319,000 of additional direct BID services delivered to over 700 town centre businesses
-  £303,000 invested in events and marketing, resulting in a 3% year-on-year increase in town centre footfall and spend
-  5,100+ young people across 6 local schools engaged in 39 experiential career and employability activities, supported by the Education Business Partnership
-  300 residents supported with job signposting, and 25 local apprenticeships/jobs created through major construction partnerships
-  52 new local business start-ups launched through REDA's partnership with Reading Rotary, offering funding, training, and support
-  Three Screen Network events delivered in collaboration with the Reading Business Network, each drawing 70+ attendees
-  700+ businesses now registered as part of REDA's film sector supply chain initiative; 60 local tradespeople introduced to screen industry pathways
-  Flagship "Pathways into the Creative Industries" showcase at Green Park welcomed over 600 students and 100+ local residents

## Improving the visitor experience

-  Secured national recognition for Reading as a visitor destination by partnering in a successful Local Visitor Economy Partnership bid with the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead
-  Developed and promoted the St James' Way pilgrimage trail, strengthening ties with the international Camino de Santiago brand; featured in major publications including *Country Life*
-  Hosted 60 travel journalists and Great West Way partners at a two-day familiarisation conference in Reading, showcasing local venues and visitor experiences
-  Elevated Reading's business tourism profile in London through targeted fam trips, dedicated website/brochure development, and participation in the Business Travel Show via Meet Reading
-  Relunched the Reading Visitor Guide and co-delivered major cultural events to grow the leisure market in Reading, including:
  - The third annual Reading Walks Festival
  - Reading Food Festival
  - Heritage Open Days
  - Celebration of Jane Austen's 250th anniversary, in partnership with Hampshire, spotlighting her Reading school connection

# Strategic Marketing

REDA's Annual Marketing Report highlights a year of strong digital growth, content innovation, and brand visibility across the region. By focusing on content development, SEO, and social media engagement, marketing activity played a key role in supporting economic growth and enhancing Reading's profile as a visitor and business destination.

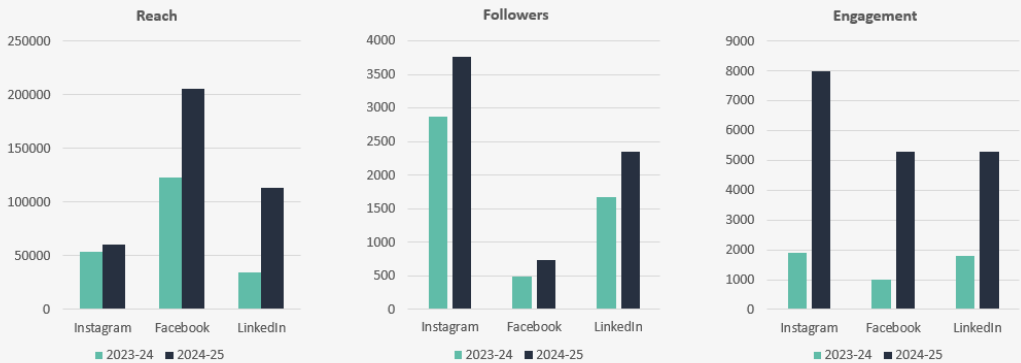
Key achievements include a 76% increase in total pageviews, 25% more website users, and a 235% boost in organic search traffic. Blog views surged by 2000%, while social media reach climbed by 79%, with engagement up by 296%. Product listings, business site usage, and newsletters also performed strongly.

The report showcases year-on-year performance trends, audience insights, and campaign highlights, including Christmas and Summer promotions, and outlines actionable recommendations for 2025–26. These insights will help guide future marketing decisions, ensuring alignment with REDA's wider strategy and continued value for partner investment.

## Year on Year snapshot: Website



## Year on Year snapshot: Social Media





## Shaping a better Reading

These are just a few of the many highlights delivered by REDA's dedicated team on behalf of Reading. I want to express my sincere thanks to everyone across the organisation for their commitment and hard work in helping to shape a better future for our town.

Alongside our many partner organisations and suppliers, we continue to:

- Support local businesses
- Sustain the vitality of the town centre
- Raise Reading's profile nationally and internationally
- Help local people access jobs and training opportunities
- Attract investment that will underpin the town's long-term growth

Finally, my thanks to all REDA Board Directors for their time, support, and shared commitment to our mission. Your leadership plays a vital role in helping us deliver for Reading.

### The REDA Team – Impact during 2024-25

#### *Visitor Destination & Tourism*

- Achieved national visitor destination status through REDA's role in the Local Visitor Economy Partnership bid for Berkshire, providing greater recognition internationally and driving Government support to grow local capacity
- Promoted Reading internationally at leisure and business travel shows with Great West Way partners
- Deepened ties with Spain via the St James' Way pilgrimage trail and led the successful Reading Walks Festival
- Relaunched the Reading Visitor Guide and co-ordinated Reading's programme for Jane Austen's 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations

#### *Marketing & Digital Engagement*

- Spearheaded REDA's annual marketing campaigns, delivering a year-on-year uplift through the Visit Reading This

Summer and Christmas in Reading marketing campaigns, driving footfall and online engagement

- Enhanced digital capabilities, including extra social media support and focus, a comprehensive SEO audit, and refreshed, audience-focused web content across visitor and inward investment pages
- Expanded REDA's Marketing capacity by recruiting a Social Media & Content Assistant, immediately enhancing content creation, distribution, and campaign visibility across core platforms

#### *Reading BID & Town Centre*

- Rolled out Year 1 BID delivery plans (Central & Abbey Quarters) following successful 2024 BID Ballot
- Established 2 new BID Committees, re-tendered contracts, and began pursuit of National BID Accreditation
- Expanded Warden Team to 3 officers and delivered monthly events, including trails, themed markets, and



Reading Walks Festival 2024





BIID Wardens receiving national award

the Christmas Light Switch-On

- Launched workplace support: health & wellbeing programmes, training courses, and after-work experiences
- Initiated Winter Warmer and Summer Donation Drives for vulnerable residents and young people in Reading
- Partnered with the Council to install contactless donation points, reducing street begging and supporting local charities

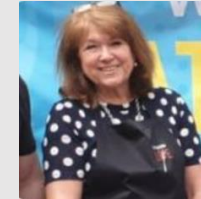
#### Recognition & Awards

- Reading BID Wardens received a national award and recognition in a local crime reduction initiative
- REDA and Reading BID both received nominations in the new Reading Cultural Champions Awards
- REDA attained Silver Corporate Social Responsibility Accreditation, with nomination for an international CSR award
- BID Manager, Alexa, achieved her British BIDs Management qualification and joined Reading Borough Council's Leadership Development Programme

#### Team Transitions

##### Farewell to:

- [Sue Brackley](#), retiring after 38 years of service to the Council and REDA, having this year supported:



Thank you and farewell to [Sue Brackley](#) and [Carol Gardiner](#), who both retired this year, after many years of service.

- 50+ entrepreneurs with start-up grants
- Youth career programmes and outreach
- Creation of hundreds of local jobs with construction companies
- Film sector training scheme with Yulia for Shinfield Studios' supply chain
- [Carol Gardiner](#), retiring after 8 years of service to REDA, having supported:
  - Commercialisation within the town centre
  - Establishing twice-weekly town centre markets
  - Delivering Reading's Christmas market and events programme

- [Jonnelle Pheonix-Roach](#) (parental leave cover, Reading BID)
- [Yulia Syrovoiskaia](#) (working closely with Sue and the creative sector) has left to work at Station Hill
- [Anisha Sharma](#), (parental leave cover, Marketing)

##### Hello and welcome to:

- [Emma Matthews](#) who joined Marketing as Social Media & Content Assistant in December 2024
- [Mark Pearson](#) who joined as Sue's successor in January 2025, bringing economic development expertise across key sectors

##### Welcome back to:

- [Victoria Patyra](#) who returned from Maternity Leave in April 2024
- [Alice Rampling](#) who returned from Maternity Leave in November 2024

# REDA Board

## 2024-25

REDA's Board of Directors brings together experienced leaders and senior professionals from across Reading's private, public, cultural, and educational sectors. United by a shared commitment to the town's continued success, the Board provides strategic insight, local knowledge, and a clear vision for Reading's future economic growth.

This year we said a heartfelt thank you to our former Chair, Adam Jacobs, who stepped down after nearly eight years of leadership, guiding REDA through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and global recession and helping it emerge stronger than ever. We're also grateful to Cllr Jason Brock (former Vice Chair) who stepped down this year after providing valued support and insight.

We were pleased to welcome **Scott Witchalls of Stantec** as our new Chair and **Cllr Liz Terry** as our new Vice Chair. Both bring valuable experience and energy to the roles. Alongside these appointments we have welcomed three additional Board members during 2024-25 – hello and welcome to:

- **Mike Ward**, Blake Morgan
- **Eleanor Wills**, Great Western Railway
- **Matthew Saunders**, Marsh Commercial
- **Jackie Evans**, Reading Football Club

These new appointments bring valuable expertise and fresh perspectives as REDA continues to shape and champion Reading's evolving economic landscape.



REDA Board Meeting



# Boosting Business





Reading Food Festival 2024

## Reading Business Improvement District Strategy

The Reading Business Improvement District (BID) spans a broad footprint, representing over 700 businesses, from independent retailers to major financial firms. With such diversity, the BID's strategy is tailored to meet a wide range of needs, making Reading a thriving, welcoming place to work, visit, and invest.

Safety and security remain key priorities, with dedicated business wardens working alongside town centre security teams and Street Pastors providing evening support and reassurance to the night-time economy.

To create a more vibrant, attractive town centre, the BID delivers year-round placemaking initiatives, from festive Christmas lights and seasonal floral installations to bunting and public events that encourage footfall from shoppers, visitors, and local office workers.

The health of the town and the numbers returning to work are analysed through our footfall and sales data provision demonstrating Reading's growth to both existing traders as well as prospective investors.

The BID also helps businesses meet their sustainability goals through free cardboard and small electrical recycling schemes, while contributing to workforce development through regular wellbeing initiatives, training, and upskilling opportunities - ensuring employees are supported in their personal growth as well as their professional roles.

### Partnership working

The BID continues to work closely with a wide network of partners, including the council, police, community organisations and charities, to improve the town centre. As a member of the Town Centre Steering Group, the BID helps shape discussions on travel, public realm enhancements, and anti-social behaviour, ensuring swift action and influence.

- This year, the BID contributed significantly to the development of the **Town Centre Public Realm Strategy**, offering practical insights and supporting business involvement in the consultation. We also helped create a new Busking Guide in collaboration with the Council to



reduce fly-tipping and ASB and to license the area for appropriate use by local businesses.

- Community engagement remained strong, with the **Winter Warmer 2025 campaign** collecting over 400 coats and hundreds of winter garments. We also launched a new summer donation programme with Brighter Futures for Children, securing widespread business involvement and supporting 986 vulnerable children during the holidays.
- **Business Wardens** maintained strong links with the local police, helping track down missing people, relay intelligence, and encourage crime reporting among retailers. Their ongoing presence provides vital support for local enforcement efforts.
- Lastly, the BID funded and facilitated the installation of **donation tap readers** in collaboration with the Council's Community Safety and Homelessness teams. These allow the public to give directly to homelessness charities, with the BID managing donation distribution and venue coordination.

### Supporting our town centre businesses

During 2024-25, the BID team continued to deliver well-attended training sessions including bi-monthly

400+

Coats donated to those in need locally, through the BID's Winter Warmer donation campaign

Emergency First Aid at Work, Fire Marshall and Mental Health Awareness courses, along with ad hoc disability and deaf awareness sessions. This year also saw the launch of the SeedL online training portal, offering BID businesses access to a wide range of professional development courses. Monthly recognition of a "Learner of the Month" celebrates ongoing engagement.

Recycling initiatives remain popular, with weekly cardboard and quarterly small electrical collections offered through a Council-managed service that ensures professional handling and supports businesses' sustainability goals. These services, alongside training, help save time and money, aid staff development, and bolster recruitment and retention.



Top-left to bottom-right: BID Security Wardens, Little Picking, Tap for Reading, Small Electrical Waste Collections



£100K+

Worth of stock from  
Reading town centre  
return to retailers by  
Reading BID security  
wardens

## BUSKING AND STREET PERFORMANCE IN READING

A GUIDE



*Busking Guide, 2025*

The BID's wellbeing programme evolved to include Pilates, in addition to established gym, yoga, and walking sessions, removing the need for businesses to create their own.

The Business Warden contract was awarded to ASEL (Argenbrite Security Europe Ltd), expanding the team to three for consistent two-person coverage across the week. Wardens collaborate closely with Police and the Town Safe Coordinator, returning over £100K in stock and maintaining active communication with retailers via the Town Safe Radio.

Events like the Retail Against Crime forum at The Oracle and training in counter-terrorism (Action Counters Terrorism and Prevent) and WAVE (Welfare and Vulnerability Engagement) brought businesses and law enforcement together to address safety and crime and anti-social behaviour prevention. WAVE was initially delivered in August and repeated in March 2025 (latterly funded by Reading Council).

Despite a weather delay, Purple Flag accreditation bi-annual visit took place in March 2025, following a written



*Purple Flag Accreditation*

submission including positive feedback on town centre safety from Street Pastor surveys and suggestions around better train services and evening activities for visitors.

The permanent Safe Space venue - home to Street Pastors, First Stop, and paramedics - continues to support vulnerable individuals on weekend nights and increasingly serves as a

collaborative base for wider community partners, such as the BID wardens and police.

# BID highlights



Over £100K in stock recovered by Wardens



Increased Business Wardens from 2 to 3; minimum of 2 on duty daily



Strong partnership with Police and retail security



Street Pastors & First Stop patrols continue every Friday and Saturday



Two seasonal floral planting schemes delivered



Safe Space hub saved 300+ annual A&E visits via onsite medical facility



CCTV operations maintained throughout the year



112,000+ sq. m. of pedestrian areas deep cleaned before Summer 2024



BID's cardboard & WEEE recycling schemes remain popular



Monday Sales data informs Centre for Cities national reports



Monthly footfall data shared via Friday Update: includes dwell time, heat maps & demographics



Continued development of 'Vicinity' CRM for business engagement



Partnered with Council to secure new station forecourt traders



Staff wellbeing menu updated: added Pilates, continued gym, yoga & walking.



BID led REDA Board walkabout highlighting challenges & progress



Town-wide litter pick & graffiti clean-up for Great British Spring Clean



Post-fire hoardings at Union/Friar Streets feature archive photo artwork - family of depicted subjects gifted framed photocopy



DISC system upgraded for ASB/shoplifting tracking; separate nighttime DISC funded by PubWatch



Ongoing PA/EA networking events; expanding attendee list for greater reach



Supported Tap for Reading initiative, purchasing donation tap readers to encourage charity donations and reduce begging



Emergency First Aid & Fire Marshall training fully subscribed. Launched SeedL online training portal, with 300+ local workers registered and monthly 'Learner of the Month' celebrated

# Business Growth and Skills

REDA’s business growth and skills programme delivered innovative and game-changing activities through 2024-25, funded by a combination of government’s UK Shared Prosperity Funds and S106 Skills Funds.

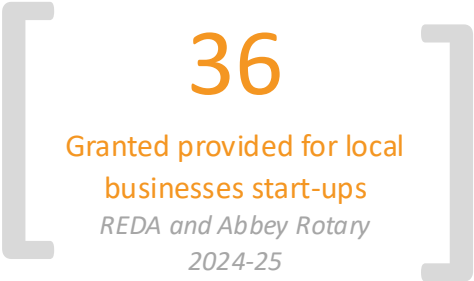
## Outreach Sessions

The community outreach project took informal, friendly and expert guidance to all parts of Reading between April – September 2024 and January – May 2025. Working with the Borough’s library service and other community partners every week our outreach team engaged with hundreds of local people – looking to find the so-called “hidden” unemployed people who wouldn’t usually have access to professional advice and guidance.

Examples of the guidance provided included referral to training providers, recruitment to the Abbey Rotary’s “Launch Reading” start-up course and general support and sign posting for help with job seeking and welfare advice.

Sessions ran in Whitley, West Reading, Caversham, Tilehurst and Broad St Mall. Our

team also supported networking events, the community job fair in Whitley Wood and the Job Fairs.



## Collaboration with Rotary

Thanks to REDA’s programmes under UKSPF Yr3, supporting local business infrastructure, we carried on support of Abbey Rotary’s *Launch Reading*. Reading continues to be the only place in England rolling out a programme to support local people into new business. REDA was able to support the new start-up businesses with small grants, ranging from £800 to £1500. Three more 10-week courses ran during 2024-25, providing a total of 36 grants to local business start-ups, with the new enterprises ranging from a range of natural screen products to car leasing.



Networking at Station Hill

## Reading Business Network

REDA’s collaboration with Reading Business Network, providing funding and organisational services continued through to October 2024. Monthly online meetings featured expert speakers and attracted an online audience of 30-40 local business people. Themes included the economic forecast, planning and development and recruitment and skills.

RBN’s live networking events were even more popular – the Spring event focused on Professional Services in the creative industries and attracted 50 delegates, the Summer Social at Double Barrelled Brewery hosted over 40 small businesses and the late autumn event introducing Reading’s Christmas programme welcomed 70 people.

The 2024-25 season finished with over 450 local people on the RBN network.





Reading Job Fair, Reading Town Hall

### Job Fairs

Two successful Reading Job Fairs took place during the year. Working with our partners and JCP Plus and supported by Reading Town Hall, both events were “sellouts” with over 80 employers attending to meet with, support and recruit over 2000 job seekers who attended during the year.

The main events took over the exhibition spaces at The Town Hall in May and September, attracting employers including Thames Water, John Lewis, The Range, MacDonalds, Armed Forces Careers, Probation Service, Reading Borough Council and AWE.

The inaugural Community Job Fair was held at Whitley Wood Community Centre in October, marking the launch of a bold new initiative to bring employment support directly into local neighbourhoods. The pilot event received enthusiastic backing from several local employers, including the Holiday Inn South, Collards Recycling and RBC, as well as providers New Directions, Ideas Fishing Association and DWP Job Centre Plus. More than 40 local residents attended to receive tailored advice and guidance, leading to the formation of several promising new professional partnerships.

### Supporting south Reading Communities

A key theme for programmes in 2024-25 was supporting the aims of Reading

Borough Council’s Place Based Pilot in Whitley and Church Wards. This initiative focuses on improving outcomes for communities that have historically lacked the same opportunities as more affluent areas. REDA responded by prioritising the delivery of skills and training programmes, particularly those supported by our UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) creative skills initiative.

One of the most transformative elements was a training partnership with Rabble Theatre, designed to open doors into the creative industries for individuals with little or no prior exposure. Weekly sessions offered participants the chance to collaborate with industry professionals, develop new creative works, and access guidance from self-employment advisors, turning imagination into opportunity.

Earlier in the year a networking event at Holiday Inn South (on Basingstoke Road, Whitley) provided over 70 local tradespeople with the opportunity to meet professionals and hear first-hand how professionals launched their careers in the creative sector.

This was supported with the Upskilling Courses run at Reading College which gave existing skilled crafts and trades people the additional knowledge and training to transfer their skills into the screen industry.



## The Landscape for Creative and Screen Skills

Building on the foundations laid in 2023-24, REDA continued its mission to establish Reading as a thriving hub for creative entrepreneurs, start-ups, and screen and stage talent. Three separate screen networking events have taken place through 2024, focused on getting more people into much needed roles in the sector. The Lights! Cameras! Business! events took on the role of trades and professional services in the industry, while the sold-out November event introduced local people to Shinfield Studios.

To support this growing creative network, REDA has also been developing the Filming in Reading online directory, a comprehensive, one-stop resource for production teams seeking local suppliers. From hotels and caterers to logistics experts, accountants, makeup artists, landscapers, and beyond, the directory showcases the breadth of local talent required to deliver film and TV productions.

While creating routes into the industry for adults looking for new jobs, or to reskill, there has also been a commitment to opening pathways for young people – unlocking young talent and supporting the teachers and others offering information, advice and guidance who can signpost and support young people into creative work.

Also looking to provide more links into the industry, by way of work experience and an intensive week of training was the project run with Resource Productions and Activate Learning – providing 15 students with a week working alongside professionals, and providing a model for future work experience delivery, including a teachers' pack and linking in the work of Education Business Partnership across Reading.



*Creative Pathways event, March 2025*

## Case Study: Creative Pathways

The Creative Pathways event was designed as an immersive skills showcase, introducing both adults and young people to the wide range of career opportunities within the local creative industries. In addition to raising awareness of jobs in fields such as film and television, the day also served as a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunity for teachers keen to better understand emerging routes into the sector.

Another aim of the event was to foster connections among local creative professionals. The event offered a valuable networking platform where practitioners could meet, share knowledge, and pass on their own career journeys to the wider community.

The day adopted a hands-on, “come and try it” approach, allowing participants to actively engage with industry experts and sample creative activities first-hand. A total of 17 professionals and training providers took part, supported by a rich programme of two panel discussions and nine skill-based workshops, most of which were arranged following outreach in January.

Activities were deliberately designed to be

broad in scope, providing something for everyone - from makeup artistry and costume design to virtual reality, gaming, composing, sound design, animation, film editing, educational arts, live performance, advertising, and green screen technology.

**650**  
Young people welcomed  
from 15 schools and  
colleges  
*Creative Pathways event, 2025*

Small-group workshops (capped at 15 participants) explored subjects including film directing, scriptwriting, creative wellness, and stage performance. Meanwhile, two panel discussions (one tailored for students, the other for adults) offered honest, inspiring insights into how professionals built their careers and navigated pathways into creative roles.

The event exceeded expectations, welcoming over 650 young people aged 11–17 from 15 schools and colleges to the morning sessions, followed by around 120



adults in the afternoon. Though it began as a pilot, Creative Pathways has laid strong foundations to become an annual skills event — showcasing local opportunities, introducing practical training routes, and helping people of all ages take their first steps into the creative sector.



## Employment & Skills Plan: A Construction Case Study

### Unlocking Opportunity at Station Hill Phase 2 with Lincoln MGT and Sir Robert McAlpine

The Station Hill redevelopment is one of central Reading's most transformative projects, revitalising a major gateway into the town used by millions annually. Phase two of this three-stage scheme included significant infrastructure and public realm upgrades: hard landscaping, podium and residential blocks, a 19-storey tower, green spaces with a water feature and pocket park, and elevated pedestrian links alongside leisure and community facilities.

To maximise local benefit, REDA worked in partnership with Lincoln MGT and Sir Robert McAlpine (SRM) to develop a comprehensive Employment and Skills Plan (ESP), which was approved in October 2021. Over the following three years, REDA collaborated closely with SRM to implement the plan, ensuring that local residents gained meaningful access to job pathways and training opportunities throughout the construction process, which completed in October 2024.

### Building Skills and Partnerships

Throughout the delivery period, SRM

engaged a wide network of partners including: CITB, Reading College/Activate Learning, Central Berkshire Education Business Partnership, Jelly, the University of Reading, local schools, and the DWP Jobcentre, to deliver a robust programme of activity, including:

#### Apprenticeships:

30 apprentices were employed onsite across electrical and technical roles (Levels 2–5).

#### Community Engagement:

26 local people attended DWP-led employment events providing an overview of jobs in construction and route into CSCS training.

#### Work Experience & Education:

- 290 students visited the live site, well beyond the original target of 122. Activities included bricklaying and drylining masterclasses delivered by onsite contractors.
- 148 students completed work experience placements.
- 53 students attended CSCS workshops co-delivered by CITB and Activate Learning.

#### Local Employment:

802 local people contributed to the project workforce.

### Inclusion and Innovation

Beyond core skills delivery, REDA and SRM supported targeted campaigns to diversify and futureproof the sector workforce:

- Women in Construction and Open Doors events were held as part of national awareness initiatives, encouraging underrepresented groups to explore careers in construction.
- Onsite upskilling training achieved remarkable levels of involvement with 2,878 outputs recorded.

The Station Hill Phase 2 redevelopment stands as a powerful example of how strategic investment, collaborative planning, and a shared commitment to skills development can deliver far-reaching social and economic benefits. Through the implementation of the S106 Employment and Skills Plan, REDA and Sir Robert McAlpine not only delivered a landmark construction project, but also created a framework for inclusive growth, empowering local residents with valuable experience, improving diversity in the workforce, and building strong partnerships between education, industry, and the community.

# Enhancing the visitor experience





**[ 99% ]**  
**Walks Festival attendees  
satisfied**  
*Reading Walks Festival 2024*

## Leisure Tourism

### Reading Walks Festival

The Reading Walks Festival returned for its second year from 10–18 May, drawing over 900 participants to explore Reading’s rich blend of history, green spaces, and rural surroundings. Organised by REDA and supported by Great Western Railway, the 2025 Festival delivered 49 walks, led by a mix of passionate volunteers and professionals from the heritage and leisure sectors.

The programme ranged from gentle garden strolls at The MERL to immersive heritage experiences like medieval town centre walks, explorations of the University campuses, wildlife spotting at Fobney, and even a two-day pilgrimage along the historic St James’ Way. New walks such as “In the Footsteps of Jane Austen” expanded the festival’s reach to literary and cultural enthusiasts.

Designed to be accessible, affordable, and environmentally conscious, the majority of walks were priced at just £3, with 70% of participants arriving by public transport, on foot, or by bike. The response was overwhelmingly positive: 99% satisfaction, 89% of walks sold out, and the vast majority of attendees expressed high appreciation for the chance to learn something new, stay

active, and connect with others in an inclusive and sustainable setting.

### St James’ Way

REDA’s sustained work to develop and promote the UK route of the historic St James’ Way reached new heights in 2024, with an estimated 1,000 walkers completing the trail over the year. Two high-profile press trips secured extensive media coverage, including a 10-page lead feature in BBC Countryfile Magazine, with the front cover hailing it as “Britain’s ultimate pilgrim trail” and further recognition in The Walk (Ramblers Magazine). REDA also supported the Confraternity of St James in submitting a planning application for a permanent obelisk at the Abbey Quarter, which will mark the official start of this long-distance journey and provide a lasting symbol of Reading’s growing status as a cultural and heritage gateway.

### Jane Austen 250 Anniversary Celebrations

In 2025, REDA co-ordinated Reading’s campaign for the national celebration of Jane Austen’s 250th birthday, showcasing the town’s historic connection to the beloved author, who spent her formative school years here at Reading’s Abbey Gateway. A rich programme of events and activities showcased Reading’s Austen



story to both domestic and international audiences, positioning the town as a key destination for heritage tourism during this high-profile anniversary year and achieving some notable results:

- A far-reaching marketing campaign targeted audiences across the UK as well as in the US, the Netherlands, and Germany, helping draw Austen enthusiasts from around the world.
- REDA played a central role in launching the celebrations nationally, including delivering a presentation at the official Jane Austen 250 launch at the National Portrait Gallery.
- Strategic partnerships with Visit Hampshire, Visit Bath, Visit England, Great West Way, and Tourism South East amplified Reading's profile as part of the broader Austen trail.
- The campaign attracted substantial media interest, with coverage across major national outlets such as *The Times*, *Time Out*, and *Waitrose Weekend*, bringing Reading's Austen connection to new audiences and reinforcing its cultural tourism appeal.

### Heritage Open Days 2024

Heritage Open Days 2024 once again welcomed residents and visitors to explore the rich architectural and cultural tapestry of Reading. As part of the UK's largest free heritage festival, REDA co-ordinated and championed the local programme in Reading, featuring more than 40

Reading's 250 Jane Austen celebrations, Abbey Gateway



historic buildings and venues across the town and the surrounding area.

Organised locally by REDA, the festival embraced accessibility and wide community reach, with all events offered free of charge. A printed guide to the programme was created and distributed by REDA across key locations in Reading, including libraries, Reading Town Hall, and the visitor information booth at Reading Station, ensuring broad engagement and visibility for this national programme celebrating local history.

### Third Anniversary of Reading's Station Volunteers

Summer 2024 marked the third anniversary of the popular Station Ambassador volunteer programme. Our dedicated group of Reading-based volunteers are managed by REDA and continue to provide a friendly and knowledgeable presence at Reading Station to members of the public - welcoming visitors, offering directions, and highlighting local attractions. Their contribution extends beyond the station itself, with ambassadors also supporting Visit Reading's presence at four University of Reading Open Days, helping prospective students and their families feel at home and discover all the town has to offer.

### Growing Reach of Visit Reading

REDA has continued to strengthen the town's destination profile through strategic marketing, sector engagement, and collaborative promotion throughout 2024-25, with significant progress around Visit Reading, including:

- Worked closely with the **Caversham Traders Association** to position Caversham as an integral part of the Visit Reading offer, broadening the narrative of the town and highlighting its riverside charm, independent businesses, and visitor appeal.
- Presented Reading at **GWW Market Place** event to international tour operators.
- Brought first **Great West Way Media Discovery Day to Reading** as event sponsor and host. 50+ UK and international travel journalists experience Reading's leisure tourism offer.
- Produced a second edition **Visitor Guide** and an accompanying **Travel Trade guide** to support tour planners and promote the town to UK and international operators.
- Created a new **Paddington Trail leaflet** in line with the launch of the Broad St Paddington Statue, showing links to Reading with author Michale Bond and adding to Reading's heritage offer.
- Hosted a successful **familiarisation trip for 20 group travel operators**, helping showcase Reading's attractions firsthand.
- Coordinated **Visit Reading stand at Excursions 2025**, giving Reading visibility within the UK's leading group travel showcase and

# 25%

year on year increase in traffic  
to the Visit Reading website

*Visit-Reading.com*

strengthening relationships with the leisure travel sector.

- Increased **web performance of Visit-Reading.com**, achieving 25% year-on-year increase in traffic (well above the 6% industry average), 76% uplift in page views, and 21% more product page impressions, compared with 2023–24.

### Visit Reading this Summer – 2024 summer campaign

The 2024 *Visit Reading this Summer* campaign aimed to boost town centre footfall and celebrate Reading's leisure, evening, and cultural offer. Designed using the “R” frame brand device and dynamic creative assets, the campaign delivered impressive results: web traffic rose 17%, organic social engagement jumped 206%, and attraction-related content saw a 50–56% increase in views compared to 2023.

A flagship event of the campaign, the **Medieval Fantasy Trail Quest**, returned for its second year with 23 giant toy-brick models



Visit Reading 2024 Summer Campaign

displayed across Reading town centre from 27 July to 18 August. Organised by Reading BID in partnership with Broad Street Mall and The Oracle Shopping Centre, the BRICKLIVE-built trail included eye-catching models like a 4-metre dragon made from 210,000 bricks and interactive features

such as a selfie throne and hidden-letter prize competition. With 4.7k page views, 2.2k trail map downloads, and nearly 2k video views, the trail attracted families, enlivened the town centre, and contributed significantly to the summer campaign's reach and engagement.



## Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP)

In 2024–25, REDA played a pivotal role in Reading’s successful inclusion within the new Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) for Berkshire - one of the government’s key frameworks for supporting tourism at a regional level.

Spanning all six local authorities in the county, this coordinated partnership marks a significant step forward in strengthening collaboration, attracting investment, and boosting Berkshire’s profile as a wider visitor destination.

REDA led Reading’s engagement in the bid process, hosting a Reading businesses consultation event and ensuring that the town’s priorities and visitor offer were fully reflected in the emerging Berkshire Visitor Economy Framework.

The success of the application opens the door to enhanced strategic support, shared resources, and stronger place promotion for Reading as part of a county-wide visitor economy approach.



## Business Tourism

### Meet Reading

In 2024–25, REDA continued to promote Reading as a leading location for business tourism through its dedicated Meet Reading initiative. This included targeted marketing and partnerships to highlight the town’s diverse, high-quality meeting and conference venues to national and international audiences, including publishing the second Meet Reading brochure, offering a comprehensive guide to the town’s major venues, from boutique spaces and heritage settings to large-scale academic and hotel conference facilities.

To boost visibility within the event planning sector, REDA coordinated a stand at the PA Show 2025 at ExCeL London in February, alongside partners such as Venue Reading (the conference team behind the University of Reading’s Whiteknights and Henley campuses), and The Roseate Reading (the town’s five-star boutique hotel featuring meeting space, private cinema, and fine dining).



## Town centre events

Throughout 2024–25, Reading town centre played host to a vibrant calendar of events supported by Reading BID, bringing energy, culture, and footfall to Broad Street and beyond.

### Music & Festivals

- [Are You Listening?](#) Festival returned in May 2024, showcasing emerging talent across town centre venues and offering exclusive ticket deals for local businesses.
- [Reading Food Festival](#), also in May, delivered by Blue Collar and transformed Broad Street with global street food and live local music, earning strong feedback from retailers reporting increased sales.
- [Bastille Day](#) in July featured a French-inspired celebration, including a crowd-pleasing battle re-enactment. The BID continues to support the event and is exploring a French Food Market for Easter 2025.
- [Carnival of the World](#) (August) brought Broad Street alive with vibrant music and dance from CultureMix performers, drawing large crowds and continued support from the BID.

### Seasonal & Cultural Celebrations

- A [Paddington Bear](#) statue was installed



*Marmalade sandwiches all round – Reading's Mayor & Paddington Bear*

in October to mark the release of [Paddington in Peru](#), delighting a wide range of visitors.

- [Diwali and Chinese New Year](#) celebrations featured colourful parades, dance, and music in partnership with Kala the Arts and Reading Chinese School respectively, attracting growing community involvement.
- [Seasonal Trails](#) (Easter, Summer, Halloween) continued to engage families across town with a free activity, encouraging exploration with retailer-hosted installations and prize competitions. The Summer trail expanded to include The Oracle and Broad St Mall shopping centres.

- The 2024 [Reading Lantern Parade](#) was postponed due to Storm Darragh and rescheduled to mid-February with added heart-making workshops and a successful finale in Town Hall Square aligning with wider Valentine's Day celebrations - now permanently moved to February following record attendance.

### Community Highlights

- [Launchpad's Pancake Race](#) returned in March 2025, with BID-supported business teams racing down Broad Street in a spirited fundraiser full of fun and rivalry.



## Christmas 2024

The 2024 festive season marked a new chapter for Reading town centre's Christmas offer, with Reading BID commissioning a refreshed lighting scheme following the start of the new BID term. Appointed through a competitive tender process, Gala Lights delivered a striking new design with a bauble and gift theme, complemented by bespoke lamppost motifs that gave each area of the town centre its own identity.

New 'Welcome to Reading' signage was implemented at four key entry points: Oxford Road, Station Road, Duke Street, and Kings Road. A series of 22 illuminated centrepieces along Broad Street paid tribute to key themes of the Reading story, including the cityscape, the Maiwand Lion, and the Reading Festival logo. Additional eye-catching installations like a giant bauble, a walk-through arch, and a large, illuminated READING sign brought a new dimension to this year's display and have received positive feedback, with the design set to remain in place for the next five years.

The popular German Food Market returned with an expanded footprint and enhanced covered seating, helping drive consistent footfall despite some wet weather. Plans are already under way to grow the market further in 2025.

# 380%

increase in social media traffic  
during the 2024 Christmas in  
Reading campaign

[Visit-Reading.com](https://www.visit-reading.com)

The Christmas lights switch-on event on 16 November attracted large crowds and introduced a new purpose-built stage to host live performers and festive buskers throughout the season. Enhanced security and safety measures were implemented in line with preparations for Martyn's Law.

To support activity throughout December, Reading BID delivered a vibrant programme of 12 festive events including six family-focused weekends with live music and character visits, and six midweek experiences tailored to the office sector. Activities such as beer tasting, bingo, and craft workshops helped energise the town centre into the early evenings, encouraging both dwell time and discovery.

## Christmas in Reading Marketing Campaign

The 2024 *Christmas in Reading* campaign supported the town centre economy with broad, inclusive messaging under the new "Wrap it up in Reading" theme, highlighting the ease of shopping, dining, and celebrating all in one place. Visually, the campaign used a festive 3D papercut wrapping-paper style to enhance appeal. The campaign delivered significant digital growth, including a 48.5%

significant digital growth, including a 48.5% increase in website users, 380% more social traffic, and over 1.6 million screen impacts at Reading Station. Across channels, the campaign reached over 203,000 users on social media and generated 19.6k ad clicks, firmly positioning Reading as a key Christmas destination.



*Reading Christmas Light scheme, 2024*



Reading UK CIC  
trading as REDA



## Reading UK CIC, trading as Reading's Economy & Destination Agency (REDA)

### Financial Summary

REDA, now in its 19th year of operation, continues to grow and maintained a strong bank balance throughout 2024/25 with reserves able to safeguard against any unforeseen eventualities. Its turnover reflected a four-year average of £1,939,263. The balance of restricted and unrestricted funds allows REDA to continue existing services and invest in new projects going forward.

Year end 31 March 2024	£	£
Turnover	2,482,344	
Private £		2,192,344
Public £		290,000
Year end surplus	478,078	
Reserves	991,358	
Restricted		694,968
Unrestricted		303,624

*Reading UKCIC Accounts are prepared by  
MHA – Baker Tilly*

### REDA head count at year end

**REDA Board:** 22 registered Non-Executive Board

- New Chair Scott Witchalls elected.
- Directors covering all but one of our target sectors with no gaps in the skill areas required at Board level)

**REDA Staff:** 10.2 FTE posts – 11 staff members (including 1 maternity leave + cover)

### Governance and Continuous Improvement

- 22 Board Members
- Corporate Risk Reports and Financial Risk Report updated quarterly
- REDA awarded Corporate Social Responsibility: Silver Award .
- Governance arrangements of the BID updated for new 5-year term
- New BID Committee and Chairs reviewed and Annual Meeting held
- Corporate Plan Priorities: Setting of 5-year priorities

# Annual Report

2024-25

[www.redauk.org.uk](http://www.redauk.org.uk)

Reading's Economy & Destination Agency (REDA) is the trading name for Reading UK CIC, a Community Interest Company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales (No. 5671172) at One Forbury Square, The Forbury Reading, RG1 3EB



R·E·D·A<sup>TM</sup>  
Reading's Economy & Destination Agency