

REDA Annual Report

2021-22



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

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Corporate Update

A message from the chairman



Adam Jacobs
Chairman
Reading UK

“With the second year of a global pandemic fully upon us in early 2021, the continued need to provide financial and skills support was coupled with new requirements to help reopen the high street and start to rebuild Reading’s profile as a destination of choice for both leisure and business visitors.

The early part of the year welcomed positivity from national commentators who reported that Reading’s economy was showing signs of bouncing back, which was largely confirmed by the abundance of local job adverts and positive key indicators collected as part of REDA’s monthly Economic Recovery dashboard. However, the effects of Covid-19 were still very much prevalent, with the end to furlough looming and no immediate signs of a mass return to the office.

The REDA team embraced these challenges, responding quickly with a reopening campaign to drive interest and footfall into the town centre. While a gradual return of local, in-person events was welcomed, much work was undertaken to establish Reading’s

international tourism links, with the reopening of the St James Way, a renowned walking route from Reading to Galica in north-west Spain. The 2021 Christmas period was largely successful for many of Reading’s retailers, and the BID delivered a ‘Biscuit Town’ themed Christmas light trail for locals and visitors, which returned for a second year in the Forbury Gardens and Abbey Ruins.

REDA also responded quickly to changes brought about by Brexit, bidding for the Government’s Interim Community Renewal Fund and supporting Reading Borough Council in their response to the Government’s invitation to bid for City Status. Employment challenges have also been addressed through delivering career advice for young

people in schools, as well as kick start placements, business start-up support, and working with national developers to create jobs, apprenticeships and work experience opportunities for local people.

Reading’s smart and sustainable aspirations have continued into the early part of 2022, with work to create the first ‘Green BID’ fully underway. Key developments such as Station Hill have demonstrated green credentials and a commitment to arts, culture and public realm, aligning with Reading’s 2050 Vision. We saw Reading University open Cine Valley, which offers state-of-the-art film studios and local job opportunities, and Reading-based company, Altitude Angel, has worked to establish Reading as the centre of a new UK-wide drone superhighway. As we move into 2022-23, our work with businesses will begin to shift from

support with surviving to thriving. We look forward to refreshing our own corporate identity and website, as well as launching a shared place story for Reading, continuing to work in close partnership with the Council and University. We will also begin to lay the foundations for the BID renewal vote for the next five-year term, due to come into effect from 2024.

In what has been another challenging, but successful, year for REDA, I am once again grateful to the team for their continued energy and passion with supporting the business community and their dedication to driving Reading’s economy. I’d also like to take this opportunity to extend my thanks to my fellow board members for their ongoing support and commitment to helping us shape a better Reading for the future.”

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adam".

Corporate update

The 2021-22 financial year has been a time for planning our future.

Some 2021-22 highlights include:

- Supporting the Council in a bid to purchase Reading Gaol, with our own contribution to include a tech-creative start-up hub.
- Planning to become a 'Green BID', demonstrating our sustainable credentials and delivering a workshop at Reading Climate Festival to generate ideas which attracted national interest from other BIDs, The ATCM and Institute of Place Management.
- Delivering sustainable initiatives such as wildflower planting along the highways and reedbeds in the Kennet, as well as plans for a new app to give shoppers financial incentives on travel to the town centre.
- Developing Reading's tourism offer through reopening and launching the St James' Way, a historic pilgrimage route from Reading to Galacia in North-West Spain and partnering with the Galacian Tourist Board, as well as launching our volunteer-led Mobile Tourism Unit to welcome visitors at Reading stations.
- Completing our current programme of work in schools, supporting over 1000 young people with careers and personal development training, and delivering 650 employment opportunities to local people through advice and jobs fairs.
- Working with New Directions College and Reading Borough Council to create 132 new kick start job opportunities for local young people with 32 local employers, as well as delivering start-up business training to 70 local people.
- Establishing our Reading Business Network through monthly online meetings and building a social media and communications network of over 500 local businesses.
- Working with local developers such as Henry Construction, Watkin Jones, Morgan Lovell, Midgard/JRL and Ash, to secure 35 work experience opportunities, 18 construction apprenticeships, 416 local jobs and site visits and talks for 126 school students.
- Establishing key partnerships with the University of Reading and Reading Borough Council to create a new place brand for Reading, with input from over 60 Reading businesses and 1692 survey responses from residents, community groups and businesses.

Looking ahead

After a year of planning and consultation, we look forward to transitioning to our new corporate identity, launching a new place brand and delivering a new destination website. We will be expanding the organisation with new board and team members, developing working groups around key issues, and partnering with Reading Borough Council to access new sources of funding to help make Reading a more inclusive, smart and sustainable place, and realising our 2050 Vision.

The team will manage and deliver new projects, including research into green skills, creative industry skills, local procurement opportunities and business tourism. Later in the year we will support the town centre economy over the festive season with new Christmas activity and a campaign to drive awareness, footfall and spend.

Finally, we will bring forward the Town Centre Strategy, led by Reading Borough Council, and undertake thorough research, planning and consultation in preparation for the BID Renewal Vote in February 2024.



“As a team, we have used this time to refresh our corporate identity, create a new Reading place narrative, and develop a new destination website. The BID has continued to provide added value services for the Central and Abbey Quarter districts, introducing new initiatives to support local business and drive member engagement. The Board has reviewed its governance and sector and skills gaps, as well as setting up new committees to oversee its expanding portfolio of interest as we look to the future.

Nigel Horton-Baker
Chief Executive, REDA

Refreshing our corporate identity

Refreshing our corporate brand identity

As part of its Marketing Infrastructure Strategy, REDA (formerly Reading UK) undertook a corporate brand review in April 2021, to understand how stakeholders, partners and customers viewed the organisation. A survey was created to help gather insight, and the results were reported back to the Board in July. Research showed stakeholders were not fully clear on the organisation's offer, and there was confusion around both the name 'Reading UK' and the synonymity with the place identity of Reading. A huge 45% of respondents didn't think that the current brand identity reflected the organisation. This insight was used as the basis to recommend a brand refresh for Reading UK (now REDA), with a new creative identity and full guidelines, to help us a clearer, more consistent story to both our partners and the wider Reading community.

The team's knowledge of the company was used alongside the stakeholder research to create a new corporate brand framework, with a clear purpose, mission and values, alongside an elevator pitch and new name: Reading's Economy & Destination Agency (REDA). Local brand agency, ClearBrand, was commissioned to support with the creative identity and the final proposal was presented to the Board in January 2022, with a comms plan and launch scheduled for summer 2022.

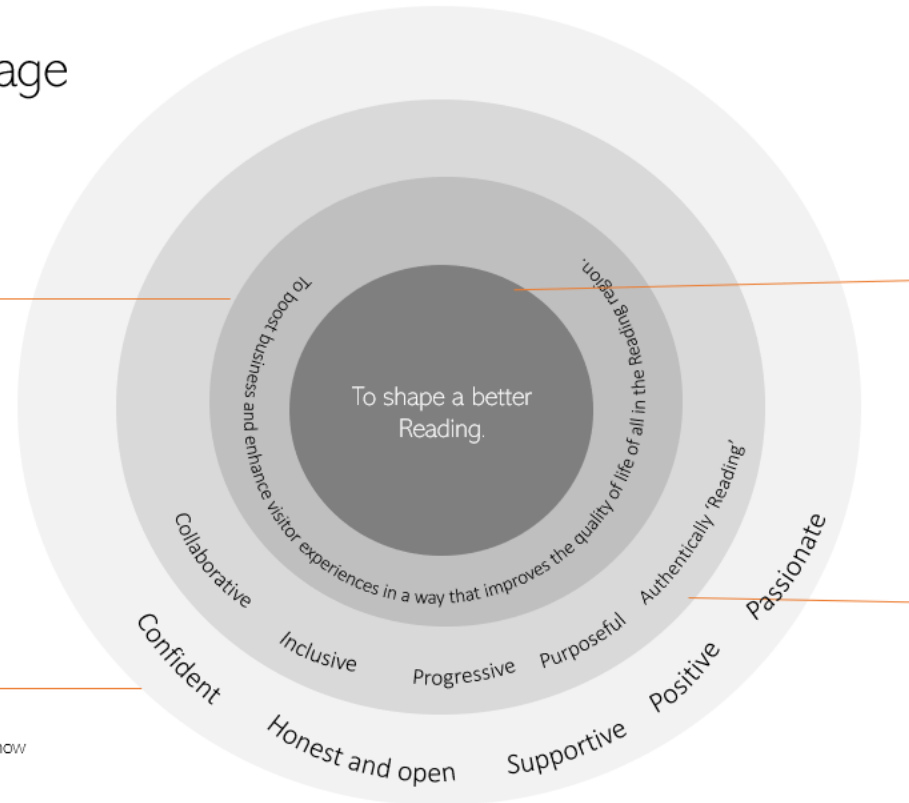
Brand on a page

Our mission

A **short statement** which describes our company objectives and approach to reaching these objectives.

Our personality

A set of **internal words**, similar to character traits, which help guide how we communicate and behave.



Our purpose

A short (**internal facing**) statement that describes our reason for being. The *why*:

Our values

Internal statements which sum up what we (Reading UK) stand for and care about.

Board of directors 2021-22

The company's Board of Directors is a team of experts comprising leading figures from property, retail, education, transport and media organisations as well as the local authority. REDA Board members have a stake in the real estate, market and labour force of Reading, bringing a vision for Reading's

future growth and a desire to champion its ongoing success. This year REDA saw some changes to its board membership, with John Elis (PwC) and Peter Sloman (Reading Borough Council) moving on and Caroline McHardy (Berkley Homes) and Steve Connolly (Broad Street Mall) joining the team.

Adam Jacobs

Jacobs the Jewellers (Chair)

Scott Witchalls

Stantec UK

Steve Connolly

Moorgarth Group,
Broad Street Mall

Aaron Pope

M & G Real Estate

Kim Cohen

Barton Willmore Partnership LLP

Frances Martin

Reading Borough Council

Jason Brock

Reading Borough Council

Samantha Foley

University of Reading

David Pinder

Great Western Railway (GWR)

Rory Carson

Mapletree UK Management Ltd,
Green Park

Andy Briggs

Hammerson Plc,
The Oracle Shopping Centre

Tim Kilpatrick

Reading Football Club Ltd

Paul Newman

Activate Learning / Reading College

John Ellis

PWC

Becky Holland

BH&P Ltd

John McLaughlin

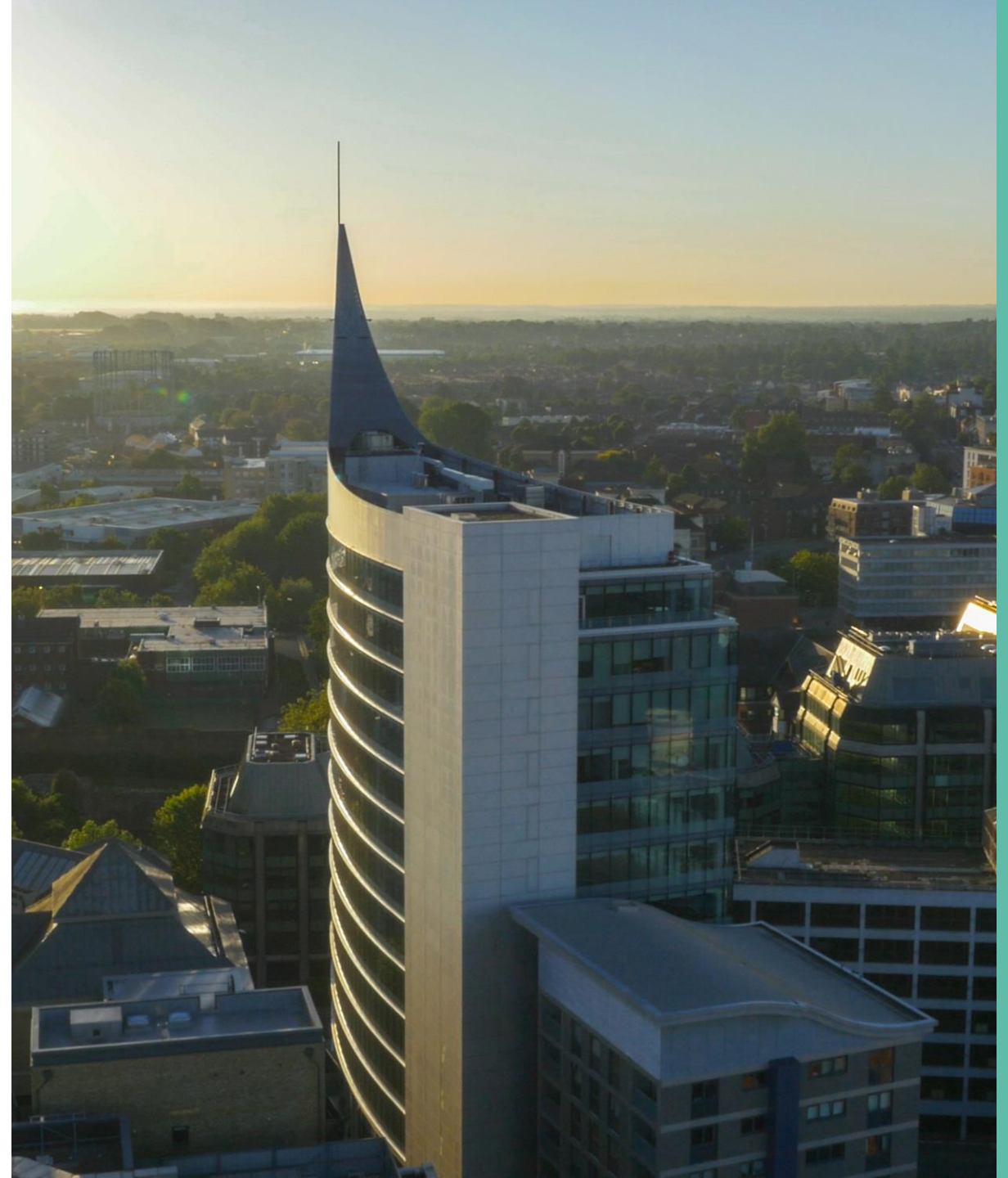
Hilton International, Reading

Caroline McHardy

Berkley Homes

Nigel Horton-Baker

Chief Executive, REDA



Strategic Leadership

Strategic leadership

REDA continues in the spirit of Reading UK CIC as the lead agency for strategic leadership on economic development and place-marketing in the Greater Reading area.

During the year we have provided leadership through a number of key initiatives and strategic projects, including:

Supporting the Council's team in managing the reopening of the town centre during the pandemic, creating a vision and strategy for the town centre going forward. As the Business Improvement District, we were instrumental in supporting Reading through the COVID pandemic and during reopening, creating welcome back improvements to our street markets, ensuring day and night-time safety by our street pastors and wardens in the town centre, and delivering a spectacular Christmas in Reading offer for residents and visitors.

Chairing the Berkshire Economic Development Officers Group (BEDOG) across Berkshire through Sue Brackley (Economic Development Manager). Setting up a pan-Berkshire start-up business programme; representing BEDOG on the Berkshire LEP Business and Environment Group, and overseeing the pan-Berkshire economic strategy. REDA's role extends to work on the development of a 'County Wide

Deal' to assist in gaining devolved responsibilities and budgets from Government in the future as in other cities in the country.

Playing a lead role in co-ordinating pan-Berkshire, joined up planning on the submission of a joint UK Shared Prosperity Fund application, leading on 2 of the 3 Reading UKSPF strands, as well as delivering skills, training and business support including support for the Berkshire Growth Hub.

Supporting the Reading Borough Council team to develop the City Status application, embedding the new Reading story and key messaging as a result of the Reading place brand review.

Working with our strategic partners such as the Reading Climate Change Partnership and Ethical Reading to raise the profile on climate change and adaptation issues among the business community, leading to the development of a 'Green' Business Improvement District initiative to map progress towards the 2050 Vision and net zero carbon by 2030.

Leading the Reading Place Brand Review in partnership with the University of Reading and Reading Borough Council and our board members, to create a set of place brand values



Above: The Reading City Status BID application, using the newly developed Reading narrative to align messaging.

and a branding Toolkit. In addition, we have launched a bespoke destination website, Visit-Reading.com, to promote Reading as a destination of choice for both visitors and residents.

Acting as the Reading Destination Marketing Organisation for Reading, showcasing Reading as a visitor destination at national visitor exhibitions and joint working with partners including the Great West Way and Galicia in NW Spain, our partners at the other end of the reopened and signposted 'St James Way'.

Local business support

Employment and Skills Plans

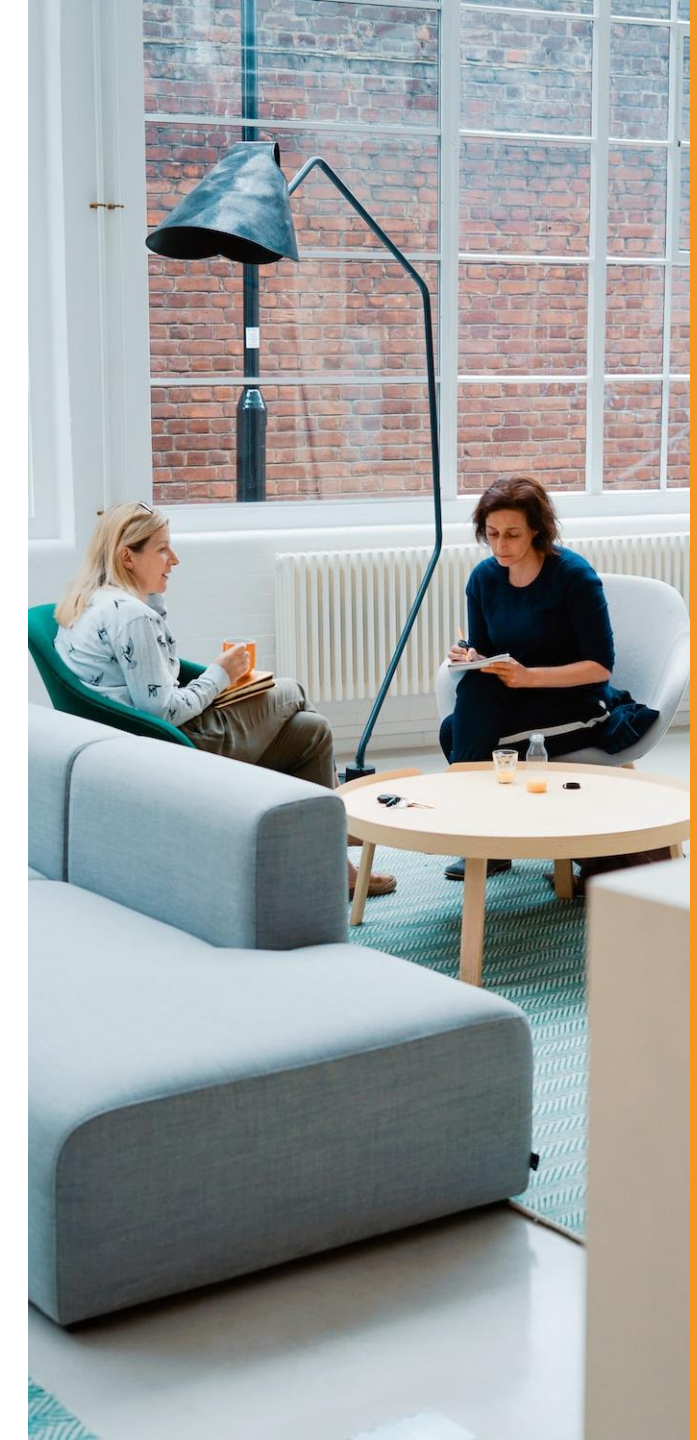
Although the Covid pandemic had direct impacts on delivery through to early 2022 the economic development team worked to address the challenges facing the town's economy following the impacts of multiple lockdowns. This was in line with the Powered by People Strategy adopted by Policy Committee on 28 September 2020.

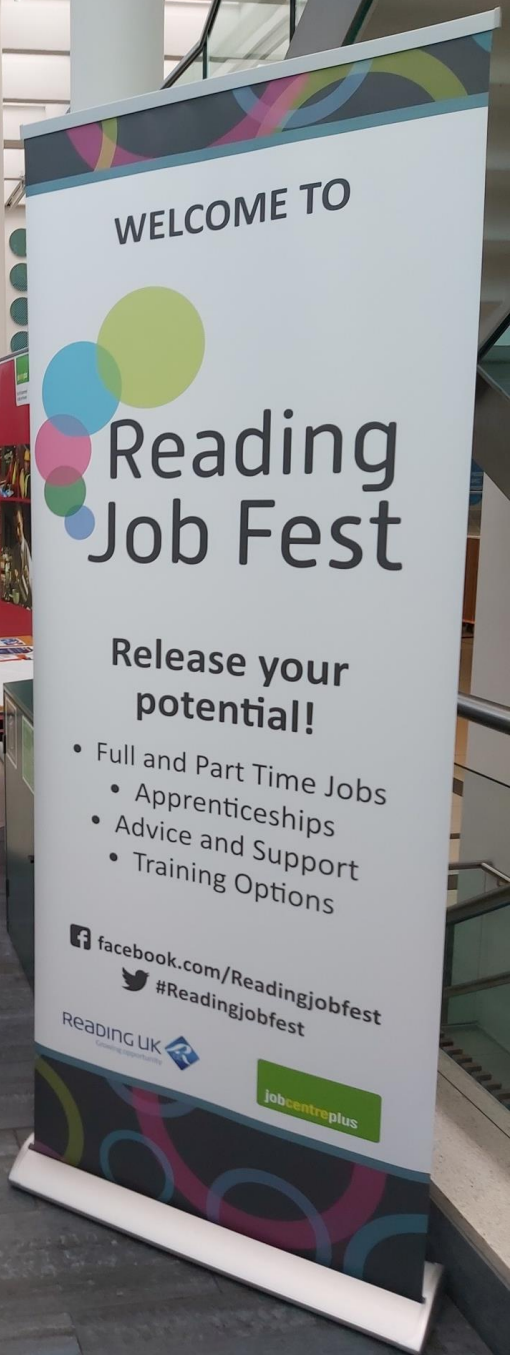
This work took the shape of employment and skills plans, working mainly with the construction industry, as well as an ambitious variety of employment and business support projects targeted at those unemployed and facing barriers to employment, delivered using S106 financial contributions.

The framework for ESP delivery has responded to the unforeseen impacts of the Covid Pandemic – including sector shortages, an abundance of jobs not matched by available local skills, schools and colleges delaying return to in person teaching. In particular, inequality has become even further entrenched as a cost of living crisis impacts the country and REDA continues to support the Council's Financial Crisis and Social Inclusion groups.

Outputs, though impacted throughout 2021, have included job fairs, support for young people, start-up business training, workplace wellbeing events and small business networking.

Recovery Theme	Outcome	Total Supported
RECOVERY NETWORKS (WORKPLACE WELLNESS)	Small businesses and employees given support to provide good mental health in the workplace	150
RECOVERY NETWORKS (SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY)	Local businesses helped to develop sustainable business models "Meet Local, Buy Local"	70
WORLDS OF WORK	Year 10 and 11 Students supported in careers, access to work and life skills	1,071
NEW EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES	Local people given access to employers with live jobs and agencies to support them into work. A Redundancy guide made available	650
NEW EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES	Employers given access to candidates through two local job fair events	60
SELF EMPLOYMENT	Local people given the tools and training to start their own business	70
RECOVERY NETWORKS	SMEs provided with a local network to support business recovery within a community	400





While all direct delivery was virtually halted between March 2020 – Jan 2022, many work programmes successfully shifted to online delivery, including:

- Creation of the Reading Business Network, meeting monthly online
- Continued one to one support for start-up business who were then invited to join the Reading Business Network
- Skills and Employment roundtables
- Business Recovery Network meetings
- Inclusive Recovery Group established with private and public sector partners to shape immediate recovery needs
- Ongoing work with schools to maintain student support into work

Employment and Skills Plans are delivered with major contractors at the following sites:

Rivermead / Palmer Park, Hamilton Centre, The Oracle /House of Fraser, Queen Anne School,

RIBP, Station Hill Phase 2, Stadium Way, Greyfriars Church, Foundry Place, Thames Quarter, Station Hill Phase 1.

Successes at March 2022

New Apprentices: 18,
 Education Outreach: 126,
 Local Jobs created : 416,
 Work Experience places; 35.

The Real Business Club

Three start-up courses and two programmes of 1-2-1 support were delivered in 2021 (Jan-Mar,

May-July, Sept-Dec). Although in-person or hybrid training was considered all delivery was finally delivered on-line due to concerns about Covid transmission.

A total of 91 signed up for the training, with each course running for 10 x 1.5 hours weekly. Some 27 start-ups took up the detailed 1-2-1 support, and 95% of attendees had no previous business experience. Referrals came from agencies including DWP, Optalis, Housing Associations and Alana House. The attendants were ethnically diverse, with 61% over 40, 50% female and 30% on UC.

Reading Business Network - Meet Local, Value Local, Buy Local

Reading Business Network was created in September 2020 to help local businesses survive and thrive through the pandemic. The group met online once a month bringing business owners news, helpful information and a chance to share best practise, with membership climbing to nearly 400 by Spring 2022. The group has now developed in person meetings – the first of which was January 2022 with over 40 businesses coming together to hear from local entrepreneurs on how they coped through the pandemic. The group continues monthly meetings on-line but now meets quarterly in person.

Berkshire and Rebel Business School

As part of the wider work with the Berks Local Enterprise Partnership, Berks Growth Hub and



Cllr Jason Brock talks to Station Hill developers, JRL, at Reading Job Fair



Panel at RBN Live – Start Up Stories, Jan 22

1071

Engagements with students through school programmes

Education Business Partnership

the Berkshire Economic Recovery Group, REDA Chairs the Berkshire Economic Development Officers Group.

As part of the Group’s work five of the six local authorities in Berks came together to provide an online Rebel Business School start up business course. Over 120 people signed up for the course, with approx. 25 Reading people completing the training and taking first steps to working for themselves.

Reading also represents BEDOG at the LEP’s pan-Berks Business Environment Group.

Education Business Partnership

REDA funded Education Business Partnership’s work with local schools, targeting schools where pupil attainment has struggled, and where there are less employment and skills opportunities:

School	Programmes Completed (Nov 2020 – April 2022)	Student Engagements
JMA	All About Me (Yr 9) Lifeskills Careers Spotlight / Preparing for work	166
Highdown	Spotlight on careers Virtual work experience / Job expo	540
Hugh Faringdon	In School Careers Event Virtual work experience	190
Maiden Erlegh	Work Placements Work Experience	175
Prospect	Preparing for work / Virtual work experience	

Schools Programme with Education Business Partnership



Town centre support

Reading Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

Partnership working with unlocking the town centre

The BID sits in a unique position to facilitate the joining up of many and varied businesses and partners to work together. Listening to and understanding the needs of local businesses the BID has been able to support numerous sector-specific projects and initiatives they can engage with. This has also worked when dealing with the many partner agencies where the BID has supported pooling of resources and networking.

Promotion and support of town centre

From March 2021 - August 2022 the BID set up and led weekly Friday morning meetings with Reading University Community colleagues; RUSU representatives; licensing, marketing and communication representatives from both Reading and Wokingham Councils. Representatives from Thames Valley Police and the Council's Town Safe Radio also attended, along with the Berkshire Public Health Hub. These weekly catch-up meetings ensured Covid messaging was standardised across the two Boroughs, the University student events and town centre Freshers and reopening plans were aligned. Covid compliance issues or concerns (whether by individuals or in venues) were reported and dealt with in a timely manner, and reopening plans and processes were made together. The result of these meetings is that there are much stronger, and more open working relations between these stakeholders.

Night-time Economy

Working with the PubWatch Committee, the BID set up monthly Reading Nighttime Economy Meetings. This is a select group of stakeholders involved in the management of the nighttime economy. The purpose of these meetings was to discuss Covid guidance, police and licensing restrictions directly with the agencies, ensuring aligned communication with all venues to ensure compliance. The meetings have since continued and help formulate plans ahead of larger events such as Freshers and major football matches.

In October there was an intensification in media reports around spiking in nightclubs. The BID engaged with the Bristol Night Tsar to learn from work they had done already around this issue. Taking a lead from their experiences, the BID formed a working group with all the late-night venues, South Central Ambulance Service, Reading Street Pastors, and the Police, including CID. The group discussed the issue, the effect on the venues, and solutions. A co-ordinated marketing campaign of posters both printed and digital screens as well as social media messaging was pulled together and shared with all venues. The BID funded the purchase of drink spiking testing kits which were handed out to all late-night venues including the University. These two initiatives assisted in bringing confidence back into customers of the nighttime venues, who are immediately offered testing capability either within the venue or the First Stop service.



Left: Reading Pubwatch won the prestigious National Pubwatch Award 2022 (for activities during 21/22).



Left: 2500 drink spiking testing kits provided to night time economy venues, including Reading University

BID highlights



Funded and supported Street Pastors and the First Stop Hub at St Marys Minster which offers a safe haven and medical treatment for visitors from 9.00pm to 3.00am each Friday and Saturday evening.



Employed two town centre security wardens, tackling shoplifting, rough sleeping, aggressive begging/ASB and welcoming visitors, as well as welcoming and directing visitors.



Day time Street Pastor patrols continue to be supported, Monday to Friday, 10.00am to 2.00pm.



The BID cardboard free recycling scheme collected and recycled over 400 tons of cardboard from shops and offices. This service is well received and continues to grow.



Close partnership working with Townsafe Radio Scheme involving over 90 businesses and RBAC (Reading Business Against Crime) and joint accreditation with National Business Crime Solutions.



Engaged and improved communications with the University.



Funded and distributed 2500 drink spiking testing kits to night time economy venues, including the University.



Installed a large vehicle mounted screen for staff and visitors to watch Wimbledon.



Funded free one-month gym membership for staff in the Abbey Quarter.



Developed and managed the DISC digital system to maximise logging and reporting of ASB and shoplifting for both the day and night time economies.



Continued development of 'Solomon' the CRM system used to facilitate accurate communications with BID businesses, with the view of state-of-the-art data for BID renewal.



Deep cleaned over 112,000 sq. metres of pedestrian areas over spring and autumn.



Supported the delivery of anti-terror seminars for the day and night time economies - a partnership with Thames Valley Police, Reading Borough Council and Reading Business Against Crime (RBAC).



Delivered two floral planting schemes over summer and autumn.



Supported numerous theatre and musical events in the Gardens, Abbey and town centre venues.



Continued development of sophisticated intelligence gathering and dissemination to keep business informed of all ongoing business retail, footfall trends, working with CoSTAR and Springboard to provide accurate intel.



Delivered a Wellbeing Conference aimed at helping organisations deal with the wellbeing of staff in particular after the effects of Covid.



Maintained CCTV operators.

Town centre events

During the first week of **July** 2021 the BID funded a large vehicle mounted screen to show the last week of Wimbledon. The screen was set up in the grassed courtyard area of Davidson House along with picket fencing and deck chairs. We worked with Carluccio's and The Roseate to build a special 'Wimbledon' menu that would allow customers to takeaway food and drink, to sit in front of the screen. When the screen was not showing the matches, a rolling series of adverts was displayed promoting local businesses. In **October** the Abbey Quarter BID funded a Wellbeing Conference held in Reading's Town Hall. The event brought together guest speakers and workshops focussing on wellbeing initiatives and staff retention, as well as sleep and nutrition experts. This was the first face to face event since lockdown and despite anxiety around larger groups the conference attracted nearly 100 people. In **November** Reading Central BID funded local theatre group, Rabble, to put on a performance in St Mary's Minster. The play focussed on an historic unsolved crime committed in Reading's Cross Street, and while ticket sales were good the play length was short-lived due to Covid infections and restrictions. **March** 2022 saw the return of Launchpad's annual Pancake Race held on Broad Street. This annual fundraising event is supported by Reading Central with a number of businesses in the BID area taking part and competing against each other. Working with the High Street Heritage Action Zone, the BID promoted workshops led by retail expert Graham Sout. The workshops were focussed on independent businesses and included talks like "Maximise Your Kerb Appeal".



At the start of the year the Abbey Quarter BID linked up with local independent gym business, Buzz Gym, funding a month's free gym membership to staff working in the BID area. This helped increase membership numbers and worked as an added incentive to encourage staff to return to the office. EAT Reading returned to Broad Street in **August** 2021. The weekend saw a full complement of food stalls, covering a wide range of cuisines. Music from local bands throughout both days kept visitors entertained and helped deliver a successful event. The delayed PubWatch Conference took place in **March** 2022, hosted by local venue Sub89, the event attracted both local and national guest speakers. Over 80 attendees from all the pubs and late night venues in the Borough heard about advances in ID technology, a national overview of the hospitality industry and the launch of the Best Bar None accreditation initiative, helping night time economy venues meet industry standards and share good practice.

Throughout **June** 2021 the Abbey Quarter BID supported Rabble Theatre's "The Last Abbot of Reading", a tale of Reading's unlikely last Abbot, Hugh Faringdon, and his devastating relationship with Henry VIII. Due to social distancing restrictions it was not possible to sell the full number of seats available, however those that were on sale were all booked and each night was full. After being shut down in 2020 the Are You Listening? music festival in association with the charity Mencap returned in **October** 2021. Supported by the BID, this event features over 60 acts playing in 7 town centre venues.



Town centre events

Council Collaboration

In collaboration with the Council's Emergency Planning team, the BID formed part of the communication and observation plan for testing the UK Government's new service of Emergency Alerts. The emergency alerts warn of danger to life nearby and was being trialled in Reading. The BID forewarned businesses so staff were aware and able to calm those in their stores if needed. The BID Wardens and team also observed the public in the town centre for their reactions and also to keep the public calm if anyone became concerned.



In collaboration with the Council's Community Safety Team, a Counter Terrorism Policing course SCaN (See, Check and Notify) was held in the Council Chambers in March 2022. This course offers

attendees information on identifying possible terrorism situations and reporting them. It also gave attendees the opportunity to hear first hand the impact of these kinds of events on places and people.

Christmas festivities

Along with the "Biscuit Town" lighting trail in Forbury Gardens, REDA and the BID continued to bring the 3 Christmas trees and the full festive lighting scheme to the town centre. Alongside this the German Food Market operated along Broad Street, adding additional market stalls to their promotional space, this added a further festive feel to the town.

Street food markets

Reading's street food markets, hosted by local company Blue Collar, have continued to expand their weekly food offering with new and existing customers every week. The markets continue to run every Wednesday and Friday between 11:30am-3pm at Market Place.

Through the Welcome Back Fund we enabled Blue Collar to enhance the look and welcome feel of the market, attracting more business. Following the success of the Wednesday and Friday markets the street food operator, Blue Collar, has secured a permanent site on the south side of Reading for a weekend and night-time food and drink venue.



Reading's Reopening Campaign

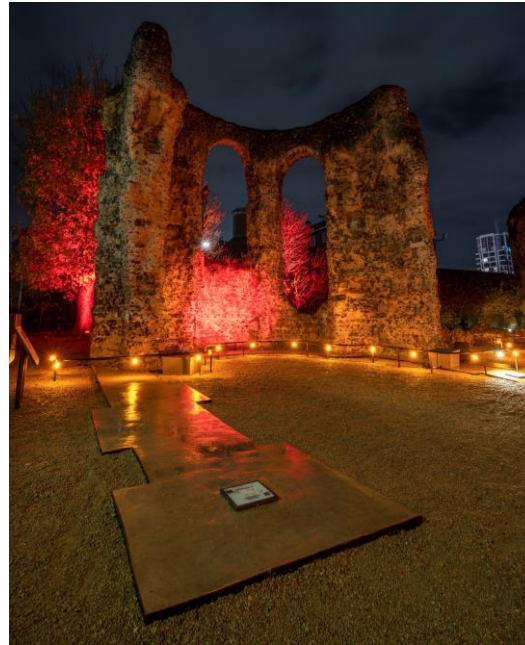
With Covid-19 restrictions beginning to ease from April 2021, REDA delivered a recovery campaign to support town centre businesses during the reopening. The campaign's purpose was to raise awareness of things to do in Reading from the date restrictions eased, highlighting the breadth of activities in Reading and driving footfall. Content included:

- A short video
- Series of blogs
- Organic social media
- Paid social media in partnership with Berkshire Live
- Dedicated landing pages
- Lamppost banners on Broad Street
- Screen advertising at Reading Station
- Resident e-newsletters via Reading Borough Council

The campaign ran between April – July, to align with the government roadmap of reopening. During the campaign period, the content generated over ¼ of all website views, with a local direct reach of over 90k through the Council's resident newsletter and over 132k impressions through paid social activity with Berkshire Live, with an average engagement rate of 0.65%.

Christmas Campaign: Reading's Twilight Trail Returns

The 2021 *Christmas in Reading* marketing campaign was designed to support the town's economy by driving awareness of Christmas activity and events, as well as welcoming people back to the town and encouraging visitors, footfall and spend in Reading town centre.



The headline event was the Twilight Trail, which returned for its second year, this time with a Biscuit Town theme which linked to Reading's biscuit heritage.

The lighting installations included a brand-new *Son et Lumiere The Packing Plant* in the Abbey Ruins, a recreation of a board game featured on a 1950s biscuit tin, an interactive *Lion's Roar* and a shimmering photo frame entirely constructed from rolling pins. Leading light trail producer, Luminism, worked alongside playwright Helen Eastman and artists from Reading and beyond to create a mouth-watering, wintery wonderland, along with two specially commissioned songs celebrating Reading's history as Biscuit Town, recorded by children from six local schools.

Results included

- 63k web sessions
- 3 press releases issued
- 23 pieces of media coverage generated
- Radio advert in partnership with GWR, generating an estimated 1.1 million impacts and 383 spots played
- Google AdWords campaign generating over 160k impressions and 6.6k link clicks
- Round and About print advertising, reaching 81.5k local homes
- Email comms with Reading Arts, Tourism South East, Arts Tickets, City Vision News, BID and Reading Borough Council's residents newsletter – total reach of 140k+

Despite the positive marketing reach and awareness metrics, the Twilight Trail ticket sales reached a total of 12,590, generating a total revenue of £112.9k. Greater competition locally, the rise of the Omicron variant and booking trends were all factors in reducing sales, which remained the same as 2020 despite being open for an additional 2 weeks.

12k+
tickets
sold

Twilight Trail 2021



Strength of Reading



Development in numbers

OFFICES

75 office leases signed in Greater Reading financial year 2021/22

- Almost 318,000 sq ft of space leased
- Av deal 4200 sq ft
- Leases across 58 buildings
- Largest deals- Amazon, EY, Rapid 7, Evertz, BMC Software, Stage 50.

RETAIL

- 45 leases signed
- 91,000 sq ft across 40 buildings
- B&M, Bensons for Beds, Foundation Flooring, Coconut Tree, Tesco

INDUSTRIAL/LOGISTICS

- 71 lease deals
- 877,000 sq ft

Big leases over the last financial year include: UPS, Stage 50, Market Yard

A refreshed narrative for Reading

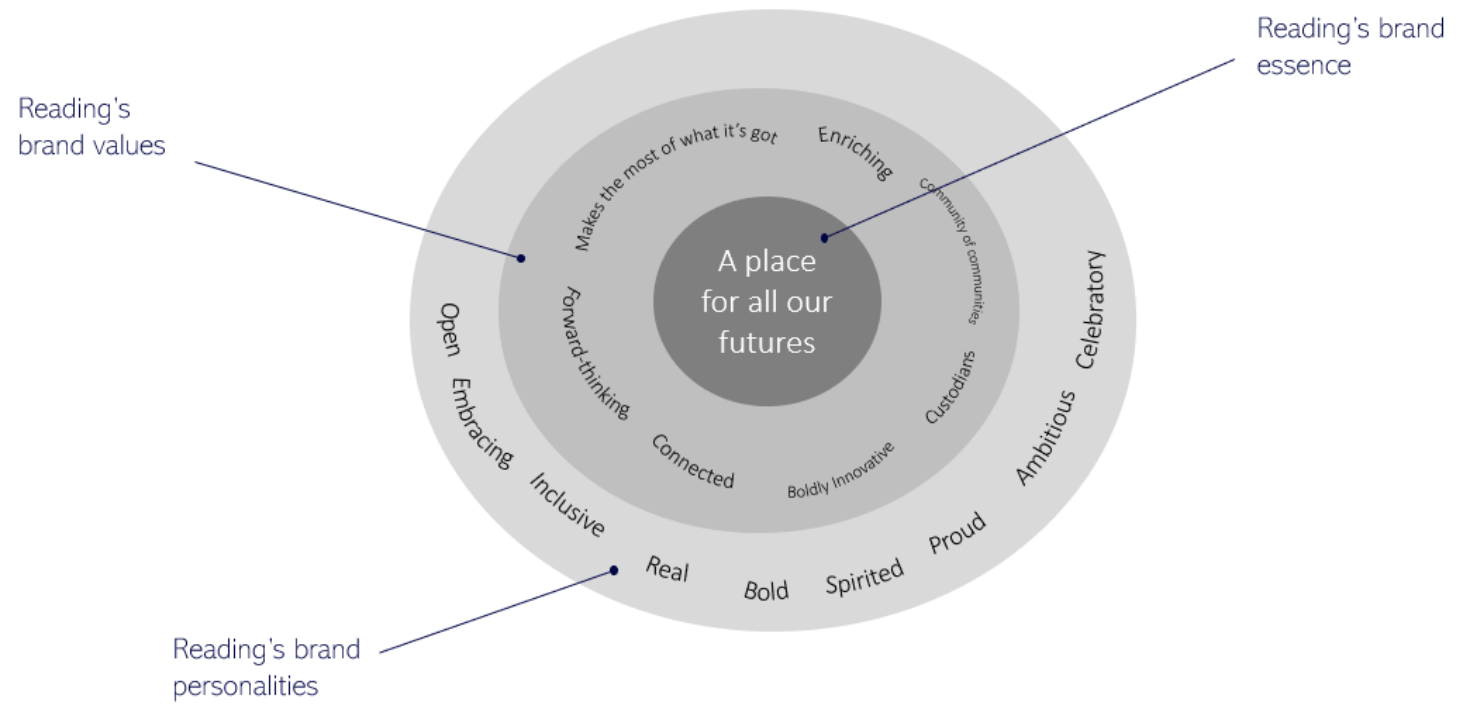


Creating a new place story for Reading

To help drive a more consistent story for Reading, REDA instigated a partnership with Reading Borough Council and the University of Reading to develop a new place narrative and place brand for the town.

The project kicked off in April 2021, with place marketing specialists, thinkingplace, commissioned in July. The initial phase of the project involved in depth research using a variety of methodologies including 37 one-to-one interviews, 3 workshops, 5 focus groups and an online survey which received 1692 responses from local people and businesses.

The research and narrative were presented back to the stakeholders in October, with the University of Reading's creative department supporting with the development of a brand framework and visual identity to help bring the brand to life. Work continues into 2022/23 with the launch of a toolkit and communications network to help deliver the new brand into the community and more widely.



The Reading place brand framework, developed as a joint partnership by Reading UK, The University of Reading and Reading Borough Council.

The Reading Welcome

The Reading Welcome

Reading Tourism Group

Regular online meetings through the pandemic has offered support to local hospitality and tourism organisations, with 20-30 businesses engaged from hotels, attractions, tour guides and the local authority. REDA provides Secretariat and Chair, and collectively the group provides a networking and sharing forum, as well as an opportunity to work together on behalf of the destination. The network has been critical in coordinating local tourism activity, such as delivering a programme of activity to celebrate 200 years of Huntley and Palmers biscuits, creating content for the new visit-reading destination website.



Visit-Reading.com launches

A new destination website for Reading was launched in spring 2022 by REDA. Replacing livingreading.co.uk, the site is the one-stop shop for anyone visiting Reading. Developed with destination website specialist Simpleview, visit-reading.com provides the best listings for things to do/places to stay/food and drink and shopping in Reading as well as itineraries and a series of top 10 themed suggestions. A sister site to whatsonreading.com, Reading now has the visitor experience covered. A business site on the same platform is due to launch later in 2022.

+10%

increase in traffic since
launching Visit-
Reading.com

*Compared with previous year
web traffic stats*



Tourism and hospitality support

Throughout the pandemic, REDA has continued to support the tourism and hospitality sector with proactive and reactive campaigns designed to raise the profile of Reading. Activity has included:

- Co-ordinating Reading Biscuit Town programme and promotion
- Excursions 2022 – organised Reading stand with Reading Museum/MERL and Thames River Cruise to target group market
- Launch and management of Welcome to Reading volunteer Ambassadors at Reading Station in July 2021. Volunteer recruitment, mobile information unit creation, uniforms, training, tourist information, rota management.
- Develop international pilgrim partnership with A Coruna in Galicia (north west Spain) to position Reading as part of the international Camino de Santiago through its own pilgrim heritage - published Reading for Modern Pilgrims map guide, working in partnership with Confraternity of St James to waymark and establish the St James Way (starting in Reading)- long distance walking path, visit to Galicia to present Reading's credentials, develop learning from Spain's success and develop contacts with other UK & Ireland pilgrimage destinations, produced a St James Way film and hosted and co-ordinated political visit from A Coruna in conjunction with Reading Borough Council.



- Develop domestic tourism partnership with GWR - access £5000 match funding for Christmas in Reading campaign
- Heritage Open Days 2021 - co-ordinated Reading's 35 events in September 2021 with PR, print, social media and more to raise awareness of Reading's heritage offer
- Re-opening support for Reading tourism businesses
- Achieved 40 free tourism business listings and new Reading destination page on visitsoutheastengland.com
- Social media campaign around re-opening in summer 2021
- Abbey 900 - 2 influencer press trips to Reading in summer 2021 linked to Abbey 900th / Abbey 900 anniversary support through REDA tourism partners - Great West Way, Tourism South East, Visit Thames, Visit Britain.
- Joined Advisory Board of Great West Way.
- REDA accepted as fully fledged DMO (Destination Management Organisation) and part of Visit Britain tourism structure
- Bought into Tourism South East #lovesoutheastengland digital re-opening campaign – social media. newsletters

Annual Report

2021-22

www.redauk.org.uk



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Reading's Economy & Destination Agency

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