

# REDA Board Away Day April 30<sup>th</sup> 2025: Summary of workshop discussions

## Workshop Group 1

**Q1: What will the world and UK look like in 2035? What aspects of global change may have affected London and the Southeast and Reading specifically if anything AI Integration and Impact on Jobs:?**

1. **Industries Affected:**
  - Sectors such as engineering, finance, technology, food systems, retail, and manufacturing will experience significant transformations due to AI integration. Job roles may evolve, with an increased focus on tech-savvy skills and the potential for automation to alter traditional job functions.
2. **Uncertainty as a Constant:**
  - The rapidly changing landscape brings uncertainty, emphasizing the necessity for adaptive strategies. How organizations and communities respond to disruptions will shape future outcomes and resilience.
3. **Climate Change Response:**
  - An increasing emphasis on addressing climate change will necessitate innovative technologies and policies that promote sustainability and resilience in various sectors.
4. **Aging Population Dynamics:**
  - The effects of an aging population will drive shifts in workforce demographics, prompting a need for more intergenerational collaboration. Younger generations may face challenges reconciling different values and expectations regarding work and lifestyle.
5. **Work Patterns and Cultural Shifts:**
  - Changing work patterns, including remote working and labour mobility, will influence productivity and organizational culture. Companies will need to adapt to flexible labour markets and diverse working preferences.
6. **Costs of Employment in London and the Southeast:**
  - Rising costs associated with recruitment and retention in London and the Southeast could lead to a competitive disadvantage for businesses. There is a need to assess whether the high costs are hampering growth and whether alternative locations like Reading can attract talent effectively.
7. **Challenges of New Commercial Developments:**
  - A hindrance to new commercial and office developments in Reading is attributed to high costs associated with building. It's essential to explore how these challenges can be mitigated to foster growth and attract businesses.
8. **Attracting Top-Tier Companies:**
  - To ensure Reading becomes a competitive hub, there is a pressing need to attract “best in class” companies through targeted strategies that showcase local strengths and assets.
9. **Education and Workforce Development:**
  - Promoting high-quality education and ensuring that this is well advertised are critical. The community should strive to create educational pathways that lead to high-demand skills and future career opportunities.
10. **Transportation Infrastructure:**
  - Recognizing the strategic importance of transportation in Reading and the broader Southeast is vital. Improved connectivity can support economic growth and accessibility across the region.
11. **Geopolitical Influences:**
  - Political dynamics and geopolitical factors will continue to impact local economies, necessitating strategies that promote self-containment and enhance skills development to close existing gaps.
12. **Housing Market Evolution:**
  - Social and cultural shifts will influence home ownership models, requiring adaptations in housing policy to reflect changing demographics and preferences.
13. **Emergence of a Two-Tier Economy:**
  - There may be growing disparities in economic opportunities, warranting interventions that reduce inequalities and create inclusive growth strategies.

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**Q2: What must we do to maintain and enhance Reading's lead in software; professional services; advanced engineering; life sciences; and film production? Ensuring the Greater Reading area maintains its leading position as a resilient growth economy. What are our strengths and weaknesses in attracting companies in these sectors?**

1. **Strengths of Reading:**
  - Reading possesses substantial assets and potential for growth, including a vibrant community and advantageous location.
2. **Focus on Climate and Energy:**
  - Capitalizing on opportunities in climate and energy sectors is critical for fostering innovation and attracting investment.
3. **Political Leadership:**
  - Effective political leadership at all levels is necessary to drive initiatives that support sector specific growth and address community needs.
4. **Inward Investment Strategy:**
  - Developing an inward investment strategy will be essential for attracting businesses, particularly in identified key growth sectors. This strategy should emphasize Reading's unique advantages.
5. **Key Growth Sectors:**
  - **Defence:** Potential for increased government spending in this area.
  - **Diversity and Young People:** Engaging diverse sectors and empowering youth is essential for long-term sustainability.
  - **Effective Advertising:** How Reading is promoted to potential investors and businesses will influence its attractiveness.

### Strengths and Weaknesses

1. **Strengths:**
  - **University of Reading:** A key educational institution that can drive research and innovation.
  - **Talent Pool:** Availability of a skilled workforce.
  - **Accessibility:** Strong transport links that enhance connectivity.
  - **Reading as a Hub:** The city's strategic importance as a central hub within the Thames Valley.
2. **Weaknesses:**
  - **Planning Constraints:** Regulatory challenges may hamper development and growth in the town centre.
  - **Advanced Manufacturing Limitations:** While there are strengths, there are also weaknesses that need addressing.
  - **Power and Energy Issues:** Energy constraints could impact future developments.
  - **Diversity Gaps:** Identifying and addressing areas where diversity can be improved

In conclusion, navigating the changes anticipated by 2035 requires a collaborative approach that leverages Reading's strengths while addressing its weaknesses. By embracing innovative solutions and focusing on education, infrastructure, and community development, Reading can position itself as a dynamic leader in the evolving economic landscape.

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## Workshop 2

### Q3) How can Reading attract and develop new technologies and industries?

1. **Potential to become a hub for innovation**, particularly in sectors such as AI, life sciences, and climate technology. The establishment of anchor institutions is crucial for fostering this growth. By concentrating expertise and resources in fields like climate science, Reading could replicate the successful model seen in Oklahoma City, where a cluster of climate specialists attracted data-driven industries, particularly in insurance risk analysis.
2. **Strengths in climate sciences at the University** can create a unique ecosystem, making it the world leader in this area. This concentration of knowledge can attract businesses seeking specialized data and insights, resulting in the growth of associated industries.
3. **The biobank for natural history** could engage various industries, particularly in biotechnology and pharmaceuticals. However, to leverage these resources effectively, it is essential to engage with industry stakeholders and ensure that their needs align with the capabilities of Reading's institutions.
4. **Making funding available**. While Reading may not dominate in quantum computing or leading-edge life sciences research, it can still foster startups in technology through vital support mechanisms. Given that startups typically have limited resources, subsidized support is necessary, such as providing affordable laboratory facilities, hot desking options, and flexible workspace arrangements. This approach can facilitate collaboration and innovation among emerging companies.
5. **Provide suitable real estate**. To accommodate growing businesses, continuous development of high-quality office spaces is vital, as secondary standard offices are losing demand. Modern, versatile workspaces that promote collaboration will be essential for attracting talent and businesses.
6. **Address concerns about infrastructure and quality of life in Reading**. As the workforce grows, it is important to enhance living conditions, from cleaner streets and better restaurants to the availability of amenities in the town centre. Meeting these needs will not only attract skilled professionals but also improve the overall quality of life in Reading, making it a desirable location for new industries.

### Q4) How do we prepare the workforce for AI and emerging technologies?

1. **Harness the benefits of AI and other emerging technologies**, it is crucial to educate the workforce on their uses and advantages, focusing particularly on improving efficiency. However, education should not only be about mastering tools but also involve developing critical thinking skills. As AI relies on open-source information, establishing data quality assurance mechanisms is vital. This includes implementing specific standards and checks, overseen by nominated individuals, to ensure the integrity of the data used.
2. **The main application of AI will be to enhance productivity**, necessitating significant upskilling, especially for older workforce members who may struggle with new technologies. Upskilling initiatives should be designed to facilitate a smooth transition into these technologies, ensuring that employees can effectively leverage AI in their work.
3. **Adopt a proactive approach to reskilling as the job landscape evolves**. As new industries and activities emerge due to AI advancements, the workforce must continuously adapt and be ready to learn new applications..

By addressing these expectations, Reading can build a resilient economic development framework that fosters innovation, attracts businesses, and prepares its workforce for future challenges.

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## Workshop 3

### Q5 How can we work together to lift those in disadvantaged groups out of poverty?

To effectively lift disadvantaged communities out of poverty, a multi-faceted approach is essential. The group identified several key strategies:

1. **Targeted Resource Allocation:** If resources were available, prioritizing spending on the least performing schools would help support young people. Focusing on practical career advice, local company engagement, work experience pathways, apprenticeships, and mentoring can provide essential guidance for students. A significant emphasis should be placed on students aged 16-18, especially those at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training).
2. **Parental and Community Involvement:** Addressing the lack of parental support and role models is critical. Programs aimed at involving parents in their children's education can foster a positive environment, reinforcing the importance of schooling and career opportunities. Additionally, community initiatives that highlight local role models can inspire both young people and adults facing challenges.
3. **Support for Older Individuals:** A people-focused approach that addresses the specific barriers faced by adults aged 25 and over is necessary. This strategy should involve understanding the circumstances of individuals in areas like South Reading, including their connections to the town centre where job opportunities and support services are concentrated.
4. **Devolving Government Programs:** With the government's devolution of the Connect to Work program to local authorities and partners, it is critical to align these plans with a practical framework action plan that addresses local community needs. This is an opportunity to tailor services effectively.
5. **Collaboration with Employers:** Building strong relationships with employers is crucial for bridging the gap between education and employment. Understanding what employers need and facilitating their outreach to young people can create mentorship opportunities, work experience placements, and apprenticeships. Highlighting successful businesses as role models can serve to inspire others to engage similarly.
6. **Community and Business Engagement:** Encouraging local businesses to support schools and provide local recruitment opportunities can strengthen ties within the community. Collaborative initiatives, such as job shadowing and exposure to various career paths (as demonstrated by organizations like EGNYTE and Blake Morgan), can help demystify various professions and their entry points for young people.
7. **Lifestyle Improvements:** To prevent Reading from becoming merely a dormitory town, it is essential to enhance the overall quality of life. Vibrant public spaces, cultural amenities, and community events can make Reading a desirable place to live and work. Fostering a strong sense of pride among residents can improve local motivation and involvement.

### Q6 How can we achieve lasting regeneration in the under-performing parts of Reading?

To achieve sustainable regeneration in the underperforming areas of Reading, the following strategies should be implemented:

1. **Comprehensive Community Understanding:** A detailed understanding of the socio-economic conditions in underperforming areas like South Reading is crucial. This includes identifying the key challenges faced by residents and the existing resources that can be tapped into. Engaging residents in discussions about their needs and aspirations will help guide effective interventions.
2. **Education and Career Support:** As previously mentioned, enhancing educational outcomes and career readiness among young people is vital for long-term community regeneration. This can be accomplished through strong collaborations with local schools, businesses, and community organizations. Implementing mentoring programs that connect students with professionals in various fields can help broaden their horizons.
3. **Integrated Support Services:** To tackle the individual barriers faced by community members, integrating support services—such as mental health resources, housing assistance, and job training programs—will

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provide a holistic approach to regeneration. This ensures that people receive the comprehensive support necessary to thrive.

4. **Employability and Skills Development Programs:** Specific training initiatives tailored to the needs of the local labour market can equip residents with the skills required for available jobs. Collaboration with employers to develop courses or workshops can ensure that the skills being taught align with industry demands.
5. **Infrastructure and Accessibility Improvements:** Enhancing transportation and connectivity between underperforming areas and the town centre can improve access to job opportunities and services. Investments in public transport, walkable neighbourhoods, and safe public spaces can foster a more inclusive environment.
6. **Fostering Community Pride:** Initiatives aimed at enhancing the visual appeal and functionality of underperforming neighbourhoods can create a sense of pride among residents. Community-led beautification projects, arts events, and festivals can engage local residents and encourage ownership of their spaces.

By implementing these strategies, Reading can create lasting change in disadvantaged communities, fostering upliftment and regeneration that helps residents break free from the cycle of poverty.

### Response from all three workshop groups

#### Q7 What are your expectations from the Economic Development Framework?

1. **Workable Framework Implementation:** The regeneration framework needs to be realistic, deliverable, and innovative. Regular evaluations and adaptations based on community feedback will ensure that the framework remains relevant and continues to address the evolving needs of the community effectively.
2. **Benchmarking and Data:** Establish clear metrics for benchmarking progress, utilizing data and projections to inform decision-making.
3. **Impact-Focused Approaches:** Strategies should be designed with a focus on measurable impact to ensure effectiveness.
4. **Attractiveness for Inward Investment:** Continuous evaluation of factors that improve the attractiveness of Reading for potential investors and businesses will be essential for future growth and regeneration.
5. **Inclusivity and Accessibility:** Efforts should be made to support individuals who may miss out on opportunities by providing access to education and training. This can significantly enhance workforce capabilities.
6. **Business Attraction Toolkit:** Developing a robust toolkit to position Reading favourably against rival locations is crucial. This may include improving marketing processes, enhancing client relationships, and facilitating product development.
7. **Monitoring and Adaptation:** Continuous assessment of Reading's rankings in comparison to other locations is essential. By understanding what competitors do well and evaluating the local industry's strengths, Reading can capitalize on its successes and replicate effective strategies as appropriate.
8. **Strategic Focus:** It is vital to define Reading's unique strengths and build pathways to success. Given the volatile global landscape, a discerning approach should be adopted to identify which industries to pursue and which areas to avoid, ensuring sustainable growth without overextending resources.