

REDA Annual Report

2022-23



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
REDA

During two years of Covid restrictions, our work had been focused on helping challenged Reading businesses: providing necessary financial and skills support as well as reopening our high street. 2022 saw a welcome return to 'business as usual'.

Covid interruptions had also allowed us to take stock as an organisation. After 15 years as Reading UK, 2022 saw a complete organisational rebrand, clarifying our roles and responsibilities, simplifying our positioning and launching our new identity as REDA: Reading's Economy & Destination Agency. Since launch, our new corporate brand has been warmly received and adopted by our partners and business community. This was further enhanced by the launch of a new business facing website in July. One of our primary roles (indeed, most often asked for when I speak to people) is to [raise the profile of Reading](#) outside the town. The team has collectively focussed on delivering this through a number of key activities and outputs. From a refreshed place brand identity (in partnership with the University of Reading and Reading Borough Council), created to deliver a unique narrative and visual identity for our town, to a new destination website, as well as a 'Biscuit Town' themed year and a newly signposted St. James Way pilgrimage

route from Reading to Southampton and on to Galicia in Spain. As a result, REDA gained exposure in national media and exhibitions for visitor tourism.

The year has also seen a focus on research and development of key new areas of [support to the local economy](#), commissioning new research in sector skills which will underpin our strategic focus and economic development priorities over the coming years. In partnership with the Council, we also secured significant funding to support action plans emerging from our research and providing much needed support services for skills, start-ups and careers guidance in Reading.

[Reading Business Improvement Districts \(BIDs\)](#) - Central and Abbey - are central pillars of our work. The team encouraged much-needed business and leisure visitors back into Reading during the year and have since continued to provide vital support to Reading's town centre

businesses, securing the coveted Purple Flag accreditation for Reading's safe and vibrant night-time economy, as well as providing ongoing services, sustainability initiatives and town centre events. The team has been working with the Board and Council on a plan to tackle public realm and anti-social behaviour issues, as well as preparing for the BID Renewal which will run into next year, with the final vote taking place in February 2024.

Continuing the town centre theme, REDA's Chief Executive has personally taken a keen interest in the issues surrounding the sale of Reading Gaol, raised by the business community and Board. This has since become another priority for REDA: leading a strategic approach to tackling the issue with the Council and other key partners in the arts and heritage community. As we progress, REDA will continue support this cause through a partnership campaign aimed at challenging the MoJ, spurring action, and after 10 years

of inactivity, finally seeing the area developed for our benefits.

I am delighted to have welcomed several [new board members](#) to REDA throughout the year, strengthening our executive team by bolstering gaps in our sector coverage and with key skills. I'm also grateful for the support of those who have stepped down over the year and look forward to working alongside our Board as we help oversee and steer REDA's updated priorities and governance into next year.

I am extremely grateful to the Chief Executive and his team for their hard work and tenacity over the past year - their work is exceptional. I look forward to working with REDA throughout 2023-24 as we progress these important priorities for Reading, hopefully securing a further five-year term for Reading BID. My thanks also go to my fellow REDA Board members, for their continued dedication in supporting and steering the team, ultimately helping to shape a better Reading for us all.

Corporate Update

In its 15th year of operation, Reading UK rebranded as REDA: Reading's Economy and Destination Agency, to deliver a clearer message around the work we do, and the wider benefit for Reading.

During this time, we also revisited the Reading place brand, launching a refreshed external-facing identity for the town, with the essence: *a place for all our futures*. Unfortunately, despite this and the backing we gave, the Council were unable to persuade Government to appoint us with the coveted City Status recognition, which many believe we already have and deserve.

The new Reading brand was first deployed in our annual Christmas campaign. This year's campaign focused on the message, *'However You Christmas'*, showcasing the inclusivity of Reading and its community value. The campaign saw a 112% increase in web pageviews, over half a million social media impressions, 1.5m displays on Reading Station screen and nearly one million through advertising on Reading Buses and nearby railway stations. The installation of a new Christmas tree above the Swiss Chalet on Broad Street also proved a successful addition to the high street offer, providing an opportunity for 'selfies' and a fantastic backdrop during our annual light switch on.

Town centre services and BID Renewal has been a priority for the team, who have been busy preparing for the BID Ballot vote and addressing the concerns of the Board, the BID Committee and guests at our

annual dinner in April 2022. The BID Renewal action plan has been drafted ahead of the campaign, alongside a marketing plan and a series of mitigation measures to ensure we achieve a majority YES vote,

such as:

- British BIDs, BID Renewal 'Buddy' Service to ensure we get every step correct
- A new footfall counting service, providing full town centre coverage day and night
- A review and plan to tackle empty shop units
- An 18-point action plan tackling specific public realm and ASB issues

In our sector skills work we have undertaken two pieces of evidence gathering on:

- Green skills: a working definition and the job and skill opportunities for local people in Reading's local economy, working with key business sector skills organisations (ECITB and CITB), businesses, the Activate Learning FE college and adult education service.
- Film and screen skills: charting the unique structural make-up of the sector, the plans for Shinfield Studios and identifying job opportunities, skills and supply chain needs, including the demand for self-employed labour and micro business services. Strategic partnerships have been established with the industry; the University, Activate Learning Reading FE College, Reading

Borough Council, New Directions Adult Education service, Berkshire LEP and neighbouring Wokingham Council.

This work will underpin our success in securing a further £236k employment and skills plan funding and Shared Prosperity Funding, to deliver out in the next two years. This will include support for business start-ups and careers work in our schools, job opportunity signposting, and new skills training provision - especially targeted at communities in South Reading. The sectors will also feature in our future inward investment and relocation aspirations for the town.

Destination Reading has also embraced the new Reading place brand, both for visitor and business tourism. This year we have:

- Bounced back from Covid, promoting Reading as a visitor destination on our new Visit Reading website and What's On Reading events listing site. We themed our campaign as 'Biscuit Town', launched the newly signposted St. James Way pilgrimage trail from Reading to the South Coast, had a range of travel writer visits and write ups and exhibited at a number of national exhibitions.
- Established our business visitor credentials, with a new 'Meet Reading' section of our website, covering all our key meetings, exhibitions and conferencing venues, as well as visibility on London sites to promote facilities outside the capital.

REDA Priorities

Looking ahead to 2023-24, we will prioritise:

- Improving the quality of our current BID services, seeking the backing of business for a further five-year-term
- Delivery of our 'green' and 'film screen' sector skills plans through strategic alliances and delivery of funded programmes secured this year
- Campaigning around the Gaol, inward investment, Visit Reading (leisure and business) and sustainability
- Supporting our local business network and encouraging a culture of enterprise, self-employment, and business start-ups more widely within local communities
- Embedding the 2050 Vision in all our work and reviewing it five years on, alongside the Reading Local Plan interim review
- Continually improving the organisation's governance and representation, ensuring it retains a viable and sustainable financial position



“

During the 2022-23 year, the REDA team has worked exceptionally hard to shake off the last years of COVID and return to full operation to support the local economy and local businesses. The team has continued its focus and commitment in delivering our corporate business plan to help shape a better Reading.

I am particularly proud of the Strategic Marketing activity that has gone in to relaunching us with a new REDA corporate brand and identity for the next 15 years. Also the extensive engagement and partnership working to provide us with a vibrant, lively new Reading place brand which we will promise to cherish and use wisely to promote the Reading as a 'Place for all our Futures' as we seek to full fill the Reading 2050 Vision to become a Smart and Sustainable City

Nigel Horton-Baker
Chief Executive, REDA

REDA Team changes

This year we have said goodbye to our BID Manager, Bobby Lonergan, after nine years of service to the team and Reading BID. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Bobby for all his work and dedication to Reading's two Business Improvement Districts and wish him well in his retirement.

Following Bobby's departure, we are delighted to announce that Alexa Volker, previously Head of BID Operations, was promoted to the position of BID Manager in April 2022. Throughout her first year, Alexa has made significant progress, securing the coveted Purple Flag night-time accreditation, installing new reed beds in our canals, launching an improved footfall platform, delivering two new town centre events, tackling public realm and ASB issues, as well as planning for the BID Renewal 2024-29.

We also welcome Alice Rampling to the team, taking the position of Head of Operations for Reading BID. Alice has made significant inroads since joining us in September, supporting Alexa to deliver the BID plans and championing business engagement, wellbeing initiatives and training for BID Businesses.



Sue Brackley,
Economic Development
Manager



Alexa Volker,
BID Manager



Victoria Patyra,
Head of Marketing



Alice Rampling,
Head of Ops



Carol Gardiner,
Commercial Executive



Alex Brannen
Comms Manager

Introducing REDA, our new brand identity

A new future for Reading UK

A review of the Reading UK corporate brand in 2021 showed that stakeholders were not fully clear on the organisation's offer, with confusion around both the name 'Reading UK' and the synonymity with the place identity of Reading, as well as 45% of respondents feeling that the brand identity didn't accurately reflect the organisation.

This research led to a corporate brand review in 2021-22, to understand how stakeholders, partners and customers viewed the organisation and, in 2022, a new brand identity was launched for the company.

Welcoming the REDA team, Board and key stakeholders to a launch event at Reading's Malmaison in July, the new name of *REDA: Reading's Economy & Destination Agency* was introduced, alongside a new visual look and feel, brand guidelines, and a clearer story for the organisation. The brand has since been endorsed by partners and wider business community, and has gained traction both through attending a number of industry events and the launch of our new business website, developed to better showcase REDA's business services, economic development and inward investment offer, including Reading BID's services and core priorities.



REDA launch event, July 2022

REDA Board

2022-23

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 Sam Foley (University of Reading) moving on and Lee Gwilliam (Marsh Commercial), Dominik Zaum (University of Reading), Alex Aitchison (Lincoln Property Company) and Stan Hansen (Egnyte) joining the team.

Paul Newman (Activate Learning) is also moving on but has temporarily continued to cover his Board role while a replacement is secured.

David Pinder (GWR) remains on secondment in Birmingham, and we look forward to welcoming him back to the REDA Board as we move into the new financial year.



Adam Jacobs (Chair)
Jacobs the Jewellers



Jason Brock (Vice Chair)
Reading Borough Council



Nigel Horton-Baker
REDA



Kim Cohen
Barton Willmore
(now Stantec)



John McLaughlin
Hilton Hotels



Lee Gwilliam
Marsh Commercial



Dominik Zaum
University of Reading



Caroline McHardy
Berkeley Homes



Steve Connolly
Broad Street Mall



Rory Carson
Green Park (Mapletree)



Andy Briggs
The Oracle



Alex Aitchison
Lincoln Property Company



Aaron Pope
M&G



Tim Kilpatrick
Reading Football Club



Frances Martin
Reading Borough Council



Stan Hansen
Egnyte



Becky Holland
BH&P



Scott Witchalls
Stantec



David Pinder
Great Western Railway



Paul Newman
Activate Learning

Strategic Leadership

Strategic leadership

Reading Gaol and its future became a core focus of our work programme this year, following a debate at our annual business dinner in April 2022 where the business community expressed concerns at the lack of any progress on Gaol sale, and benefits to Reading for nearly 10 years. In response, REDA has worked on a strategic approach to tackling the issue, alongside the Council and key partners in the arts and heritage community. We have also made our views known to the Prison Minister through our local MPs, Alok Sharma and Matt Rodda, and will continue to campaign as we move into 2023-24.

Strategic alliances have also continued with Reading Borough Council, the Reading Climate Change Partnership and Ethical Reading, in particular supporting Reading Climate Festival and The Green Business Conference with our work on green audits.

Through our work on the updated Reading place brand, REDA worked alongside Marketing and Communications leads and Reading Borough Council and the University of Reading, to deliver an authentic brand that represented the wider place and community. An extended group of Marketing and Communications professionals, representing key Reading businesses, was also formed to help test and deliver the brand at the launch event in October.

“As Reading's Economy & Destination Agency (REDA), we offer our full support and applaud this (gaol) campaign... we're also trying to find a way to unlock the gaol for Reading, working with a range of committed partners including the *Save the Gaol* community.

Reading Business Network is becoming an important network for collecting vital intelligence on the local small business community and for dissemination of economic developments in the town and opportunities for those businesses to grow.

As a company, REDA has undergone a governance review during the year to ensure we better reflect the key sectors in the economy and the skills required on the Board. As a result, we have initiated several additional working groups with Board members acting as champions, so that we can more efficiently deliver our business plan and core priorities moving forward.



Promoting the place of Reading

Marketing Reading

A new destination platform for Reading

In April, REDA launched a new destination website for Reading, visit-reading.com. The site was built by Simpleview, the most successful destination web platform in the UK. Over 700 business listings were created with the option for Extranet access plus dynamic content for things to do, where to stay, shopping, eating out, as well as the night-time economy, itineraries, what's on and practical information.

22k

page impressions for
Reading business listings

2022-23, Visit-Reading.com

The site was the first iteration of the new place brand. A set of 4m high place-branded banners promoting the site have been hung in Broad Street since summer 2022.

REDA identified 2022 as the 200th anniversary of Huntley & Palmers biscuits, one of the renowned 3Bs in Reading history. We coordinated an anniversary programme which included a special

exhibition at MERL, 20 biscuit guided walks, an exhibition at Blake's Lock, promotion of the H&P Gallery at Reading Museum and a special afternoon tea at the Roseate Reading. Working with MERL, a Biscuit Town 200 branded campaign ran from May to September with a launch attended by 100 people at MERL including members of the Palmer family, biscuit giveaways at Reading station in partnership with GWR and media coverage in publications such as *The Oldie*.

Promoting Reading to the group travel market

REDA has continued to promote Reading to the group market, attending the Group Leisure and Travel Show (Oct 2023) and Excursions travel show (Jan 2023). Follow up familiarisation visits have taken place, generating a number of new contacts.

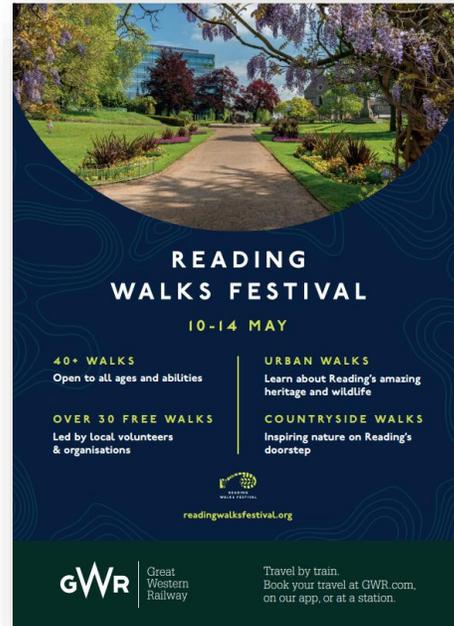


Excursions Travel Show, Jan 2023

Tourism & Hospitality Support

St James Way

REDA's promotion of the St James Way continued in 2022-23. Supporting the work of the CSJ, who waymarked all 68 miles of the route in 2022, REDA has been promoting Reading as the start of a modern pilgrimage route. We coordinated all the tourism bodies along the route from Reading to Southampton to promote a seamless experience. Walker numbers have grown steadily with Reading Museum receiving daily visits to get the 'Pilgrim Passport' stamped. There has been coverage in the Guardian and visits (awaiting publication) from the Telegraph and BBC Travel.



Reading's inaugural Walks Festival

Building on the post pandemic interest in more outdoor leisure and especially the growing number of walks being organised in Reading, REDA has been planning the first Reading Walks Festival (to take place in May 2023). Working in partnership with lots of local organisations, a programme of 42 walks has been created with strong bookings and media interest in advance of the festival.



Throughout 2022-23, REDA has continued to chair the Reading Tourism Group, a forum for Reading businesses involved in tourism to come together regularly to share intelligence and plan joint working.

REDA has continued to represent Reading as part of the Great West Way (GWW), with activities ranging from a Reading takeover of the GWW Instagram account to a day-long trade show and hosting travel trade on a Reading fam trip.

REDA coordinated the annual Reading involvement in Heritage Open Days, producing a brochure and managing PR to promote the 32 local events that took place in September.

We continue to manage a team of volunteer Welcome Ambassadors, who greet and assist visitors at Reading Station. In July, we celebrated

the first anniversary of the project, which continues to provide an excellent welcome to Reading for visitors.

Business Tourism for Reading

A new strand of tourism work commenced in summer 2022. Responding to industry feedback, REDA began work to support business tourism (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions). REDA commissioned a report to analyse Reading's position in the market and to identify steps the sector could take together. Following a kick-off meeting, a new Meet Reading website has been developed, a venues listing leaflet created, attendance at the PA Life show in October and content and listings as part of the Meet Beyond London consortium of destinations and venues.



Reading Tourism Network

However you Christmas

The 2022 Christmas in Reading marketing campaign was the first opportunity for us to deploy the new Reading place identity. Designed to support the town's economy by driving awareness of Christmas activity and events in Reading town centre, the messaging was broad and wide-reaching, allowing us to showcase the retail and hospitality offer in Reading and in turn encouraging visitors, footfall and spend into the town centre over the festive season.

137%

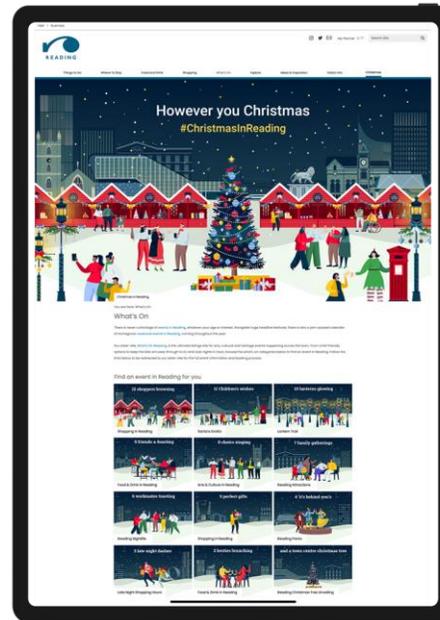
increase in website users
during Christmas Campaign

Visit-Reading.com

The However you Christmas campaign featured a range of illustrative scenes, each telling stories of the many ways the festive season can be celebrated and enjoyed within the place of Reading. Using illustrations also allowed us to bring to life real elements of Reading, such as notable places and recognisable assets to add a sense of distinctiveness and authenticity to the campaign.

The multi-channel activity spanned across digital, out of home advertising and PR/content activity, helping us to target a broad audience demographic. Results included:

- 137% increase in website users
- 112% increase in page views
- Google Ads campaign with average 14% click through rate
- Over 500,000 social media impressions
- 2.9 million estimated impacts through out of home advertising



Attracting investment to Reading

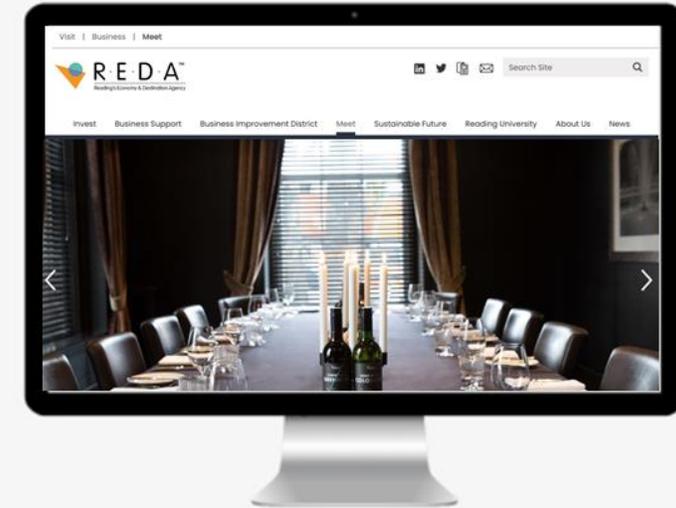
Inward investment & development

Following the launch of the new Reading Place Brand in summer 2022, the Economic Development team felt the time was right to use this new identity to support a new wave of marketing to relocating businesses and employees.

Working with Board Members BH&P, an investment group was brought together in September 2022, including developers, commercial property agents and estate managers. The discussion focused on what made

Reading attractive to investors and occupiers. The group also considered what needed to be done next, and what the future looked like for office and commercial occupation.

This work led to REDA developing a baseline report on the current state of office take up, business moves, growth and retention and the sectors that are most likely to shape Reading's business growth in the coming years.



A new business website for Reading

Following the successful launch of the new Visit-Reading.com destination website, a business site to showcase Reading's inward investment offer, relocation profile, as well as the BID work and REDA corporate profile was launched in July 2022.

The new site has been created as a microsite within the main Visit-Reading.com domain, which means we can reap the benefits of maintaining and promoting one website, while segmenting content for our visitor and business audiences. Since launch in July, the business site has attracted over 16.7k unique page views, with the 'About us', 'News' and 'BID' pages ranking highest.



In the first quarter of 2023, a new Meet Reading section of the site was added to profile Reading as a MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conference and Exhibitions) destination. This has further enhanced the profile of Reading as a place to invest, develop and do business, listing 38 venues from conferences to weddings, meeting rooms to incentives.



Development in numbers

OFFICES

- 76 lease deals
- 327,000 sq ft
- 4311 average deal sq ft
- Across 47 buildings
- Largest deals – Regus at Green Park (renewal), Huawei move to Thames Valley Park, Impact Working, Desklodge, Apex, Bellway Homes

RETAIL

- 31 leases
- 75000 sq ft across 27 buildings
- Largest deal – Deichmann, KTO, Fennies, Tesco

INDUSTRIAL/LOGISTICS

- 39 leases
- 200,000 sq ft
- Average new lease – 5,092 sq ft.

Source: CoStar, 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023



Elizabeth Line

Awards and Accolades for Reading

Reading's economy has long been recognised as one of the most buoyant economies in the UK. Latest research cites Reading's skilled workforce and leading employment rates, alongside productivity and high wages as some of the key reasons driving Reading's success, making Reading a great choice for inward investment and relocating businesses.



Sunday Times top 10 best places to live
(*Sunday Times*, 2023)



Set to lead the UK's post-pandemic economic recovery
(*EY*, 2023)



Top 5 performing innovation economies
(*Centre for Cities*, 2022)



Home to UK's most successful businesses
(*CMC Markets*, 2023)

Supporting Local Business in Reading

Business Support

Reading Skills for Growth Group

As the UK economy emerged from the impacts of Covid-19 and faced the new challenges of a cost of living / cost of business crisis, REDA felt the time was right to bring together key partners to help shape future delivery. This work focuses on skills shortages, the challenging economic landscape and the impacts on productivity. Leaders from education and the private sector, including Reading University, Reading Borough Council, Adult Education, Activate Learning, Thames Water, Collards Recycling, Egnyte, Recruitment and Schools started meeting in September 2022 to help shape REDA's emerging skills programmes. The group meets quarterly to advise on delivery and bring real-life experience to strategy.

ESPs and Skills Framework

In July 2022, REDA submitted its progress report on Employment and Skills Delivery as well as outlining plans for next programmes. REDA continued its strong track record of delivering benefits to the local community through using S106 developer contributions. The report showed support had been given to some 1,700 local people, helping them move forward in the

jobs market or into self-employment.

Partnership with both public and private sector partners remains central to delivery of the programmes with match funding and support-in-kind from companies and organisations including Hammerson, Abbey Rotary Group, Reading Business Network, Hilton Reading, Activate Learning, Thames Valley Berkshire LEP, Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce and the University of Reading.



In December 2022, the programme framework was approved by Reading Borough Council's Policy Committee, and explained that REDA's Skills for Growth Group had identified the following priority areas: Start up in the Community; Sector-focused Careers Advice for Schools; Employment and Employability Support (particularly targeted at over 50's, single parents

Supporting yourself into work and training

A short guide to finding the right job and training opportunities for you in Reading



FREE

HERE TODAY

Earn money working for yourself?

Come and have a chat!

Find out if self-employment is right for you
Get help starting a business and making it a success

Support and guidance Skills training

Money matters Courses

RED.A
Reading's Economy & Development Agency

Collateral for community outreach sessions

and other key cohorts); developing the New Skills employers will need – creative skills, green skills, engineering and construction and Supporting Skills at the heart of Reading's economy including construction, technology, hospitality and healthcare.

Since the start of 2023, REDA, working with Abbey Rotary, has started an outreach programme at Whitley Community Café. These light touch sessions provide an opportunity to really understand what local residents are looking for in terms of training. As well as promoting vital self-employment training, the sessions offer signposting to other forms of local training and advice.

Skills Research – Understanding our Impacts

Meanwhile REDA has worked with partners in producing two core research documents – The *Green Skills Roadmap*, and the *Screen Production Skills Report*. Both provide a comprehensive overview of the current employment landscape for emerging sectors.

With the overarching aim of preparing local people for new and emerging job opportunities from developing sectors, we are also supporting the development of a more environmentally sustainable economy, not just through training for jobs in the emerging 'green economy', but by recognising that every job should be part of the net zero carbon journey.

“The race to Net Zero by 2030 means a race to create 20,000 low carbon and renewable energy jobs in Reading by 2050. With the UK's Net Zero Strategy to become carbon neutral by 2050, the need to transition to low carbon industries, invest in green technologies, and adapt the labour market is clear... This report is the starting point for understanding this local picture...and how active targeting of Reading's key economic sectors could bring the maximum benefit to the economy as we seek to create benefit from the need to adapt to climate change.

Nigel Horton-Baker
Chief Executive, REDA



Green Skills launch event

There has been much work on the rapidly developing film and TV production facilities in greater Reading and REDA is playing a role in not just commissioning baseline research, but in joining the Creative Skills group led by the University of Reading and Wokingham Borough Council, supporting the work of the Chamber of Commerce's LSIP and ensuring there is funding to support the delivery of Screen Skills throughout our community through the UKSPF fund.

REDA continued to develop the Reading Business Network through 2022-23, with over 400 members now linked through social media and newsletters. A mixture of live and online events take place monthly, bringing networking opportunities as well as local business intelligence, access to professional services, training and skills provisions and researching procurement opportunity. The latter included a major piece of work with the FSB and major public/third sector employers Reading Borough Council, Royal Berks Hospital Trust and the University of Reading, to produce a report on the current state of local procurement and suggest a way forward to remove barriers on both sides.

The work will be ongoing through 2023-24, but in February 2023 key findings were shared with the Reading Business Network and proposals have started to take shape for a local sourcing directory – a business to business guide which could also be useful to the Screen Production industry. Simplified local supply

400+
 Reading Business Network
 members, bringing networking
 opportunities and local
 business intelligence to the
 Reading business community.

Reading Business Network 2022



Reading Business Network live event

small business christmas

Sat 3 & Sun 4 Dec, Market Place

10am-6pm
 Christmas market
 offering some of
 the very best of our
 local independent
 traders

chains will provide not only a more sustainable route for procurement, but will give local businesses easily navigable ways to bid for contracts.

Small Business Weekend

In December 2022, REDA hosted a weekend event as part of the national Small Business Saturday campaign, bringing together over 24 small local businesses for two days of trading on Reading's Market Place.

Around 300 people visited the event, which

included live music from local artists and a chance for diverse local companies including a brewery, silversmith, comic shop, milliner and honey producer to sell and promote to local residents.

300+
 Visitors attended Small Business
 Christmas, supporting Reading's
 independent businesses

3-4 December 2022

Reading Business Improvement District

Reading Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

Reading town centre and Business Improvement District Strategy

Post-lockdown there is now a regular rhythm to the town centre with footfall peaking over the weekends as shoppers and revellers return to pre-pandemic habits and routines. Office workers are returning but not to the levels seen pre-pandemic and it is unlikely that this ever will, and BIDs nationally have now stopped comparing footfall data to 2019 figures, opting rather to compare with 2021 for this reason.

With professional sector employers changing the way they work, staff have returned to varying degrees depending on company requirements. Many only return during mid-week days which sees footfall increase between Tuesdays to Thursdays, and bars are now referring to Thursday as 'the new Friday'.

Retail focussed BID services (safety, cleaning and recycling) continue to be well received with requests for increased services, in particular the BID Wardens. Wellbeing, training and recycling initiatives focussed on the Abbey Quarter office sector have expanded more than expected this year, resulting in much higher levels of business engagement. Engaging with and learning from similar business-focussed BIDs has allowed us to expand our local offer and presence within the Abbey Quarter area.

Working alongside the Council we have secured funding for safety initiatives across the town centre this includes lighting, security fencing and provision of a safe hub.



Reading BID first aid training course

Reading BID continues to offer all businesses in the town centre **free cardboard recycling** on a weekly basis. This is a hugely popular initiative and one that is growing all the time with new businesses coming on board. We have recently implemented a new recycling initiative for small electrical items. A number of businesses have asked about this recently and we piloted the scheme in January 2023. It was very well received (in fact, oversubscribed), so we now have a waiting list for our next small electrical collection which will take place in April.

This year we also began offering businesses and their staff **free training**. Beginning with an emergency first aid at work course which was oversubscribed, a further four of these sessions have been held, all of which have been fully booked with 100%

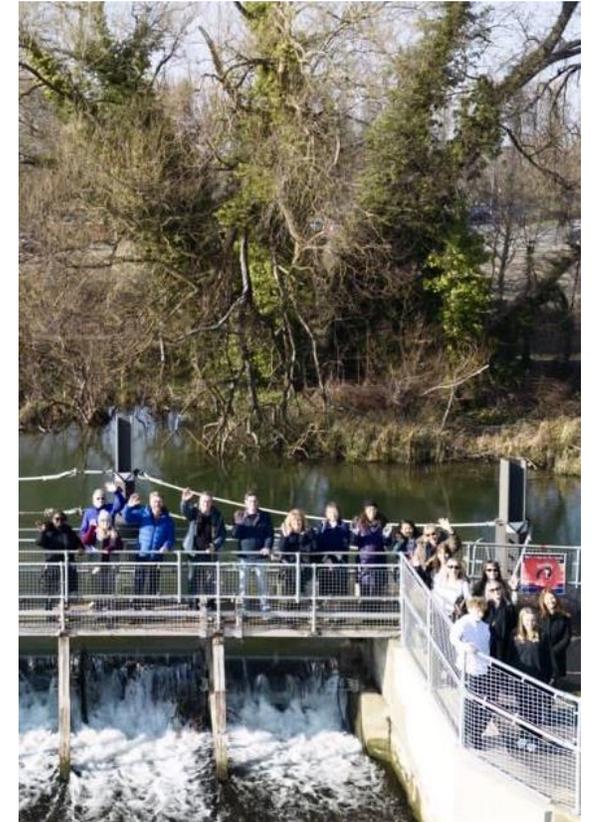
attendance. We continue to hold a waiting list for those interested in upcoming courses. In addition to this we have held a mental health awareness training course and a disability awareness training session, both of which were fully booked with waiting lists for our next sessions. This has highlighted the need for training in the town centre, helping businesses to access these courses easily and locally.

We have begun implementing **wellbeing initiatives** for all the staff and businesses in the town centre.

128
Local employees have attended training courses as part of Reading BID's staff training programme
Reading BID, 2022-23

Beginning with weekly yoga in the gardens in June 2022 this has slowly grown to now include weekly walks through WalkWorks as well as a suite of meditation sessions throughout the week. These have been welcomed by many staff and numbers

continue to grow each week, with 1.5 million steps being clocked up by local employees in the first 6 months of our Wednesday walks. We are now working with local employers on further initiatives and look forward to piloting those in Spring 2023.



WalkWorks lunchtime walking group

Promotion and support of the town centre

The two BID **Business Wardens** continue to patrol the town centre, 7-days a week, supporting businesses with incidences of ASB and assisting with reporting of crime. Connected to many of the retailers via the town safe radio, the wardens are able to communicate directly with the stores and relay communications as needed. The wardens have begun noting all of their interactions on our CRM system which includes stock returned to stores following a shoplifting incident. In December this amounted to a total of £18,000 worth of stock in one month.

Constant lobbying of the Police has resulted in one more FTE CCTV operator being employed in the CCTV suite. We are still not at full complement, but in a better position than we were. The Wardens and CCTV operators continue to communicate effectively during live investigations of any incidences in the town centre.



Reading Business Wardens

Supporting the need to **rewild and re-green** many of the town centre, Reading BID funded a series of floating reed beds along the Kennet. This was delivered in conjunction with The Oracle, the Kennet Canal Trust, and a local primary school. Abbey Quarter staff were invited to help with the planting of the floating reedbeds which were then moored along the edges of the Kennet Canal between The Oracle and Queens Road carpark. The floating reedbeds will attract insects and birdlife, as well as helping waterborne insects and fish, and assisting with water filtration.

Having been delayed initially, the **Travel Perx** initiative has begun again, ready for launch in 2023. Discussions with Reading Buses and The Oracle carpark have taken place and B2B engagement is being planned.



Planting reedbeds in the River Kennet

£18k

Stolen goods returned to
Reading's high street
businesses during
December alone

Reading BID, 2022



Meerkat (now Beyond Procurement) were contracted to offer a pilot project engaging businesses in the BID and Reading Business Network to take part in a **green audit**. Take-up and feedback was mixed with regards this approach, and we are researching further ways to assist businesses with green audits and energy saving.

Following a hiatus during Covid, this year the BID once again spearheaded the application for the Purple Flag accreditation. The accreditation recognises the management of the night-time economy, drawing on the strengths of all the partnerships within the town centre. Over 20 individual interviews were conducted with all of the stakeholders and partners including Reading University, Reading Buses, licensing, policing, Street Pastors, cleansing teams, paramedics and venue operators.



The report was submitted and at the beginning of December we accompanied 2 assessors on an overnight inspection of the town centre. The outcome was we were awarded the accreditation with special mention for the variety of venues available as well as the support of the street pastors and paramedics.

1 200+
Visitors attended
Reading's first lantern
parade in December
Reading Lantern Parade 2022

Reading Lantern Parade – Dance of the Fireflies

As part of this year's Christmas offering, we held a lantern parade brought to us through Beautiful Creatures who have previously provided large outdoor winter installations such as Big Blue. In the lead up to the parade, we ran numerous lantern making workshops in the town centre and with funding from the Council were able to offer a further 3 community-based workshops in Whitley Wood, Southcote and Coley Park.

The workshops were fully booked, resulting in nearly 300 lantern bearers taking part in the procession along with their families and friends. Over 1200 attended the procession on the evening of Saturday 10 December, culminating in a light and music show in Forbury Gardens. Working with Reading Buses we were able to negotiate a Family Fare voucher, offering a discount for anyone travelling on the day for the procession. This meant we offer support to Reading's harder to reach communities, who could enjoy discounted travel for those travelling in for the parade.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, and work has already begun to plan the 2023 version of this event.

Reading Lantern Parade, December 2022

Town Centre events

Working with a local Southeast-Asian arts organisation, *Kala the Arts*, the BID sponsored Diwali 2022. This took place in Market Place during the afternoon and consisted of musicians, local school dance groups performing as well as the professional troupe. We had not worked with this group before so purposefully kept the event small and manageable, however it was very well received by visitors and local businesses, many of whom asking how they can assist in the future. Work has already begun on plans for Diwali 2023 in October.

Launchpad's annual Pancake Race held on Broad Street returned again in February 2023. 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. Businesses from similar sectors are pitted against each other increasing the competitive and entertaining nature of the event. The BID sponsors this event on an annual basis.

EAT Reading returned to Broad Street in May 2022. 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.



May 2022 saw the return of the Are You Listening? music festival in association with the charity, Mencap. Supported by the BID, this event features over 60 acts playing in 7 town centre venues, including The Oakford Social Club, Purple Turtle, Sub89 and The Roseate. Many well-known indie and local bands attracted a wide audience into these venues throughout the day and into the night.

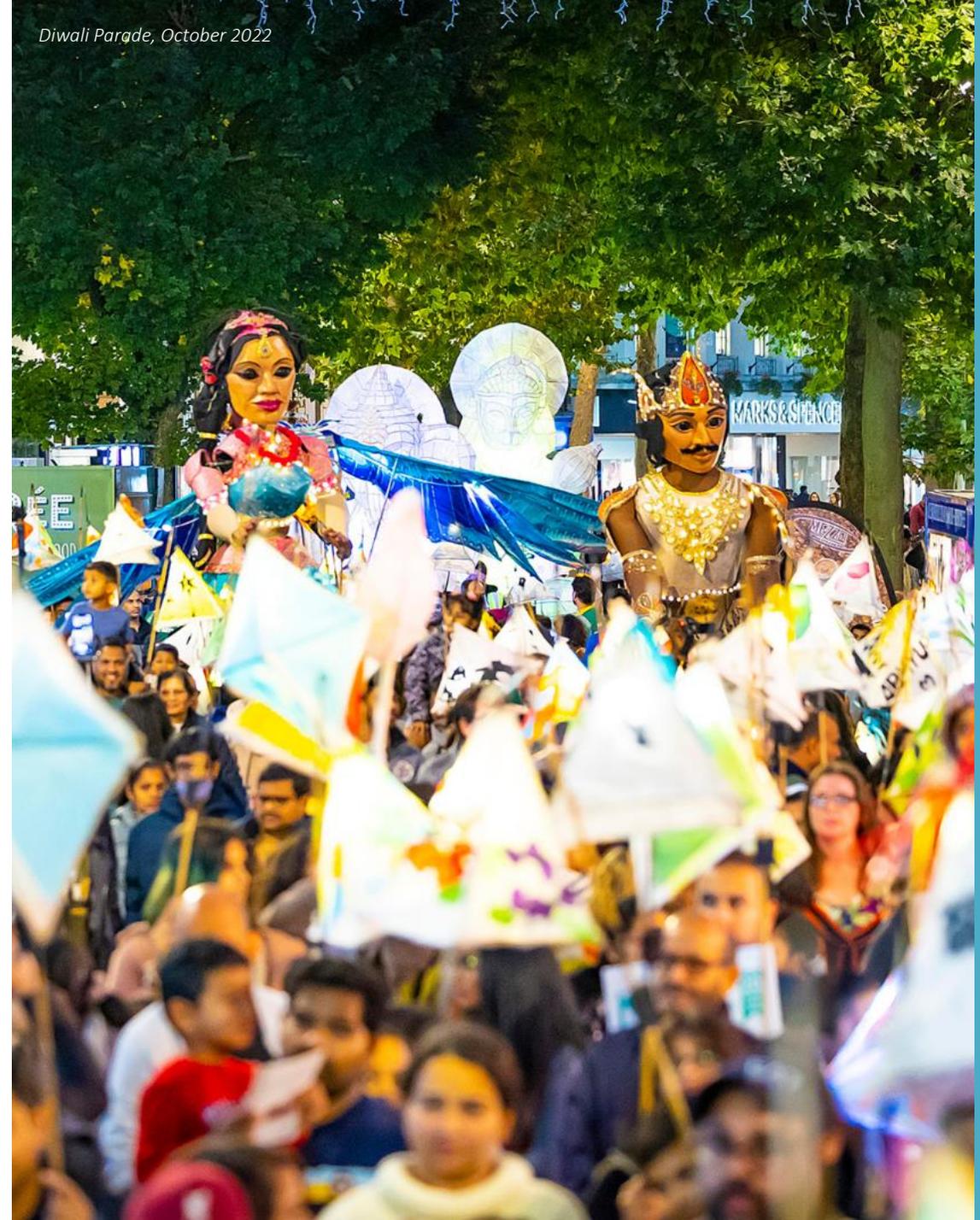
In collaboration with the Council's Community Safety Team, two Counter Terrorism courses SCaN (See, Check and Notify) were held on 25 May for the night-time economy and 12 September for the day-time economy. This course offers attendees information on identifying possible terrorism situations and reporting them. It also gave attendees the opportunity to hear first-hand the impact of these kinds of events on places and people.

Christmas trading and festivities

Working with our German Food Market operator, we installed a pop-up wooden bar and 35-foot conical tree, along with covered and openair seating. This new area proved very popular, and we will continue to make improvements to this offering year on year. Two other Christmas trees and the full festive lighting scheme were also installed throughout the town centre to add to the festivities.

Despite the pre-Christmas negative press around the cost of living crisis, there was positive feedback from retailers regarding Christmas trading and post Christmas sales.

Small Business Christmas, took place during the first weekend in December to coincide with the national Small Business Saturday campaign. A marquee was erected in Market Place, with indie retailers invited to take a stand to sell and promote their businesses to visitors and shoppers. The event was hampered by exceedingly cold and wet weather which did affect footfall, with around 300 people attending the event.



BID highlights



Funded and supported Street Pastors and the First Stop Hub at St Mary's Minster which offers a safe haven and medical treatment for visitors from 9.00pm to 3.00am each Friday and Saturday evening. This facility saves over 300 A&E visits each year.



Continue to employ two town centre security wardens, tackling shoplifting, rough sleeping, aggressive begging/ASB as well as welcoming and directing visitors. They now record their activities to show numbers of business engagements as well as values of stock returned.



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.



Newly implemented WEEE (small electricals) recycling was very well received by all BID businesses.



Engaged and improved communications with the University has opened up invitations to attend the Freshers and Open Day events.



Worked with the Council's Community Safety team to secure Safer Streets 4 funding (c£429K) to implement better lighting and a safe hub.



Held our first Reading Lantern Parade through the town centre and into Forbury Gardens, this event attracted over 1200 people as part of the parade with 300 lantern bearers.



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 Visitor Insights to provide accurate intel.



Began implementing a wellbeing menu of activities for BID staff – yoga, walks, meditation are now weekly features and engagement numbers continue to grow, with more activities in the pipeline.



Maintained CCTV operators.

Annual Report

2022-23

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Reading's Economy & Destination Agency

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