

REDA Annual Report

2025-26



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



Scott Witchalls
Chairman
REDA

I am delighted to have seen REDA go from strength to strength this year under the leadership of our Chief Executive, Nigel, supported by a dedicated Board representing the Reading economy and wider community, and a highly skilled, innovative REDA team.

The focus on delivering a clear set of five-year corporate plan priorities is proving effective, with REDA's impact gaining increasing recognition at regional, national and international levels.

My sincere thanks go to the Chief Executive, Board members and the REDA team for their continued hard work, energy and commitment, which underpin REDA's success.

At the outset of my tenure as Chair in 2024, I highlighted the importance of ensuring Reading remains a go-to location for business and investment. I am therefore delighted to see the launch of the Invest in Reading Hub this year - a comprehensive, evolving digital

platform promoting Reading as a place to do business. Its content, including information on new businesses investing in the town, is already being used by our property agent network to promote Reading's strong commercial offer, supported by regional and national media engagement. We have seen a number of direct enquiries and are encouraged by global companies choosing to relocate while maintaining a presence in Reading.

In my role representing REDA on the Reading Climate Change Partnership Board, I am also pleased that REDA has contributed to the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2025–30. REDA continues to support the annual Reading Climate Festival and has undertaken

research to identify opportunities to further 'green' REDA's town centre Business Improvement District.

The newly developed Reading Economic Development Framework, created in partnership with Reading Borough Council, is aligned with both the Climate Strategy and the Reading 2050 City Vision, which is currently being refreshed ahead of its relaunch in 2026.

I look forward to delivering the third year of REDA's five-year Corporate Plan and to further strengthening our pan-Berkshire presence and influence in driving tourism and economic growth, while also making our town centre fit for the future.



It is hard to believe we are already two years into delivering our five-year corporate priorities and the Business Improvement District (BID) Plan 2024–29. Reading continues to be part of a fast-moving, dynamic economy, and REDA is focused on supporting Reading stay ahead of the competition. The Economic Development Framework 2025–35, completed this year, highlights both the significant labour market challenges facing Reading and the considerable business and regeneration opportunities available to help achieve our Reading 2050 City Vision.

Nigel Horton-Baker
Chief Executive,
REDA



Chief Executive Update

This year, I am proud to say we have maintained a high-quality service through our BID team, delivering a strong programme of events and experiences that attract people into the town centre throughout the year. This has been complemented by our tourism activity, including the Jane Austen 250th anniversary campaign, which drew visitors from regional, national and international markets to Reading Museum and the Abbey Ruins, with visitor numbers surpassing those to Windsor this year.

We have continued to receive positive feedback from town centre businesses through our annual BID survey, particularly against the key themes of the BID plan. Our Wardens are especially valued, recovering nearly £150,000 of stolen goods this year. Behind the scenes, we are also seeing growing demand from town centre employees for our BID SEEDL online learning modules, as well as strong

participation in our health and wellbeing programme, including weekly lunchtime walks. While encouraged by this progress, we are not complacent. This year, we have strengthened collaboration with Reading Borough Council and Thames Valley Police to tackle anti-social behaviour, supporting increased reporting, introducing new enforcement powers, providing guidance on busking, and targeting persistent offenders.

A particular highlight for me has been our work supporting the film sector and local filmmakers. REDA provided grant funding to support the production of *Just a Mum* by local filmmaker Maria Trevis, helping us to pilot the potential of a future filmmaker grant programme. We also sponsored the *Reading Through a Different Lens* Film Festival, produced by Jocelyn Chandar-Hawkins. Later in the year, we delivered three industry workshops with expert panels, filmed with the support of Vania Flaccomio, Founder of Cinergy

Studios. These have now been released as a trilogy of short films: *Sustainability in Film*, *AI in Film* and *Financing Film*, demonstrating the growth of the sector locally. We are grateful to the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund for supporting this work.

Our community-focused activity has also expanded, including regular clinics in South Reading, hosted at the Whitley Cafe, providing one-to-one support on employment, self-employment and training pathways. Over the past two years, 77 local people have benefited from the Launch Reading business start-up programme, delivered in partnership with Abbey Rotary, offering training, mentoring and access to start-up grant funding.

REDA has also focused on its own development this year, and I am pleased to report that we have achieved the CSR International Excellence Award – World Leader status.

Shaping a Better Reading

REDA Team Highlights

This year’s highlights reflect the breadth of REDA’s work and its ongoing collaboration with partners and the wider business community.

From supporting business growth and employment, to enhancing Reading’s visitor offer, delivering impactful marketing campaigns and strengthening support of the town centre, REDA’s team highlights 2025-26 demonstrate a continued focus on delivering tangible outcomes for Reading.

4500

Local students supported with careers advice & job readiness

Boosting Business



Delivered three film-led events on sustainability, AI and finance, engaging over 150 businesses, with content amplified through three professionally produced films that inform and further strengthen our film supply chain businesses.



Led the development and publication of a new 10-year Reading Economic Development Framework 2025-35, demonstrating Reading’s key role in the Thames Valley economy and aligning with government priorities for support in the Government’s ‘New Industrial Strategy 2035’.



Successfully delivered three Job Fairs, engaging 120 employers and 20 training providers, with approximately 2,500 local residents attending gaining advice, links to employers and training opportunities.



Delivered the Groundworks programme in partnership with RBC Parks, supporting individuals with barriers to employment through landscaping, arboriculture and water conservation training. Of 44 referrals, 21 participants completed the programme and 12 moved into employment.



Hosted ‘Like and Subscribe’, a research initiative and conference with 30 local social media influencers to identify business development opportunities and support for this growing niche sector of our local economy.



Supported 4,500 local school students with careers advice and job readiness through the Education and Business Partnership (EBP) and the support of local businesses, who provided staff time and workplace visits.



Delivered a weekly employment support clinic in South Reading (Whitley Cafe), engaging 120 residents across 200 one-to-one conversations on employment, self-employment and training opportunities and referrals to partner organisations for ongoing support.



Supported 14 local residents to launch new businesses through the Launch Reading programme (in partnership with Abbey Rotary Club), including 10 weeks of training, mentoring and start-up grants, funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Improving the visitor experience



Delivered **Reading Walks Festival 2025**, featuring 50+ walks and attracting over 800 participants.



Hosted a **Great West Way Media Day**, welcoming 40+ travel journalists and 40 destination partners to experience Reading.



Published the **Reading Tourism Impact Report**, highlighting significant growth in leisure visitors, supporting 10,000 jobs and contributing £405m to the local economy.



Delivered a national campaign celebrating the **250th anniversary of Jane Austen**, generating 14,613 website views and over 33,000 video views.



Supported the installation of a **St James' Way milestone** marker in the town centre, marking Reading's role in the historic pilgrimage route.



Hosted the **"Britain's Bayeux Tapestry" media day** with 25 high-profile outlets including The Sunday Times, Sky News and BBC South Today.



Attended key travel trade and consumer **exhibitions**, including Excursions, Destinations (Olympia) and the PA Show.



Reading BID & Town Centre



Delivered **National Apprenticeship Week 2026**, attracting 180 attendees, with speakers including Steph McGovern and Ross Brawn.



BID wardens recovered nearly **£150k of stolen goods** and received a Thames Valley Police Commander's Commendation for their work apprehending a dangerous offender.



Delivered the **Winter Warmer campaign** in partnership with Network Rail and Hampshire Community Rail Partnership, supporting over 200 people with essential clothing items.



Hosted major **cultural celebrations** including Diwali, Chinese New Year and the Glow Lantern Parade, attracting thousands of visitors and participants.



Raised over £3,000 through **TAP for Reading** machines across the town centre to support local charities assisting those experiencing rough sleeping.



Celebrated success through the **Pride of Reading** and **Reading in Bloom** awards.



Delivered the Reading **Children's Business Fair**, showcasing 30 young entrepreneurs.



Delivered the **town centre summer trail** featuring 12 Shaun the Sheep sculptures in partnership with Wild in Art, across key locations including The Oracle and Broad Street Mall.



Introduced and widely circulated a new **Busking Code of Conduct**.

Marketing & Digital Engagement



Launched the **Invest in Reading Hub** and promotional video to attract inward investment.



Delivered a refreshed **Christmas in Reading** town centre marketing campaign.



Delivered the Shaun the Sheep **summer campaign**, distributing 40,000 flyers and generating 1,111 competition entries.



Achieved a **social media reach** of 2.28 million, representing a 464% increase across Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.



Streamlined digital platforms and introduced a centralised **Reading place-based image library**.

Carnival of the World, August 2025



Team Transitions

Alongside these achievements, the year has also seen important team developments, with colleagues taking exciting personal milestones and new talent joining to support delivery across key areas.

Congratulations to **Victoria Patyra**, Head of Marketing, and **Alice Rampling**, Head of BID Operations, on the birth of their children, both of whom began maternity leave during the year. We also welcomed several new colleagues to the team:

- **Kureen Mapp**, Events & Commercialisation Co-ordinator (Reading BID)
- **Maria Lloyd**, Head of Marketing (maternity cover for Victoria)
- **Elijah Seville Williams**, Head of Operations, Reading BID (maternity cover for Alice)

Their expertise and contribution have ensured continuity and momentum across REDA's programmes and initiatives in 2025/6.



Kureen Mapp



Maria Lloyd



Elijah Seville Williams



Reading BID Wardens receive national award



Recognition and Awards

- REDA appointed to the Board of Screen Berkshire from April 2026
- Reading BID Wardens received a national award and recognition in a local crime reduction initiative
- REDA and Reading BID both received nominations in the new Reading Cultural Champions Awards
- REDA attained a Bronze International Corporate Social Responsibility Award
- Three Reading tourism businesses successful at Beautiful South Tourism Awards: Thames Lido, The Roseate and Wokefield Estate

Strategic Marketing

The latest Annual Marketing Report from REDA signals another benchmark year for digital advancement and targeted audience engagement. Our marketing metrics have continued to improve while elevating Reading's dual identity as a thriving commercial hub and leisure destination.

Headline successes include a 38% rise in total webpage views, a 303% surge in blog views, and an 83% increase in business website traffic. This commercial momentum was accelerated by pivotal digital infrastructure upgrades, notably the launch of the Invest Hub and tailored landing pages for business events.

Social media performance also delivered exceptional growth, significantly expanding the reach and impact of REDA's place marketing activity. Across Facebook,

83%

Increase in business website
traffic, 2025-26

12,600

Total audience across REDA social
platforms, a growth of 84% year
on year

Instagram, LinkedIn and TikTok, social reach increased by 464% to 2.28 million, impressions rose by 678% to 3.7 million, and engagements grew by 412% to 76,500. Our audience expanded by 84% to more than 12,600 followers, supported by the publication of over 2,000 pieces of content and strong engagement rates across all platforms. This strengthened digital presence increased awareness of Reading as both a leading business destination and a vibrant visitor economy.

Looking forward, REDA is exploring opportunities to map campaign analytics directly against town centre footfall and consumer spending metrics. These evolving data frameworks will sharpen future campaign activity, ensuring our ongoing marketing efforts remain closely aligned with REDA's overarching economic objectives.

Shaun the Sheep, summer campaign 2025





International Green Apple Awards

Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility sits at the core of REDA's purpose, shaping how the organisation supports Reading's economy, communities and environment. Over the past year, this commitment has been further recognised at a national level while continuing to deliver tangible, local impact.

Recognition as a CSR World Leader

In Autumn 2025, REDA was honoured to be named a CSR World Leader at a prestigious ceremony held at the Palace of Westminster by The CSR Society, part of The Green Organisation. This recognition reflects both the breadth and depth of REDA's work and marks the third major CSR accolade, following an International CSR Excellence Award and Silver CSR Accreditation.

The award acknowledged REDA's inclusion in *The CSR World Leaders Work of Reference*, following a rigorous independent assessment. The submission highlighted REDA's integrated approach to social value, from supporting local businesses and enhancing workforce opportunities, to driving sustainability and coordinating charitable initiatives within the town centre.

£7k+

Raised for homelessness charities through *Tap for Reading* initiative

Delivering Meaningful Social Impact

Alongside national recognition, REDA's CSR activity continues to create meaningful outcomes across the local community. Charitable giving remains a central pillar of Reading BID's ongoing business plan, underpinned by partnerships and initiatives that encourage collective action. Through the town's *Tap for Reading* initiative, a total of £7,200.49 was raised between January 2025 and March 2026, directly supporting local causes. Additional fundraising efforts generated charitable income, including Launchpad's annual Pancake Race which raised £8,200, while smaller initiatives such as event ticket sales contributed further charitable income.

Two pillar campaigns, delivered by Reading BID, have also delivered essential support to the local community. The Winter Warmer programme collected and distributed a total of 852 items of clothing, including coats, hats, gloves and other essentials, directly benefiting 187 individuals in need of winter clothing during the colder months. Alongside this, the Summer Donation Drive collected and delivered a wide range of vital goods, from school supplies and clothing to hygiene products, bedding and food essentials, to community groups in Reading throughout July, benefitting young people in the area.

Volunteering is another key strand of REDA's CSR activity, bringing its values to life through hands-on community engagement. In August 2025, a member of the team dedicated two volunteering days to supporting Street Pastors at Reading Festival, exemplifying REDA's commitment to community care, strong partnerships and the creation of safer, more inclusive environments.

[Read Emma's case study](#)
→



CSR CASE STUDY: READING STREET PASTORS

In August 2025, REDA's Emma Matthews, dedicated her two volunteering days to supporting Street Pastors at Reading Festival. Street Pastors is a charity that plays a vital role in supporting those enjoying Reading town centre's nightlife, with ongoing backing from Reading BID.

Each year since 2012, the charity has been invited by Festival Republic to offer this same support at

the festival. During more recent years, Reading Street Pastors have extended their outreach by operating two 24/7 tents within the campsites at Richfield Avenue. These spaces provide a safe and welcoming environment where festival-goers can rest in a comfortable, dry environment, access refreshments and receive support.

The service is particularly important for younger attendees, many aged around 16-18 years, who are often away from

home for the first time. By offering a calm, supportive presence, Reading Street Pastors help ensure that vulnerable individuals have somewhere to turn when they need reassurance, guidance or simply a listening ear. Emma supported the charity in this way, preparing food, offering conversation and escorting festival-goers around the site.



REDA Board

2025-26

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

This year **Scott Witchalls, Stantec**, undertook his first year as Chairman with **Councillor, Liz Terry**, as our new Vice Chair. It was an important year in which they championed key matters such as the new joint REDA and RBC Reading Economic Development Framework 2025-35 and the refresh of the Reading 2050 City Vision.

Alongside the appointment of **Mike Ward**, Solicitor at Blake Morgan we said farewell and thank you to:

- Kim Cohen
Stantec (formerly Barton Willmore)
- Becky Holland
BH+P
- Aaron Pope
M+G
- John McLoughlin
Hilton, Reading
- Stan Hansen
Egnyte



REDA Board Meeting



Boosting Business

Reading Business Improvement District Strategy

The BID covers a large area of over 700 businesses, from independent retailers to multinational finance firms, each with diverse needs. We support safety through Business Wardens and Street Pastors, while initiatives such as floral displays, Christmas lights, and cultural events like Diwali and Chinese New Year attract shoppers, visitors, and office workers into the town and its hospitality venues.

Footfall and sales data are regularly monitored to demonstrate Reading's growth to existing and prospective businesses. Our recycling programmes help organisations meet sustainability goals, and we provide added value services such as wellbeing, training, and upskilling initiatives to support staff development where businesses may lack capacity.

Partnership working to improve the town centre

Our work across Reading town centre involves a wide range of partners and stakeholders. By working together, we support not only our own success but that of the wider community. Whether alongside the Council, Police, community groups, or charities, our aim is to

collaborate as broadly as possible.

The BID is a member of the Town Centre Steering Group, a Council-led working group focused on key town centre issues. Topics such as transport, public realm, and anti-social behaviour are discussed, with officers taking forward actions and reporting back on progress. This forum provides us with valuable insight and a strong platform to help drive meaningful change.

Looking ahead, the BID will also join the annual Access and Disability meeting, providing further important insight into how we can better support and improve services for people with mobility challenges.

The Busking Guide continues to be used when engaging with buskers, especially around volume issues, encouraging them to be aware of those around them. While the guide has not been a panacea, it has helped. We will be taking this guide along with feedback to the next Council Committee meeting in early Summer to discuss next steps in enforcement of the guide.





Winter Warmer clothing donations, Jan 2026

The third Winter Warmer project took place in January 2026, with the BID supporting the marketing and promotion of the initiative and coordinating relevant stakeholders across all areas of donations and distribution. The project received nearly 400 winter coats, along with thousands of additional items of seasonal winter clothing. Donations were collected at the central Community Hub at Reading Train Station, provided by Network Rail and managed by the Reading–Basingstoke Community Rail Partnership. Contributions were encouraged from office-based businesses as well as the wider public. This year, we also worked closely with the Council’s family support teams to help fast-track donations directly to families in need.

The second Summer Donation Programme took place in July, bringing together contributions to support vulnerable young people during the school holidays. We again partnered with Brighter Futures for Children to develop a targeted list of essential items for children and their families. The BID engaged office building managers across the town centre to mobilise their

tenants, with donation points established at each location and a coordinated marketing campaign led by the BID. This year, the initiative was also promoted publicly, encouraging wider community participation. We were delighted by the strong level of donations received, and feedback from Brighter Futures for Children was overwhelmingly positive.

The work of our Wardens, in partnership with the local Neighbourhood Policing Team, continues to deliver strong results. Acting as the eyes and ears of the town centre, Wardens provide vital intelligence, help locate missing persons, and support police by detaining individuals wanted in connection with offences. This close collaboration also encourages retailers to report incidents, strengthening the overall response to crime and supporting effective enforcement. The partnership enhances the credibility of the Warden service while providing a valuable additional resource for policing teams.

During 2025/2026, Wardens recovered nearly £150,000 of stolen goods, successfully returning them to retailers.

They were also awarded Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS) status, granting enhanced enforcement powers. In recognition of their professionalism, the team received a formal police commendation for their handling of a significant incident.

£150k

Worth of stolen goods
recovered by Reading BID
Wardens 2025/26

The alternative giving scheme, Tap for Reading, raised over £7,000 this year. Working with the Council's Community Safety and Homelessness teams, the BID funded the implementation of tap readers and administered the funds received. On a quarterly basis these funds are donated directly to homeless charities supporting those rough sleeping and begging. This year was a pilot scheme and discussion will now centre around how to improve the scheme.



Supporting Town Centre Businesses

- **Training opportunities** remain popular, with in person, accredited Emergency First Aid at Work and Fire Marshall training courses continuing to be fully booked and well-received by businesses and their staff. Our online training portal, SEEDL, grows each month with new subscribers, offering access to a variety of training opportunities to suit all needs.
- **Weekly cardboard recycling** and quarterly small electrical recycling continue to be popular services offered to the businesses. Collection and recycling operations are contracted through the Council, giving assurance that recycling is dealt with professionally.
- **Wellbeing programmes** such as weekly gym, pilates, yoga and walks are well received by businesses and their staff. By supplying these sessions we remove the need for businesses to implement their own.
- **Business Wardens** patrol the town centre seven days a week, supporting businesses with incidences of anti-social behaviour and assisting with reporting of crime.

250

A&E visits prevented by the
work of Reading Street
Pastors during 2025-26

- Connected to many of the retailers via the **Town Safe Radio**, the Wardens can communicate directly with the stores and relay communications as needed. The Wardens return stock losses where possible, returning almost £150k worth of stock to retailers in 2025/26. They are a well-known and welcomed addition to the town and are often called upon by the police to support their operations.
- January 2026 saw a repeat of the **Winter Warmer initiative**. Staff, businesses and the public were encouraged to donate warm clothing for men, women and children. Hundreds of winter coats, hats, jumpers, scarves, and gloves were donated. Staff were also offered the opportunity to volunteer their time, receiving and sorting donations.

- The **Purple Flag** accreditation bi-annual visit was held in March 2025 following a postponement from the previous year. The annual submission for the accreditation highlights the work being done by many evening and night-time economy stakeholders. The resulting report on the work done was positive. Going forwards we will be introducing bespoke training for all businesses operating at night, including casinos, off-licences, etc. The first of these courses focussed on vulnerability training and was attended by 23 businesses.
- **Safety initiatives** such as Safe Space housing, Reading's Street Pastors and First Stop service with South Central Ambulance Service paramedics continue to operate well. Covering Friday and Saturday night this service saved nearly 250 A&E visits this year. The building hosts other stakeholder groups working with vulnerable members of the public.
- The **deep cleaning** service has been replaced with a more local contractor this year, improving the service by operating weekly and responding more quickly to all areas of the town.
- **Footfall and sales data** are offered to all business and shared weekly through the Friday Update. The footfall report includes dwell times alongside town centre heat maps, and income demographics. Sales data analyses card transactions by sector, including general retail, food and drink, etc. These two data sets also supply customer demographics including Experian data.
- Through an initiative led by the Police & Crime Commissioner, we have joined an expanded **DISC intelligence-sharing network** that enables businesses to record and escalate evidence of shoplifting and anti-social behaviour to Thames Valley Police. Supported by the Office of the Police & Crime, the wider scheme now connects neighbouring towns, strengthening the identification of repeat and travelling offenders. The daytime retail sector is fully integrated, with participation now being extended to the nighttime economy.
- Continued development of 'Vicinity' the **CRM** system used to facilitate accurate communications with BID businesses, and logging interactions with those businesses.



Reading BID floral displays, Broad Street

- This year our **floral contractor, WindowFlowers**, received a Royal Warrant by His Majesty The King. WindowFlowers is a local, family-run business which delivers an excellent service to the town centre. This year the BID delivered two floral planting schemes over summer and autumn.
- The BID maintained its financial support of the **CCTV operators**. We continue to support retaining local CCTV operator coverage and will continue working with the Council on this.

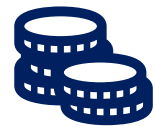
Business Growth and Skills

REDA's business growth and skills programme continued to expand in 2025/26. The programme has supported innovation, created valuable networking opportunities, facilitated knowledge exchange, developed workforce skills and strengthened key business clusters, alongside the launch of the new *Invest in Reading* hub. We are pleased to have worked closely with Shadowbox, Shinfield Studios, Screen Berkshire and Reading Tech Cluster Thames Valley AI at the University, The Education Business Partnership and Whitley Community Development Association, as well as many other contractors to progress a wide range of new interventions to support our local economy.

These initiatives represent a significant step forward in the scale and impact of activity delivered across Reading. Funded through a combination of the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund and private sector funding, they help to deliver a step change in local economic performance and position Reading as a more competitive and dynamic place to work and do business.

Launch Reading

Delivered in partnership with Abbey Quarter Rotary, Launch Reading provides intensive business start-up support for aspiring entrepreneurs from underrepresented communities, with startup grants provided by REDA out of the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund. During 2025/26, six cohorts completed the programme, with Cohort 7 commencing in June 2026. Since launch, 227 individuals have engaged with the programme, 92 participants have started the course, 77 have successfully completed it, and 46 start-up grants have been awarded.



£15,900

total grants
funded during
2025-26

During 2025/26 REDA funded 11 startup grants, totalling £15,900, helping local entrepreneurs establish new businesses, invest in skills and equipment, and contribute to Reading's economic growth.

CASE STUDY: LAUNCH READING SUCCESS STORY GOD STUDIO

“ I needed a mentor, and I got it

After years working as a freelance creative, University of Reading graduate Yannick Mourad joined REDA's Launch Reading programme in 2023, completing a free 10-week course to gain the business guidance and structure he needed to turn his passion into a viable company. Following a successful final pitch, **Yannick received a £1,500 start-up grant** and launched God Studio Ltd in January 2024. He used the funding to secure a stand at the National Wedding Show, generating new business opportunities and accelerating growth. As a result, the company's turnover is projected to increase from £35,000 to £70,000 within a year.

➤ Read the full case study:
<https://www.visit-reading.com/business/business-support/start-your-own-business/case-studies/god-studio>

CASE STUDY:
LAUNCH READING SUCCESS STORY
NOVA HOME IMPROVEMENTS

“Launch Reading gives you the structure, the mindset, to be in that position

After moving to the UK from Italy, skilled tradesman Angelo Patrizi joined REDA's Launch Reading programme to gain the business skills needed to turn his construction expertise into a sustainable company. The 10-week programme helped him develop a business plan, understand financial forecasting and improve his marketing approach.

Following a successful pitch, Angelo received a **£1,400 start-up grant** and launched Nuova Home Improvements Ltd in 2024. The funding enabled him to **gain an NVQ Level 2 qualification**,

create a professional website and invest in marketing materials to attract new customers.

Today, Nuova Home Improvements provides high-quality renovation services across Reading, with **ambitions to expand** and create future employment opportunities.

➡ Read the full case study:
<https://www.visit-reading.com/business/business-support/start-your-own-business/case-studies/nuova-home-improvements>

OutReach Business

This REDA-funded pilot programme has been delivered across South Reading to encourage and support residents into employment, self-employment and business start-up opportunities. Based at the Whitley Community Development Association (WCDA) and operating through a weekly programme of outreach and drop-in sessions at locations including Whitley Wood Community Centre and Hexham Road, the initiative provides accessible, community-based support for local residents. Over a six-month period, the programme maintained a regular presence across these locations, facilitating more than 200 meaningful conversations with individuals exploring opportunities to return to work or start a business.

Supporting individuals into employment or helping them establish new businesses is vital to the continued success of Reading's economy, improving individual wellbeing and social inclusion while fostering a diverse and resilient business community. Both Launch Reading and OutReach Business demonstrate how targeted, locally delivered interventions can create positive outcomes, helping residents build confidence, develop skills and take practical steps towards economic independence.

Supporting Local Employment

Job fairs are now a well-established part of REDA's support for local job seekers, creating valuable opportunities for direct engagement between employers and potential candidates locally.

During 2025/26, REDA worked in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus to deliver three large-scale job fairs at Reading Town Hall. These events attracted over 2,700 job seekers and more than 250 employers, spanning both national organisations and local businesses.

In addition, a targeted community job fair was delivered at Whitley Wood Community Centre, connecting 35 job seekers with nine employers offering positions.

These events provide a vital platform for employers to recruit talent and for residents to access employment opportunities. While their full impact is best measured over the longer term, indicators are positive: the 2025/26 Index of Multiple Deprivation shows some wards moving out of the bottom 10%, indicating encouraging progress.



Reading Job Fair, Reading Town Hall

RBN: The REDA Business Network

During 2025/26, REDA successfully re-established the Reading Business Network, working closely with local SMEs to shape a programme of both online and in-person events. The programme focused on networking, knowledge sharing and contributing to key strategic initiatives.

Five events were delivered over the year, covering topics such as the Reading Economic Development Framework, input into the 2050 Vision, artificial intelligence, strategic updates and core business essentials. These sessions attracted over 250 attendees in total.

Face-to-face events were held across a range of venues, including Reading Football Club, The Spill Bar in Caversham and the Holiday Inn in South Reading, ensuring engagement across the town.

The programme has strengthened connections within the local business community, enabling valuable knowledge exchange, fostering collaboration and improving understanding of the key challenges and opportunities facing businesses in Reading.

Skills, Business Support and strategy

Partnership Working

Partnership working is central to REDA's economic development role, bringing together a wide network of stakeholders with a shared interest in Reading's success.

During 2025/26, REDA collaborated with a diverse range of partners, including TVAI Hub, Reading Tech Cluster, UK Property Forums, the University of Reading, Shadowbox Shinfield Studios, Reading Borough Council, Rotary, One Station Hill, Reading Football Club, Whitley Community Development Association, Reading Business Centre, RABBLE Theatre, the Business Growth and Skills Hub, and Screen Berkshire.

These ongoing partnerships play a vital role in delivering programmes and events across the town, combining expertise, resources and local insight. This collaborative approach ensures a coordinated and effective programme of activity that supports business growth, skills development and the ongoing promotion of Reading as a vibrant and competitive economy.

Creative and Screen skills

REDA has continued to develop its *Lights, Camera, Business* programme, strengthening support for Reading's growing screen sector. During 2025/26, three in-person events were delivered, attracting a combined audience of 200 delegates. Each session focused on key industry themes, including sustainability in film, the impact of AI, and film finance.

The programme was delivered in partnership with key sector organisations, including Shadowbox Shinfield Studios, the University of Reading's TVAI Hub, and Reading Tech Cluster, with events hosted across the town, including at the Holiday Inn South Reading. All sessions were panel-led, featuring a total of 13 expert speakers and chaired by REDA. Content from each event was filmed to create a suite of promotional materials, alongside a highlight film capturing the full series, further supporting the visibility and growth of the sector in Reading.

In addition, REDA collaborated with



The Power of Apprenticeships event, Reading Town Hall

Reading Tech Cluster to deliver a Creator Economy workshop, exploring the needs of content creators and identifying opportunities for targeted support. This work reflects REDA's commitment to nurturing this fast-growing segment of the creative and screen industries in Reading.

Green Skills

In 2025/26, REDA completed the third cohort of its Green Skills programme,

delivered in partnership with Groundwork South. The programme supported 16 individuals to gain industry-recognised qualifications, including the LANTRA Brushcutter and Trimmer certification. Alongside skills development, participants also reported significant improvements in mental health and wellbeing, highlighting the wider social impact of this initiative.



Retail Support

REDA led a Berkshire-wide pilot retail skills programme, focused on supporting businesses in Caversham. Through the initiative, four local businesses were assisted by the Berkshire Growth Hub to develop practical approaches to improve trading performance and strengthen commercial resilience.

Invest in Reading

A new *Invest in Reading* Hub was launched in Autumn 2025, to support inward investment activity and promote Reading's strong commercial offer. The hub has been designed to provide up-to-date market intelligence and data to support property agents, developers and investors, alongside a new promotional video designed to raise the profile of Reading as an investment destination.

Employment and Skills Plans

REDA continues to work closely with developers across Reading to deliver Employment and Skills Plans as part of Section 106 planning obligations. These plans create valuable opportunities for local people, including job creation, apprenticeships, work experience

placements and engagement through job fairs, ensuring that growth in the town benefits the local workforce.

Strategy Development

During the year 2025/26, REDA focused on two major strategic frameworks to help guide Reading's long-term growth:



- Reading Economic Development Framework (2025–2035) – setting out key priorities and actions to drive economic growth. (Completed)
- Reading 2050 Vision (refresh) – updating the long-term ambition for the town's future. (To be completed by Autumn 2026)

Both strategies were shaped through extensive stakeholder engagement and workshops. In addition, REDA commissioned:

- How Green is Reading Town Centre? to assess environmental performance and identify practical recommendations to support sustainability improvements.
- A report on the social media visibility of Reading to inform our marketing of the town centre and Reading as a business location.

Reading's Creator Economy

Through REDA's ongoing work supporting the local film and screen sector, a growing and previously underrepresented part of the industry was identified: the creator economy. This includes independent content creators and influencers who produce short-form video content, often using mobile technology, and monetise their work through platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. While globally this sector can be highly lucrative, it also represents an emerging and accessible way for individuals to build sustainable local careers.

In response, REDA commissioned the support of Reading Tech Cluster (RTC) to engage with around 40 Reading-based creators and creatives, in a dedicated workshop to better understand their needs. Many creators use Reading as a backdrop for their content, providing valuable exposure for the town and contributing to its cultural profile.

The creators highlighted a strong sense of pride in Reading and a desire to collaborate more closely as a community. Key priorities included: access to shared creative spaces to support collaboration (such as co-working hubs, studios and venues), support in monetising content, and a desire for greater recognition and opportunities to showcase and celebrate their work.

A full report by RTC, will be published in 2026, with REDA continuing to work with this emerging community to help unlock its potential and strengthen its contribution to Reading's wider creative economy.

Inspiring Entrepreneurship in Reading's Malayalee Community

REDA's CEO, Nigel Horton-Baker, and self-employment coach, Isabel King, supported and sponsored an event in partnership with the Malayalee Association of Reading Community (MARC), bringing together nearly one hundred attendees at the Holiday Inn, South Reading. The event focused on promoting entrepreneurship within the local Malayalee community, which has its roots in Kerala, India, and continues to play an important and growing role in Reading's economy. The event also welcomed local MP Yuan Yang and featured a range of nationally and internationally successful entrepreneurs sharing their experiences.

Speakers included founders and business leaders from sectors such as retail, hospitality, technology and global services, providing inspiration and practical insight into starting and scaling a business, including: Deepa Joseph, Co-founder of Theresa's Clothing; Chef Jomon, an award-winning celebrity chef; Harsh Amin, CEO of Farm Technologies and Stealth Mode BioTech; Shine Mathew, Founder of Invotool; and Febin

Cyriac, Founder of Envertiz Group. Together, they shared practical insights and personal journeys from sectors including retail, hospitality, technology and global services, providing both inspiration and guidance for aspiring entrepreneurs.

REDA complemented this with guidance on establishing a business in Reading, alongside information on available local support. Attendees were invited to take part in a 10-week self-employment training programme, delivered with Abbey Rotary, and to apply for start-up grant funding. Six new entrepreneurs have already progressed their business ideas by joining the Launch Reading startup business training course with access to a start-up grants.



Read more:

[MARC – Malayalee Association of Reading Community | Connecting Hearts & Celebrating Culture](#)

Enhancing the visitor experience



Throughout 2025/26, REDA continued to strengthen Reading's position as a distinctive leisure and business tourism destination, delivering a programme of high-profile campaigns, events and partnerships that have increased visitor engagement, raised the town's national profile and supported economic growth.

Leisure Tourism in Reading

Jane Austen 250

REDA coordinated Reading's Jane Austen 250 celebrations throughout 2025. The partnership working delivered the best visitor numbers on Reading Abbey Quarter walks ever achieved (doubling previous visitor numbers) and raised awareness of Reading's Austen links through a diverse programme of events. Results include:

- Visit-Reading.com: 14,613 page views
- REDA Jane Austen teaser video: 33k views
- Mill at Sonning's *Death Comes to Pemberley* Austen show sold 8000 tickets (80% capacity) and went on to an 8-theatre tour
- Extensive media coverage
- The partnership project won the Heritage Award at the 2026 What's On Reading awards

Reading's Bayeux Tapestry

REDA coordinated promotion of Britain's Bayeux Tapestry at Reading Museum ahead of the British Museum autumn 2026 exhibition. Results include:

- Extensive media day with coverage including Sky News, Sunday Times, BBC South Today
- Visit England picked up Reading's place in the tapestry story and have promoted Reading nationally and internationally
- Group Travel Organisers fam trip and promotion
- Reading Museum have tripled the number of tapestry tours they are providing in 2026 due to demand
- Engaged experts on the Bayeux Tapestry to hold events in Reading





“

Reading is mostly spoken of as an uninteresting and unattractive town. These walks proved the opposite. **I now think of Reading in a different way.**

Reading Walks Festival 2025

Promoting Reading through its Cultural Excellence

As well as promoting culture and heritage in Reading, this year REDA was able to support the Rabble Theatre tour of the UK, representing our town through its production: *Glitch - The True Story of the Post Office Scandal*. Featuring in 16 cities around the country, the show attracted over 50 interviews across regional radio stations, news outlets and TV stations. Alongside Reading Rep Theatre, theatrical tours are a growing trend, spreading Reading's name as a cultural centre of excellence across the UK.

Reading Walks Festival 2025

REDA delivered the third Reading Walks Festival with 96% satisfaction levels and the vast majority of the 50 walks fully booked.

- The festival continued to shape perceptions of Reading – *“Reading is mostly spoken of as an uninteresting and unattractive town. These walks proved the opposite. I now think of Reading in a different way.”* (festival survey 25)
- The walks attracted over 800 people to walk in Reading town centre, surrounding countryside and along Reading's waterways.

- In line with the festival's ethos, 73% used public transport to access the festival
- The festival was delivered for a net cost to REDA of £1000 while managing to only charge an average of £3 per walk, making it hugely accessible
- Reading Council has since produced four self-guided wellbeing walking maps of Reading as a result of the festival

[800+]
people attracted to Reading
through its annual Reading
Walks Festival, May 2025

Visitor collateral

- The second Reading Visitor Guide was published as Reading's prime piece of visitor collateral, designed to work in combination with visit-reading.com
- A new hero visitor film was created with local film makers. Discover Reading welcomes users to visit-reading.com with a heritage, waterways, family fun message aimed at core segments: older couples, friends, groups and family visits.

St James Way

REDA facilitated the visitor of tourism authorities from Galicia for the installation of the first milestone marker to be installed on the St James Way. The 'mouteira' was a gift from Spain and is located in the Abbey Quarter as the starting point of the walking route. BBC South Today also covered the launch event on the Kennet riverside.

- The Reading-Galicia relationship was strengthened by Reading's participation as a speaker at their internationalisation conference on 'camino's'
- Estimated numbers walking the St James Way in 2025 is double that of 2024 – approx. 2000 people.

REDA co-ordinated Heritage Open Days 2025 for Reading, programming and publicising 35 events showcasing Reading's heritage.

Destinations Travel Show

REDA coordinated a Reading stand for four days at the UK's main consumer travel show, showcasing the day trip and short break attractions of Reading to a domestic audience at Olympia.



Business Tourism

- REDA has stepped up its support for the MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) sector in Reading via a dedicated partnership campaign, Meet Reading, working with 12 key venues in the town.
- REDA chairs regular Meet Reading meetings of the partners.
- A new Meet Reading film showcasing Reading's offer has been created in partnership with leading conferences trade media *Conference News*.
- REDA organised a showcase event for 20 Reading venues in September 2025 which was very well received by the venues and invited business delegates
- REDA took a stand at the PA Show to promote our key venues to PAs/EAs and event organisers. The event led to a number of live event booking leads, coordinated by REDA as a result.
- REDA continues to work with Meet Beyond London to promote our venues as an alternative to the Capital.



3.2%

increase in Reading's
visitor economy



41%

increase in overseas trips
to Reading



10k

jobs supported locally by
Reading's visitor economy

Supporting Tourism Development

Economic Impact of the Visitor Economy report

REDA published a second report assessing the impact of the visitor economy on Reading's overall economy in March 2026.

The tourism economy is now worth £405 million – this has grown since the previous report, against a backdrop of declining visitor numbers at a regional level.

Reading, with a lead from REDA, has successfully flexed its visitor economy away from the shrinking business tourism market to grow leisure tourism, overseas visits and domestic leisure visits. Highlights include:

- Reading's visitor economy has grown by 3.2%
- Reading has grown its overall overseas trips from 98,000 to 139,556 per annum, an increase of 41%
- The visitor economy supports over 10,000 jobs in Reading, 10.5% of all employment locally

The REDA-managed **Reading Welcome Ambassadors** celebrated the fourth year of the scheme based at Reading Station. The service now operates six mornings a week to welcome visitors to Reading as volunteer numbers have grown.

REDA was able to resolve **coach parking issues** in the town centre that was limiting the number of group visits. We brokered an agreement with Rivermead Leisure Centre for dedicated coach parking for town centre hotels and attractions.

REDA has been the Reading-lead for the **Berkshire LVEP**. Arranging county-wide press trips, supporting the launch of the Visitor Economy Framework, representing Berkshire at a national level on business and leisure tourism work strands.

REDA has worked with the **University of Reading** to support their centenary walks programme and with the School of Architecture to develop self-guided walks that showcase Reading's amazing Georgian and Victorian architecture.





Town centre events

As part of REDA's continued tourism activity and Reading BID's wider business plan, a vibrant year-round events programme is delivered by the wider team to drive footfall, boost trade, and enhance the visitor experience across the town centre.

The 2025/26 calendar combined popular returning favourites with exciting new additions. April saw the the **Easter Trail** bring families into the town centre during half term, alongside the **French Food Festival**, which drove footfall despite the Easter weekend timing, and shows strong potential for growth in 2026.

May's flagship **Reading Food Festival** transformed Broad Street with a diverse range of street food, live local music and strong visitor numbers. Retailers reported increased sales, underlining the event's positive impact on the high street. This momentum continued into July with lively **Bastille Day** celebrations, drawing large crowds to enjoy all things French!

August featured two standout events: the interactive **Shaun the Sheep Summer Trail**, which saw increased participation through competitions and town-wide installations, and the popular carnival parade, **Carnival of the World**. The latter was delivered through local company, CultureMix, and brought vibrant African and Caribbean music, dance and performance to Broad Street, attracting and entertaining large audiences.

Autumn and winter events continued to celebrate Reading's diversity. November's **Diwali celebrations**, led by Kala the Arts, grew in scale and reach, with social media showing visitors travelling into Reading to take part.

February introduced a new **Lunar New Year Food Festival** to Reading town centre, in partnership with Urban Food Festival. It featured 12 food operators as well as cultural performances from the local Chinese community.

Also in February, the popular **Glow: Reading Lantern Parade** returned as a permanent Valentine’s fixture, combining community workshops, a well-attended parade and an evening finale in Town Hall Square. March saw further cultural celebrations for **Chinese New Year**, with parades and performances, alongside the return of **Launchpad’s Pancake Race**, which raised over £8,000 while bringing businesses together for a fun, charitable cause.

Seasonal trails remain a key driver of family engagement, with Easter, Summer and Halloween trails continuing to grow in popularity. Free to participate and enhanced with competition elements, these trails successfully encourage exploration of town centre businesses and venues.



Images top left to right:

*Reading Lantern Parade, Chinese New Year
Gala, Diwali Celebrations, Carnival of the
World*

Christmas in Reading

The town centre Christmas lighting installation was installed for the second of the five-year contract. Feedback and comments have been overwhelmingly positive, particularly with the use of local images and references to Reading's heritage.

The German Food Market operator extended their coverage by three additional stalls, with discussions of further expansion in 2026. Retailers in Broad Street West support market growth, welcoming an increased footfall during the period.

Reading's annual Light Switch On event took place on Saturday 15 November 2025 and was a great success, growing in entertainment and visitors. With large crowds attending, extra precautions are taken around safety,

using our established partnership working with the police, Community Safety and Licensing teams.

During the Christmas period, Reading BID managed six family-focussed public weekend events, and six business focussed mid-week events. The weekend events included well-known character visits including Santa, and music, all arranged to boost footfall and encourage shoppers to stay in town longer. The business events brought office workers into town early evening to take part in various hospitality events such as beer tasting, bingo and crafts. We also worked closely with the Illuminate light trail installed in Forbury Gardens to offer a special BID night for staff to visit, attracting nearly 160 BID staff and businesses.

Town centre festive events: Character visits on Broad Street





Christmas Marketing Campaign

The 2025 Christmas campaign focused on positioning Reading as a leading festive destination while strengthening connections across customers, businesses and the local community. A multi-channel approach combined targeted door drops, magazine advertising, out-of-home posters, social media and website content to maximise reach and engagement, with all activity tracked to measure performance.

A key addition to this year's campaign was the installation of a **brand-new Snow Windows trail**, delivered in partnership with 15 BID businesses. Supported by a dedicated online landing page and social media promotion, the trail successfully showcased local retailers and ranked among the top 10 most visited pages on the website, demonstrating strong public interest.

Community engagement was enhanced through a nostalgia project celebrating past Christmases in Reading, alongside

writing competitions that attracted entries across all age groups. These initiatives helped build new local connections and expand the BID's community network.

The campaign delivered strong results, including a **24% increase in website traffic** compared with 2024, and a door drop click-through rate of 0.78%, exceeding industry benchmarks. Social media activity effectively reached the target audience, with 80% of paid engagement from users aged 35 and over.

Overall, the campaign highlighted the value of combining placemaking activity with business promotion. Insights from this year will inform future campaigns, with a greater focus on driving sales conversion, strengthening local partnerships and enhancing data capture through tools such as QR codes, alongside increasing use of AI to optimise activity.

Reading UK CIC
trading as REDA

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

Now in its 19th year of operation, REDA continues to demonstrate financial resilience and steady growth. Throughout 2025/26, the organisation maintained a strong cash position, with reserves at a level sufficient to safeguard against unforeseen challenges.

Turnover remains robust, with a five-year average of **£1,868,444**, reflecting consistent performance. A balanced mix of restricted and unrestricted funds ensures REDA can both sustain its core services and invest in future priorities and new projects.

Year end March 2025	£	£
Turnover	1,887,623	
Private £		1,694,291
Public £		193,332
Expenditure	2,024,343	
Year end surplus	-136,720	
Reserves Brought Forward from 2025/26	1,058,416	
Reserves Carried Forward to 2026/27	921,696	
Restricted		620,308
Unrestricted		301,388

Reading UK CIC Accounts are prepared by MHA – Baker Tilly

REDA Headcount (Year End)

Board

- 19 Non-Executive Directors representing a broad range of sectors
- Chair: Scott Witchalls (Stantec)
- Vice Chair: Cllr Liz Terry (Leader, Reading Borough Council)

Staff

- 8.8 FTE (10 employees, including maternity leave and cover)

Governance and Continuous Improvement

REDA continues to strengthen its governance and operational effectiveness:

- Board representation spans all but one target sector, with full coverage of required skills
- Corporate and financial risk reports are reviewed and updated quarterly
- Awarded Corporate Social Responsibility International Bronze Award
- Governance arrangements for the BID refreshed for the new five-year term
- New BID Committee structure in place, with Chairs reviewed and Annual Meeting held
- Five-year Corporate Plan priorities established for **2024–2029**

Annual Report

2025-26

www.redauk.org.uk



R·E·D·ATM
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