

READING CITY STATUS BID

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL



SUMMARY

If the cities of the future are to be defined by anything, it will be by their response to the great challenges of our age. Those challenges do not come much greater than climate change. COP26 put not just the UK but also Reading on the world stage for the contribution it is making: Reading provided the leadership, through the presidency of our local MP the Rt Hon Alok Sharma, the imagery, in the form of the 'climate stripes' created by the University of Reading's Professor Ed Hawkins, and much of the science, from the world-leading team at the University, as recognised in the award of the 2021 Queen's Anniversary Prize.

Reading's recent addition to the international 'A' list of municipalities taking bold climate action has placed us in the company of London, Manchester, Newcastle and other great cities around the world for our efforts to confront this epoch-defining issue.

Our focus on climate is in the best traditions of Reading, which has always been built on big ideas. Since Anglo-Saxon times, Reading has had enduring regional, national and international significance. From the 10th century Reading Minster was a regional centre for religious life. With the royal foundation of Reading Abbey 900 years ago it became a European political powerhouse from the reign of Henry I to Henry VIII.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, its industries – beer, biscuits and bulbs - gave it global renown. Today, our world-class research, the innovations of our multi-national and local companies, and the strength of our community and cultural offerings illustrate Reading's continued impact and influence.

As the county town of Berkshire, Reading is the economic hub of the Thames Valley, from where key regional health, education, retail and other services are provided to a much wider catchment on a city scale. A global technology town with an international community, set in a stunning natural landscape, Reading is served by excellent physical and digital connections. A place of history and HQs, culture and connectivity, leadership and learning, Reading radiates influence as a place of progress and potential, which will only increase when the Elizabeth Line opens in 2022.

The physical geography of the rivers Thames and Kennet continues to shape Reading's development, but the human geography of our diverse population is also central to our identity - and will be the key to our success in future. Our community comprises people of different backgrounds, ethnicities and cultures, adding glorious texture to daily life. Our growing cultural industries provide verve and vibrancy. Reading is a crucible of creativity known worldwide for its festivals, events and entertainment. With a booming film industry, this is a town of talent, made infinitely richer by its diversity.

Reading is a captivating combination of global knowledge hub, creative collective and a remarkable environment of rivers, parks and meeting places. But it also faces deep-rooted challenges as the benefits of its success have not reached all sections of the community. City status would boost our efforts to address these challenges, helping to forge an even stronger identity and sense of purpose to deliver our [2050 Vision](#) for Reading: a place for all our futures.

From the noble families who shaped Reading after the Dissolution, to the great Victorian benefactors through to modern entrepreneurs, successful residents have lent their names to buildings, streets, parks and schools throughout Reading.

While Reading is proud of its association with these well-known figures, it is even more proud of the many less celebrated individuals who contribute so much to our community and cultural infrastructure. They make Reading what it is and we dedicate this application to their efforts.

DISTINCT IDENTITY

Reading has grown into one of the most vibrant and economically significant urban centres in the country [\[image 1\]](#), the fourth largest urban area in the South East with a catchment of 1.7 million people. Whilst it has an identity rooted in a rich history, illustrated by the [Abbey Ruins](#) [\[image 2\]](#), Reading is a modern and forward-looking town. It is also a university town and the University of Reading helps to inject new talent and vibrancy to the community.

Reading is so much more than its urban centre. It sits within beautiful countryside, has great green spaces within it and its identity has been shaped by the rivers on which it was founded: the Thames [\[image 3\]](#) and Kennet. The arrival of the Kennet & Avon Canal [\[image 4\]](#) in the 18th century stimulated the growth of modern Reading and made the Kennet one of the busiest transport routes of the era, while the Thames at Reading remained unspoilt by urbanisation. Surrounded by open meadows, it remains a popular destination to this day, and is home to one of the oldest rowing regattas and one of the newest hydro-power schemes in the UK.

Reading's identity evolved with the industrial revolution and three industries – beer, biscuits and bulbs - would emerge to put Reading on the global map. William Blackall Simonds established a small brewery in 1785, and the town's brewing empire was born – surviving in various forms until 2010. Another entrepreneur - John Sutton – set up a small corn and seed business and in 1807 his son - Martin Hope Sutton - shaped Suttons Seeds into a global business, covering 6 acres of central Reading. Then, in 1822, Joseph Huntley opened a small biscuit shop, serving passing coach traffic. The business grew and became a great innovator, known for its decorative tin-ware. By 1900 Huntley and Palmers employed 5,000 people.

Throughout the Victorian era these industries grew to become major employers of international repute, as well as generous benefactors of the town. This was the Reading that Charles Dickens would have recognised when he lectured at the Athenaeum (of which he was President) and that Oscar Wilde later knew – first as a regular guest of the Palmer family, then as an inmate of [Reading Gaol](#) [\[image 5\]](#), inspiring his most famous poem, The Ballad of Reading Gaol (1898) and his confessional letter, De Profundis (1905). These industries left indelible marks on Reading's identity, reflected in buildings and place names to this day: from The Maltings on the banks of the Kennet, to the new [Biscuit Factory](#) artisan cinema and community hub, opened in 2021.

Today, Reading's strategic location, highly-skilled workforce and excellent transport links have attracted some of the world's most prestigious companies. This has established Reading's modern identity as a hub of the UK's IT industry, and it has been identified as one of the best places in the UK to start and grow a business (Fasthosts, 2021) based on its talent, skills and diversity. Reading offers a high quality of life, and the town centre is an exemplar of regeneration.

The award-winning [Oracle](#) retail complex [\[image 6\]](#), designed to embrace the River Kennet, sits in close proximity to old coaching inns, ancient churches and Reading's characteristic red and grey brick Victorian architecture [\[image 7\]](#). Reading is youthful and wonderfully diverse with a mix of communities and culture that come to the fore in a range of activities and experiences across the town. Its cultural gene makes it attractive to people from very different backgrounds and this will be a vital part of the town's success in the future.

As well as its vibrant town centre, modern Reading consists of thriving local centres which have their own distinct identities. Caversham [\[image 8\]](#) on the north bank of the Thames boasts a remarkable array of international cuisine; Tilehurst to the west has its 'Triangle' shopping and social centre; while Emmer Green is a quintessentially English village with a green, duck pond and country pubs. Newtown lies to the east of the town centre and marks Reading's industrial heritage, having been built to serve the workers at Huntley and Palmers' factory [\[image 9\]](#). Its Cemetery Junction area [\[image 10\]](#) lent its name to Ricky Gervais' 2010 film and retains great character – an ethnically diverse and bohemian area, popular with artists and musicians, linking town and University.

Reading's identity is, however, as much about its plans for the future as its past, and Reading is a forward-looking place with aspirations for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth set out in our [Reading 2050 Vision](#). Published in 2017, the Vision was co-produced by Reading UK, Barton Willmore, the University of Reading and Reading Borough Council with engagement of some 20,000 people across the town. It represents an ambitious blueprint for place-making in Reading: a city of green technology; of rivers and parks; and of culture and diversity. In 2020 the Financial Times FDI 'Tier 2 Cities of the Future' Awards placed Reading 13th globally, building confidence in our ability to realise these ambitions.

CIVIC PRIDE

Reading's unique blend of social, cultural and economic assets has established it as the county town of Royal Berkshire, and affords us a key leadership role across the Thames Valley area and beyond.

To the extent that civic pride derives from important buildings, infrastructure and institutions, Reading has no shortage: it has 850 listed buildings and structures including 30 designated Grade I or Grade 2*, and 2 Scheduled Monuments (Reading Abbey and Reading Gaol [\[image 11\]](#), and High Bridge [\[image 12\]](#)). Among our Listed buildings are the Grade 1 Abbey Gateway [\[image 13\]](#) and the Grade 2 Royal Berkshire Hospital [\[image 14\]](#). As well as built heritage, natural heritage is important to Reading's sense of pride. The Borough boasts seven miles of river frontage; two National Trails on our doorstep; and two Green Flag Award-winning town centre greenspaces (Forbury Gardens [\[image 15\]](#) and the Abbey Ruins, and Caversham Court [\[image 16\]](#)) which are also Green Heritage sites. In addition, we have access to the Green Flag award-winning Whiteknights campus on the Borough boundary [\[image 17, 18\]](#). Reading's open spaces are loved and cared for, evidenced by the Britain in Bloom Gold Award secured in 2019.

Reading has some of the best transport links in the country, including the second busiest rail interchange outside London, subject of a major refurbishment in 2009-14 when the station was opened by HM Queen Elizabeth II [\[image 19\]](#). With a highly skilled and well-educated population, the town has some of the best performing schools in the UK as well as a University leading the world in several disciplines. Other Reading institutions such as the Crown Court and [Royal Berkshire Hospital](#) serve a wider catchment and contribute to Reading's sense of civic pride well beyond their immediate function. The Hospital has a particular significance, being Reading's largest employer (whose parent NHS Trust serves a population of over a million) as well as the place where generations of residents have been born and cared for throughout their lives.

But 'civic pride' in Reading is about more than buildings and institutions, or economic and academic prowess, important though they are. It also derives from our active and engaged communities, and the many ways in which they shape Reading's identity. In the process of compiling this bid we took account of what the people of Reading value about their town. Through conversations with stakeholders, informed by an online survey conducted by [Reading UK](#), the [University of Reading](#), [Reading Voluntary Action](#), the [Reading Alliance for Cohesion and Racial Equality](#) and [Reading Borough Council](#), the people of Reading in particular highlighted civic pride as deriving from:

- Reading's waterways and green space: the massive increase in visits witnessed during the 'lockdowns' of 2020-21 seems to have made people even more appreciative of the access to nature, and the opportunities for recreation and relaxation, which they provide. Forbury Gardens, which has assumed even greater significance to the town following the fatal terror attack in 2020, was given particular attention by respondents to the survey.
- Reading's transport services: [Reading Buses](#) were cited as a source of pride. If London Buses are iconic for their uniform red appearance, Reading Buses are similarly so for the opposite reason: their colourful diversity. The fleet sports a rainbow of liveries [\[image 20\]](#) with a functional as well as an aesthetic purpose

of signifying the routes they serve. The affection in which Reading Buses are held is reflected in usage: Reading has consistently bucked national trends for declining bus use and is second only to Brighton & Hove for patronage per head of population.

- Reading's diversity: people told us that they valued this feature of life in Reading, illustrated by the events celebrated in the town including the Reading Community Carnival (marking our rich Caribbean heritage), Carnival of the World [\[image 21\]](#), Diwali, Windrush Day celebrations, Reading Rathayatra, Sharad Utsav, Reading Mela and Black History Month. Visitors can walk along the Oxford Road and eat food from nearly any country in the world, through to London Street, the heart of the town's black history and music heritage [\[image 22\]](#). Staff at the Royal Berkshire Hospital represent 40 different nationalities while students from 150 nations attend the University of Reading – just two examples of how diversity enriches the area.

CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE, INTERESTING HERITAGE, HISTORY AND TRADITIONS

A brief history of Reading, its heritage and traditions

Reading began life as a Saxon settlement - inhabited by the Readinga (the people of Reada) probably in the 5th Century AD. It was first mentioned in 870-871 AD when the Vikings built a winter camp in Reading and was razed by the Danes in 1006. By the time of the Domesday Book (1086) Reading had a population of less than 500. The Norman Kings assured Reading's future when in 1121, Henry I (youngest son of William the Conqueror), laid the foundation stone for Reading Abbey. Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, consecrated the Abbey in 1164, in the presence of Henry II. For the next 400 years the Abbey shaped modern Reading and became one of the most important religious and political centres in Europe.

In 1539 the Abbey was dissolved by order of Henry VIII and the last Abbot, Hugh Cook Faringdon, was executed outside the Abbey Gate. While the Abbey was stripped of its treasures, Henry granted Reading's Corporate Charter, giving it some independence, and setting the town on its future path.

After the dissolution, the influence of the Abbey waned and it fell into disrepair. Despite efforts to maintain them, the ruins had to be closed to the public in 2009. But with major investment by local partners, and the support of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Abbey Ruins were lovingly restored in 2017-18 by the 'Reading Abbey Revealed' project. The re-opening of the site, with high quality interpretation, was the focus of major community celebrations and has put the Abbey firmly back at the centre of the Town's identity and its plans for culture-led regeneration.

In 1633, Reading-born William Laud was made Archbishop of Canterbury by King Charles I. A staunch ally of the King, Laud played a key role in the country's slide into Civil War. Reading suffered greatly during the conflict: strategically placed between Oxford (the King's capital) and the seat of Parliament in London, the town fell to both Royalists and Parliamentarians. Reading was besieged by Parliamentary forces in 1643 and forced to surrender, despite a counter-attack by Prince Rupert accompanied by the King. Reading was also the setting for the only bloodshed during the 'Glorious Revolution' (1688), when the townsfolk fought with William of Orange's troops to rout King James' forces.

Because of its strategic location between London and Bath/Bristol, Reading became an important staging post: it developed as a prosperous market town and was quick to embrace opportunities such as the arrival of the Kennet and Avon Canal, and later the Great Western Railway. These underpinned the growth of the brewing, biscuit-making and seed manufacturing empires which would make Reading known around the world.

Reading's cultural infrastructure and initiatives

Reading is well served by cultural infrastructure. In addition to [Reading Museum](#) [\[image 23\]](#), famous for its replica Bayeux Tapestry [\[image 24\]](#), the town hosts three University museums – the [Museum of English Rural Life](#) [\[image 25, 26\]](#), the [Cole Museum of Zoology](#) and the [Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology](#) – plus a host of galleries and important collections. It also hosts four theatres: the [Progress Theatre](#), one of the oldest amateur dramatics venues in the UK; the [South Street Arts Centre](#), a beloved fringe theatre; the [Hexagon](#) [\[image 27\]](#), a much-admired example of brutalist architecture; and Reading's newest theatre, [Reading Rep](#). A range of other venues support a vibrant cultural scene.

Reading also excels in the diversity of events and festivals which take place in these settings and beyond. The biggest and most renowned is [Reading Festival](#) [\[image 28\]](#), which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2021. Organised by Festival Republic every August Bank Holiday, it has grown from its origins as the National Jazz and Blues Festival in 1971 to now drawing in over 100,000 music fans to its Thames-side site every year. For half a century it has been a keystone in the British music scene, helping to establish acts and musical genres that have become the soundtrack to the lives of millions. Today it is the third largest UK festival (after Glastonbury and Download), worth over £31 million to the economy. More modest in scale but no less important to Reading's cultural life are the myriad community led events which appeal to a large and diverse audience. To name a few:

- [Reading Pride](#), founded in 2003, welcomes around 5,000 visitors each year to promote equality and diversity and eliminate discrimination in relation to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT+) people across the Thames Valley.
- [Reading Children's Festival](#) celebrates its 33rd anniversary in 2022. This three-week celebration of children and young people attracts 20,000 visitors every year.
- [Water Fest](#) is Reading's largest town centre annual community event, featuring a mix of arts, culture and heritage every June. This year it acted as the flagship event for the 900th anniversary of the Abbey, attracting 4,000 visitors (18,000 pre-Covid).
- [Pride of Reading](#) is an annual awards campaign celebrating achievement within the wider community, recognising the very best of the town and its real-life heroes.
- [Reading Fringe Festival](#) is a 10-day annual festival which has welcomed national and international artists from a range of genres to venues across the town since 2013.
- [Reading Climate Festival](#) is a week-long programme of events to inspire action on climate change as part of Reading's commitment to net zero.
- [Reading Town Meal](#) is an annual harvest celebration of locally grown food hosted by Food for Families, a local charity. Food is donated by growers around Reading, cooked by Reading College students, and served for free in Reading's beautiful Forbury Gardens, to the accompaniment of music and other activities.

Reading also hosts a thriving outdoor theatre and cinema programme showcasing heritage sites such as Caversham Court Gardens and the Abbey Ruins, brought to life by local theatre groups such as RABBLE Theatre and Progress Theatre.

Reading's cultural pedigree is matched in sporting excellence: [Reading FC](#) has enjoyed an extended period in the English women's top flight – now in their 7th successive season in the Women's Super League. The men's team has been ever-present in the top two tiers for two decades, including three seasons in the Premier League since 2006 [\[image 29\]](#). And while fans of every club chant from the stands that theirs is 'the best team in the land', supporters of Reading FC have firm evidence to back up the claim: the men's team still holds the record for the

highest number of points gained in a professional league season (106 in the 2005–06 Football League Championship campaign).

With the Thames running through the Borough, rowing is another important sport for Reading. Our Amateur Regatta was established in 1842 and is still held a few weeks before Henley. Many of the world's top rowers compete and 2022 promises to be an outstanding event as a showcase for British rowing. The Redgrave Pinsent Lake on the boundary with Oxfordshire is the base for GB's highly successful rowing team, and many Olympic legends have cut their teeth on the Thames at Reading. Less well known is the fact that four of the Team GB hockey players from the 2016 Rio Olympics hail from Reading Hockey Club, including gold-medal winning captain Kate Richardson-Walsh. Reading Half Marathon takes place once a year (usually March/April): as many as 16,000 competitors from elite international to fun runners take part. The event began in 1983 and was one of the first long-distance events to include wheelchair athletes.

VIBRANT AND WELCOMING COMMUNITY

Visitors have found a welcome in Reading since the middle ages, when it was a centre for pilgrimage. The great Victorian manufacturers spread the town's name throughout the world, but nowadays the world comes to us: we are a centre for global industries and a multi-cultural community which benefits from and celebrates its diversity. Reading is proud to be [City of Sanctuary](#), committing us to be a welcoming place of safety for refugees offering sanctuary to those fleeing violence and persecution.

Reading has seen many waves of immigration – from invading Danes and Normans in its early days, refugees from Poland and other Eastern bloc countries in the 1940s/50s, and migration from the Commonwealth in the 1960s/70s. Reading is home to large Indian and Pakistani communities, and the largest number of Barbadians outside of Barbados live in Reading. A large Nepalese community has settled locally, and Reading has strongly advocated the rights of Gurkha soldiers to remain in the UK, as well as being among the first UK Councils to offer to house Afghan refugees fleeing persecution.

A broad range of faiths are represented in Reading, which has an active Interfaith Forum. Reading has the only purpose-built synagogue in Berkshire with a very active Jewish community based on Goldsmid Road [\[image 30\]](#). Various churches cater for all aspects of the Christian faith, while other places of worship include several mosques [\[image 31\]](#), a Buddhist centre, a Hindu temple [\[image 32\]](#) and a Sikh temple.

Reading's population today is the embodiment of the rich multi-cultural heritage of modern Britain and the town is a cosmopolitan community at ease with itself. It is also a success story in promoting good community relations and gaining social and economic benefit from the diversity of its population base. All major public services joined the Reading Council for Racial Equality in its launch of the Reading Declaration to eliminate racism. The initiative was highly commended in the British Diversity Awards.

Our welcoming community extends to our international relations: Reading is twinned with the City of Düsseldorf (officially since 1988); Clonmel in Ireland (1994); and Speightstown in Barbados (2003). It also has informal links with Reading, Pennsylvania and Beruwela in Sri Lanka. Reading was one of the first places to establish friendship links with a German city in the aftermath of World War II when the Mayor, Phoebe Cusden, mobilised the town to help the starving population of Düsseldorf. She founded the [Reading Düsseldorf Association](#). Reading's current Mayor still serves as its President.

RECORD OF INNOVATION

Reading prides itself on creativity and innovation, fostering an environment where entrepreneurialism can thrive. It embraces new thinking and technology and was rated third largest important technology location in the UK 2019 Digital Technology Census. Historically, Reading has produced many great innovators and visionaries:

- Neo-Classical architect Sir John Soane was educated in Reading - the son of a bricklayer, he rose to the top of his profession as Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy and Clerk of Works responsible for the Palace of Westminster.
- Ernest Hives, former Chairman of Rolls Royce, who was involved in the invention of the company's jet engines, was born and learnt his trade in Reading.
- Local boy Sir John Madejski OBE DL created the Autotrader brand before investing part of his fortune in the rejuvenation of Reading FC, rescuing it from receivership, building a new stadium and overseeing its promotion to the Premier League.
- Modern photography took its earliest steps in Reading, when pioneer William Fox Talbot set up a studio, creating Calotype prints, in 1844.
- Suttons Seeds were world leaders in creating reliable seed stock and air-tight packaging, enabling their products to be sent anywhere in the world.
- Huntley, Bourne and Stevens led the world in tin manufacturing – their novelty tins were shipped around the globe and are now highly sought-after antiques.
- James Cocks first sold his Reading Sauce in the late 18th Century. It became popular throughout the UK for nearly 200 years, becoming a favourite of Mrs Beeton, featuring in the writings of Jules Verne and Lewis Carroll.

The University of Reading has been at the forefront of Reading's record of innovation for nearly a century. Pioneering cutting-edge research, pushing academic boundaries and leading social change, the redbrick University is the tenth oldest in England, having been granted its Royal Charter by King George V in 1926. Today it is among the top 30 UK universities (QS and THE World University Rankings 2021) and hosts 19,000 students.

Headquartered at the state-of-the-art Whiteknights campus, and set in 130 hectares of Green Flag Award-winning parkland, the University of Reading is known worldwide as a leading institution in environmental science, health, food, arts and humanities, social science and business. and its pioneering research on climate change has achieved global recognition. Working in partnership with the Met Office, the University is ranked second in the world, and first in the UK, for research in Meteorology and Atmospheric Sciences. As the UK's only dedicated university meteorology department, the University boasts internationally recognised research and teaching staff, including five Fellows of the Royal Society.

The University contributed more expert authors to the 2021 Working Group I report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) than any other institution in the world. The University's Professor Ed Hawkins MBE joined Sir David Attenborough in opening the UK Climate Assembly in 2019. Professor Hawkins' 'climate stripes' data visualisation [\[image 33\]](#) has been used around the world to inspire action on climate change. As the highest ranked University in the world for Agriculture (QS and THE rankings 2021) Reading plays a global role in improving food security and reducing the environmental impacts of food and farming.

The University is in a health innovation partnership with the Royal Berkshire Hospital, and the latter runs c.200 research studies at any one time. It is one of England's top five highest recruiting hospitals, with a reputation for high quality research and innovation. As an example, during World War I, Leonard Joyce, a surgical registrar, pioneered a new way of healing wounds when he discovered the Reading Bacillus.

The University's focus on climate change is reflected in the wider community with the multi-agency [Reading Climate Change Partnership](#) convening key players to deliver action across the borough. In November 2021 Reading's work in this area was recognised with its addition to an international 'A' list of cities taking bold climate action – one of only 10 UK local authorities and 95 globally to receive this accolade. The list, prepared by the Carbon Disclosure Project, is regarded as the 'gold standard' for climate reporting and only 9.8% of cities reporting via the platform are admitted to the 'A' list.

Innovations are also being taken forward by the wider community – in August 2021, the [Reading Hydro](#) project [\[images 34, 35\]](#) went live, tapping into the Thames to provide 230 MWh of renewable electricity p.a. and powering the popular [Thames Lido](#) [\[image 36\]](#). The scheme was funded by community share issues requiring no subsidy.

The Reading 2050 Vision embedded the idea of a 'smart city' as a guiding tenet of our future plans, and a number of projects are being taken forward under this banner.

SOUND GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

Reading has a long tradition of good governance, and can lay claim to the entire country being governed from here in the 13th century: William Marshall, 1st Earl of Pembroke, celebrated by his peers as 'the Greatest Knight', saw out his days in Caversham, from where he ran the country as Regent to the boy King Henry III. Parliament also met in Reading on several occasions in the 15th century. Today Reading is the county town of Royal Berkshire and a single level unitary authority.

Reading has had some degree of local government autonomy since 1253 when the local merchant guild was granted a Royal Charter by Henry III, and was granted self-governance by Elizabeth I in 1560 when the honour of County Borough was bestowed. The town has been run by a borough corporation, as a county borough, and as a district of Berkshire. The Borough became a unitary authority in 1998 when Berkshire County Council was abolished, and is now responsible for all aspects of local government. Reading Borough Council uses the committee system of governance, adopting this in 2013 following a period of utilising the Leader and Cabinet model.

Reading has elected at least one Member of Parliament to every Parliament since 1295. Currently, Reading and its surrounding area is represented by two MPs – the Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP (Reading West) and Matt Rodda MP (Reading East). Both Reading MPs share the local community's commitment to tackle the global challenge of climate change and it was a great honour for Reading when Alok Sharma was appointed President of the COP26, overseeing the international effort to tackle global warming.

The town is an important regional base for the Judiciary and home to Reading Crown Court. The administrative centre of the magistracy in Berkshire is in Reading, which is also home to the County Court.

ASSOCIATIONS WITH ROYALTY

Reading's Royal associations reach deep into English history and continue to the present day: the former Catherine Middleton, Duchess of Cambridge, was born in the Royal Berkshire Hospital at Reading on 9 January 1982 and visited again in 2020.

In 979 Queen Elfrida, second wife of King Edgar, founded a royal nunnery in Reading whilst in 1121 Henry I laid the foundation stone for Reading Abbey and was buried here in 1136, making Reading one of only a handful of towns where British monarchs are buried [\[image 37\]](#). In 1164 the Abbey was consecrated by Thomas Becket in the presence of Henry II and in 1359 John of Gaunt, son of Edward III, married Blanche of Lancaster at the Abbey.

In 1464 Edward IV's secret marriage to Elizabeth Woodville was announced at Reading, Elizabeth being escorted to the Abbey and honoured as Queen of England. Tradition has it that Elizabeth I, who visited regularly, actively encouraged the creation of a cloth industry in the town by gifting mulberry trees for the production of silk worms. She was certainly pivotal in helping shape modern Reading granting it Borough status in 1560.

King William IV took a keen interest in construction of the Royal Berkshire Hospital when it began in 1837, such that his coat of arms appeared on its front, not that of Queen Victoria during whose reign it opened. Huntley and Palmers began delivering biscuits to Windsor Castle in the 1850s and in 1867 first carried the Royal Arms and 'By Appointment to the Queen'. Suttons Seeds became a supplier to all Royal farms and gardens and its Reading headquarters bore the name 'The Royal Seed Establishment'.

As part of her Diamond Jubilee celebrations a statue of Queen Victoria was erected on Reading's Town Hall Square. A statue of her son Edward VII stands opposite Reading Station. Walton Adams, one of Reading's pioneer photographers, included Queen Victoria amongst his clients, and his son Marcus gained renown as a photographer of royal children. His 30-year career spanned four generations, starting with a visit of George V to Suttons Seeds and ending with portraits of Princess Anne in 1956.

First used in the Grant of Arms from Elizabeth I in 1566, the re-introduction of 'RE' (Regina Elizabetha) to our Borough Arms [\[image 38\]](#) was a tribute to Queen Elizabeth II, in whose coronation year they were granted.

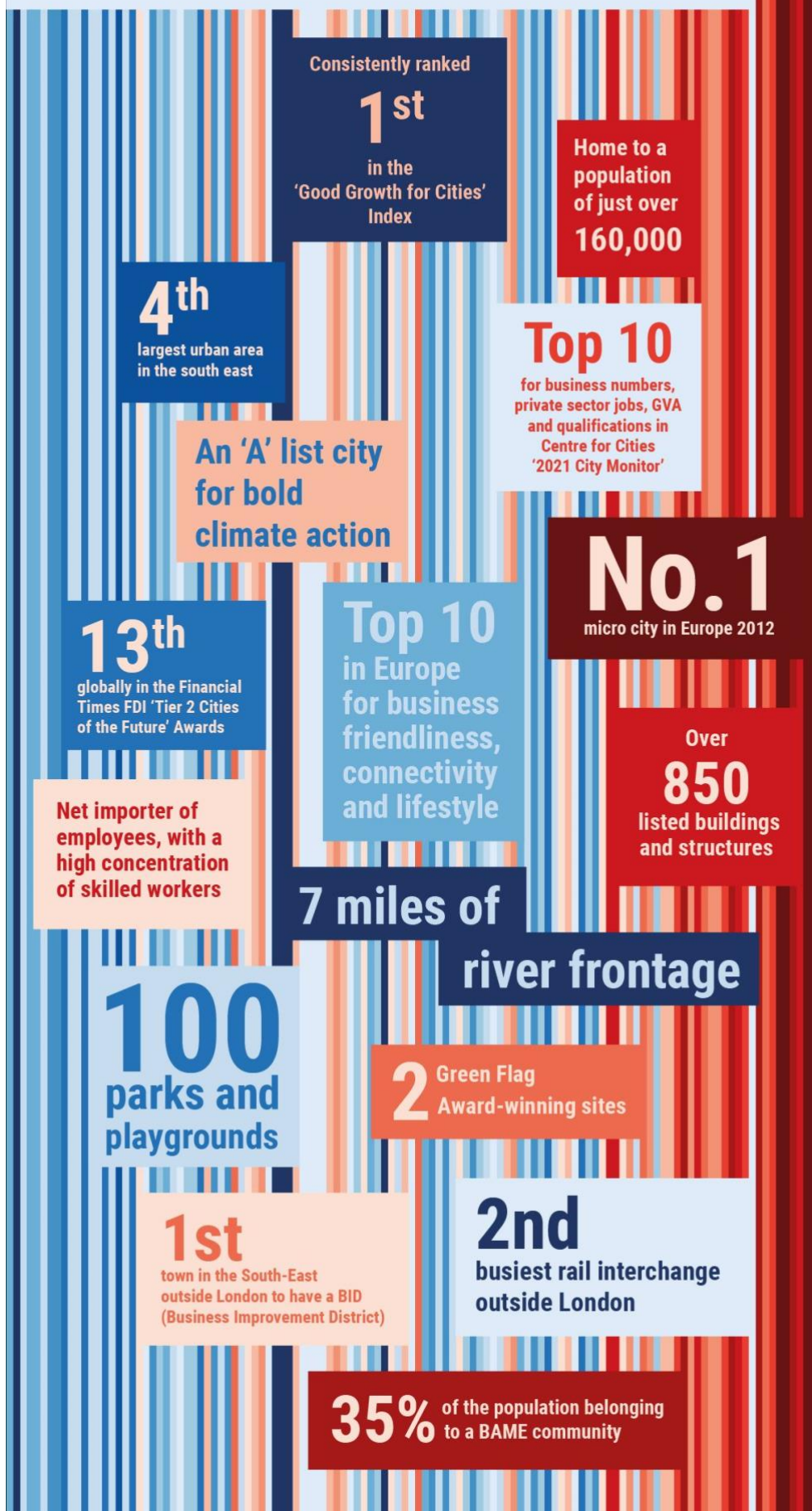
The University of Reading has won five Queen's Anniversary Prizes between 1998 and 2021, for work in typography, archaeology, meteorology, the study of Shakespeare, and climate change. In 2012, as part of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations, Reading was one of 12 universities in the country to be granted a new Regius Professorship by Her Majesty, the UK's only Regius Chair of Meteorology and Climate Science.

OTHER PARTICULARLY DISTINCTIVE FEATURES, AGE, RESIDENTS OR COMMUNITIES WHO HAVE MADE WIDELY RECOGNISED SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIETY

Great Redingensians have come from all fields. As well of those mentioned above others who have been born, educated or settled here include: novelist Jane Austen; author and dramatist Mary Russell Mitford; director and producer Sam Mendes CBE; actress Kate Winslet CBE; comedian and actor Ricky Gervais; broadcaster Chris Tarrant OBE; actor Rudolph Walker CBE; actress Jacqueline Bisset; singer and actress Marianne Faithful; actor and film-maker Sir Kenneth Branagh; musician and composer Mike Oldfield; and film director and producer Sir David Lean CBE. Between them Bisset, Branagh, Gervais, Lean, Mendes and Winslet have amassed 10 Academy Awards (Oscars) and 21 BAFTAs.

Notable entrepreneurs, scientists and politicians who have been born, educated or settled in Reading include: former British Prime Minister Henry Addington; Reading MP and playwright Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd; cloth merchant and philanthropist John Kendrick; mathematician and astronomer John Blagrove; Sheriff of Berkshire and Reading MP Sir Thomas Vachel; Parliamentarian Sir Francis Knollys; former Director of the Bank of England Edward Simeon; Victorian architect Alfred Waterhouse; neo-Classical architect Sir John Soane; department store owner William McIlroy (former Mayor of Reading); 'King and Queen of the Gypsies' Levi and Matilda Stanley; aircraft designer F.G. Miles; Formula 1 director Ross Brawn OBE; business leader Karen Blackett OBE; and pioneer of robotics Prof Kevin Warwick.

Reading at a glance



A special thank you to Professor Ed Hawkins MBE, University of Reading, for his permission to use the climate stripes imagery. The progression from blue (cooler) to red (warmer) stripes portrays the long-term increase in average global temperature for Berkshire from 1850 (left side of graphic) to the present day #showyourstripes.

THE RESIDENT POPULATION OF THE AREA

- 2020 ONS mid-year estimates show Reading Borough's population at 160,337 with 20.8% aged between 0-15; 64.1% of working age; 12.7% above working age and 49.1% female. Currently 65,410 households live within the borough boundary.
- The total population is projected to see an increase of 3.2% by 2043.
- These figures belie the fact that the Reading urban area includes the large suburbs of Woodley, Earley and Calcot outside the Borough boundary. A realistic figure for the population of the 'greater' Reading area would be in the region of 275,000.
- Reading has a young population but the town is seeing a 'greying' trend, with the pensionable age population projected to grow more quickly (by over 50% over next 20 years) than those of working age. The 'dependency rate' (the ratio of total population to those of working age), is set to rise over the next 20 years accordingly.
- Reading is a very diverse community. At the 2011 Census 35% of the population belonged to a Black and Minority Ethnic community, the third highest proportion in the South East after Slough and Oxford. The largest ethnic category is White British (66.8%), followed by Pakistani (4.5%), Indian (4.2%) and Black African (3.9%).
- According to the School Census 2020, 58% of primary school children and 59% of secondary school children are from a Black and Minority Ethnic group.
- The Council's Interpretation and Translation service recorded requests for a total of 67 different languages in 2019/20.
- Despite Reading's economic success, there is a gap between the most and least prosperous neighbourhoods, where the benefits do not always reach local people.
- The high cost of living and, in particular, the high cost of housing, have had a significant impact on local communities.
- Although Reading has some of the most affluent neighbourhoods in the Thames Valley, it also has some of the most deprived - a 2016/17 Centre for Cities report suggested that Reading was the 3rd least equal city.
- According to the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019, there are now five Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in Reading that fall within the most deprived 10% nationally, compared with only two in the previous index in 2015. This suggests relative deprivation has increased in certain areas within Reading over recent years.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IN READING

Reading's economic and business profile

- Reading has been consistently ranked first or equal first with the City of Oxford in PwC's 'Good Growth for Cities' Index. This measures the performance of the UK's largest cities against 10 quality of life and economic indicators.
- Reading is internationally known as a base for knowledge-based sectors including information and communications technology, bio-pharma, fin-tech, medi-tech and food-tech – some of the most important sectors for innovation and growth.
- This enviable mix, made up of 7,045 businesses (ONS, 2019), has made Reading highly resilient to recessions – and given the local economy a powerful ability to 'bounce back'.
- Previously a hub for service sectors such as insurance, finance and customer support, the town is now a focal point for advanced business services including banking, accountancy, legal and consultancy services.
- Reading is a net importer of employees, with a high concentration of skilled workers. Pre-Covid, unemployment was very low but has risen recently with the claimant count currently standing at 5.3% (September 2021).
- A pivotal location on the M4 and rail network, close to Heathrow Airport, has given Reading strong connections to business networks at national and global scales.
- The town has a broad functional economic area comparable to many larger UK cities, putting it at the heart of Berkshire with surrounding areas looking to Reading for jobs, shopping, nights out and transport links.

- The Financial Times FDI 'Cities of the Future' Awards consistently recognise the town's status – in 2012 naming Reading the 'Best Micro City' in Europe, and over the last decade placing it in the top ten in Europe for qualities including business friendliness, connectivity and lifestyle.
- Reading appears in the top 10 for business numbers, private sector jobs, GVA and qualifications in Centre for Cities '2021 City Monitor'.

FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT IN READING

- Reading plays a key role at the heart of the South East's powerhouse economy, thanks to the productivity of key global sectors: the Greater Reading economic area hosts over 400 foreign-owned businesses, the highest concentration in the country.
- These companies provide a remarkable 59% of local employment, and success in attracting foreign investment is ongoing with 23 new Foreign Direct Investment landings in 2019 (ONS/Thames Valley Berkshire LEP) reinforcing Reading's position at the centre of world economies.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

- Reading has one the most entrepreneurial business landscapes in the country. These home-grown industries, bolstered by the presence of major players like Oracle, Verizon, Microsoft, P&G, Bayer and Virgin Media, are helping to define a new Reading that has research and innovation at its heart.
- Reading had 71 high growth firms operating in 2019 – including Roc Search, Huntswood, RedStor, Fiscal Tech and Primrose – there were another 72 high growth businesses in the Greater Reading area (Thames Valley Berkshire LEP/Beauhurst).
- Much of the research-based industry has emerged from the University of Reading – a leading research University which is also home to the Henley Business School.
- Every part of the University has strong links with the business community. The success of sectors such as bio-pharma, technology and climate change is largely due to the University's focus on entrepreneurship and innovation through its Enterprise Centre, Thames Valley Science Park, and now Cine Valley, which is set to become a hub for global film and TV production.
- The global HQ of the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts is in Shinfield Road, with plans under discussion to move to the University's Whiteknights campus, creating the world's largest cluster of weather and climate scientists.

BUSINESS NETWORKS

- While the reach of the University is pivotal, it is part of a larger landscape of networks that underpin Reading's economic success and drive its development.
- Networking groups like First Friday, Thames Valley Property Forum, Reading Business Network and Heart of Berks Hospitality Association are unique to Reading. They run alongside established networks such as the Chamber of Commerce, the IOD (there is a business hub here), Tech Nation (one of 14 UK Tech Hubs) and the Federation of Small Businesses.
- Reading is also unique in having an economic development company (Reading UK Community Interest Company) that is private sector led, providing an important conduit between business and the Local Authority and Thames Valley Berkshire LEP.
- Reading was the first town in the south-east outside London to have a BID (Business Improvement District) – renewed in 2014 and 2019, this created a £5m investment pot. Reading has since added a second BID (Abbey Quarter Commercial District).

- Reading UK provides the management base for Reading's two BIDs which alone represent over 800 companies. It recently led production of Reading's Economic Recovery and Renewal Strategy 'Powered by People' setting out a roadmap to help the local economy emerge from the pandemic.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- In recent years the development of the M4 J11 corridor has allowed the settling of Green Park [\[image 39\]](#) - an award-winning business park and residential area. Set in a remarkable natural landscape with sustainability at its heart, it is home to major corporations such as PepsiCo, Virgin Media, Huawei, Thales, Bayer [\[image 40\]](#) and Cisco.
- Green Park is flanked by the Royal Berkshire Conference Centre, Reading Football Club's stadium and hotel complex, and Reading International Business Park, home to Verizon. In the same area there are two large retail parks and Reading Gateway – a massive mixed-use development bridging old and new South Reading.
- In the town centre, The Oracle is recognised as a model for best practice in 'place-making' – a riverside regeneration occupying the 22-acre site of the former Courage brewery spanning the River Kennet. 72,000 sqm of retail and leisure was opened in 1999 but this site continues to evolve with the changing face of the high street.
- Following adoption of Reading's first Tall Buildings Strategy in 2008, designed to ensure appropriate development of the townscape, the iconic Blade building [\[image 41\]](#) became the tallest building in the town centre (282 feet) when it opened in 2009. Subsequently, the Thames Tower near the station interchange was refurbished in 2017, kickstarting regeneration of the area.

MAJOR REGENERATION OPPORTUNITIES

- The scale of The Oracle is about to be matched by Station Hill, the long-awaited regeneration of one of the town's premier business areas which is now underway.
- This mixed-use development, between Reading Station and Friar Street, is just one of the town's major Foreign Direct Investment successes. Delivered by US owned Lincoln Property Company in partnership with MGT Investment it covers 6.5 acres of office, retail and residential space, including two acres of public realm. One Station Hill, a landmark 15 storey building, will provide 276,470ft of innovative work space.
- By 2023 Station Hill will transform the area opposite Reading Station which will become the western terminus of the Elizabeth Line in 2022 [\[image 42\]](#). This direct link from Reading to the City of London and beyond will offer travel times to London Paddington of 25 minutes.
- Planned growth in residential provision in the town centre will provide c.20,000 homes for local residents wanting to enjoy the convenience of urban living. Chatham Place, one of the first major schemes, was completed in 2009 and is now joined by Verto, Thames Quarter, Foundry Place, Kennetside within the town and schemes such as West Village, Dee Park, Reading Gateway and Green Park Village further out - all high-quality brownfield site regeneration projects.
- Reading is also planning to capitalise on the rich history surrounding Reading Abbey and the adjoining areas to develop two strategic regeneration opportunities:
- The 'Abbey Quarter' encompasses the Abbey Ruins, with other historic buildings including Reading Museum, Reading Gaol, the Maiwand Lion monument [\[image 43\]](#), the Simeon Monument [\[image 44\]](#) and St Laurence Church [\[image 45\]](#), drawing on the rich history of the area to create a cultural and creative industries hub.
- The Minster Quarter will be a distinctive, high density, mixed use redevelopment befitting any city centre whilst retaining the historical associations of the area. It will provide high quality public realm and contribute to the adjoining conservation areas at St. Mary's Butts/Castle Street and Russell Street/Castle Hill, whilst enhancing the listed St Mary's Church ('the Minster') and its setting [\[image 46\]](#).
- The local authority also has an ambitious New Build programme delivering much needed affordable and key worker housing, with new homes being built using Passivhaus principles in line with our net zero commitments. In

recognition of this, the Council received the prestigious 'Homebuilder of the Year' title in the UK Housing Awards in November 2021.

PUBLIC GREEN SPACES

- Reading is blessed with a rich natural heritage and an abundance of rivers and green spaces – with around 100 parks and playgrounds spread across the Borough, and a wide expanse of unspoilt Thames river meadows close to the town centre.
- Reading has 20 woodlands, including some ancient woodland, and five Local Nature Reserves. Many of our parks have areas managed for nature conservation and the volunteer and 'friends of' groups are especially active within these areas.
- The open parkland of Prospect Park [\[image 47\]](#), Reading's largest open space and a Grade II registered park, gets its name from the fine views across the Kennet Valley, which can be seen from the Mansion House, a Grade II Listed mansion and restaurant.
- The park has areas of conservation grassland while 'The Rookery', a designated Local Wildlife Site, is an area of mature oak woodland. The park is also home to a large children's play area, floodlit football courts and the Reading Society of Model Engineers' miniature rail layout.
- The Forbury Gardens sit at the heart of the town centre, in the town's most historic area, the Abbey Quarter, adjacent to the Abbey Ruins. Originally laid out in 1833 these Victorian formal gardens were awarded a major National Lottery Heritage Fund grant and fully renovated in 2005.
- The Forbury Gardens are home of one of Reading's best-loved icons, The Maiwand Lion. Named after a village in Afghanistan where 328 men from the 66th (Berkshire) Regiment died on 27 July 1880, it was sculpted by George Blackall Simonds of the town's brewing empire. The lion's image was adopted by the town as a symbol of togetherness in the wake of the fatal terror attack in the Forbury Gardens in 2020.
- Caversham Court Gardens date back to the 17th Century and are listed in the English Heritage 'Register of Historic Parks and Gardens of special historic interest in England'. The Gardens were refurbished with support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, re-opening in 2009.
- Both Caversham Court Gardens and the Forbury Gardens hold Green Flag Award and Green Heritage Site status.
- Reading has had an active 'In Bloom' campaign for over 25 years and the town won regional and national Gold Awards in 2019.
- Waterways have always been important to Reading and the town owes its existence to its location at the confluence of the River Thames and the River Kennet. Unlike many Thameside locations, it has retained most of its boat operators, being popular for both cruising and holiday hire.
- The Kennet and Avon Canal starts in Reading, and links the town to the sea at Bristol. It fell into gradual decline from the 1850s and was closed in 1955. A determined group of enthusiasts raised funds and campaigned to reopen the canal, succeeding in 1990 when the waterway became fully operational once again between Reading and Bristol.
- To the south-west of the town, the flood plain of the Kennet, encompassing the area known as the Kennet/Fobney Meadows and the Fobney Island nature reserve, is a haven for wildlife and people alike. The Council is working with local partners on a project to enhance wetland habitats and deliver a major opportunity for urban biodiversity enhancement.

SPORT AND LEISURE FACILITIES

- Reading has a thriving and diverse mix of sport and leisure opportunities for residents within the Borough and those in neighbouring areas.

- Reading Football Club, established in 1871, is one of the oldest clubs in the league and was named Family Club of the Year in 2010.
- The Select Car Leasing Stadium is a 24,000-seater stadium to the south of Reading and is home to Reading Football Club. It has also hosted top flight rugby union as home to London Irish RFC. The ground originally opened in 1998 as the Madejski Stadium, named after Sir John Madejski, the successful Reading entrepreneur who also sponsored the Madejski Academy School.
- Reading Football Club, commonly known as 'The Royals', entered their 150th anniversary campaign in the 2021-22 Championship season, while the women's team are playing in the Women's Super League where they have been a fixture since 2014.
- Reading Football Club has always had a focus on youth development. Following the launch of the Premier League's Elite Player Performance Programme (EPPP) in 2011, the Royals managed to achieve Category 1 status by July 2013 to be put on the same footing as the best academies in the country.
- This has been further enhanced by the opening of the state-of-the-art Bearwood Park training ground, which hosted its first training session in the summer of 2019. Here, Reading FC's Academy not only sources local young talent but also provides an education for fledgling players to maximise their potential on and off the pitch.
- Reading Football Club has a social inclusion unit which has several different pathways to engage typically hard-to-reach children in education.
- Within the Borough there is abundance of community football, with local leagues working in partnership with the Council and community volunteers.
- Reading Borough Council is transforming its own leisure provision through a £40 million investment into facilities in partnership with Greenwich Leisure Limited.
- This includes replacing its current main centre, extending a second centre and refurbishing two other local centres.
- The new flagship leisure centre will provide competition facilities including: a 25m 8-lane competition swimming pool and 300 spectator seats, a combined teaching and diving pool with moveable floor, a 6-court sports hall with 250 spectator seats, a 120-station gym with 3 studio plus café/information hub and soft play area.
- Palmer Park Stadium [\[image 48\]](#) already provides competition athletics and cycling facilities and will now benefit from a new gym, new junior activity zone, café and information hub. Along with a 25m community pool, velodrome and athletics stadium will all be in one location. This combination of facilities will be unique in the UK and will put Reading firmly on the map as a top sports destination.
- As a regional centre for athletics and cycling, Palmer Park is home to Reading Athletics Club and is the training ground for many past and future Olympians.
- Thames Valley Triathletes, based in the town, is Britain's oldest triathlon club, and the British Triathlon Association was also formed here in December 1982. Britain's first-ever triathlon was held at Kirton's Farm in Pingewood, Reading in June 1983.
- South Reading & Meadway Sports Centres are local community sports/leisure centres which provide a range of activities, ranging from racquet sports and swimming to regular gym use and exercise referral classes.
- In addition to Borough-owned leisure centres, Reading acts as a hub for other sports clubs and leisure opportunities, from water sports to more traditional sports.
- Reading has a wide variety of land used for sports, including numerous grass and artificial football pitches, bowls greens, and tennis courts. These facilities are managed in close liaison with various leagues and clubs.
- Reading has introduced up to date facilities for young adults – including skate parks, multi-use games areas, floodlit sports courts, multigyms and basketball hoops.

- There is a wide variety of other sporting clubs and facilities immediately outside the Borough border further enhancing Reading's regional importance. For example, Reading Hockey Club has a ladies performance team and men's high performance and performance development teams, which enjoy significant success at national and international level, with many club members playing for the national team.
- Reading Cricket Club (established 1823) has a long tradition of nurturing talent, while the Rams Rugby Football Club (founded 1924) based at Sonning is currently enjoying success in National League 1.
- The River Thames is the base for Reading's various rowing and canoeing groups. Both the University Rowing Club and Reading Rowing Club have large clubhouses on the river – and they continue to produce outstanding talent for the national team, with athletes competing in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.
- Water sports facilities have been further improved by the Redgrave Pinsent Rowing Lake - a purpose built rowing lake and marina at Caversham, which serves as the training base for Team GB Olympic rowing teams.

LOCAL AUTHORITY SUPPORT FOR THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

- The third sector in Reading is significant and diverse, including over 1,000 separate organisations.
- Reading Borough Council (RBC) has a large number of current funding agreements in place with third sector providers in the form of contracts and grant arrangements.
- Some are linked to specific projects (e.g. the Cultural Commissioning Programme) or pathways (e.g. the Homelessness Pathway). Some are mechanisms for disbursing funding streams allocated to the local authority for specific purposes, e.g. NHS England Suicide Prevention funding awarded to RBC for bereavement support.
- In addition to these quite tightly defined processes, however, the Council has also for many years commissioned a broader range of services from voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations through a mix of general grants and community support commissioning frameworks.
- 39 contracts were awarded to VCS organisations under the Narrowing the Gap (II) commissioning framework, due to end in 2022, with a total value of £1.13m p.a.
- During the pandemic the voluntary and community sector came together with the Council to establish the One Reading Community Hub, with a seven-day-per-week action line connecting people in need of help with volunteers, organisations and services who could support them.
- As a result of Covid-19 and as part of the Council's post Covid-19 Recovery Plan, in July 2020 it awarded grant funding to 17 organisations from a Covid-19 small grants voluntary sector funding pot, totalling £59,113, to help them expand existing services, deliver services in a different way or develop new services.
- The Council recently embarked on a review of its relationship with the local voluntary sector, which will include and inform future plans about approaches to commissioning.

SHOPPING CENTRES

- Since its days as a large market town - home of hiring fairs, livestock sales and, between 1750-1850, England's biggest cheese fair - Reading has remained one of the most important centres for commerce in the south of England.
- The opening of The Oracle over 20 years ago lifted Reading into CACI's top ten retail centres for many years, with a pre-Covid daily footfall of 80,000.
- The primary catchment area for the town centre includes the major suburbs and surrounding small villages. The secondary and tertiary catchment areas include Ascot, Maidenhead and Slough to the east, Camberley, Fleet and Farnborough to the south, Thatcham and Newbury to the west and Wallingford and Didcot to the north.

- This means Reading retail centre serves a population of 857,000, with the primary and secondary catchments bringing in 81.4% of their potential spend, and even the tertiary catchments spending 48% in the town (of an estimated £1,809 million according to Forty Group).
- Traditionally the principal shopping area was found around Market Place and evolved to include Friar Street and Broad Street [\[image 49\]](#).
- Modern shopping arrived in 1972 with the arrival of the Butts Centre to the west of Broad Street, now the [Broad Street Mall](#).
- In the last decade the centre has kept up with changing retail demand and includes an NHS Walk-In Centre, and The Biscuit Factory – an independent cinema and live music venue.
- When it opened 1999, The Oracle was the region's premier retail and leisure destination with over 120 retail units anchored by House of Fraser and Debenhams.
- As retail tastes and shopping habits have changed Debenhams has made way for Next Home and Beauty, and House of Fraser is expected to be developed into a leisure outlet including bowling and more restaurants. This will enhance the unique outdoor leisure experience of the centre which already has dozens of restaurants and cafes fronting the River Kennet.
- Broad Street [\[image 21\]](#) and [\[image 49\]](#) is still a major shopping venue, with one of the UK's largest John Lewis branches and Marks and Spencer still trading solidly alongside other household brand names.
- It is a mark of Reading's success as a regional centre that it has retained shops and restaurants that have been forced to abandon other towns – including Pizza Express and Carluccio's. While some brands were lost during lockdown the vacated spaces have quickly been taken over by emerging brands and independents, creating a strong sense of confidence in the future of the town centre as it adapts.
- The rise of interest in independent business and the clamour for new leisure experiences has allowed our regular street food market 'Blue Collar' to flourish – to the point where it will be taking over the space of our former street market, creating a permanent container village for artisan food and drink companies.
- New research undertaken by Forty Group to support the Borough Council's Town Centre Strategy has concluded that Reading has a highly balanced retail proposition, assuring its position as a strong retail destination for the future.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE RANGE, VARIETY AND APPEAL OF COMMUNITY AND 'INTEREST' GROUPS BASED IN THE AREA

- With one of the most active voluntary and community sectors in the region, Reading has more than 1,000 organisations contributing to the life and economy of the town.
- Reading Voluntary Action (RVA), a registered charity, supports the voluntary and community sector in Reading to thrive and flourish.
- Reading has a buoyant culture and community sector, and hosts hundreds of community events each year from theatre to re-enactments and carnivals. These events bring the community together and span a wide range of sectors.
- Reading's voluntary sector regularly features winners in the Queen's Awards for Voluntary Service. In recent years awards have gone to: Smart Works Reading, No 5 Youth Counselling, Reading Family Aid, Progress Theatre, Reading Refugee Support Group, Sport in Mind, The Mills Archive Trust, and Reading Rowing Club.
- Reading Volunteer Awards is an annual celebration hosted by RVA to acknowledge and celebrate the extraordinary contribution volunteering makes in our town.
- Reading's charities also boast excellent governance in charity management and 20 charities have achieved Reading's Good Governance Quality Award for Charities.
- Reading's cultural community has flourished through connecting, collaborating and creating. The 2016 Year of Culture was programmed to celebrate attributes that are uniquely 'Reading' and catalysing the already vibrant

grass roots arts scene. This brought together the arts community as well as Reading's diverse communities and was strongly supported by the town's businesses.

- Each month in 2016 saw the town celebrating an aspect of our cultural heritage and history that makes the town truly unique. Involving internationally renowned arts organisations from Artangel at the Reading Gaol celebrating the life and times of Oscar Wilde with Patty Smith and Stephen Fry reading the Ballad of Reading Gaol; through to Bompas & Parr creating an immersive Huntley and Palmer biscuit-making experience at the Reading Museum.
- As well as the town's history, which inspired arts events and activities, the Year of Culture also showcased the town's digital innovation, hosting a talk from the first person to have sent a text, and Coralie Bickford-Smith (author of Waterstone's Book of the Year) who studied at the University of Reading.
- The end of the Year of Culture saw the town lit up, inspired by a young resident's essay about how she would like her community to come together. National and local artists worked together to create lighting installations around the town.
- The pinnacle of the Year of Culture was a major exhibition at Reading Gaol attended by over 50,000 people.
- The collaboration between partners and connections with national and international agents brought about by the Year of Culture continued beyond 2016 and was followed up in 2017-19 by the Reading on Thames Festival. This celebrated the town's waterways and the fact that Reading has the longest stretch of the Thames running through any borough.
- Residents were able to enjoy events on the water, created by Walk the Plank, in the water, with a swim through the town centre, and by the water with talks from local poets and authors set on the river banks and performances from Cirque Bijou. Artists from Nepal and Reading worked together to create works inspired by rivers in their respective homes.
- From the Reading on Thames Festival has come the High Street Heritage Action Zone project, which is celebrating Reading as a 'World in One Place' in terms of its ethnic and cultural diversity.
- The importance of these partnerships was highlighted when Covid-19 restrictions shut down many 'in real life' cultural offerings in 2020-21. In order to support cultural organisations and our community's mental health, Reading Culture Live was launched in May 2020, just ten weeks into lockdown.
- The virtual platform supported local organisations with a small commissioning fund that helped them to deliver content inspired by the NHS 5 'Steps to Wellbeing', and showed a myriad of local cultural content. 100% of participants who answered a survey said that it helped their mental wellbeing during lockdown.
- The Reading Green Wellbeing Network encourages collaboration between community gardens and horticultural therapy groups in and around Reading.
- The Community Participatory Action Research project, a collaboration between Reading Borough Council, the voluntary sector and the University of Reading, is sharing knowledge and experience in reducing health inequalities. It is a unique bottom-up opportunity where five local community researchers have been identified and are working directly with the local BAME communities to understand the issues that matter to them arising from Covid-19. The Project has been praised by Health Education England as an excellent example of local collaboration.
- Reading is home to a large Nepalese community, which has greatly contributed to culture and volunteering in the town. The Greater Reading Nepalese Community Association, a local charity, was instrumental during the pandemic, with many of its members volunteering at the local Vaccination Centre to serve the most vulnerable.
- Reading also has an independent arts organisation – Jelly – co-ordinating projects around the town, from the Open For Art scheme to Nuit Blanche. Other independent art activities include Whitfest (formerly the Whitley Arts Festival), Readipop Festival, Whiteknights Studio Trail, Caversham Artists Trail and Reading Fringe.
- Reading is proud to support three National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs): [CultureMix](#) Arts, a majority female-led organisation producing world-class music and community projects inspired by Black History; [Readipop](#), a charity supporting young, vulnerable people through creative projects; and the Museums Partnership Reading, a collaboration between two of Reading's best loved historical institutions.

- Looking to the future, Reading hopes to increase its number of theatre and cultural spaces. As Banksy very keenly pointed out when he created a new artwork on its perimeter wall [[image 50](#)], the potential for cultural redevelopment on the old Reading Gaol site is an exciting prospect for the town.
- Beyond the cultural sphere, leisure interests in Reading are catered for by clubs and societies ranging from the Reading Düsseldorf Association to Reading Film and Video Makers, the Berkshire Family History Society and the Reading Cloggies.
- Reading Civic Society is one of the town's most respected and knowledgeable groups, advising on listed building consent and protecting the town's heritage.
- [Connect Reading](#), with over 120 member organisations from each sector, is the region's leader in bringing together business, non-profit, education and statutory organisations. Taking a strategic implementation role, Connect Reading builds collaboration, infrastructure and partnerships through innovation.
- [Ethical Reading](#) is a not-for-profit social enterprise dedicated to making Reading a better place to live and work through helping organisations adopt more ethical approaches to business, purchasing and employment.

These examples illustrate just a few of the many ways in which the active and engaged communities which characterise Reading shape the place we love.

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An accessible version of this document is being made available on the Reading Borough Council website.

Image 1: aerial view of central Reading from north of the Thames with the main business district beyond the railway station in the background (image credit: James Singleton www.jsaerial.co.uk.)



Image 2: the Reading Abbey Scheduled Monument with 'The Blade' beyond – for 400 years the Abbey was one of the most important religious and political centres in Europe



Image 3: the Thames Promenade - Reading has the longest stretch of the Thames running through any English borough



Image 4: the Kennet & Avon Canal in central Reading, flanked by The Oracle retail and leisure complex. The canal enabled the growth of modern Reading from the 18th century - after its closure in 1955 it was reopened to boat traffic in 1990 (credit: James Singleton www.jsaerial.co.uk)



Image 5: Reading Gaol (with interior inset © Matt Emmett), scene of Oscar Wilde's incarceration – pictured with Reading's MPs and community groups lobbying for its transformation into an arts and cultural hub



Image 6: the Oracle retail complex with the Kennet & Avon Canal in the foreground during the Reading-on-Thames Festival



Image 7: Alfred Waterhouse's Grade II* Listed Town Hall façade of 1875 is a fine representative example of Reading's characteristic red and grey brick architecture



Image 8: Caversham, a major centre for pilgrimage in the Middle Ages, is now a unique suburb of Reading north of the Thames with its own distinct identity (© Matt Emmett)



Image 9: the Huntley & Palmers factory in Newtown was once the largest biscuit factory in the world employing 5,000 people in Reading



Image 10: the Grade II listed Cemetery Arch resides within Cemetery Junction, a multi-cultural quarter of Reading which inspired Ricky Gervais's 2010 film of the same name



Image 11: the Reading Abbey Scheduled Monument – reopened to the public in 2018 with high quality interpretation (with Reading Gaol beyond, right)



Image 12: the Grade II listed High Bridge, a single arch of vermiculated Portland stone, is a Scheduled Monument and the oldest surviving structure to span the River Kennet (credit: @talespotter)



Image 13: the Grade 1 Listed Abbey Gateway collapsed in a storm in 1861 and was rebuilt by Sir George Gilbert Scott. From 1785-86 Jane Austen studied in a building adjacent to the Gateway which was home to Reading Ladies' Boarding School



Image 14: the Royal Berkshire Hospital, now part of the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, opened in 1839 and was built on land donated by former Prime Minister, Henry Addington (credit: Royal Berkshire Hospital)



Image 15: Forbury Gardens is one of Reading's most treasured greenspaces – even more so after the tragic events of summer 2020 when three people died here in a terrorist attack



Image 16: Caversham Court – along with Forbury Gardens, one of two locations in Reading to hold both a Green Flag Award and Green Heritage Site status



Image 17: the University of Reading's Whiteknights campus is set in 130 hectares of Green Flag Award-winning parkland



Image 18: the Enterprise Centre at the University of Reading's state-of-the-art Whiteknights campus



Image 19: the refurbished Reading Station, opened by Her Majesty the Queen in 2014, is the country's second busiest rail interchange outside London (image credit: James Singleton www.jsaerial.co.uk)



Image 20: the rainbow liveries of Reading Buses are an iconic feature of the townscape – and a public transport success story, bucking national trends for declining bus use



Image 21: Broad Street – one of Reading's main shopping thoroughfares, here playing host to the 'Carnival of the World'



Image 22: Reading's 36-metre long Black History Mural on London Street was commissioned in 1988. The mural is a designated Asset of Community Value for which listed status has been sought



Image 23: Reading Museum has provided award-winning opportunities for learning, inspiration and enjoyment since 1883



Image 24: created in the 19th century by a group of talented Victorian embroiderers, the replica Bayeaux Tapestry is one of Reading's Museum's better-known attractions



Image 25: the Museum of English Rural Life was established by the Department of Agriculture in 1951 to capture and record the rapidly changing countryside following World War II. It is one of three University of Reading museums in the area



Image 26: the Museum of English Rural Life (below) and Reading Museum are in a strategic partnership as part of the Arts Council England National Portfolio 2018-22, providing cultural opportunities for Reading's young people and diverse communities (credit: Stewart Turkington www.stphotos.co.uk)



Image 27: the 1200 seat Hexagon Theatre has been one of Reading's pre-eminent cultural venues since opening in 1977 – pictured here hosting a performance by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (credit: Sam Frost)



Image 28: the Reading Festival attracts big-name acts from around the world and celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2021



Image 29: the former Madejski Stadium, now the Select Car Leasing Stadium, home to Reading Football Club, has a 24,000 capacity



Image 30: the grade 2 listed Synagogue on Goldsmid Road was opened in 1900 by Chief Rabbi Hermann Marcus Adler and now services the greater Reading area, especially West Berkshire, Wokingham and South Oxfordshire (credit: Sue Brackley)



Image 31: the opening of a mosque on the Oxford Road in 2013 realised the Abu Bakr Trust's vision for a purpose built Islamic and community centre in west Reading



Image 32: the Reading Hindu Temple on Whitley Street opened in 2006 on the site of a former church



Image 33: the 'climate stripes' data visualisation created at the University of Reading is now used around the globe to illustrate global warming – including on the main stage at this year's Reading Festival



Image 34: the turbine house of the new community-led Reading Hydro project – funded by public share issue and decorated by local artists (credit: Reading Hydro)



Image 35: the Reading Hydro scheme opened in September 2021 – one of the country's newest hydro power schemes (credit: Reading Hydro)



Image 36: the popular Thames Lido, now powered by renewable energy from the nearby Reading Hydro project



Image 37: the plaque commemorating the burial of Henry I at Reading Abbey was restored in 2021



Image 38: first used in the Grant of Arms from Elizabeth I in 1566, the re-introduction of 'RE' (Regina Elizabetha) to Reading's Borough Arms was a tribute to Queen Elizabeth II, in whose coronation year they were granted



Image 39: Green Park - an award-winning business park and residential area set in a remarkable natural landscape with sustainability at its heart



Image 40: the Bayer building at Green Park – one of a number of global companies to choose Reading as a major administrative base



Image 41: the iconic Blade – Reading's tallest building at 282 feet (credit: Through My Lens UK/@throughmylensuk)



Image 42: Reading will become the western terminus for the new Elizabeth Line when it opens in the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Year



Image 43: the 31 foot, 16 ton, cast iron sculpture of the Maiwand Lion in Forbury Gardens is one of Reading's most iconic symbols



Image 44: the Simeon Monument (or Soane Obelisk) in Reading's Market Place was commissioned by the successful Reading-born merchant Edward Simeon



Image 45: St Laurence Church (right) dates back to the 1120s – it, and the neighbouring Town Hall (left), survived a World War II bomb in 1943



Image 46: Reading Minster (the Minster Church of St Mary the Virgin) - the oldest ecclesiastical foundation in Reading, central to the 'Minster Quarter' regeneration area



Image 47: Prospect Park is Reading's largest open space and takes its name from the fine views afforded across the Kennet Valley from the Grade II Listed Mansion House



Image 48: Palmer Park Stadium – architect's drawing of the refurbished stadium and leisure centre complex, construction of which began in July 2021



Image 49: Broad Street showing the main pedestrianised area and the town centre's flagship John Lewis store



Image 50: this 'Banksy' artwork, Create Escape, thought to celebrate the literary links to the site made famous by Oscar Wilde, appeared on the wall of Reading Gaol overnight in March 2021



Reading Area Map

Attractions

- 1 Abbey Ruins
- 2 Reading Gaol
- 3 Reading Museum (and Town Hall)
- 4 Museum of English Rural Life
- 5 Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology
- 6 Simeon Monument
- 7 Cole Museum of Zoology
- 8 Banksy Artwork HMP Reading
- 9 Caversham Bridge
- 10 High Bridge
- 11 Maiwand Lion
- 12 Reading Abbey Gateway
- 13 Reading Bridge
- 14 Reading Minster of St Mary the Virgin
- 15 Royal Berkshire Hospital
- 16 Reading Crown Court
- 17 Saint Laurence Church
- 18 The Blade
- 19 The Market Place

Entertainment

- 20 Hexagon Theatre
- 21 Progress Theatre
- 22 Reading Film Theatre
- 23 Reading Rep
- 24 South Street Arts Centre
- 25 The Biscuit Factory
- 26 Vue Cinema complex
- 27 Mates Rates Comedy Club
- 28 Just the Tonic Comedy Club
- 29 Stand and Deliver Comedy Club
- 30 The Face Bar rock club

Key

- Train routes
- Main bus routes

Leisure

- 31 Meadway Leisure Centre
- 32 Palmer Park Leisure Centre
- 33 Rivermead Leisure Centre
- 34 South Reading Leisure Centre
- 35 Select Car Leasing (formerly the Madejski) Stadium (Reading FC)
- 36 Broad Street Mall
- 37 The Oracle
- 38 Redgrave Pinsent Rowing Lake
- 39 Forbury Retail Park
- 40 Reading Climbing Centre
- 41 Reading Central Library
- 42 Reading Rowing Club
- 43 Thames and Kennet Marina
- 44 Thames LIDO
- 45 University of Reading Athletics Pavilion

Green Spaces

- 46 Caversham Court
- 47 Cintra Park
- 48 Christchurch Meadows
- 49 Forbury Gardens
- 50 King's Meadow
- 51 Prospect Park
- 52 Palmer Park
- 53 Whiteknights Campus
- 54 Chestnut Walk
- 55 Coley Recreation Ground
- 56 Coley water meadows
- 57 County Lock (Kennet & Avon Canal)
- 58 Reading Old Cemetery
- 59 Rivermead Park
- 60 Thames Path
- 61 Victoria Park
- 62 Waterloo Meadows
- 63 Christchurch Bridge



APPENDIX TO MAP: MAIN TRANSPORT ROUTES AND SUMMARY OF SERVICE FREQUENCY FOR READING

Rail services

- Reading is served by eight different rail lines including the new Elizabeth Line to Central London and East London opening in 2022.
- More than 30 high speed and local trains every hour connect Reading to London, Guildford, Gatwick Airport, Southampton, Bournemouth, Exeter and the West Country, Swindon, Bristol and South Wales, Oxford, Birmingham and Manchester.

Bus and coach services

- Reading has a comprehensive local bus network including a bus rapid transit (BRT) connection on the South corridor to Mere Oak Park and Ride serving sites including business parks and residential areas.
- Over 60 local bus routes serve the town centre and connect the Thames Valley with central Reading's business and retail centres.
- Each week more than 67,000 miles of bus services are operated in Reading Borough Council's area with council owned and multi award winning Reading Buses running 95% of services.
- There are over 10,000 bus departures from Central Reading every week serving eight main corridors. Frequency of departures in these corridors ranges from eight departures per hour (peak) to five corridors with 15 departures per hour or more each.
- The busiest corridors are west along Oxford Road (up to 15 buses an hour), south to Whitley Street (up to 16 per hour), South East to the Hospital and University (up to 17 per hour) and East along Kings Road (over 20 departures per hour) at peak times.
- Five key routes 5 and 6 (South), 17 (East to West), 21 (South East) and 26 (West) run 24 hours a day serving Reading's night time and service economies.
- Route 17, Reading's busiest from Wokingham Road to Tilehurst, offers over 1600 departures from Central Reading to each end of the route each week. Reading Buses' low emission/low carbon CNG powered Route 17 is the modern successor to Reading Borough Council's previous municipal trolleybus and tram services dating back to 1901 on this route.
- Coach services offer connections to Heathrow Airport and to cities along the M4 corridor.

Active travel

- Reading is a junction of several National Cycle Network Routes (4, 5 and 23) and has an established network of cycle routes.
- Reading Borough Council is rapidly developing dedicated cycle tracks across the area along key corridors.
- Significant investments have been made in cycle facilities including a cycle and pedestrian bridge over the River Thames and with development of a central cycle hub underway.

Trunk roads

- Reading is adjacent to the M4 providing good links for logistics and distribution across the south of England and further afield.
- Car traffic to Reading is intercepted at two Park and Ride sites to the south and east plus several local stations

