

# Written evidence submitted by University of Reading, Reading Borough Council, and Reading UK (CIC)

## **Reimagining where we live: cultural placemaking and the levelling up agenda:** **Joint submission by University of Reading, Reading Borough Council and Reading UK**

*(Submitted by:*

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### **Summary**

This multidisciplinary consultation response has been led by the University of Reading's School of the Built Environment and academics from across the University (from Real Estate and Planning, Henley Business School, Department of Film, Theatre and Television, School of Art, and Department of Archaeology) in conjunction with officers from Reading Borough Council and Reading UK (CIC). The consultation response draws on our shared experience and evidence base of cultural placemaking projects in a Reading context.

#### **How can culture reanimate our public spaces and shopping streets?**

- **A clear vision is vital:** A high-level vision for a place is required to enable buy-in and to help develop collaborative bids for funding.
- **Co-creation and partnership-based arts and culture programmes are crucial:** Co-created projects and partnership-based programmes have the highest potential impact and can help improve pride in place and skills and education.
- **Community engagement:** Community engagement needs to be at the heart of any culture led regeneration project, driven by community need rather than using a top-down approach. Civic voice and influence is also important in this context.

#### **How can creatives contribute to local decision-making and planning of place?**

- **Collaborative, 'practice based' projects:** Culture networks, partnerships and groups can all contribute to placemaking, and this gives ownership and voice to a community and develops civic pride.
- **Role of local technology and creative clusters in research and development:** Place-based research and development projects can utilise the creative sector to create innovative outcomes which contribute to better decision-making and planning of place.

#### **How can the Government support places without established artistic infrastructure to take full advantage of the opportunities that the levelling up agenda provides?**

- **Direct asset ownership and strategic decision-making in a place:** Government-owned property assets can be used as the basis for culture-based regeneration projects.
- **Encouraging and supporting further local partnerships:** A mix of capital and revenue investment in arts and culture projects is needed to help local artists flourish.
- **Developing the role of the private sector especially through BIDS:** Governments can also assist by encouraging arts and cultural collaboration with the private sector.

#### **How might changes to the UK's broadcasting landscape affect investment in cultural production outside the capital, and what could the consequences be for artists and communities?**

- **Universities are a vital part of skills and training agenda:** they can research requirements and develop new programmes of study and training targeted to meet the skills shortages in the sector.
- **A consequence of the increased decentralisation of the broadcasting economy for artists in the sector is the collapse of assumptions of London-centric work opportunities:** regional hubs for the production of broadcast content such as Cine Valley will play a growing role in providing more secure locations for employment.

#### **How should Government build on existing schemes, such as the UK City of Culture, to level up funding for arts and culture?**

- **Rebalance funding** so that areas outside London, including Reading and other areas in the southeast, receive proportionate and fair funding.
- **Flexible funding** is needed to use as leverage capacity building and to innovate and grow local arts and culture.
- **Long term funding is important** and needs to be available to artists and organisations and should not be driven by outcomes but by talent and talent development.

## 1.0 Background and context

1.1 This multidisciplinary consultation response has been led by the University of Reading's School of the Built Environment and academics from across the University (from Real Estate and Planning, Henley Business School, Department of Film, Theatre and Television, School of Art, and Department of Archaeology) in conjunction with officers from Reading Borough Council and with Reading UK (CIC). The views expressed represent those of the individuals listed at the end of the document. The consultation response draws on our shared experience and evidence base of cultural placemaking projects in a Reading context.

**1.2 The School of the Built Environment at the University of Reading** is internationally renowned for its research and education relating to the design, construction and operation of the buildings and places within which we live, work and play. Our areas of expertise include architecture, construction management, energy systems and environmental engineering. We have a strong orientation towards interdisciplinary 'real-world' problems and have a proud track record of active engagement with the professions. We are ranked 3rd in the UK for the impact of our research in architecture, built environment and planning. 83% of our research is rated world leading (4\*) or internationally excellent (3\*). Our work includes a strong emphasis on urban futures and city visions (Professor Tim Dixon) and community engagement/placemaking (Professor Lorraine Farrelly and Professor Flora Samuel).

**1.3 Reading Borough Council (RBC) Culture Services** include Leisure, Libraries, Museums, Berkshire Archaeology, New Directions, Berkshire Record Office, Reading Arts and Venues, and Culture and Heritage Placemaking. These services use culture as a mechanism and driver to deliver against social and economic outcomes that respond to the Corporate Priorities:

- Healthy Environment, such as working towards making Reading a greener, more attractive place to live that is easy to travel around and having a tangible impact on physical and mental health and life expectancy of every resident.
- Inclusive Economy, including building on our cultural heritage to enhance our tourist industry, creating an amazing place for people to enjoy.
- Thriving Communities, such as prioritising the needs of the most marginalised groups and the most vulnerable adults and children in our communities.

**1.4 Reading UK**, founded in 2007, has a long history of working with its partners to develop a vision for Reading, raise the profile of the arts and cultural sector, as part of our visitor destination strategy and inward investment and investor development strategy, and to develop new and innovative approaches to ignite the latent strengths of the arts and cultural sector in Reading.

1.5 A list of relevant collaborative research and cultural development projects in Reading is provided in **Appendix 1** and the response in this paper draws on the shared experience and evidence from them.

## 2.0 How can culture reanimate our public spaces and shopping streets?

2.1 Recently there has been a growing recognition of the importance of cultural activity in the lives of people, communities, businesses, and places. The social and economic value of the cultural sector, alongside the intrinsic value of cultural activity as an enriching experience is now clearly recognised (DCMS, 2016; LGA, 2017). The recent Levelling Up White Paper also highlighted the important role of culture, which is captured in a key mission: "*Pride in Place*': *By 2030, pride in place, such as*

*people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing''.*

2.2 For culture to play a 're-animation' role in a place requires a clear co-created vision, or a shared and desirable long-term view of future for the place in question. City visions (with their frequent emphasis on 'urban futures' (Dixon and Tewdwr-Jones, 2021)) have therefore often not only focused on 'smart' and/or 'sustainable' futures but also on the important role of culture and arts in the re-imagined future of a place and how people connect with it. At the heart of this thinking is the 'quadruple helix model' which brings together government, business, civil society, and academia (Dixon et al, 2018). This concept underpinned the development of the Reading 2050 vision (<https://livingreading.co.uk/reading-2050>), which places a strong emphasis on 'culture and diversity' (for example, the Reading Festival<sup>1</sup>, the Abbey Quarter<sup>2</sup>) and 'green technology'.

2.3 The 2050 vision is referenced in the borough local plan and supports the aspirations for Reading as a dynamic, inclusive community of the 21st Century<sup>3</sup>, and so has therefore acted as a framework and high-level strategy and has brought together the four crucial stakeholder groups referenced above through a range of related projects and programmes of culture and arts-based research. In the context of Reading, our joint place-based learning experience is that culture, through its dynamic nature, can act as a joint delivery mechanism for improving community cohesion, quality of life and well-being for local people, in what might be termed a 'steppingstones' approach. Our partnership working has also been instrumental in other collaborative ventures such as the emerging 'Town Centre Strategy' (RBC 2022) and 'Reading Powered by People Economic Recovery Strategy for Reading' (Reading UK Nov 2021) both of which highlight the changing dynamics of retailing in our town centres and the part that culture and the arts can play in transferring the use of buildings and the town centre user/visitor experience.

2.4 The primary lessons learned from these projects to date (some of which are ongoing) are that:

- **A clear vision is vital:** Integrating culture-led projects needs to recognise the existing plans and strategies that are in a place. A high-level vision for a place is required to enable buy-in and to help develop collaborative bids for funding.
- **Levelling up needs to apply to all parts of the country:** Cultural investment from national government needs to continue to focus on a wide range on contexts. Although the levelling up agenda rightly raises the need to invest in underinvested areas, more prosperous areas also need government funding to maintain and enhance cultural and arts-based assets so that these communities do not themselves get left behind or disadvantaged in the levelling up of other areas.
- **Co-creation and partnership-based arts and culture programmes are crucial:** Co-created projects and partnership-based programmes have the highest potential impact and can help improve pride in place and skills and education. Cultural investment, however, is not enough on its own. There needs to be a focus on a holistic place-based approach which also underpins skills, training, and education training alongside infrastructure investment to enable our high streets and towns and cities to thrive.
- **The role of a civic university:** A 'civic university' (such as University of Reading (see also 5.5 below) can play a vital role in arts and culture through collaboration and outreach and this links to placing arts and culture in the context of a better understanding of the 'past, present and future' of a place<sup>4</sup>. Linking this to the narrative of net zero and climate change are also

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/blog/reading-1971-town-first-reading-festival>

<sup>2</sup> See also, in the context of Reading, the role that museums can play in changing perceptions in areas of high deprivation (<https://indicesofdeprivation.co.uk/2016/05/10/readings-happy-museum-project/>)

<sup>3</sup> The Local Plan also has an expanded section on heritage, including new policies on both enhancement of conservation areas (EN3) and new development in a historic context (EN6).

<sup>4</sup> The University of Reading is home to a number of museums including the Cole Museum of Zoology, the Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology, and the Becket Collection. These museums are open to the public and academia, offering insights into Reading's collections and expertise in these areas to the community. A stand-

important in understanding the particular ‘eigenart’, or unique characteristics of a place (see University of Reading’s Climate Stripes (Professor Ed Hawkins, Meteorology), although this ‘connectivity’ and integration has often been overlooked in many placemaking/storytelling narratives (Dixon and Tewdwr-Jones, 2021).

- **Community engagement:** Community engagement needs to be at the heart of any culture led regeneration project, driven by community need rather than using a top-down approach. Celebrating the stories of the people that make up the ‘place’ is vital to empower and create a sense of belonging in communities. Civic societies can also play an active role in shaping the public realm, natural environment, good design, heritage and conservation (Maidment and Chettiparamb, 2022).

### 3.0 How can creatives contribute to local decision-making and planning of place?

3.1 As town centres and high streets seek to recover from the COVID pandemic it will be crucial to envision how spaces and places can be re-utilised and re-imagined to be thriving and liveable, and arts, culture and the creative sector have an important role to play in a holistic ‘creative placemaking’ agenda<sup>5</sup>.

3.2 The role of the creative industry (and celebration of diversity) in the economic development of cities is well-referenced in the academic literature (see for example, Landry, 2000; Florida, 2002), and this also has synergy with the more recent emergence of ‘thriving places’, or places which more broadly can be thought of as a socially just and ecologically safe and where quality of life and wellbeing are important indicators of success<sup>6</sup>. Similarly, places that have strong cultural and artistic ‘pull factor’ also tend to attract creatives (Florida, 2002).

3.3 Reading has a substantial strength in the creative sector. For example, Nesta (2016) found that a total of 11.2 per cent of employment in Reading (15.4% of all businesses) is in creative industries with 78 per cent in software and digital. This strength is founded on the fusion of a strong digital tech creative sector in alliance with visual and performing arts. The case of Reading also demonstrates how supply chains can be developed through joint working with the leading London cultural sector, including Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, National Gallery, Royal Opera House – for example, hosting a procurement fair in 2017 with these organisations procuring digital solutions from the strong digital tech and IT comms sector in the ‘Greater Reading’ Region. Certainly, our experience is that co-created visions for a place also provide a powerful opportunity for engaging with the creative industries, and this was a feature of the Reading 2050 vision (a collaboration between University of Reading, Reading UK, and Barton Willmore) where architects, designers and the creative sector came together to help develop the vision.

3.4 Our experience in Reading suggests creatives can contribute to placemaking and planning through different mechanisms and delivery processes, often where the University can play an important role:

- **Collaborative, practice-based research:** RBC has championed a collaborative approach with a major site redevelopment site Station Hill in the town centre working together to create a strategy for public performing spaces, public art and cultural activity within the fabric of the buildings. The Vision for Station Hill is ‘Painting a Portrait of Reading’ (see above), bringing

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out cultural success story for the University has been the Museum of English Rural Life. Another notable example of a strategic local partnership is the major partnership with the British Museum which was launched in late 2017 to develop the British Museum Archaeological Research Collection (BM\_ARC). This is a significant new collection storage and research society that is housed in a new facility in Wokingham Borough (Hatch Regeneris, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Creative placemaking occurs when planners, community development practitioners, artists, and others deliberately integrate art and culture into place-based projects – putting arts at an equivalent level of importance with land use, transportation, economic development, education, housing, infrastructure, and public safety strategies (source: <https://artsandplanning.mapc.org/creative-placemaking/>)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.thrivingplacesindex.org/>

together creative and cultural offerings that reflect the best of the town and set ambitious art precedents. As a welcome point for Reading, Station Hill will be interconnected and enhanced by collaborations and artwork offerings that reflect the best of the town. Encouraging best practice through current developments such as Weldale Street using a collaborative approach to public art to ensure the community vision and voice are reflected in the public art strategy making it relevant to the 'place' and not commissioned based on pedigree. Culture networks, partnerships and groups all contributing to placemaking objectives, underpinning the cultural and heritage strategy and supporting the RBC corporate priorities.-The Cultural Education Partnership, Street Art Panel, Ageing Well Partnership, NPOs, Reading Independent Festivals Forum – all working through cultural organisations to deliver important targets around Health and Wellbeing, youth voice, social inclusion, diversity and sustainability. This gives ownership and voice to our community and develops civic pride. Future City are also establishing an advisory group to develop the project with local organisations, including the University of Reading. Reflexive, or practice-based projects, which involve 'creatives' such as architects, are also highlighted through the work of the School of Architecture at University of Reading. For example, there is an architects' panel that was established in collaboration with the School of Architecture that consists of local architects to offer advice to the planning department on the quality of buildings and public spaces. In addition, the architecture students are developing ideas for the development of public spaces in the town centre.

- **Role of local technology and creative clusters in research and development:** The digitisation of planning is also salient here and this has been evidenced in the Reading context through the AHRC-funded Community Consultation for Quality of Life (CCQoL) project - see above. The project involves setting up a physical space for community consultation in in Broad Street Mall and an associated digital platform managed by Commonplace (a creative tech company specialising in community engagement) [www.commonplace.is](http://www.commonplace.is) On the digital and physical map, for example, people will have the opportunity to share about what they love/don't love/want to see more of/ideas about Reading as a home town to them including culture, arts and other relevant issues such as climate change. Similarly, the University's (School of the Built Environment) work with Stantec, O2 and others in the **Thames Valley Berkshire Live Labs Project**<sup>7</sup> has highlighted the important role that local and national digital tech companies (with creatives as employees) can play in helping develop digital platforms that can inform local people about air quality and the journey to work for example- and therefore indirectly help shape and influence the placemaking agenda.
- **Net zero narrative:** The University and the council also have a strong relationship with other creative companies and are partnering (through the Reading Climate Change Partnership) with Innovate UK and Stronger Stories in developing a net zero narrative that will help underpin community and business engagement with the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy (2020-2025). This is likely to lead to further opportunities for film-making and joint creative endeavours (see also the University's Climate Stripes campaign).

#### **4.0 How can the Government support places without established artistic infrastructure to take full advantage of the opportunities that the levelling up agenda provides?**

4.1 The government has a crucial role to play in supporting different places with different contexts and issues as part of the levelling up agenda. This can be facilitated in the following ways:

- **Direct asset ownership and strategic decision-making in a place:** Here in Reading a case in point is the Reading Gaol site. This is seen as an opportunity to create a hub for arts and culture, zero-carbon housing, high-quality, sustainable design and economic regeneration (Thames Valley Berkshire LEP, 2021). The Grade II listed building is an integral part of the Reading Abbey Scheduled Monument, and presents significant commercial, housing and regeneration opportunities including new cultural space including a new Reading Gaol and Oscar Wilde Museum. There is also potential for new theatre facilities, residential,

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.reading.ac.uk/news/2021/university-news/pr853350>

commercial offices, a boutique hotel, digital hub and start-up incubation space. Reading Borough Council submitted a conditional bid to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to transform the Gaol into a beacon of arts, heritage and culture in March 2021. The MoJ confirmed that they would not be taking the Council's bid forward and put the Gaol backup for sale in Summer 2021. The Council's bid remains on the table and the Council hopes the MoJ will see the value of working with the Council to develop this iconic site. The council is ready to take ownership or work with the preferred bidder to realise the vision.

- **Encouraging and supporting further local partnerships:** Reading's location as a commuter town means that it frequently loses new artistic talent to the capital where studio space is more widely available and where there is a strong, funded, professional infrastructure for the arts with international connections. While there is pride for local activities in Reading, there is only a small-scale 'art scene' or art industry for its workers to benefit from and so Reading's local arts economy struggles, because of the lack of funding and infrastructure. It is reliant on volunteers who run local art groups. Government support could help support the work of local artists to, for example, to help establish affordable studio and workspace.
- **Developing the role of the private sector especially through BIDS:** Governments can also assist by encouraging arts cultural collaboration with the private sector. For example, Reading UK has a long history of working with the arts and cultural sector to deliver major festivals and various high street and festive events. The role of the two BIDs in Reading is important here and BIDs nationwide have the capacity, focus and business backing to add value through arts and cultural experiences in our town centres of benefit to residents and visitors/ shoppers alike. For example, the re-use of empty retail property in town centres is increasingly becoming a core theme of the five year BID investment plans (of £1million pa) in Reading.

## **5.0 How might changes to the UK's broadcasting landscape affect investment in cultural production outside the capital, and what could the consequences be for artists and communities?**

5.1 The changing nature of the UK's broadcasting landscape is likely to have ramifications for those areas of the UK which have already developed improved film-making facilities to attract investors and filmmakers, by providing additional jobs and clustering opportunities. This will also link with the continued role of Local Enterprise Partnerships (for example, in the local context, Thames Valley Berkshire LEP).

5.2 For example, the University of Reading's longstanding expertise in Film and Television is aligned with its commitment to developing the local economy and communities in its creation of Cine Valley, a new film and TV production hub in Shinfield, Berkshire. Located on the University's Thames Valley Science Park, the project will help provide a range of new jobs to the Thames Valley, attract inward investment to the UK. Shinfield Studios, the main 'anchor' tenant for Cine Valley is currently constructing the largest purpose-built studio complex in the UK: four new sound stages and associated workshops are now open, the first client being Disney, and 14 more sound stages and supporting workshops have planning permission (from Wokingham Borough Council) and are scheduled for completion before 2024. The wider Cine Valley complex will include a television studio – UoR holds planning permission and is seeking to work with partners keen to move production outside London – and a cluster of Creative Industry companies, not just the ancillary business which support a major studio, but also tech and innovation companies attracted to the site. Alongside Cine Valley, 'Eco Valley' is designed as a green space which will preserve and develop woodland areas for the benefit of the local community, as a site for research into mitigating the effects of climate change, and to offset the carbon emissions involved in constructing the studios.

5.3 British TV and film sectors are currently growing rapidly but also face significant challenges including: ensuring the training and development of talent; diversifying the talent pool, responding to rapid technological development, and moving toward net-zero production. Local partnerships are critical to addressing these issues, including the University's civic role as well as its role in education

and research. The University is seeking to build relationships with the companies attracted to Cine Valley, and between them and local partners. These include:

- Constructing a structural relationship between the University's programmes and the professionalising opportunities provided by placements, internships etc to address the skills gap and enhance training opportunities.
- Creating relationships in research and innovation in a number of fields (from digital production to sustainability).
- Integrating Cine Valley into the University's work in Widening Participation and its expertise in Diversity and Inclusion.

5.4 In these ways Cine Valley can be more than just a physical location for film and creative industries. It will provide the wider network of support for a booming UK industry that is keen to support green growth, create opportunities for a more diverse workforce, and help rebalance the UK economy.

5.5 Conclusions which might be drawn from this experience include:

- **The importance the 'civic' role of universities** in building links in the local community, and with different kinds of commercial enterprise.
- **Universities are a vital part of skills and training agenda**, able to research requirements and develop new programmes of study and training targeted to meet the skills shortages in the sector.
- **A consequence of the increased decentralisation of the broadcasting economy for artists in the sector is the collapse of assumptions of London-centric work opportunities.** The professional life of the UK's creatives has been dominated for decades by the insecure conditions of freelance employment and a requirement to locate in the capital. Regional hubs for the production of broadcast content such as Cine Valley will play a growing role in providing more secure locations for employment. Issues for local communities include the influx of new residents and the requirements for housing and services.

## **6.0 How should Government build on existing schemes, such as the UK City of Culture, to level up funding for arts and culture?**

6.1 Crucially we believe that, as a starting point, a better understanding and evaluation of the impact of culture is needed: as an AHRC paper pointed out, the sector had been good at making the case for investment but lacks robust methodologies to show how public funding contributes to wider social and economic goals (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016). More research is needed to unpick this at a local level in the left behind places and the more successful places.

6.2 Experience from the Reading context suggests the following conclusions:

- **Rebalancing funding.** This is needed so that areas outside London, including Reading and other areas in the southeast, receive proportionate and fair funding. Recognise that areas which have significant disparities in wealth within the same locality also present a case for levelling up.
- **Flexible funding.** This is needed to use as leverage capacity building and to innovate and grow. There should be a replacement for the Great Places Funding scheme, and a new placemaking cultural grant could assist councils to utilise their assets, collaborate with artists and local businesses in a more meaningful way.
- **Encouraging links.** There needs to be encouragement to develop links between the best in international arts and culture and local artists to encourage them to grow (for example, Reading International, Reading Year of Culture and Reading on Thames Festival). Most towns and cities have cultural twinning arrangements and Reading, with Dusseldorf, has used this as a basis for cultural twinning and exchange of artists and performers.
- **Encouraging a move away from 'business as usual' approaches to arts and culture.** The pandemic has aggravated inequalities, but through a cultural and heritage programme and

targeted investment, working alongside community groups and organisations, these inequalities could be addressed and reduced - for example, through aggregated regional or sub-national opportunities (i.e. not a sole reliance on the UK City of culture programme) which could secure additional financial support, and develop new pan-local authority collaborations.

- **Recognising local expertise.** There should be more opportunities for grass roots organisations to develop their art and culture activities- here local authorities and partners would act as ‘local experts’ to support local and organisations who do not have the opportunities to apply for national funding so that mentoring is important.
- **The role of ‘heritage’ is crucial.** This can aid place-making and levelling up. For example, re-igniting of the St James Way in Reading, a medieval footpath from St James Church in Reading to Galicia in N.W Spain This in turns further supports economic activity through visitor tourism.
- **Long term funding is important.** This needs to be available to artists and organisations and should not be driven by outcomes but by talent and talent development.

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## Appendix 1 List of Relevant Projects (Joint Evidence Base from Reading)

Examples of recent programmes led by Reading Borough Council, and with a successful collaborative approach with the University and Reading UK, include:

- **Reading's Great Place Scheme (GPS)** – 'Reading, Place of Culture' was jointly led and delivered by Reading Borough Council, Reading UK Community Interest Company (CIC) and the University of Reading in line with the Reading 2050 Vision. The project focused on building mutually beneficial bridges between the arts and the private sector, developing a new model of cultural commission in health and adapting to change through digital formats with the onset of COVID 19. The wider GPS programme included almost 500 events and reached a total audience of over 43,000 people, despite delivery being heavily affected by the Covid 19 pandemic in the last year. It was delivered through four key strands: The Festivals Strand, The Cultural Commissioning Programme, The Research Programme and The Culture and Business Engagement Strand. The project has created strong legacy in:
  - Developing strategic partnerships explores how arts, culture and heritage are represented in Reading at a strategic level.
  - Increasing arts, culture and heritage engagement looks at the targeting of new audiences and barriers to engagement.
  - Changing pride and perceptions of Reading's cultural offer addresses how the Programme developed a sense of belonging among Reading's communities.
  - Strengthening the arts, culture and heritage sector considers the ways in which the Programme helped develop the sector.
  - Creating evidence, tools and models to show the value of culture demonstrates how research was central to Reading, Place of Culture and its legacy.
  
- **Hugh Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ)** Reading is one of 68 areas of England to receive a share of a £95 million government fund having secured HSHAZ status for three conservation areas in the town centre<sup>8</sup>. The HSHAZ scheme is a regeneration initiative lead by Historic England, working with local councils and the community to create economic growth and improve the appearance and quality of life in historic high streets. The programme's goal is to make the high street a more attractive, engaging and vibrant place for people to live, work and spend time. The Council, working with its partners will play a positive role in the recovery of Reading's high streets through delivering across three complementary strands:
  - Physical interventions: to buildings, including repair, reinstating lost features, supporting the conversion of historic buildings for new uses and improvement of shared spaces, drawing on the lessons learnt in Streets for All
  - Community engagement: giving local communities a key role in deciding what works they want to see happening on their high street and what sort of place they want it to be
  - Cultural programme: activities and events celebrating the history of the high street and its importance to local communities
  
- **Reading Abbey Revealed Project/ The Abbey Quarter vision (RBC):** The creation of the Abbey Quarter is Reading's most ambitious heritage project for a decade – transforming the precinct of Reading's royal abbey into a unique historical and cultural destination at the heart of the town. The £3.15 million conservation project has been a catalyst for positive change, putting this international monastic and royal heritage firmly

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<sup>8</sup> This work also includes the Oxford Road HSHAZ cultural pilot 'Community Story Telling' Project (Dr Sally Lloyd Evans, Department of Geography and Environmental Science). The aim of the project was to engage with Oxford Road area communities to explore people's real stories of the area to amplify the local heritage and rich multicultural history of the road – see separate consultation submission for this project.

on the map. This project has had a major impact beyond the Abbey's walls, galvanising a step-change in the town's attitude to its distinctive past by providing a sense of place, pride, and cohesion for Reading's diverse and expanding population. The success of this project has been recognised through prestigious national awards, such as the Planning Awards 2020 for the '*Best use of Heritage in Placemaking*' and has attracted an additional £1.7million of funding and further investment into the Abbey Quarter. Some key successes of the project in terms of community outreach, wider participation, volunteering opportunity, skill development, training and employability are:

- A total of 350,429 people have actively engaged in the project since July 2016
- 45,320 people have attended events in the Quarter
- 20,698 people have participated in Abbey/Museum on Wheels outreach programme
- 131 individual volunteers have been trained to support the project from creating digital content to leading public tours, or acting as costumed interpreters
- 4,327 school and university students, teachers, young people and adult learners have attended workshops, training, take-over days, and consultative panels
- 219 Victorian Schoolroom sessions have been held for 6,137 children and 803 adults – despite 18 months of Covid lockdown restrictions. Since autumn 2020, 43 virtual Victorian Schoolroom sessions engaged 1,165 children and 59 adults
- 58 new 'Royals in Reading' virtual workshops ran during the 2020-21 academic year, with 1,766 pupils
- 6 paid interns employed and trained that went on good paid position in other organisations

The University has also led several relevant projects which involve collaborations with the Council and other stakeholders:

- **Reading Abbey: Connecting Archaeology, Heritage Management and Placemaking (Professor Roberta Gilchrist, Archaeology):** This project between the University, Berkshire Archaeology and Reading Museum connects the medieval archaeology of Reading Abbey with current heritage needs and opportunities in the town of Reading. It is designed to produce an original contribution to archaeological understanding of this site of national historical significance; to develop innovative approaches to 4D digital data modelling and visualisation; and to use the research to inform local conservation policy and community engagement with heritage.
- **Community Consultation for Quality of Life (CCQOL) (Professor Lorraine Farrelly and Professor Flora Samuel, School of Architecture):** CCQOL is a major research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council to develop a new, map-based model of community consultation that takes place both online and face-to-face across the UK. The project also a pop-up space in the local shopping mall in Reading town centre (urban room) ([www.ccqol.org](http://www.ccqol.org)). The space will have an exhibition for local community interest groups and will provide the community with an interactive set of digital maps to map their views about their quality of life in England (Reading), Northern Ireland (Belfast), Scotland (Edinburgh), and Wales (Cardiff).
- **Reading International RI (Professor Susanne Clausen Reading School of Art, Arts and Communication Design),** RI is a major research project funded by Arts Council England's Ambition for Excellence Award, RBC and UoR, initially running from 2017- 2020, which aimed to transform artistic ambition and audience expectation in the region and to develop leadership within the local arts community. RI commissioned international artists for major exhibitions, events, workshops as well as offsite projects and temporary public artworks, each in partnership with a local arts organisation. RI also brought a wide range of children and young people from different socio-economic backgrounds into contact with cutting edge artwork. This research project has tested, trialled and pushed the boundaries of traditional professional/local collaborations and emphasised the importance of partnership working.
- **Civic Societies and the Planning System (Dr Christopher Maidment and Prof. Angelique Chettiparamb)** This project explores the important roles in place stewardship and place leadership of civic societies in England. It shows how civic societies cultivate local pride by

championing local identity and promoting educational and cultural events; promote good design and a high quality public realm by holding the planning system to account; and promote cultural and aesthetic sensibilities through various initiatives. In addition, the work brings to light the variety of active relationships with other groups and organisations that societies engage in to achieve their aims. By preserving institutional memories and disseminating local histories and cultures, civic societies help to keep local heritage contemporary and relevant.

- **Reading Museum Partnership:** is a strategic partnership between Reading Museum and The Museum of English Rural Life (UoR), funded by Arts Council England's (ACE) National Portfolio Organisation scheme, in which the two museums are working together to improve educational opportunities for young people, host joint exhibitions, provide new online experiences and invest more in volunteering.
- **Work in Progress:** is the second iteration of a collaboration between UoR's Department of Film, Theatre & Television and RBC's South Street Arts Centre, in which colleagues and students have worked with 12 theatre companies or artists to develop new work, supported in part by funding from ACE. The most recent outcome of this collaboration is Fast Familiar's interactive *The Acquisition Panel*, which also involves input from the MERL and centres on an object from Reading Museum's collection which dramatises local and global histories and their interrelationship.