

Summary of Cultural Sector Meeting – 9 July 2025

Purpose of the Meeting

- Reflect on Year 2 strategic priorities from the Statement of Intent.
- Assess progress and shape Year 3 intentions for Reading's cultural and heritage sector.

Year 2 Strategic Priorities Reviewed

The first breakout group session reviewed the Year 2 objectives of the Statement of Intent and the second group session reviewed Year 3 objectives. Themes that can be drawn from the groups feedback includes:

1. Enhance Identity

- Limited awareness of Shared Prosperity Funding and EDI consultation outcomes.
- Advocacy efforts are seen but not consistently communicated or inclusive.
- Cultural identity of Reading is perceived as fragmented and underrepresented.
- Oxford Road discussed as a vibrant but misunderstood area needing better cultural recognition.

2. Increase Opportunity

- We would benefit from improved collaboration and visibility across organisations.
- Strengthening communication and networking.
- Creating mentoring and support structures for emerging groups.
- Understanding the barriers to engagement, which include complex funding processes, lack of accessible communication, and absence of inclusive representation in decision-making.

3. Celebrate Reading

- We could benefit from improved joint marketing and transparency.
- Audit networks and forums to ensure they meet sector needs.

Suggestions for Improvement

- Simplify the Statement of Intent into a clear, actionable one-pager.
- Remove or carry over the objectives that have not been delivered against.
- Create a directory or network hub for collaboration and visibility.
- Improve physical and digital signage for cultural assets through Wayfinding and Brown Signs.
- Increase community level engagement and representation.

- Use culture as a tool for community cohesion and safety.
- Ensure follow-up and transparency on strategic progress.

Next Steps

- As we are coming to the end of the current Statement of Intent, we will be looking at how we can make the next statement 2026 to 2030 more accessible and inclusive.
Action: Work together as a sector to share best practice on how to do this. Set up cultural sector to working group for this.
- Improve communication channels within the cultural sector.
Action: pull together an audit of all the current networks and ways to engage, communication platforms and as a cultural sector decide on how we are going to better work together to improve communications. Set up cultural sector working group to support this work.
- Consider external and internal promotion of Reading's cultural offer to boost visibility.
Action: share with REDA the details of the wayfinding suggestions and external promotion hopes, ask them to attend a future Arts and Heritage meeting to present their current marketing strategy and how the cultural sector feature and can support it.
- Renew Statement of Intent for this year.
Action: Zsuzsi Lindsay to update Statement of Intent based on feedback and send round Impact Statement.

Please see below for full overview of notes taken from the 9th of July. We hope that the above is a useful summary of all that was discussed in our meeting.

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| Attendees: | Adele Barnet-Ward Zillah Puri Chris Routh Suzanne Stallard Kate Powell Kirsty Dabbs Maria Lloyd Jennifer Stokes Beth Allum Jason Murphy Damien Passmore Lucy Daniels Carly Newman Annette Hayworth Richard Stainthorp Susanne Clausen |
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| | Brendan Carr Christelle Beaupoux Evelyn Williams Megan Turnell-Willett Anurita Chaudra Nyasher Browne Zsuzsi Lindsay |
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Agenda:

- **11am to 11.05am** Welcome
- **11.05am to 11.15am** Introductions and House Keeping
- **11.15am to 11.25am** Mentimeter Questions
 - What are your culture and heritage highlights from last year?
 - As a practitioner, artist, or representative of an organisation, what achievement or contribution from the past year are you most proud of?
 - What have been your biggest challenges this last year to delivering and or creating culture or heritage activities?
- **11.25am to 11.35am** Reminder of the key parts of the Statement of Intent
- **11.35am to 11.55am** Break out groups session 1
 - Your reflections on how well the statement has been delivered over the last 12 months? Each group to tackle one Priority of the three.
- **11.55am to 12.15pm** Break out groups feedback
- **12.15pm to 12.35pm** Break out groups session 2
 - Please revisit the planned actions for Year 3. Do these still feel relevant? Does anything need to change or be added? Each group to tackle one Priority of the three.
- **12.35pm to 12.45pm** Break out groups feedback
- **12.45pm to 12.55pm** Summary and Next Steps
- **12.55pm to 1pm** Close

Mentimeter Questions

All attendees were asked to share their thoughts on the questions. This was an opportunity to anonymously share thoughts.

What are your culture and heritage highlights from last year?

code - urban theatre event at JMA school and online safety summit incorporating creative elements, both museums and artist in residence; likewise DA conference with artist in residence

Station Hill public art

We joined the Arts Alliance (Clink) giving us insight to creative and cultural activity that can address crime and support victims

Jelly Open for Art, OHOS curatorial programme,

Collaboration in the community

Completion of final first draft of Eldon Square Conservation Area appraisal for informal public consultation.

Artists residencies

Diversity in the arts offerings

Digital (DEC) exhibition where Young Voices had their own space to highlight their thoughts and feelings about online safety

Whitley carnival

Bringing the world renowned Gandini Juggling, and the premiere of their new show to Reading.

Station Hill public art

Street performances - dance Reading 'into the clouds'

All Roads - Jelly/MERL/Reading Museum/RCLC collaboration working with women who arrived in Reading pre 1970, collecting the textiles they brought with them and recording their oral histories.

Young Voices production of video content for use in schools including ASB awareness week, and online safety.

Waterfest event has been a highlight for me as an individual and as an artist. I am fairly new to Reading so it's an exciting way to learn more about the town.

The growth of diverse, cultural events in the Town Centre e.g Diwali Parade and the Chinese New Year celebration. The increase in participation in community events such as Water Fest and East Reading

HSHAZ walks leaflet printed.

Creative lives

Cultural Champions Awards Importance of Being Earnest at the Ruins Waterfest X2 Slowly improving collaborative working practices

What's On Cultural Champions, Readipop Festival, Parade & Night Watch at Progress, Three Hens... Reading Rep, Are You Listening, Austen plaque at Abbey Gateway, Hexagon panto, 2K events on What's On!

I joined another choir

Reading festival, jelly open for Art, waterfest, the Big artwork event at New Directions and Reading Museum.

The paintings that went up on the market place walls. Local plays

Creative content of young people on mobile music studio the Booth Buss

Mural at foot of Russell Street won the Sign & Wrap gold award for traditional signs

Readipop Festival, Are You listening Festival, Open for Art, Roman Silchester Talks, Art Stories Exhibition, RhymeTime, Kala Art of Dance performances at the Museum, Waterfest

As a practitioner, artist, or representative of an organisation, what achievement or contribution from the past year are you most proud of? (top 3)

Being able to have a say
Creating my own events

Open for art and its many collaborations. All Roads project with MERL / MP Supporting and mentoring young artists

1- Sustainable fashion show at Waterfest 2- Upcycling workshops at schools that don't have access to a lot of arts 3- Wellbeing workshops at Whitley Wood Community Centre

Creative input to Community Safety events The visual output of that input Pilots of test and learn activity such as theatre based content in schools such as breaking barriers

Rainbow Rescue Early Years theatre in libraries and community spaces; pilot Reading Schools Drama Festival event; Three Hens in a Boat (major co production with pending London transfer, made in Rdg)

The Young Voices work with Reading Museum

Submitting a cultural bid for OHOS to save Brock Keep as well as the organisation

Working in positive, ethical, and creative collaboration with amazing partner organisations.(Dance Reading)

1. Eldon Square CA appraisal 2. HSHAZ walks leaflet 3. Award won by Cliveden Conservation for Russell Street mural (139-141 Oxford Road). We contributed research.

Station Hill public art Friends of Reading Museum input into events at the museum Successful bid for HLF funding for Junction Arch - £250,000

Collaboration with Reading Libraries to deliver the summer reading scheme (with RISC). Creative lives Identity workshops in schools Collaboration with other groups and working for joint funding bids

Supporting 10 young people achieving silver arts award, despite extreme challenges and obstacles put in their way. And with almost no funding. (Dance Reading)

All Roads - NHLF funded project celebrating women and their contribution to Reading's history Open for Art - in particular the collaborations Lantern parade - Valentines Day version

Running the Would You Like a Cup of Tea? Event at the Biscuit Factory. It gave people a voice and safe space to open up and begin to work on healing parts of themselves they weren't able to before

Progress Theatre: Open Progress initiative providing free tickets and memberships; Writefest; Parade

What's On Cultural Champions - awards coming back! Refresh of WoR website

Delivery of community Arts & Wellbeing programme for local Residents (NDC) Collaboration with Reading museum to deliver wider programme of Free art workshops. Working and engaging with local artists

Sustainable Fashion workshops and fashion show at Water Fest Participation in the Green Events Code of practice Working with partner organisations and groups on event delivery.

Supporting organisations and artists who face significant barriers, to access funding for the first time, (dance Reading)

The behind the scenes work that Reside Dance C.I.C. is doing to develop arts in health contexts in Reading.

1 Reading's Digital Revolution exhibition and co-production 2 Kala the Arts of Dance from Indian Subcontinent 3 Responding to best my best ability to high volume of research enquiries at the Museum

What were the biggest challenges or barriers you faced over the past year in delivering or creating cultural or heritage activities?

I oversaw the production of a museum exhibition and 3 other smaller community-led displays. Having secured funding, it was time limits and reaching quality the was the most challenging.

Cost and budgets

Coordination and input (or lack of) from stakeholders at times

Not having enough staff in our team to deliver activities without funding attached

Resource, timing and volunteers

The fact that the arts continue to be grant funded, which fuels instability and competition, and leaves communities with short term activities that do not bring about change. (Dance Reading)

Reaching audiences outside those who already know about you Clashes with other events - it's a "buyers market" at times Volunteer recruitment/retention

Trying to work in partnership and consolidate multiple organisations' priorities and agendas.

Collaboration Funding Support with advertising in terms of events being shared

An officer mindset that weekends and evening work when events may take place is not for them

Connection to schools for me to continue to do the workshops was a challenge. Schools struggle to find time in their curriculum to have creative workshops.

Uncertainty of future - no secure home Challenges to afford an accessible space to continue the work. Resources being spent (time, energy) to find a space and impacting on well being of whole team

Getting a representative range of people involved in both the organising of events and participation.

Having to bid against other groups in our community

Reaching target audience, engagement, or commitment to participation.

We are a volunteer only organisation and cannot resource many of the nice to do activities we would like to participate in e.g. Heritage Open Days.

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| Volunteer recruitment/mobilisation - supply not matching demand | Culture has been seen by some as secondary, not primary output - niche not essential | Lack of capacity and core funding. Lack of opportunities for effective partnership building that begin active listening and developing trust. | The risk of losing Brock Keep as a space for art and artists is seriously threatening our community of artists. The lack of communication with the organisation about its future is a major barrier. |
| Funding. Resource. Overarching concerns like space. Having to compete rather than collaborate | The cultural space does not feel very diverse - it all seems very white and middle class | A general attitude of competition between organisations instead of collaboration. There is room for all of us... | I oversaw the production of an main exhibition and 3 community led displays at the museum. All secured grant funding so the challenge was time deadlines and achieving quality within a small team |

You can still add thoughts to these mentimeter questions by emailing Zsuzsi.Lindsay@reading.gov.uk.

Breakout Group Session 1:

Looking Back: Your reflections on how well the statement has been delivered over the last 12 months? Each group to tackle one Priority of the three.

Strategic Priority 1 – Enhance Identity

| Objective | Feedback |
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| Support the development of capacity within our diverse cultural sector through Shared Prosperity Funding. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to assess how well this has been achieved due to lack of knowledge of what has taken place. No visibility of what the Shared Prosperity Funding is or what it has supported. Capacity has dropped in the sector due to the drop in funding. |
| Consult on the creation of a sector wide EDI intention inspired by the Arts Council Creative Case for Diversity. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No one seems to have picked up this No communication between organisations about this Need to be better as a sector at showing how we are embedding EDI practice into what we are doing |
| Develop advocacy work and endeavour to place arts, culture and heritage within key strategic discussions and strategies. | <p>Sustainability group has been started to advocate for sustainability in culture</p> <p>Not sure where other advocacy is for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Town planning RDG prison limited number of groups involved <p>What has worked well:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Station Hill |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Safety <p>Lack of representation of voices High Street Heritage Action Zone is a really good example of Advocacy Arts and Heritage forum a really good place to go and share what is going on and meet new people Digital Revolution delivered by Reading Museum Still have difficulty around perceptions of areas being unsafe when not necessarily the case</p> |
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Strategic Priority 2 – Increase opportunities through working together.

| Objective | Feedback |
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| Support creative skills development in our town from pipeline in schools through to apprenticeships and work in partnership to create schemes bridging skills gaps in the Creative Sector. | Creative Industry event run by REDA and supported by CEP. |
| Share best practice and learning locally and nationally – 2 workshops. | Not achieved, however discussed a possible opportunity: Possible opportunity? New Directions has made connections, increased participation and worked on reducing barriers to access |
| Complete delivery of the CEP 2020-2023 Action Plan and consult on the next 3-year action plan. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have worked on the 2023 action plan • 8 months spent repositioning and planning for the future • Meet 4 times a year with 50 orgs • Create opportunities for different orgs • Schools joined to learn about creative industry • Funding was received to support work in schools • Struggle with capacity and funding • Struggled to access the schools |
| Create a statement of intent in partnership from sustainability audit. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jelly and Reading Rep sustainability forum has been a success • Transparency can be improved, audience reach, time and knowledge directory |

Strategic Priority 3 – Celebrate Reading

| Objective | Feedback |
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| Develop What's On Reading in line with feedback from the community, to improve joint marketing opportunities, transparency within the sector. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated what's on based on feedback from participants and audiences • Over 2000 entries over the last year • One stop shop for whats on • More diverse audience – into Instagram • Use of different platforms for different audience members is key • 2023 1million users • 2024 2millions users |
| Complete audit of current networks and forums to ensure that they meet the needs of the creative sector. | <p>Creative Lives project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on Whitley and Church Wards • More work needed wider area • Lots of groups changed folded, new groups around • Very time dependent a snap shot needs constant updating |
| Create mentoring opportunities and support networks for new and emerging organisations. | <p>Creative lives gave opportunities for collaboration and mention around bid writing</p> <p>Grants</p> <p>Limited as grants time limited</p> <p>There is a gap around mentoring – identify organisations that can provide support</p> <p>Emergency of more forum based support</p> |

Breakout Session 2:

Looking Forward: Year 3 intentions

Please revisit the planned actions for Year 3. Do these still feel relevant? Does anything need to change or be added?

Strategic Priority 1 – Enhance Identity

| Objective | Feedback |
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| Create an action plan based on HSHAZ legacy, learnings and evaluation to be. Incorporated into existing practices and shared strategies. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough is known about this particular strand of work to comment • Those that were involved with this project felt that it met a lot of its targets, but are really interested to see how the legacy will be embedded and developed |

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| Consult on barriers within Reading to the Creative and Cultural Life. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is still relevant and useful, but who is going to write this? |

Strategic Priority 2 – Increase opportunities through working together.

| Objective | Feedback |
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| Develop external funding bid commission further research on the value of the sector in the town. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling is that there are a lot of national measures, would prefer to spend money elsewhere/ or use capacity elsewhere |
| Commence delivery of the CEP 2024-2027 Action Plan. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is underway |
| Sustainability is a fast paced, fast moving topic. With new learnings and best practice making it a constant changing landscape. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This could be passed onto the sustainability forum to populate |

Strategic Priority 3 – Celebrate Reading

| Objective | Feedback |
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| Develop an external funding bid to improve signage of culture and heritage assets to raise awareness. Including wayfinding. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will write this • Who will 'allow' this to be managed • Who is being included in the bid – diversity is needed • Who decides what a cultural asset is? • What take priority – diverse voices/different groups need to be recognised • How are culture sites registered recorded and updated? • Need to celebrate Reading outside of town, billboards in other places at other stations • Is this a role for REDA? |