

DIAMOND JUBILEE CIVIC HONOURS

READING'S APPLICATION FOR CITY STATUS

A Deo et Regina (With God and Queen)



First used in the Grant of Arms from Elizabeth I in 1566, the re-introduction of 'RE' (Regina Elizabetha) to our Borough Arms was a tribute to Queen Elizabeth II, in whose coronation year they were granted. We believe that it would be particularly fitting for our town, which has now matured into a modern European centre, to be made the "City of Reading" in Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee Year.

Introduction

Why the area deserves city status, with particular reference to its age and distinct identity

Reading is a city in waiting. We believe our rich past, vibrant, eclectic present and exciting future represent a powerful and persuasive case for success in our bid for city status.

Our unique blend of social, cultural and economic achievements marks us out as a 'jewel' in the crown of the Royal County of Berkshire, and affords us a key leadership role across the Thames Valley area and beyond. We have been identified by the Centre for Cities, in their influential Cities Outlook 2011 Report as "a 'city' to watch" and among six cities across the country that are "best-placed to lead the UK's recovery..."

Reading has a strong sense of its historic identity and its many links to Royalty, past and present. With roots that go back to at least the 7th century AD, the town is the last resting place of King Henry I, and the birthplace of a future Queen, Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge. Queen Victoria looks out over the town centre from her lofty position near the old Town Hall.

With a focus on People, Place and Prosperity, we celebrate the rich diversity of communities across the borough, contributing to a broad and inclusive cultural and social life for all. Careful design and planning have ensured that the town centre remains a lively and popular place to live. Modern waterside apartments blend seamlessly with pleasant, well-maintained terraced houses, while the suburbs offer a more traditional mix of dwelling to suit all needs.

We take pride in our town. Local people have a reputation for engaging with and involvement in the decisions and activities that shape it, contributing to a real sense of civic confidence.

Our parks, gardens, open spaces, waterways and the natural and built environment are highly-valued, providing attractive and distinctive places to live, work and play, while our museums, ancient ruins, hotels, guest houses, restaurants and cafes have something to offer for everyone – whether they live in the town or visit for business or pleasure.

The annual Reading Music Festival remains a major international event, attracting top bands and visitors from across the globe. At the time of writing, Reading Football Club had reached the final of the Championship play-offs. Success would mean the biggest names in English football would be coming to Reading next season.

With a strong business tradition, originally based on 'beer, bulbs and biscuits', today's Reading is a diverse and globally-significant economy that has managed to remain buoyant in difficult economic circumstances. Businesses of every size are attracted to the town and want to stay here because of our unrivalled location and connectivity. We are only 40 miles from central London, 28 miles from Heathrow airport and less than 50 miles from the port of Southampton. We enjoy easy access to the national motorway network, via the M4, and boast two railway stations, with local, regional and inter-city services. But it is not just our unrivalled transport links that make us a good place to do business. High-quality schools, a strong Further Education sector and a university with an unrivalled international reputation in many fields, coupled with a highly-skilled, capable workforce, help to make Reading a successful knowledge economy with strong green credentials.

The achievement of city status in the Diamond Jubilee year would represent important and deserved recognition of our leading position within the region and the country. It would add to our strong sense of civic pride, bring significant additional benefits to Reading and the surrounding area, help to extend our reach on the global scene and to unlock the door to new opportunities for all in the years to come.

A rich and varied past...

Visitors have found a welcome in our town since the middle ages, when Reading was a great centre for pilgrimage. Originally settled circa 800AD the importance of Reading to not just the Thames Valley and the south of England, but to Britain as a whole, has been demonstrated over very many centuries. The great Victorian manufacturers spread our town's name throughout the world, but nowadays the world comes to us: we are a centre for global industries and the heart of one of Europe's most prosperous and self-sufficient areas.

Our town has seen many waves of immigration – from marauding Danes and Normans to the more welcome influx of eastern European migrants in recent years. In many ways the people of Reading create its distinct identity. Today's population is the embodiment of the rich multi-cultural heritage of modern Britain. It is cosmopolitan, yet remarkably laid back: a place where people come to work, to study, to relax and enjoy their lives.

First given self-governance by Elizabeth I in 1560 when the honour of County Borough was bestowed on us, Reading has continued to grow while maintaining an identity firmly founded on our 1600 year history. The result is that today we are recognised as one of the most important urban centres in the country, while protecting our heritage for future generations.

“Few towns...better repay exploration.”

So wrote Sir John Betjeman, the great chronicler of English heritage, of Reading in the 1940s. We believe we're more prepossessing these days: from the scheduled ruins of a medieval monastery, to cutting edge business parks, Reading has embraced change while honouring its long heritage.

Reading is the sum of a hundred outstanding parts. We have over 850 listed buildings and structures (including five Grade I); seven miles of river frontage; two National Trails on our doorstep, and some of the best transport links in the country.

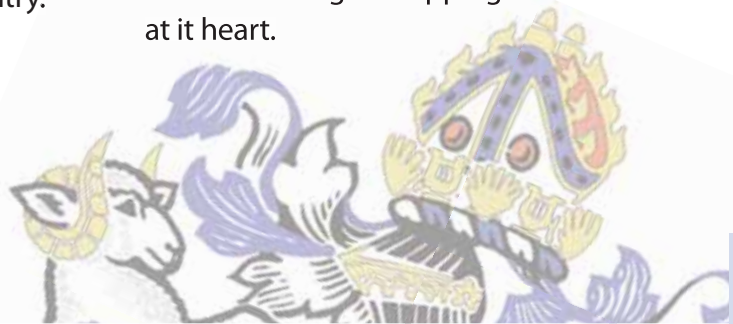
With a diverse, well educated and creative population, the town also has some of the best performing schools in the UK - as well as a red brick university leading the world in climate change study. Reading has one of the best retail centres in the country, and yet we are surrounded by the unspoilt countryside of Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Hampshire.

While we are the largest town in the south-east, with an urban area population of 213,000 [1991 Census] and 800,000 people living within a 25 minute drive time, the quality of life continues to improve.

Reading's stylish town centre is a master-class in regeneration. The award-winning Oracle complex spans the River Kennet, surrounded by old coaching inns, ancient churches, and Reading's famous red and grey brick Victorian architecture. The transport hub at the heart of the town centre includes a rail station - currently being extended in an £860 million project - with direct services to over 300 UK destinations and a fast motorway link to Heathrow, the world's busiest international airport. Local needs are served by one of the most innovative and comprehensive urban bus services to be found anywhere.

Thanks to the town's superb location it's hardly surprising that some of the world's most famous companies have chosen to set up home here - Microsoft, Oracle Corporation, BG Group, ING, Verizon Business and Symantec to name just a few. But Reading is surprising in so many other ways: we have Michelin Star restaurants; boutique hotels; family friendly museums; acres of green space including two ancient woodlands and we are home to outstanding arts organisations.

Modern Reading consists of thriving local centres, most of which were villages in their own right until they were absorbed under various boundary changes. These areas have very distinct identities - such as Tilehurst to the west; a large community with the 'Triangle' shopping and social centre at its heart.



Caversham and Emmer Green both sit on the north bank of the River Thames. The latter has its village green, duck pond and pubs creating a rural feel, while Caversham has a remarkable array of restaurants offering everything from Greek to Thai. "Newtown" lies to the east of the town centre and was built to serve the workers at Huntley and Palmers' factory. Its Cemetery Junction area lent its name to Ricky Gervais' recent film and retains immense character – an ethnically diverse area, popular with artists and musicians, linking central Reading with the University, and crowded with beautiful Georgian and Victorian architecture.

History & Traditions

Reading began life as a Saxon settlement - inhabited by the Readinga (the people of Reada) - in the early 7th Century and was first mentioned in written history in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Razed by the Danes in 1006, by the time of the Domesday Book (1086) we had a population of about 600 souls.

The Norman Kings assured Reading's future when on 18 June 1121, Henry I (youngest son of William the Conqueror), laid the foundation stone for Reading Abbey - which was to become one of the most important religious and political centres in Europe. Henry was buried in front of the Abbey's high altar in 1136 - making Reading one of only a handful of towns where British monarchs are buried.

Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, consecrated Reading Abbey in 1164, in the presence of Henry II. For the next four hundred years the Abbey was the political, social and economic power of the region – and its role in shaping modern Reading was enormous. Traces of it can be found everywhere from street names to the Holy Brook.

Reading and neighbouring Caversham became great centres of pilgrimage, but in 1539 the Abbey was dissolved by order of Henry VIII. The last Abbot, Hugh Cook Faringdon, was executed outside the Abbey Gate on 14 November that year.

While the Abbey was stripped of its treasures and its materials removed to build elsewhere in the town, Henry signed Reading's Corporate Charter, giving it some independence, and setting the town on its future path.

One of the Abbey buildings was maintained for hosting visiting royalty, and was used by Queen Elizabeth I on several occasions. It was the first Queen Elizabeth who granted the town Borough status, assuring its self-governance. As the 16th Century progressed, Reading became a major centre for cloth production; in just one year 5,753 broadcloths were exported to mainland Europe.

In 1633, Reading-born William Laud was made Archbishop of Canterbury by King Charles I. A staunch ally of the King, Laud played an important role in the country's slide to Civil War. Reading suffered greatly during the conflict that followed: strategically placed between Oxford (the King's Capital) and the seat of Parliament in London, the town fell to both the Royalist and Parliamentary camps. As well as enduring a siege, it was the site of one of the most significant battles of the war - the Battle of Caversham Bridge.

Reading was also the setting for the only bloodshed during the so-called "Glorious Revolution" (1688), when the townspeople fought alongside William of Orange's troops to rout King James' invading forces.

Because of its strategic location on the London to Bath road, Reading became an important staging post: it continued as a prosperous market town and was quick to embrace opportunities such as the arrival of the Kennet and Avon Canal. However, it would change shape forever with the arrival of those industries destined to put it on the world map:

"Reading excelleth at this day all other townes of this shire in fair streets, goodly houses, for wealth of the townsmen and their name in making cloth."

William Camden - Britannia (1586).



William Blackall Simonds established a small brewery on Broad Street in 1785. He moved to larger premises on Bridge Street in 1790, and the town's largest brewing business was born – surviving under various guises until 2010. Another entrepreneur - John Sutton - established a small corn and seed business in Market Place, in 1807. John's son - Martin Hope Sutton- shaped the business into a world-famous, cutting edge industry, covering six acres of central Reading. Then, in 1822, Joseph Huntley opened a small biscuit shop on London Street, serving the coaches that poured through the town. The business grew and became a great innovator, especially in the introduction of its decorative tin-ware. By 1900 Huntley and Palmers employed 5000 people.

Throughout the Victorian era all three industries grew to become major employers of international reputation, as well as huge benefactors of the town such that "The Three Bs" (beer, biscuits and bulbs) were at the heart of everyday life. This was the Reading that Dickens knew when he came to lecture at the Athenaeum (which he was President of), though he turned down a request to stand as our MP. Later in the century it was this ever-expanding town that Oscar Wilde knew – first as a regular guest of the Palmer family, then tragically as an inmate of Reading Gaol, the subject of his most famous poem.

Unsurprisingly, the life of Reading has focussed very much around the two rivers on which it was founded. The Thames at Reading has often been eclipsed by the less famous Kennet, since the arrival of the Kennet & Avon Canal did so much for the growth of modern Reading. By lucky chance, this meant that the Thames remained unspoilt – surrounded by open meadows, and now a beautiful asset to be enjoyed by all for boating, fishing, walking and wildlife - as well as being the location for one of the oldest rowing regattas in the country. The Riverside Museum, sited on the Kennet, tells the story of the waterways in Reading, and how they have shaped both town and people.

In medieval times people gathered in the market place in front of the Abbey, to be entertained, to trade and to watch justice being carried out.

Later the area became the site for the famous Cheese Fair held every September, and a Hop Fair in the 19th Century. Modern Reading carries on the tradition and is home to many events of regional importance, as well as one of international importance – the Reading Rock Festival.

Although we tend not to boast about our achievements, Reading has long been a centre for creativity and innovation, quick to latch on to modern thinking, and a place where entrepreneurs have been able to thrive. From the Vachel, Kendrick and Knollys families, who shaped the town after the Dissolution, to the great benefactors of Victorian times – Palmer, Sutton and Simonds – through to McIlroy and Madejski, successive residents have left their names on parks, schools, churches and artworks throughout the Borough.

We have exported great talent as well. John Soane – widely regarded as a visionary architect – was born and raised in our town. Ernest Hives – father of the Rolls Royce jet engine – was likewise born and learnt his trade in Reading. Local boy (Sir) John Madejski came up with the idea for Autotrader and created a publishing legend. More recently the University of Reading is not only one of the most highly regarded research centres in climate change, but its Cybernetics Department has done ground-breaking work in key-hole and robotic surgery.

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 healthy, reliable seed stock and air-tight packaging, which meant our seeds could be sent anywhere in the world. Huntley, Bourne and Stevens led the world in tin manufacturing – the novelty tins which they produced and shipped around the globe are now highly sought after. James Cocks first sold his Reading Sauce in the late 18th Century. It became popular throughout the UK for nearly 200 years and was a favourite of Mrs Beeton (as well as being mentioned in Jules Verne's "Around the World in 80 Days"). The sauce was eclipsed by the better marketed Worcestershire Sauce and ceased production in the 1960s. An enterprising local chef has now recreated the sauce from its original recipe, with a 21st Century twist, and is selling it in aid of charity.

Great Redingensians have come from all fields. As well of those mentioned above others who have been born, educated or settled here include:

Authors, Actors and Musicians: Jane Austen, Mary Russell Mitford, Elizabeth Taylor(author), Sam Mendes, Kate Winslet, Ricky Gervais, George Blackall Simonds, Chris Tarrant, Rudolph Walker, Jacqueline Bissett, Marianne Faithfull, Kenneth Branagh, Mike Oldfield, David Lean.

Entrepreneurs, Scientists and Politicians: Ross Brawn, Henry Hopkins, John Kendrick, Alfred Waterhouse, Yasmina Siadatan, Levi Stanley, Henry Addington, William Marshall, Thomas Noon Talfourd, Kevin Warwick, F.G. Miles.

Reading's diversity has always been a great strength and we have welcomed and absorbed many waves of immigrants. During the 1940s and 50s refugees from Poland and other Eastern bloc countries found a home here, and through the 1960s and 70s Reading developed strong links with the Commonwealth, especially from India and Pakistan, although the largest number of people from Barbados outside of Barbados is actually in Reading!

More recently, a large proportion of the Nepalese community have settled locally, and Reading has strongly advocated the rights of Ghurkha soldiers to remain in the UK.

Reading has a long-established Synagogue with a very active Jewish community based on Goldsmid Road; from 1860 till his death, Sir Francis Goldsmid served as Reading's Member of Parliament, one of the first Jewish members to be elected.

Associations with Royalty

In 979 Queen Elfrida, second wife of King Edgar, founded a royal nunnery in Reading. In 1121 Henry I laid the foundation stone for Reading Abbey and was buried here in 1136. In 1164 the Abbey was consecrated by St 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. During the 1400s Parliament and the Royal Court met on three occasions in Reading.

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. Certainly she was pivotal in helping shape modern Reading in 1560 – granting it Borough status and giving it self-governance.

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". The Osborne Biscuit was named after the Royal residence on the Isle of Wight.

Suttons Seeds becomes a supplier to all Royal farms and gardens and its Reading headquarters bore the name "The Royal Seed Establishment".

As part of her Golden Jubilee celebrations a statue of Queen Victoria was erected (paid for by public subscription) on Town Hall Square. A statue of her son Edward VII stands opposite Reading Station and carries a plaque commemorating the great civic picnic which took place to celebrate his coronation in 1902.

Walton Adams, another of Reading's pioneer photographers, included Queen Victoria amongst his clients, but it was his son Marcus who gained renown as photographer of Royal children. His first Royal photography was for a visit of George V to Sutton Seed's Factory and he took the first official photographs of Princess Elizabeth with the Duchess of York in 1926. His career as a royal photographer lasted thirty years and spanned four generations - ending with portraits of Princess Anne in 1956.

More recently the former Kate Middleton – Duchess of Cambridge and wife of Prince William – was born in the Royal Berkshire Hospital at Reading on 9 January 1982. In 1989 the University of Reading was the first to win the Queen's Award for Export Achievement, and received the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher Education three times in 1998, 2006 and 2009.

Profile

Overview

- Reading is the major urban area of the Thames Valley with a catchment of 1.7 million people.
- The commercial centre of the Thames Valley with a thousand years of trading history. More recently it has been one of the top five 'cities' measured by the Centre for Cities in Cities Outlooks between 2008 and 2011.
- Net importer of employees, high concentration of skilled workers, and one of lowest unemployment rates in Europe.
- Home to many international companies:



- One of the top retail destinations in the UK – and one of the most recession proof (according to CACI in 2009).
- At the gateway to global economy – Heathrow just 30mins away – Rail station 2nd busiest interchange outside of London.
- One of the top 20 Inbound Passenger Destinations (consistently number 12 – 13 on list, according to ONS' IPS)
- The hub of the UK's information technology industry – major employers include Microsoft (which started life in the UK with a small office near the town centre), Oracle, Cisco, Symantec and Dedipower Hosting.
- Reading is an area Bishopric with 210 parishes covering a population of 750,000. The Minster Church is a focus for many special services in the county.
- First town in south-east (outside of London) to have a Business Improvement District – 2nd BID renewed in 2009 creating a £5million private-sector led investment pot.
- The Royal Berkshire Hospital is an important centre serving its surrounding region; it houses some outstanding departments of national importance. Prospect Park Hospital is the main hospital in the region providing care for people with mental illness.
- Home to important international organisations such as the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF), an international organisation supported by 33 States; the Royal Meteorological Society, made up of weather enthusiasts, practitioners, students and scientists from across the world; and Caversham Park, the home of the BBC Monitoring Service, which for decades played a significant role in studying world affairs.

Statistical information on the resident population of the area...

2008 ONS estimates Reading Borough's population at 145,700 with 18.1% aged between 0-15; 67.6% of working age; 14.4% above working age and 48.9% female. But these figures belie the fact that Reading proper (as recognised by its own residents and businesses) includes the large suburbs of Woodley, Earley and Calcot. A realistic figure for the population of the "real" Reading, including those residents who both traditionally and practically look to Reading as their home town, would be close to 275,000.

Reading has an ethnically diverse population with 76.4% classified as White British in 2007, and is the second most ethnically diverse location in the south-east. The children in our local primary schools speak over 120 different first languages.

Our town is also bucking the 'greying' trend with its pensionable age population projected to grow slightly less quickly than those of working age. The 'dependency rate', i.e. the ratio of total population to those of working age may actually fall, even if marginally.



Our ethnic composition in order of community size (as provided by the 2001 census) is - Pakistani (2.7%), Mixed Race (2.4%), Black Caribbean (2.2%), Indian (1.7%), Black African (1.6%), Other Asian (.8%), Chinese (.7%), Other Ethnic (.7%), Black other (.4%).

However, the position has changed enormously since 2001 and the next census will show that the minority ethnic population is about 20% in total with a big increase in migration from Europe and parts of Africa. The population of school children from minority communities is in excess of 30%.

In addition, the University of Reading has a longstanding reputation for welcoming non-UK students - its first international graduate arrived in 1904. Today it hosts over 3,000 students from outside the UK with the diverse local population appealing to international students, as they see familiar communities surrounding and working with the University. For this reason the town has also become a popular centre for studying English language with several language schools based here.

Information on economic activity...

Reading has long been recognised as a key part of the major growth corridor to the west of London, which is a key location for tertiary, knowledge-based economic sectors that are acknowledged to be the important drivers of recent growth in the world economy. These sectors include information and communications technology (ICT) industries that have been at the forefront of the shift from manufacturing to informational modes of production. Reading has also emerged as a focal point and cluster for advanced business (producer) services such as banking, accountancy, legal and consultancy services. These services are prioritized as critically important, knowledge-intensive economic activities in the European Council's Lisbon economic strategy.

Reading is well connected to service networks operating on European and global, as well as national and regional scales, and this allows it to 'punch above its weight' amongst larger UK cities.

The greater Reading economic area is home to 2,000 foreign owned businesses employing 100,000 people, reinforcing its position at the centre of world economies. The service connectivity of Reading gives it a key role within the economically buoyant western area of the south-east 'mega-city region' and in relation to other even larger UK urban centres with core city status. Its workforce comes from all over the globe creating a cosmopolitan and inclusive environment.

Modern Reading grew from a traditional manufacturing base and was world famous for its "Three Bs" – biscuits, bulbs and beer. The last of these industries (brewing) departed just a year ago but they leave an enduring legacy for the town.

The town's workforce is one of the most highly skilled in the country, with a significant proportion working in knowledge economies. Reading is also a "hot house" for new growth, with research and innovation at its heart.

Internationally renowned banking, finance and insurance firms have made Reading their UK base, providing jobs for around a third of all workers, and making Reading the largest insurance and business service centre in the country.

The University of Reading is a world-class, research intensive university, which works closely with its business community. Reading's place at the heart of the technology industry is partly due to the University's focus on entrepreneurship and innovation.



In 1200, Reading was ranked 60th in terms of economic importance of all towns in the country; by 1334 it was at 38th and by 1525 it was ranked as high as 10th. Our modern town is in the ascendance again: in 2011, the Centre for Cities identified the cities best placed for a private sector-led recovery; “five cities to watch” included Reading, because “...they will be better-insulated from the economic impact of the spending squeeze, and have high potential to create private sector jobs. They have lower vulnerability to public sector job losses and spending cuts, and given the right powers and freedoms could make an even bigger contribution to the national economic recovery.” Reading scored as shown below and was explicitly mentioned as one of the ‘cities’ to lead Britain out of recession:

Claimant count Nov 2010 2.2% (3/64)
Employment rate July 2009-June 2010 76.2% (6/63)
Potential job losses in public sector by 2014/15 1.1% (55/63)
Residents with high level qualifications 2009 37.9% (9/64)
Business stock per 10,000 population 2009 371.0 (5/64)

Regeneration has taken many forms in our town, starting with the development of the M4 junction 11/A33 corridor. The Madejski Stadium complex (made up of stadium, conference centre and hotel) provides a focal point for both business and leisure. Right next door Green Park – an award-winning business park - is one of the biggest developments of its type in Europe and combines a natural landscape with modern, low rise business units. It is home to major corporations such as Cisco Systems, Symantec and Logica. Other development in the area has included the International Business Park, Southside, and two large retail parks.

In the town centre The Oracle, created by Reading Borough Council and Hammerson plc, is recognised as a model for best “place making” practice. The scheme is a classic example of riverside regeneration occupying the 22 acre site of the former Courage Brewery on the River Kennet. 72,000 sq m of retail and leisure was opened in 1999 and catapulted Reading into the country’s top 10 shopping destinations.

A rapid period of growth in residential provision in the town centre has provided c. 3,000 homes for local residents and a landmark development, Chatham Place, was completed in 2009 (Phase 1), which when finished will have transformed the western fringe of the town centre.

Meanwhile work continues on Reading Station’s £860 million upgrade. One of the most important rail schemes in the UK, over the next decade it will double the amount of trains able to use the station and remove a major bottleneck on the national rail network. Another landmark, 1.72m-sq ft mixed-use scheme opposite the station has received a boost with new development partner Stanhope having been announced this year.

Major residential development is ongoing at West Village – a superb development of 435 new homes on the former Battle Hospital site. The scheme has regenerated an important brown field site in west Reading.

The Council is also planning to capitalise on the rich history that surrounds the Abbey and the adjoining area, with an £8m proposal, hopefully supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, to develop an Abbey Quarter. This will draw together the Abbey Ruins, with other historic, listed buildings including the museum, the jail, St Laurence Church, the Maiwand Lion and the Simeon Monument, drawing on the rich history of the area to create a welcoming and attractive addition to the town centre.

Dee Park Regeneration aims to improve the quality of life for people living on the Dee Park Estate by improving housing, roads, parks, shops and increasing services for residents.

Information on the numbers attending schools...

Reading has evolved into a 'learning city' based on educational centres of excellence at its university, college, schools, libraries and museum. Further education has been established in Reading since the 1860s, with the University of Reading receiving its own Royal Charter in 1926. The University moved to its main campus at Whiteknights in 1947 and today has a total of 15,955 students (32% of which are postgraduates) with some 1,160 teaching staff.

Its Cybernetics department has an international reputation and is a primary centre for cybernetics teaching. The Meteorology department also receives worldwide recognition and is at the centre of work on climate change. The Departments of Science and Engineering, and Agriculture both draw large numbers of overseas students, while the Henley Business School, is a leading business school operating all over the world and the largest in Europe. The Fine Arts Department is one of very few combining studio practice with critical theory and history of art. The University is also home to the largest Samuel Beckett archive in the world and its College of Estate Management celebrated its 90th year in 2010; with an international reputation, its patron is The Prince of Wales.

There are seven secondary schools in the Borough though Reading children are also served by three outside the boundary. There are 37 primary schools, including 8 faith schools, serving over 10,000 children.

Two Reading state schools - Kendrick School for Girls and Reading School for Boys - both consistently lead the country in exam results. But other state schools also perform above the national average. The percentage of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs or equivalent by the end of Key Stage 4 at grades A* to C has increased from 70.4% in 2009 to 78% this year.

Independent schools also consistently feature amongst the top performing academic schools in the country and include The Abbey School; Queen Anne's School; Reading Bluecoat School; Leighton Park and Crosfields.

According to DfE figures, Reading is the highest ranking authority in the country for A- and AS-Level results, with an average point score per student of 851.4 compared with the national figure of 744.8. The points score per entry for Reading students is 235.2 compared with the national of 214.4.

Reading Museum's 'Outside the Box' outreach project for schools and older people engaged over 200,000 school children from across Berkshire and Buckinghamshire in 2009/10.

The Avenue School is a special school for boys and girls between the ages of two and 19 who have complex Special Educational Needs. The school has received many awards for its work including the prestigious Specialist Status for Performing Arts and The Inclusion Quality Mark (its work in this area has been recognised as outstanding). Its most recent Ofsted Inspection result was Outstanding in all criteria.



Local governance arrangements

Reading is the county town of Royal Berkshire - a county that despite its size in terms of population and economic importance has no city. The Borough of Reading is a single level unitary authority without civil parishes. The town is severely under-bounded with suburbs in other local authority areas - notably South Oxon, West Berkshire and Wokingham; even part of the University campus falls within Wokingham Borough.

The town has had some degree of local government autonomy since **1253** when the local merchant guild was granted a Royal Charter by Henry III. Since then 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.

The government of the Borough of Reading follows the leader and cabinet model. The council is currently run by a minority Labour administration.

Reading has elected at least one Member of Parliament to every Parliament since 1295. Currently, Reading and its surrounding area is divided between the parliamentary constituencies of Reading East and Reading West. The whole of the town is within the multi-member South East England European constituency.

The town is an important regional base for the Judiciary and Reading Crown Court has recently expanded to reflect its very high workload. The administrative centre of the magistracy in Berkshire is in Reading, which is also home to the County Court.

One mark of a great city is its international connections: Reading is twinned with the City of Düsseldorf (informally since 1947; officially since 1988); Clonmel in Ireland (since 1994); San Francisco Libre in Nicaragua (since 1994) and Speightstown in Barbados (since 2003). It also has informal links with Reading, Pennsylvania and Beruwela in Sri Lanka.

It was one of the first places to establish links of friendship with a German city - beginning in 1946 when the Mayor, Phoebe Cusden, mobilised the town to help the starving population of Düsseldorf. She founded the Reading Düsseldorf Association, which today is a voluntary body of about 50 members, with the Mayor as its President. The Association does not receive public funding, but receives organisational support from the Council.



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 South East, Reading has more than 400 organisations contributing to the life and economy of the town. (source: Reading Voluntary Action)

Leisure interests are covered by all types of Clubs and Societies ranging from the aforementioned 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 actively protecting the town's heritage.

In 2010 our town became one of 12 pilot sites for the 'Generations Together' programme, to foster meaningful interaction between under-25s and over-50s. Age UK Berkshire worked with Central Berkshire Education Business Partnership and Reading Borough Council to deliver a programme of intergenerational projects. To date 1,357 people have been actively involved in the projects - including archery, knitting, singing and Tai Chi. A further 1,800 people came and watched performances.

Connect Reading, with a membership of over 75 high profile organisations, is the region's leader on uniting business with all types of non-profit organisations, often taking a strategic implementation role, while Reading Voluntary Action co-ordinates Reading's army of volunteers across a vast range of projects.

With such a diverse population, Reading is 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 have joined the Reading Council for Racial Equality in its launch of the Reading Declaration to eliminate racism. The initiative was awarded a highly commended certificate from the British Diversity Awards.

The Cultural Partnership, a relatively new organisation, has emerged from Reading Sports Partnership. It brings together the six themes of Arts, Sport, Health, Heritage, Learning and Sustainability - offering real opportunities for the people of Reading to build on existing community work as well as developing new projects through Communities of Action. The Cultural Partnership has set a target of delivering 25 Communities of Action projects in the first year.

The Culture and Sport Grants Programme has been set up to support local community projects that seek to increase participation or provide audience development opportunities for people to take part in cultural and sporting activities within the Reading Borough, with the first theme of "Festivals and Events".



We also have an independent arts organisation – jelly - co-ordinating projects around the town, from the Open For Art scheme to Nuit Blanche. Other independent art activity includes the Reading Arts Week, Whitley Arts Festival, Whiteknights Studio Trail, Caversham Artists Trail, the Outside: Inside Festival and Reading Fringe.

The Thriving Neighbourhoods Programme (TNP) unites organisations from across local services, schools and businesses, as well as community, voluntary and faith groups. It works to tackle local problems in four parts of Reading and helps with issues facing disadvantaged areas and communities in Reading.

There are nine dedicated Children's Centres in Reading working in the Sure Start programme and delivering the town's own long-established commitment to pre-school and family support. Our centres provide education and childcare services for 0-5 year olds, and family support ranging from parenting classes to health and financial advice.

A broad range of faiths are represented in the town, which has a very active **Interfaith Forum**. As well as churches representing all aspects of Christianity our places of worship include a Synagogue, several Mosques, a Buddhist Centre, a Hindu Temple and a Sikh Temple.

Examples of other matters... e.g. tourist attractions and places of interest...

Our museums include the Museum of Reading (with the important Silchester Roman collection, the Biscuit Tin Gallery and the Bayeux Tapestry copy, visited by **102,354** people in 2009/10); the Museum of English Rural Life (a national collection of rural and agricultural history which flourishes as both a public facility with an active programme of activities and events, and a university body with a role in teaching and research); the Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology (the 4th largest collection of Greek pottery in the country), and the Cole Museum of Natural History (founded in 1907 at the University of Reading).

Our arts venues include the Concert Hall: part of The Town Hall complex, a fine example of Victorian Gothic architecture, and important as a regional arts venue with **20,000** attending events in 2009/10. Reading is home to the Reading Symphony Orchestra, Reading Bach Choir, Progress Theatre and the Festival Chorus amongst others.

The Hexagon (**200,000** ticketed admissions in 2009/10) and South Street (**17,000**) provide eclectic programmes of appeal to the widest possible audiences, reflecting Reading's diversity. We also have a fine repertory theatre: Progress Theatre was the place where Kenneth Branagh took his first acting steps. As well as a programme of classic and new plays, the company produces our annual outdoor Shakespeare performance.

In fact Reading is a town renowned as a centre for creative industry, where people find it easy to join in and develop artistically, from choirs to salsa dancing to sculpture. It's the place where Ricky Gervais, Chris Tarrant, Mike Oldfield and Kate Winslet grew up.



Visitor accommodation

Reading has seen rapid expansion in its choice of both budget and luxury accommodation over the last few years. As recently as 20 years ago there were only a handful of hotels in the town, supplemented by a range of traditional B&B accommodation. Nowadays, most of the UK's top hotel brands are represented in the town – in fact it is fair to say they have clamoured to be represented in one of the best-performing accommodation sectors in the country (up to 2007 we enjoyed one of the best RevPars in the country). Our largest hotel – the Hilton Reading – opened in 2009 (with 210 bedrooms, and conference facilities for 800), a new Holiday Inn (Reading East) opened in 2010 on the Reading fringes, providing another 174 rooms.

There are now a total of approx 2000 inspected/branded hotel rooms in Reading with a further 1,300 on our fringes. In the town centre two of our fine old coaching inns have been fully refurbished, providing modern facilities with all the charms of heritage buildings. Our original railway hotel The Great Western (believed to be the country's first railway hotel, and worked on by Isambard Kingdom Brunel) was rescued from life as offices when Malmaison refurbished and re-opened the hotel – with a railway theme and the quality facilities of a boutique hotel. Penta Hotel, the well known European brand, chose to establish its first UK hotel in Reading – completely gutting an existing 1980s building to create a funky, vibrant hotel for a new era of travel.

At the other end of town the former Shire Hall, a stunning Grade II building, has been turned into The Forbury – Reading's first 5-star hotel overlooking the historic Forbury Gardens and Abbey Ruins. Reading has a policy to promote only inspected or nationally branded accommodation an active Destination Forum meets to drive forward local tourism strategy; this group is represented on the Reading's 'Marketing Group', helping to shape generic promotion of the area.

Our hotels

Boutique – The Forbury Hotel (von Essen), Malmaison

Four Star – Crowne Plaza, Hilton Hotel, Holiday Inn South, Penta Hotel, Holiday Inn J10, Millennium Madejski, Novotel, Millennium Copthorne,

Three star – The Mercure George, Quality Royal County, Best Western Moat House, Best Western Calcot Hotel,

Lodge – Premier Inn (three) Travellodge (three) Ibis Hotel

Serviced Apartments – Reading has seen a rapid expansion of residential serviced accommodation, providing a popular option for people working here on medium or long term contracts. Most of this accommodation is based around the centre and includes House of Fisher, Number 18, Deep Blue, SACO and Berkshire Apartment Services.

Guest accommodation – Reading has a range of independently owned guest houses run to a very high standard, including Belle Vue House, Dittisham Guest House and Central Reading Hotels.



Public green spaces

Our town is a green one – with over 100 parks and playgrounds spread across the Borough, and a wide expanse of unspoilt Thames river meadows flowing through our centre.

Surprisingly, Reading has 20 woodlands, many of which are ancient and four are Local Nature Reserves. Most 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, Reading's largest open space, gets its name from the fine views across the Kennet Valley and beyond, which can be seen from the Mansion House (a Grade II listed mansion, now a restaurant). The park has areas of conservation grassland and an artificial pond while 'The Rookery', a Wildlife Heritage Site, is an area of mature oak woodland. The park is also home to a large children's play area 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, adjacent to the Abbey Ruins. Originally laid out in 1833 these Victorian formal gardens were awarded major Heritage Lottery Funds and fully renovated in 2005. Both The Forbury and Prospect Park have Green Flag status.

Reading has a wide variety of land used for sports, including numerous football pitches, cricket pitches, bowls greens, and tennis courts. These facilities are managed in close liaison with various leagues and clubs. We have also introduced up to date facilities for young adults – including a skate park, floodlit hard play surfaces, multigym and basketball hoops.

Reading has had an active 'In Bloom' campaign for over 20 years and the town has won Silver Gilt and the Best City Award for the last three years.

Waterways have always been important to Reading. The town owes its existence to its location at the confluence of the Thames and the Kennet Rivers and 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.



Major events

Growing from beginnings as the National Jazz and Blue's Festival in 1971, the Reading Festival has been run by Mean Fiddler since the late 80s and is second only to Glastonbury in size. Some 90,000 fans fill the Thames-side site every year and the event is worth over £31 million to the economy, with £16 million spent in Reading itself (source: Festival Republic, 2009 survey). [Significant licensing, environmental and business support from Reading Borough Council]

The Reading Community Carnival was founded in 1977 to mark the Queen's Silver Jubilee and the 2012 Carnival will not only be celebrating the Diamond Jubilee but the Caribbean roots of many of our residents. [Grant aided by Reading Borough since its launch, the Carnival is held on Prospect Park and gains major organisational support from the Council]

Reading Pride was founded in 2003, and while it is best known for its annual festival, the organisation also works locally to promote equality and diversity, and eliminate discrimination in relation to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people across the Thames Valley. As a registered charity run solely by volunteers the Pride event celebrates local community and has made significant progress in encouraging the promotion of LGBT equality. [The September event is held on Council land and receives active organisational and promotional support from the Borough]

Reading Children's Festival will be celebrating its 23rd birthday in 2012; this two week celebration of children and young people offers lots of free events and activities ranging from mini Olympics to puppet shows. A specially extended Festival is planned for 2012 to celebrate the world's youth. [Co-ordinated, marketed and many events organised by RBC]

Reading Amateur Regatta was established in 1842 and is still held a few weeks before Henley's and, while not as famous, is highly regarded because its focus is firmly on the sport. Many of the world's top rowers compete at an idyllic site on the Thames – and 2012 promises to be an outstanding event as a showcase for British rowing. [Held on public land at Thames Prom, supported by Parks Team]

Pride of Reading is an annual awards campaign celebrating achievement within the wider Reading community. Championed by local boy Chris Tarrant the awards recognise the very best of our town – from charity workers, volunteers and real life heroes, to restaurants and business people. [Organised with significant help from the Borough Council]

Reading Half Marathon takes place once a year (usually March), and attracts a capacity entry: as many as 16,000 competitors from elite to fun runners take part. The event started in 1983, initially as an independent event, and was one of the first Marathons to include wheelchair athletes. The Borough Council took over the event for several years before it was handed over to new organisers. [The race still benefits from significant organisational support from the Borough and other local agencies]

Traditional jazz and traditional British beer come together in another favourite Reading event, the Real Ale and Jazz Festival. RAAJ is organised as a major fund-raiser for Reading Cricket and Hockey Club, and is another river-based event. [Held on public land, with support of Reading Parks]



Sport and leisure facilities...

Reading Borough Council operates seven leisure centres, two of which are managed by external partners. The total number of visits across all the centres between January and December 2010 was 1,652,297.

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. [Owned and managed by Reading Borough]

Rivermead is home to the Reading Rockets Basketball Team (winners of the National Trophy for a 4th year) and venue for major regional and national events. This multi sport complex provides a pool, indoor bowls arena, gym and spa facilities, dance studio and huge choice of fitness courses. [Owned by Reading Borough and managed by Greenwich Leisure]

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.

A much newer rowing tradition is being established at the Pincent-Redgrave Rowing Lake - a purpose built rowing lake and marina at Caversham, which will be the training base for Team GB rowing teams before the 2012 Olympics.

The Madejski Stadium is a 24,000 seater stadium to the south of Reading. Home to Reading Football Club (currently playing in the npower Championship) as well as London Irish Rugby FC (Aviva Premiership), the Stadium was voted the best place to watch rugby in a 2010 survey.

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 Royals enjoyed two years in the Premier League between 2006 and 2008, and hold the record for the highest points tally of any League side.

Based in Sonning, Reading Cricket and Hockey Club has a Men's Hockey team, which enjoys significant success at national and international level, with many of the Club's members playing for the national team.

Thames Valley Triathletes, who are based in the town, is Britain's oldest triathlon club, and the British Triathlon Association was also formed in the town in December 1982. Indeed Britain's first-ever triathlon was held at Kirton's Farm in Pingewood, Reading in June 1983.



Local authority support for the voluntary sector

Reading has an active and diverse voluntary and community sector (VCS) with over 800 groups engaged in activities at any one point. The Borough Council recently emphasized its strong support for the sector by maintaining its overall grant support level in the face of severe economic circumstances.

The Borough Council promotes the development of the VCS through its funding programmes in the form of Community and Festival small grants, as well as through core grants to voluntary-run organisations enabling groups to provide a valuable service to Reading's residents.

The Council also supports infrastructure organisations such as Reading Voluntary Action to provide ongoing support to the many small organisations, with specialist training and advice on a range of voluntary sector matters; and Social Enterprise Berkshire as a business support organisation for budding and established social enterprises (mainly through one-to-one advice).

Grants are awarded to groups that meet the Council's corporate targets and strategic priorities: valuing diversity, challenging discrimination and inequality; and safe and strong communities. In 2010-2011, the latest year for which final figures are available, £2,507,790 was awarded as 50 community grants and 82 grants made under core funding.

Community and Festival Grants are one-off and play a vital role in stimulating new initiatives from within our communities. The grants enable activities for a variety of groups to participate in festivals such as Reading Pride, Whitley Arts Festival, Black History Month, Holocaust Memorial Day, East Reading Festival, Oxford Road Fun Day, Dhoom Dhamaka, Children's Festival and Reading Carnival, which together make Reading an outgoing and dynamic place to live.

Other grant-funded activities show how the community responds creatively to things that are felt to be important, for example setting up an elderly befriending scheme; running a "Mushaira" - an evening of new Urdu poetry; supporting a cricket tournament that promotes integration among diverse communities; and even the design and build of a new website for the Greater Reading Environmental Network, to support the development of a greener community.

The Core Funding service makes resources available to the VCS to run projects, which provide key services for the benefit of Reading residents. Other Council support includes advice and Discretionary Rate Relief on premises.



Shopping centres

Since its days as a bustling market town, Reading has been one of the most popular retail destinations in the UK, featuring in Experian, CACI and Verdict's top 10 on several occasions in recent years.

The primary catchment area for the town centre includes most of our surrounding villages, and the suburbs of "greater Reading", while the secondary catchment area (defined as the area where the centre attracts 10% or more of generated expenditure) includes Ascot, Bracknell, Camberley, Didcot, Farnborough, Fleet, High Wycombe, Maidenhead, Newbury, Slough, Tadley, Thatcham, Wallingford and Windsor.

Traditionally, our principal shopping area was found between Friar Street, Broad Street and surrounding satellite streets. The shopping offer was expanded in 1972 with the arrival of the Butts Centre to the west of Broad Street. Now known as the Broad Street Mall this popular centre is also home of the Reading Model Search and Reading's Got Talent. It enjoys an average monthly footfall of 720,000 (source: BSM).

The town centre was pedestrianised in 1995, just before work got underway on The Oracle, the first phase of which opened in 1999. It is now the region's premier retail and leisure destination with over 120 retail units anchored by House of Fraser and Debenhams. Outside the shopping centre 21 cafes and restaurants front the River Kennet, creating a unique outdoor leisure experience. The average monthly footfall in the centre is about 1.2 million. The Oracle also hosts regular events including a Fresh Food Festival, and the Christmas Spectacular (which attracted 4,500 spectators in 2010).

Broad Street is dominated by John Lewis. Formerly known as Heelas of Reading this store was a Reading institution, opening originally in 1854 as a drapery. By 1892 the department store was the grandest in the area, and continues to this day having undergone many expansions, and rebranding as John Lewis. Awarded a Royal Warrant in 2007, it is currently undergoing a £20 million investment programme.

There are branches of all the major national chains in Reading – and many "destination" names including Disney Store, Swarovski Crystal, Clas Ohlson, and most recently announced Apple. Besides the two major shopping malls, Reading has three smaller shopping arcades, which contain smaller specialist stores and also boasts a number of independent family-run businesses, e.g. Jacksons department store and Jacobs Jewellers. Union Street is popularly known as Smelly Alley, due to the open-fronted fishmongers and butcher shops it was home to. Now an eclectic mix of shops, although a quality fishmonger, butcher and greengrocer still remain.

Reading still maintains a street market (held at Hosier Street from Wednesday to Saturday), while a farmers' market operates on two Saturdays a month at the Cattle Market, just north of the town centre.



This submission has been put together by
Reading's City Status Partnership Board.

Which included representatives from the following organisations:

Jacob's of Reading (representing independent /specialist retailers)
Reading Borough Council
Reading Chronicle
Reading Civic Society
Reading Council for Racial Equality
Reading Football Club
Reading Post
Reading UK CIC
Reading University
Reading Voluntary Action
Reading Youth Cabinet
Reading Federation of Tenants & Residents Association
Yell (representing corporate businesses)
Rev Canon Brian Shenton

And taking account of the views of the people of Reading.



*Illustrative lino cuts kindly supplied by
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