

Kings Meadow View, Forbury Retail Park (Reference PL/25/1706) – Public Art Contribution

Context

The position of the proposed development is on the Forbury Retail site along Kenavon Drive and Forbury Road on one side and the railway tracks and Kings Meadow on the other. The site is opposite the Reading Gaol site and Forbury Gardens, both of which are key heritage sites for Reading and significant parts of the [Abbey Quarter](#). This development will be just outside of the heart of Reading but still within easy access to the town centre and Reading Station.

Reading is undergoing considerable development. As such, the look and feel of Reading is changing significantly to accommodate many new residents. This development will be a substantial contributor to the increased town centre population, with this in mind, appropriate provision must be made for new residents to ensure their quality of life, enjoyment of their surroundings and sustainability of the development^{1 2}— social infrastructure being a key component of sustainable development³.

This development needs to be considered in the wider context of the town of Reading, it will need to form part of the urban fabric in terms of look and feel but also be part of the story of Reading and contribute to the development of Reading's sense of place and civic pride through art, culture and heritage. Engagement in a Public Art and Cultural Strategy will satisfy these needs.

National Context

The government released their [Levelling Up White Paper](#) on the 2nd of February 2022. Within this Levelling Up Agenda under *Pride in Place* the paper states that *'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'*.

This ambition has since been reaffirmed through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 and subsequent Statements of Levelling Up Missions (2024), which further define how progress will be measured and delivered.

There are a number of factors listed that will help each place achieve transformation and enable a boost to local growth, one of these factors is *'greater access to culture'*.

Local Context

Reading has a flourishing arts, culture and heritage scene. Feedback from consultation with residents and key stakeholders, is that the cultural offering has not always matched Reading's economic success. A survey of young professionals in 2018 (research attached) stated that culture was the second most important factor when deciding where to live.

In response the [Reading 2050 Vision](#) and [Reading's Culture and Heritage Strategy](#) were developed to support the ambitions of Reading in becoming a place of culture. These ambitions are also reflected in Reading Borough Council's most recent [Corporate Plan](#). Recent work has taken place to develop Reading's place values and brand, the outcome of this work can be found [here](#), incorporating these values into the public art strategy for the site will be key.

¹ [How important is creative and cultural participation to our wellbeing? | Age UK](#)

² [Right to participate in cultural life \(unesco.org\)](#)

³ [Social Development for Sustainable Development | DISD \(un.org\)](#)

It is not just economic development that culture contributes to. Culture has also become embedded in Berkshire West's health and wellbeing strategy, and contributes to how Officers deliver social impact outcomes, including employability and sense of community.

Reading has also had success in attracting significant funding through the Levelling Up Fund, Great Places Scheme and the High Street Heritage Action Zone. The benefit and success of these schemes has been widely celebrated across services and sectors. Further adding to the prioritisation of culture to create a sense of place to help drive social and economic development.

Planning Policy Context

Paragraph 98 of the NPPF December 2024 requires that in order "to provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should [amongst other matters]: a) plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments; b) take into account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community;..."

The Development Plan, supported by relevant guidance sets out requirements for arts, cultural and community facilities.

Policy CR2 - Design in Central Reading states: *"Development will provide appropriate, well designed public spaces and other public realm, including squares, open spaces, streetscape, utilising high quality and well-maintained hard and soft landscaped areas, and public art, that provide suitable functions and interest, sense of place and safe and convenient linkages to adjoining areas..."*

Policy CC7 - Design and the Public Realm: "Developments will also be assessed to ensure that they... Are visually attractive as a result of good high quality built forms and spaces, the inclusion of public art and appropriate materials and landscaping..."

Policy CC9 - Securing Infrastructure includes requirements for cultural infrastructure where justified. The scale, central location and strategic importance of the appeal site certainly suggest this would be justified in this instance. Indeed it would be difficult to conceive where the policy might apply if it were not relevant in this case. This is supported by the Council's Planning Obligations Under S106 SPD (2015) which refers to both public art and community (which can reasonably be considered to include 'cultural') facilities being secured under S106 agreement where site-specific requirements exist.

Historical Context of the Site

The location of the site means that there is a natural and pre-existing connection with the historic Reading Gaol and Reading Abbey sites opposite within the Abbey Quarter. This development providing an opportunity to celebrate these sites within a public art strategy for the site.

The development is also close to the starting point for the St James Way, an international pilgrimage site connected to Spain.

More recently we have the development of the as well as the Banksy, that appeared on the outer wall of the Gaol, a first and only for Reading.

Key historical context for information:

- Plummery Wall - [St James church](#) | [Reading Museum](#)

- Reading Gaol - [A very short history of Reading Gaol | Reading Museum](#)
- Ballad of Reading Gaol - [The Ballad of Reading Gaol by Oscar Wilde | Poetry Foundation](#)
- Abbey Ruins - [Abbey Ruins | Reading Museum](#)
- Abbey Quarter – [Reading Abbey Quarter | Reading Museum](#) The Quarter has a comprehensive wayfinding and interpretation scheme that was implemented with National Lottery Heritage Fund support in 2018.
- New Owner of the Gaol – [Reading gaol, prison home of Oscar Wilde, sold to educational foundation for £7m | Reading | The Guardian](#)
- St James Way - [St James Way for Camino Pilgrims | Reading Museum](#)
- Reading Gaol Development Framework - <https://images.reading.gov.uk/2019/12/Outline-Development-Framework-Reading-Prison-Adopted-March20151.pdf>

Looking to the future

Reading is a vibrant and diverse town. Officers want to celebrate the uniqueness of our town and ensure that our public art represents this diversity and vibrancy. To date RBC have not had any public art that has been created or curated by diverse artists or practitioners. This is something that Officers would like to prioritise moving forwards. (Reading Census 2023 data [Reading Borough Profile](#))

Public Art and Cultural Strategy Contribution

Based on the contextual information, Planning policy and guidance set out above, there is a reasonable expectation that the development would make appropriate contributions to public art and culture, proportional to the scale of the development. This is further supported by the precedent of other similar developments within Reading Centre in terms of location, size and number of people it is likely accommodate and attract.

It is broadly welcomed that the 'Draft Heads of Terms' document submitted by the applicant, as submitted with the application, indicates that the owner will enter into a S106 Agreement in respect of the provision of public art. Officers would however consider it far more appropriate for this to be as part of an actual public art scheme, rather than the applicant suggesting that this could optionally take the form of a financial contribution. All of the above justifies the provision of a public art scheme, rather than a financial contribution, in this instance. Moreover, it is considered that the provision of public art should be committed to be a mandatory rule of any design code, with the document updated accordingly to mirror the commitment referenced in the 'Draft Heads of Terms' document.

Based on the precedent of previous developments including Station Hill and Our Domain (land between Weldale Street and Chatham Street), Officers would consider the following to be appropriate:

- To secure a Public Art and Cultural Strategy under the terms of the S106 legal agreement and that the scope and content of that Public Art and Cultural strategy is agreed before Phase 1 of the work. This is because provision will need to be made for the public art within the layout, landscaping (etc.) plans for the development. It is recommended that the Strategy should be secured in such a way as to ensure that the approval of a panel of local representatives of the cultural sector is built into the process prior to final sign off by the Local Planning Authority.

- Indicative values for this work are listed below in Table A.
- The Public Art and Cultural Strategy *could* include the following, all of these options would help the development of the cultural landscape and embed the development in the town:
 - Floorspace within buildings for the cultural and arts community to perform, meet and develop work. Performance space would need a minimum contribution of 4800 square feet with ceiling height of 16 feet if just a meeting space then 1000 to 1500 square feet. (Research conducted by the University of Reading during the Pandemic listed this as one of the main priorities for the cultural sector) (Links to the Reading Culture and Heritage Strategy Priorities 1&2)
 - Peppercorn rents available to Cultural Organisations and individual practitioners from Reading.
 - Deliver public art strategy that engages with the community for direction and development. (Great Places Scheme Final Evaluation attached document)
 - Engages with local artists and heritage experts to deliver public art projects in collaboration with nationally or internationally recognised artists. (Reading Culture and Heritage Strategy Priorities 1 & 2 and emerging Town Centre Strategy)
 - Ring fences an amount to be agreed to use as leverage match funding towards a project that develops our diverse communities and festivals, celebrating the diversity of Reading. (Reading 2050 Vision - Place of Diversity and Culture and RBC Corporate Plan)
 - Includes a Wayfinding/interpretation scheme that links with the Heritage of the site and complements the existing [interpretation schemes in the Abbey Quarter](#) and the wider town centre (Town Centre Strategy 2022 still in draft stage, Station Hill wayfinding)
 - Use of public realm 12 days a year free of charge for performances by local groups.

Table A*

Description	Indicative Starting Costs
Community Engagement	£15,000+
Engagement of local artists	£20,000+
Creation of Public Art Relevant to Reading	£55,000+ (per piece)
Wayfinding/interpretation scheme	£25,000+
Match Funding Pot for Area Space Animation	£15,000+
Creation of Culture and Heritage Strategy	£15,000+

***All to be reviewed on a yearly basis to account for increase in costs last reviewed (9/1/24)**

Best Practice Example of Public Art Development Project:

[Our Domain | A collaborative and participatory public art project in Reading \(ourdomain-reading.co.uk\)](#)

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