



## Background

Reading BID was first set up in 2005, the first outside of London. It celebrated its 10 year anniversary and is now in its third 5 year term (2014-2019).

The BID has been working to deliver a business plan aimed to deliver more business; more security; more support for the night-time economy; to make Reading town centre more attractive; more ambitious; and helping businesses get more connected. Current Strategic aims target: Inward investment; Local people, Local jobs (in areas of un/underemployment); Putting Reading on the Map; and marketing Reading more widely.

## Reading BID's approach to place branding

The BID as an area-based location - Reading is the place brand and a core element of marketing the town - largely a town centre Retail (Top-20) and Office development BID where workers and shoppers overlap in terms of activity and consumption. The BID is an asset of the Reading brand, promoting the vitality of the town to residents, workers/commuters and visitors - and to encourage return visits based on a positive experience.

The place brand is more about the style of the Reading image which is made up of sub-brands. Core values include: Forward Thinking, Moving, Vitality of the town experience and as a business location and place for inward investment. Reading is not primarily a visitor destination, but the BID is developing a lifestyle theme. Its visitor assets, such as the joint Art Council-funded 2016 Year of Culture, recognise the need to spread the word about the town's cultural assets. Key heritage assets include the Abbey ruins with the possible remains of Henry 1<sup>st</sup> being found there.

## BID's use of heritage in place branding

Heritage is part of the Reading offer and this will increase as key heritage sites are developed. The Reading BID aspiration has been dominated by retail/town centre, but in the next BID renewal (2020-) an expanded BID area is proposed to incorporate the whole CBD within the ring road, which will take in all of the Abbey ruins site, station and office developments and River Thames.

Cultural activity includes Heritage Open Days and a local authority-led Cultural Heritage Strategy. Pending the Abbey works, further heritage promotion is

expected to turn around Reading's image. When the Abbey reopens as a heritage venue, combined with Retail and Arts offer, this equates to a Big Package for Reading, its profile and place brand. An Art Angel project is also underway to celebrate Reading Prison and its historic associations (Oscar Wilde) aiming to attract a legacy bid of £300k over 4 years for further creative work around the site. A 3 year mission is seeking to build up the image of Reading museums and theatre visits, with 2016 Year of Culture underway.

## Benefits of BID's heritage/place branding

Events, such as Bastille Day, Reading Fringe festival and Eat Reading all develop the place brand and image and the BID needs to sustain these activities in order to maintain its place brand. Major office developments contribute to place making, attracting companies and inward investment, e.g. M&G development opposite the Abbey and Forbury Gardens - 100% let as soon as available to the market - BID believes the proximity to this heritage site/amenity and views have contributed to this popularity.

## Challenges and Opportunities of using heritage in place branding

Businesses are not currently invested in Culture at the moment - a major event is planned on Business, Culture and Arts to discuss this as part of Reading's Economic Forum.

There is an imperative to avoid the sale of Reading Prison by central Government to commercial/residential development and to develop the potential for a heritage-based mixed-use development alongside the Abbey.



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