



**Reflections on the Urban Room  
Your Place Our Place  
March 2022  
Broad Street Mall, Reading**

## Acknowledgements

Special thanks to all the organisations that hosted workshops, exhibitions and discussions in the Reading Urban Room and to all the participants.

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### Reading Project Partners

University of Reading  
<https://www.reading.ac.uk/>

Reading Borough Council  
<https://www.reading.gov.uk/>

Broad Street Mall  
<https://www.broadstreetmall.com/>

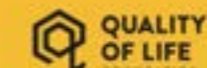
Urban Symbiotics  
<https://urbansymbiotics.com/>

Quality of Life Foundation  
<https://www.qolf.org/>

Commonplace  
<https://www.commonplace.is/>

### CCQOL Project Partners

The project is led by the University of Reading in collaboration with the following partners



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# 1. Introduction

The aim of this strategic report has been to determine the impact of the community consultation space/Urban Room, Your Place Our Place, on the local community in Reading and the organisations that participated. The analysis has been done by undertaking a review of the activities taking place in the Urban Room, the delivery of the programme, and interviewing a range of stakeholders who participated in the project. The outcome of the report aims to inform future research on community consultation that is happening in several other city centres in the United Kingdom.

The Community Consultation for Quality of Life (CCQOL) project is taking place in all four nations of the United Kingdom: England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In each city, an Urban Room was tested for four weeks with a digital platform for people to participate in the consultation exercise. Participants were asked to comment on the map of their neighbourhood by placing a pin which would help create social value maps of these cities. The consultation theme has been developed in response to the local context.

The themes are as follows:

- 1. Reading:** Quality of Life for Reading
- 2. Cardiff:** Piloting Healthy Neighbourhoods
- 3. Belfast:** Regeneration, Heritage, Housing and the Role of Developers
- 4. Edinburgh:** 20-Minute Neighbourhood

## Urban Rooms across United Kingdom



## 2. Community Consultation for Quality of Life (CCQOL)

The public should have the right to have a say in decision making that has an impact on their life and the place they live in. Community consultation allows people to be involved in the decision-making processes which in the long run has a positive impact in terms of resilience and well-being.

Your Place Our Place is one of the first pilots of the Community Consultation for Quality of Life CCQoL project. It involves community consultation through activities at an Urban Room and a digital mapping tool. CCQOL is a UK-wide project seeking to develop a Code of Conduct for inclusive participatory planning. The aim of the project is to develop a map-based model of community consultation online as well as face-to-face. People input their experiences into digital and physical maps to measure and assess the impact of changes to their neighbourhoods. The maps are a visual representation of the participant views and they will influence future decision-making in the city.

### Aims of the project Community Consultation for Quality of Life (CCQOL):

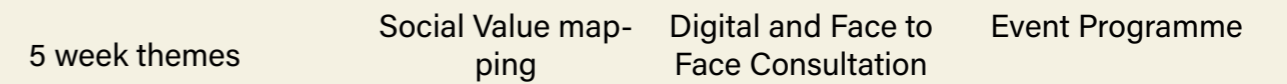
1. To create maps with the community in order to learn about the things that the people in the community value, what makes them happy and contributes to their wellbeing. The quality of life maps will be used to visually represent the views of the participants and will influence future decision making about your place.
2. To develop best practice guidelines for doing community consultation for planning in an inclusive and engaging way.
3. To develop a way of mapping places with people that can be used, with other kinds of data - for example biodiversity, to give a holistic picture of what is happening in the area in real time. These maps would be useful for transparency and decision-making
4. To explore how community generated maps might contribute to democratic decision making on local issues.
5. To test the use of the Quality of Life Framework to see how it can be made more relevant and useful to people.

## Reading Town Centre Strategy

### Quality of Life Themes



### Design



## Reading Urban Room

### Your Place Our Place

# Public consultations

## Benefits of public consultation:

- Decision makers learn about local people's preferences for an area which leads to better informed decisions
- Enables communities to engage and share their observations and suggestions
- Encourages more reflective and deliberative planning practices
- Promotes accountability and transparency
- Addresses power imbalances by bringing developers and the community together
- Builds trust in an institution by fostering relationships and providing support
- Ensures that the public are well informed
- Provides a space for the public to learn about planning practices and for professionals to learn about people's opinions and experiences
- Increases community wellbeing and local enthusiasm

## Why people get involved:

- Hope - people want to shape the future of an area
- Place attachment - people want to inform planning as they seek ways to achieve a better physical environment
- Civic activism - some individuals want to protect heritage of an area, promote sustainable transport or promote models of affordable housing
- Perceived penalties - people feel that they would be penalties if they do not participate, such as unwanted development or poorer quality design
- Threat - individuals try to block development by raising detracting, peripheral issues
- Control - people want to have some degree of control over local planning decisions
- Honeypot effect - people want to engage with public participation exercises when they are appealing

**"Good consultation can contribute to community building and a sense of identity as well as wellbeing."**

- Prof. Flora Samuel



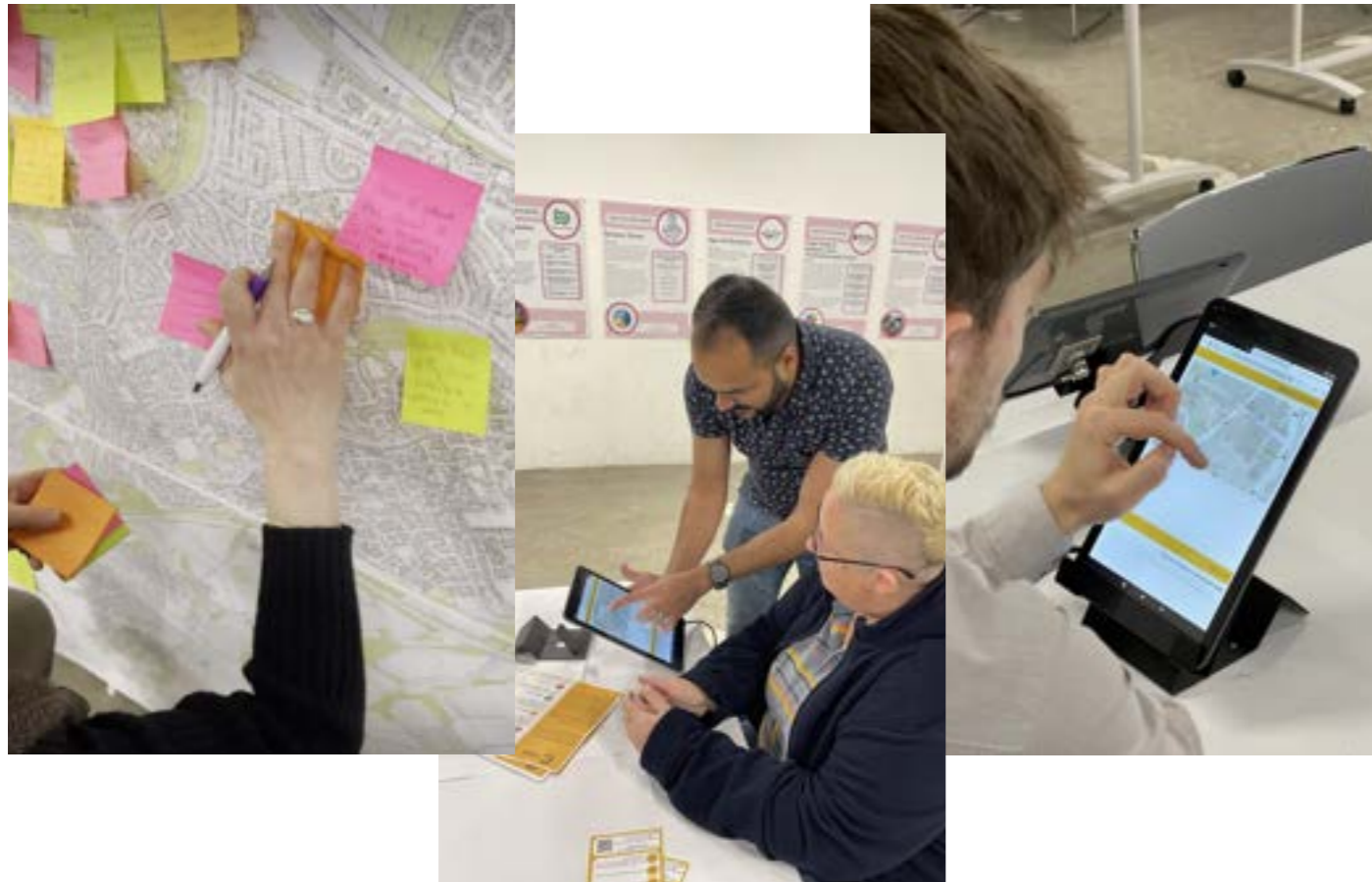
## Note from CCQOL Principal Investigator

We would like to change the course of planning to include better engagement practices and social value mapping. We hope that one day the UK will be covered by a network of quality of life maps that can be used to make better decisions about planning that fits with what people want.

Currently it is very difficult for communities to have a say in the planning of their areas because the processes can be convoluted, confusing, dis-empowering and altogether difficult. At the same time local authorities and developers find consultation expensive, time consuming, ineffective and often confrontational.

Prof. Flora Samuel

Professor Samuel is leading the Community Consultation for Quality of Life (CCQOL), a nationwide research project for the Quality of Life Foundation charity.



## Note from CCQOL Co-investigator and Reading Project Lead

The process of setting up and running 'Your Place Our Place' in Reading, including a new pop-up community space or 'urban room' in the Broad Street Mall, has clearly shown that communities want to be part of a space to host their conversations and discussions about their town. In a few months, over 60 organisations have come forward to be part of the space in some way.

While the initiative is linked to the broader, UK-wide Community Consultation for Quality of Life (CCQOL) research project, led by my Reading colleague Professor Flora Samuel, the urban room has shown that there is a great deal of local community interest and pride in their town. We had over 40 posters from local groups describing what they do – from organisations passionate about the environment, such as Ethical Reading, to community support groups. Others held discussions and contributed to our programme of community-focused events.

Throughout March 2022, 61 events took place, such as a session on sight health awareness run by Berkshire vision and another on 'NHS net zero public engagement' with the Royal Berkshire Hospital.

It's clear from the work we're doing with the Quality of Life Foundation that local people are invested and interested in shaping their area. It is encouraging to see the number of community groups that want to be part of the discussion about their place, where they live and work.

This type of community facility can offer a safe, inclusive space in our high streets for communities to describe who they are, invite participation and to be consulted about what they feel is important. A community space such as 'Your Place Our Place' provides a way to regenerate our sense of place in our communities, but also to bring people back to our high streets to reanimate our towns and cities.

There has also been positive feedback on how a neutral community space in the heart of the town, like our urban room, is much needed to provide the community in Reading with a place where they can meet and have shared conversations.

Our month-long pop up space had many enthusiastic visitors from a broad range of communities. We now have a steering group leading the ideas for the future of the space. The next step will be to discuss whether it will be viable to have a more permanent space in Reading, working with Reading Borough Council and local organisations and companies.

- Prof. Lorraine Farelly

Lorraine is an Architect and the Head of Architecture and Foundation Professor in Architecture at the University of Reading where she has set up the new School of Architecture.

## Developing a toolkit for engagement

The CCQOL project aims to create a new model for engagement that is map-based and hybrid, both digital through an online platform and face-to-face engagement through urban rooms. An important element in that is the creation of a toolkit for engagement, detailing what steps need to be taken to achieve a hybrid approach but also make consultation process more inclusive and effective. Here, Ruchit Purohit, Research Assistant at the University of Reading, explains the process.

The aim of the toolkit is to lay down steps for the engagement team in a successful build-up towards delivering the urban room. It assists the team in mapping the existing networks of the area to be consulted, and to work towards reaching out to the often-overlooked communities.

The toolkit is in its developmental stage. It is an ongoing document which is co-produced and edited as the project progresses. This was tested first with the Reading pilot community partnerships manager and successively used by the Cardiff, Edinburgh, and Belfast managers.

The toolkit asks relevant questions such as what defines capacity building, and for whom? It charts out a timeline to achieving this and in this initial case for four months. Working backwards towards the goals of an inclusive urban room (and so that we achieve the goal for participation of diverse communities the team needs to build capacity throughout the process and for the groups that participate.

### Defining the area

The first step is to decide the boundary of the area to be consulted and then to map out all the relevant stakeholders in this area. Stakeholders here comprise all the relevant bodies that should be consulted i.e. the local bodies, statutory consultees, businesses, organisations (art and culture and community groups).

The second step is to find out the demographic details of the borough based on the criteria: age, sex, ethnicity, employment, education, sexuality, faith.

The third step is to map the history of consultation process in the borough, any ongoing consultations, existing urban rooms, and to chart out existing networks of organisations.

### Contacting stakeholder groups

To achieve this, the team connects with organisations to understand the type of organisation, the audience it serves, the breakdown of audience, the communication tools that it uses to connect with its audience and any insights in working with their groups.

These exercises help the team in conducting gap analysis i.e. to understand if the team has been successful in reaching out to all the communities in the local area.

In addition, the forms also ask the organisations/groups their view of the topic being discussed in each Urban Room, if something like this has been done in the past and what is the perception of their audience towards this topic. This helps in shaping the consultation topic, questions and learn feedback from past research.

Prior to sending out the survey to every organisation, selected representatives are being interviewed in a semi-structured format to understand if the questions are satisfactory.

### Planning and design of the Urban Room

The next steps in the toolkit are programme planning and design of the Urban room. A list of existing resources available to the team are made, and communicated to the organisations, so they can plan and book an event in the programme through the booking form. Through continuous engagement with the organisations, their needs and requirements are assessed. The question the team discusses with the organisations is "how do we get these groups cross the threshold and enter the Urban Room"?

### Delivery of the Urban Room

Following the processes mentioned above, a programme of events was planned and delivered. The Reading Community Partnerships Manager, successfully enrolled 60 sessions from 50 organisations over the course of 5 weeks. These were different sets of groups which covered the vast diversity of Reading.

The Urban Room had multiple elements for participants to engage with – from the interactive map on the wall, the exhibition, the table tennis, daily events (either knowledge sharing, or making), and the digital tablets to do the consultation surveys. The room was designed to be a warm, friendly space with trained staff who were there to welcome people of all backgrounds. A space where the people of Reading would learn, share, discuss, ideate, debate, and importantly, feel heard.

Already, there have been many learnings through the development of this engagement process. Diversity and Inclusion is the core of this project and the Urban Rooms in Reading and the subsequent Urban rooms in other cities have become an example of working to engage all communities.

### Ruchit Purohit (Research Assistant, University of Reading)

## Comments from partner

The Urban Room was located in Broad Street Mall, a shopping centre, run by the Moorgarth Group. They focus on local communities and have various community facilities in the mall such as an NHS vaccination centre and several local charity groups. All of which provide a local identity for Reading. The shopping centre was used as place for conversation and local community activities which reconsiders aspects of the shopping centre as a retail space.

"Broad Street Mall understood from the first moment that this concept was discussed about how we could play our role in ensuring that the initiative was a success. A large barrier to people getting involved with discussions or feedback is the mechanism needed for members of the public to do so. People want to have a say in their environment and any changes that take place but if the ways of providing commentary are complicated, say on-line or in a space that is out of the way, then a lot of people will simply ignore it. Broad Street Mall is a place that the public are familiar with, that they feel comfortable in and that is convenient for them to access.

By being able to host the Urban Room we were able to open our doors to many different groups and organisations and place ourselves at the heart of the community, to help and support from an accessibility and inclusivity point of view."

- Steven Connolly (Broad Street Mall, Centre Manager)



### 3. CCQOL Your Place Our Place in Reading

Communities want to host conversations and discussions about the place they live in. For this reason an Urban room 'Your Place Our Place', a pop-up community space was set up in Reading Broad street Mall. The Urban Room ran between 1st and 31st March 2022 and provided information to the local community about key issues such as the Reading Town Centre Strategy and offered a place for discussion to encourage awareness and connection between various communities. It acted as a hub which brought together members of the community as well as accommodating the mapping and consultation process.

There has been a positive local interest, with over 50 organisations participating in some way. Organisations provided posters to describe what they do, held discussions and community-focused events. The activities in the Urban Room were based on the weekly topics decided from our analysis of the Quality of Life framework and the Reading Town Centre Strategy. The participating organisations were asked how they would like to contribute to these themes which informed the programme of events. The aim was to make the exhibition inclusive and one that reflects the interests of communities in Reading. There were over 60 events happening in March.

Local people are interested in shaping the future of the area they live in. The aim of the Urban Room is to improve how we communicate and discuss the changes happening in the areas around us. Consultations allow for the local community to be the key element in decision making as their input has an impact in the outcome of a planning proposal.

### Statistics

Average of **200**

VISITORS A WEEK

**23** Days

URBAN ROOM WAS OPEN

Over **55**

ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Over **60**

WORKSHOPS & SESSIONS HELD

Over **100**

PARTICIPATION SURVEYS COLLECTED

Over **400**

PINS ON THE MAP

#### YOUR PLACE OUR PLACE READING PROGRAMME OF EVENTS MARCH 2022



MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
<b>WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY</b>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	12pm-3pm Stakeholder Forum Connect Reading	11am-12pm Working in Vulnerability with Royal Berkshire Hospital (RBH) 12pm-3pm Fx Market Development team RBH	9.30am-2pm Opening Ceremony and Welcome	11am-1pm Fx Market Development team RBH 11am-12.30pm Thames Valley Built Environment Discussion	11am-4pm Fx Market Development team RBH 3.30pm-4.30pm Tree Art for Reading with Ethical Reading	CLOSED
<b>WEEK 2: HEALTH AND WELLBEING</b>						
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
CLOSED	11.30am-12.30pm Open Feedback from with Compass Recovery College (CRC) 1pm-2pm Art Therapy Life (drawing on experiencing grief with Oxford Community Centre (OCC)) 2.30pm-3.30pm Mental Health & Wellbeing with Reading Men's Group 4pm - 5pm Future City Portrait of Reading Interactive Workshop	10am-11am Dignity Health Awareness with Berkshire Vision 11am-1pm Memory Reminiscence with Age UK Berkshire 2pm-3.30pm Fostering Information session with Brighter Futures for Children	12pm-2pm Stakeholder drop in session Connect Reading 2.30pm-4pm Thriving Communities Social Partnerships Charity Talk with MERRL	11am-12pm Living with Dementia support for carers talk - Royal Berkshire Hospital 1pm-2pm Information and Registration with Compass Recovery	12pm-1pm Art Therapy Life (drawing on experiencing grief with Oxford Community Centre (OCC)) 1.30pm-2.30pm Clean Air Drop in with Friends of Earth	CLOSED
<b>WEEK 3: CULTURE AND HERITAGE</b>						
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
CLOSED	10am - 1.30pm Public Forum Consultation with HDHAZ 10.30am - 12pm Afghan refugees project drop in with CRC 12.30pm - 2pm English Conversation & Improvement with Reading Learning Community Centre 3pm - 5pm MPR & HDHAZ consultation 3pm - 5pm OHGS The Court	11am - 12pm Dignity Reading talk with Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC) 1pm - 3pm Listening Exercise with UoR, Reading Museum Council & Citizens UK Reading	12pm - 4pm Reading University Student Union (RUSU) Public Engagement 4pm - 5.30pm Youth Panel MERRL 5pm - 7pm Museum Partnership Reading (MPS) / High Street Heritage Action Zone (HDHAZ)	10am - 5pm Public Forum Consultation - HDHAZ 10.30am - 11.30am Reading Black History talk with RISC 12pm - 3pm Museum Partnership Reading (MPS) / High Street Heritage Action Zone (HDHAZ)	10am - 12.30pm Architecture walk with Terry Dixon (RCT in SHOP) 11am - 3pm Open Space in Reading with Double Day	CLOSED
<b>WEEK 4: CLIMATE CHANGE</b>						
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
CLOSED	10am - 2pm Reading Climate Action Network (RCAN) drop in 10am - 5pm Climate Change Stripes Workshop UoR 12.30pm - 1.30pm Climate Change Stripes Talk with Ed Harrison	11am - 3pm Reading CAP drop in 11am-12pm Food and Climate Change talk with RISC 1pm - 2pm NHS Net Zero public engagement with Royal Berkshire Hospital	4pm - 5.30pm Urban Forum Steering Group (UFG) Meeting 5pm - 7pm Science Fiction and Architecture - Imagining Built Futures for Reading with Amy Durr 6pm - 7pm The Town that could be with Comonads (agendat)	10am - 11.30am Building Berkshire Together Discussion with RBC 11am-12.30pm Architecture walk with Terry Dixon (RCT in SHOP)	11am - 12pm Climate Change Project Consultation Meeting 10.30am - 11.30am Clean Air drop in with Reading Friends of Earth 12pm - 4pm Zero City Analogue Board Game with Caroline Vassilias 4pm - 5pm Climate Change Project Consultation Meeting	CLOSED
<b>WEEK 5: THE FUTURE OF READING</b>						
28	29	30	31			
CLOSED	11am-12pm Building Berkshire Together Discussion with RBC 11.30am - 12.30pm Reading Quality of Life Workshop with Quality of Life Foundation 1pm - 2pm Urban Living Research Group Meeting (UR Drop) 3pm - 4pm Future City Talk	10am-12.30pm Architecture Walk with Terry Dixon (RCT in SHOP) 1pm-2pm Zero City digital feedback with Caroline Vassilias 2.30pm - 3.30pm UoR Discussion with Laid 4pm - 5pm UoR Discussion with Stakeholders 5.30pm - 7pm Closing Ceremony		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TALK/SEMINAR</li> <li>WORKSHOP INTERACTIVE</li> <li>MEMBERS MEETING</li> <li>OPEN CONSULTATIONS</li> <li>DROP IN SESSION</li> <li>ARCHITECTURE WALK NOT IN SHOP</li> </ul>		
<p>Events subject to change, for an up-to-date calendar and to book your place on an activity please visit: <a href="https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/your-place-our-place-tickets-271080066777">https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/your-place-our-place-tickets-271080066777</a></p>						

## Note from the Community Partnerships Manager

### Connecting to local communities - CCQoL Reading

My previous connection with Reading communities gave me a good understanding on how to communicate and engage with them. I understand what it takes to introduce a project to them and have them on board. I made sure I brought a perspective that made CCQoL project relatable to the communities and how getting involved in it would benefit them, both in the short term and the long run. We communicated consistently, through online meetings and in person meeting, ensuring that the communities were informed on how the project was developing and that we had taken their feedback into consideration and incorporating the feedback into the project.

Initially, the focus of the project was on climate change topic. A very important topic, but I was aware from conversations with the communities, this topic did not feel "urgent" or "immediate enough" to them as, for example, mental health. It did not feel "real". Throughout the process of developing the project, we learned that there were other topics that were as important and feel relevant to the communities which tied nicely into the quality of life theme of the project. Topics such as health and well-being, culture and heritage, in addition to climate change.

We incorporated these topics into the urban room and made them as our weekly theme to plan the activities in the urban room. I approached the local communities to collaborate with them to hold activities corresponding to each week's theme. For example, Compass Recovery College, a local organisation supporting the communities with mental health related services, held a few activities in the urban room during health and wellbeing week. Reading Climate Change Network held an activity in the climate change week, and connected with another organisation they were not aware of before, who was doing a project on climate change and held an activity in the urban room too.

I believe that because we involved the communities from the start, being very clear and open to our expectations and limitations, when the time came to deliver the urban room, it went smoothly. We had to turn down some organisations requesting to hold events in the urban room due to the activity calendar already having been filled up two weeks before we opened the urban room. This shows that the urban room was important to and needed by the communities.

I ensured that each organisation / community group was properly facilitated while running their activity/event, and that we were reaching out to the members who came to participate in our community consultation, providing them with assistance and information.

We had an activity or two nearly everyday, and the response from the communities were positive. Some of the feedback they shared with me was that a neutral space such as the urban room, in the heart of Reading is very much needed; a space that brings everyone together, regardless of their background, to learn about each other, about what's happening in Reading and to have discussion and find solutions over issues that matter to them. They felt welcome, seen and heard. The discussion about quality of life what it means to the people of Reading was one out of many events we had held in the urban room that brought out so much meaningful insights from the communities, such as tips on how they would like to be engaged in a project, what's important to them, what they expect from our CCQoL project.

We had nearly 60 activities held in the urban and more than 50 organisations participating. We had an average of 200 visitors a week, and received positive feedback from the people involved .

There are many organisations in Reading from various backgrounds. Even though we had Berkshire Youth present in the urban room, but they could not be actively involved due to the limited time between initial contact and the delivery of the urban room. I would have loved to have more youth organisations involved as I believe that their voice need to be heard; the young people are the ones who are shaping the future of Reading and will be living in Reading in the future.

Reading is a very diverse town; it is welcoming to minority groups from refugee and the asylum seeker community. It would have been a valuable addition to have them participating as well; to learn on how they would want to be engaged, how much Reading has impact on their new life in the UK.

I think as a pilot project, with the resources and time we had, CCQoL Reading successfully proved that community consultations need to be done in collaboration with the communities affected, and in a space that is neutral to them. Additionally, as we move more towards digital world, it is still equally important to engage with communities in person, not only using online interface, as human interaction is important to our quality of life, and as much as technology has been changing the way we live , there are those who are not as privileged and digitally educated to keep up with it.

To involve communities in a project, we must be willing to have a transparent ongoing communication with them. We need to make sure that we invest sufficient time and effort in place to build understand-ing and trust between the project and the communities. That it is not just another tick- box exercise where the communities would feel used and left behind once the project is finished. Engagement needs to be nurtured and continuous as the project grows and evolves as we share learnings and get better understanding of the communities and vice versa.

Future urban rooms are an exciting possibility and a huge opportunity to bring communities together and empower them to make change we want to see in their town. I am confident that an urban room in Reading will be well received by the communities as when we closed the urban room, many voiced their interests to know "what's next? Will there be another urban room? When will that happen? How can we help to make a permanent urban room a reality?".

For future urban rooms, I would allocate more time and resources to make sure that communities are fully engaged and involved on the development of the urban room so we can increase the reach of the urban room and its impacts. I would curate the activities in the urban room to be more interactive and involve more communities. Everyone can benefit from having a safe neutral space where they can engage with and support each other.

- Unis Nisa

## Delivering the Urban Room



### DESIGN OF THE SPACE

Designed by students from the School of Architecture at the University of Reading. Inspired by the pop-up Urban Rooms which have been earlier designed and installed around the campus.



### SETTING UP A COMMUNITY SPACE

The Urban Room opened in March in Reading Broad Street Mall hosted several community groups and facilities that provide a local identity for the town



### PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

Running over five weeks, the Urban Room hosted over 60 events which focused on five themes that are vital to the future of Reading.



### MAPPING

Local community used both digital and physical maps to voice their opinion on various topics impacting their quality of life.



### LISTENING TO THE COMMUNITY

Conversation about what local communities value in their area



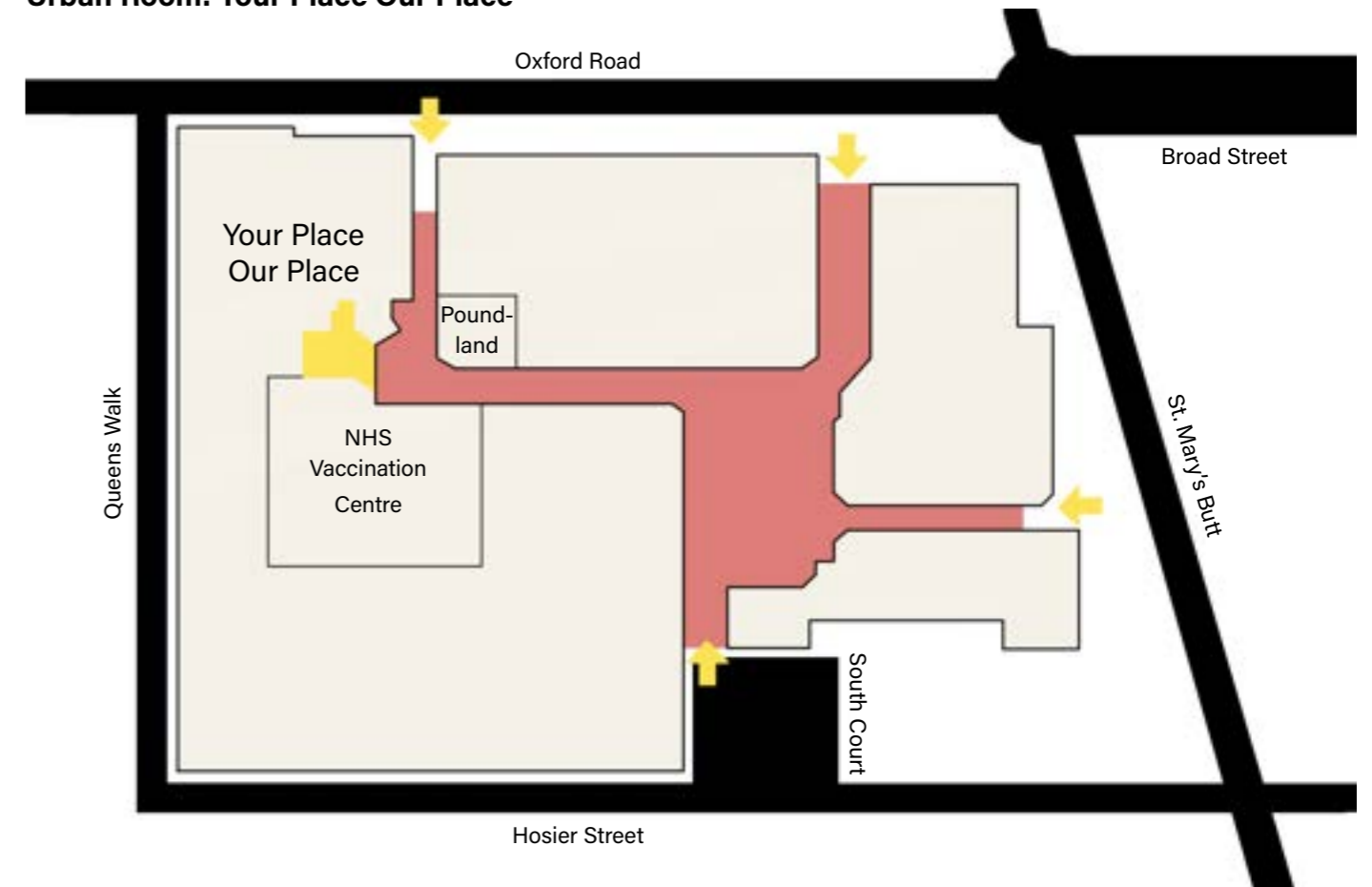
### GATHERING DATA

Collecting surveys on their experience of consultation. Identifying areas important to the local community's health and wellbeing.

## Urban Room location

Located in the heart of Reading near The Hexagon, Broad Street Mall is Reading's original mall. The centre opened in 1971 and was originally known as the Butts Centre, named after the adjacent St Mary's Butts. The current name relates to Broad Street, the principal pedestrian shopping street in Reading, as the mall is situated at its west end.

### Broad Street Mall plan and location of the Urban Room: Your Place Our Place



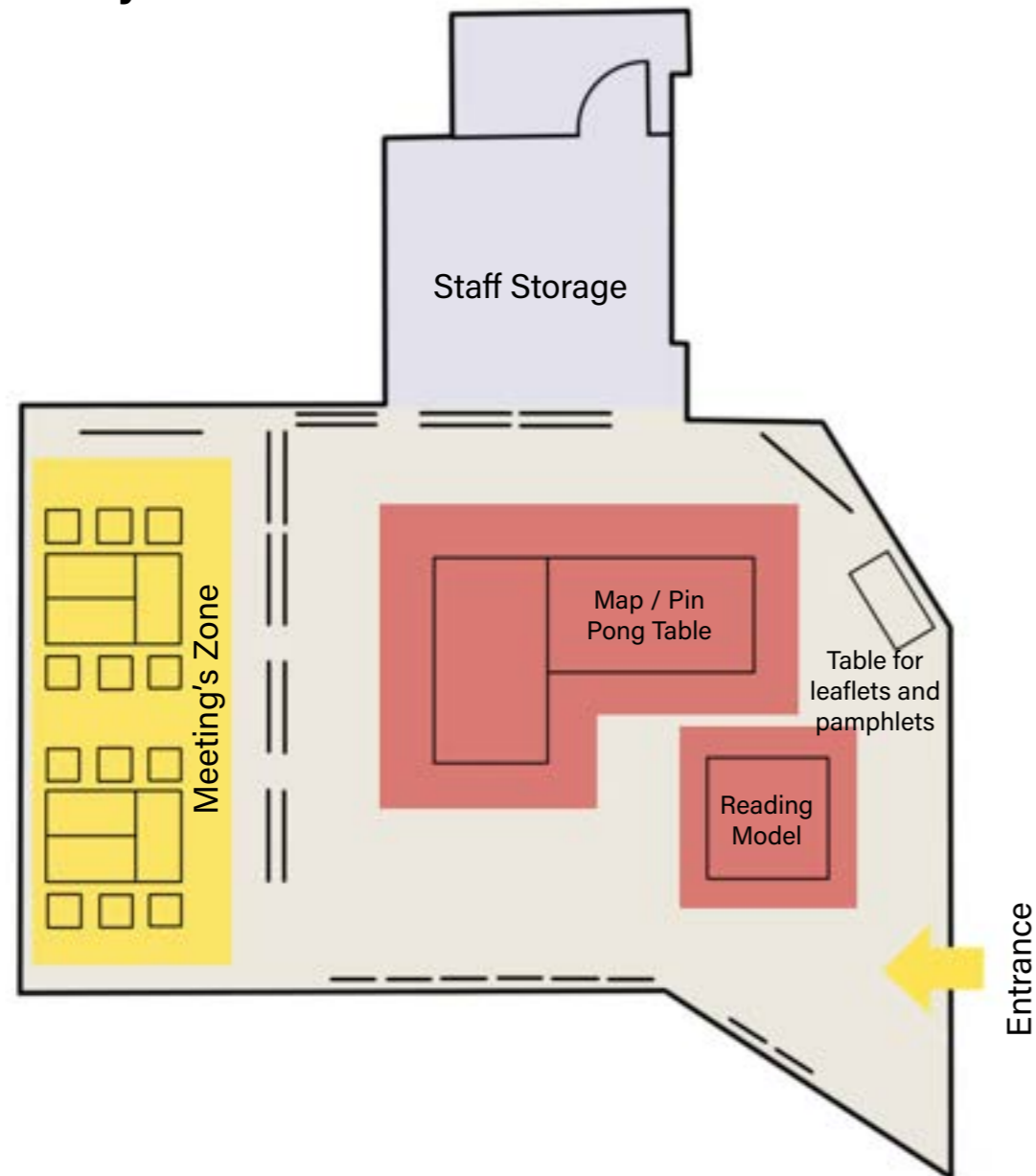
## Urban Room design

The initial layout of the Urban Room was designed by Gina Dinesen and Kim Pearce who Masters in Architecture students at the University of Reading. They divided the space into an activity, consultation and meeting zones with moveable partition boards that provided flexibility to the space.

The activity zone included a Ping- Pong table which was used for playing games and hosting workshops. The physical 3D model of Reading was never showcased and the meeting zone was removed to add space for the interactive map of the town that was hung on the wall (see page 11). To capture public perspectives, the exhibition integrated an interactive element, a map where participants were invited to identify places they valued by marking them using post it notes.

The layout of the Urban Room was later changed and for two days a play zone and a quiet zone were added. These spaces were co-designed with members of the community and another University of Reading Master of Architecture student Shanzina Alam.

### Proposed layout



## Room for neurodiverse groups

A Master student at the University of Reading, Shanzina Alam, was looking for funding to tailor the public consultation space to the needs of the autism community. She had seen first-hand experience of the difficulties that neurodivergent people face within traditional architectural confines and decided to raise the issue that the autistic community had not been adequately heard when local people's opinions were sought about their town and the quality of life. Through her research she found that certain aspects such as loud noise, crowded spaces, lighting, or unpredictable events, were barriers and played a major part in the engagement of autistic people and ultimately stopped them from coming into these consultation spaces. She researched on how to limit these barriers using a framework called ASPECTSS (created by Magda Mostafa) to make the urban room more accessible and comfortable for the autistic community.

She contacted several autism and learning disability groups in Reading to gain insight into the views on public consultation spaces and how to make these platforms more inclusive for the autistic community. Amongst the autism groups, the organisation Mencap Reading reached back to her, showing interest in participating in the Urban Room in Broad Street Mall. Before participating in the urban room and the Digital Placemaking mapping service, Shanzina visited their weekly focus group, allowing more time to interact and getting to know some of the members who were keen in taking part. The images below were drawings of the plan of the proposed urban room on the chosen days and a clear plan of Broad Street Mall, using simple sentences and clear signs so that it was readable to the group during the focus group session held by Mencap. The drawings included what the project was about, how to get to the urban room and what the expectations were when entering the urban room and what was expected from them as participants.

*“Knowing what will happen in the space and having the ability to know what I will be doing in the urban room encouraged me to come in and participate in the activities inside the urban room”*

*Participant A*



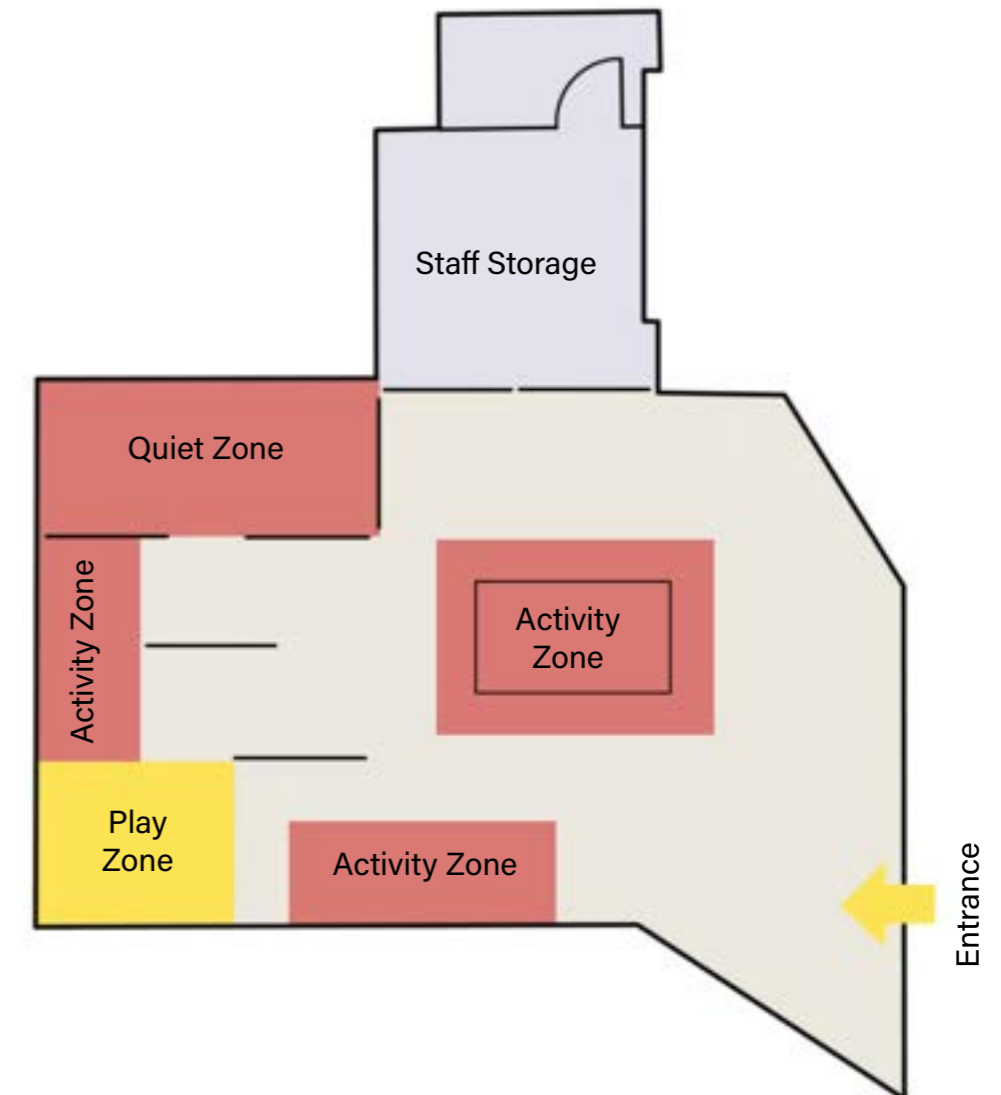
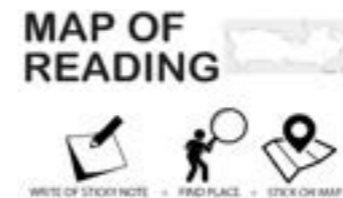
Shanzina advised on the design of the urban room so that it was easily accessible, putting in place a “one-way circulation” and printing large signs to indicate the different spaces within the urban room. The plan and activities suggested what provisions were needed for the learning disability community.

The materials helped facilitate the needs for those who found the noise distracted or overwhelming and uncomfortable. Creating a small, quieter, enclosed space helped the participants to go in and take part in the survey as well as the activities held on the chosen days.

*“It was great to have a space to go into and talk with someone and explain how to use the tablet and the harder questions to me. This was a nice space where there was less noises and distractions. It helped me to focus on the digital mapping on the tablet”*

*Participant B*

## New layout



# Your Place Our Place Programme

## Weekly themes

### WEEK 1

#### INTRODUCTION AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY

The first week introduced the community consultation and had workshops focusing on business in Reading and the region.

### WEEK 2

#### HEALTH AND WELLBEING

During the second week the focus was on Health and Well-being and a range of community groups and organisations will had workshops and discussions on this theme and important issues in Reading

### WEEK 3

#### CULTURE AND HERITAGE

The third week of the programme focused on culture and heritage projects in and around Reading and there were workshops, talks and activities to engage the community in creative activities around Reading.

### WEEK 4

#### CLIMATE CHANGE








The fourth week of the programme had discussions activities and workshops related to climate change and its impact on our community.

### WEEK 5

#### THE FUTURE OF READING

The final week of the programme was about looking forwards to consider what the future could hold for communities in Reading.

# WEEK 1: Introduction and Business Community

TUE		WED	
 <b>12pm-3pm Stakeholder Forum</b> Connect Reading	<b>1</b>	 <b>10am-12pm Working or Volunteering for Royal Berkshire Hospital (RBH)</b>  <b>10am-3pm PA Market</b> Development team Reading Borough Council (RBC)	<b>2</b>
THU		FRI	
<b>5.30pm-7pm Opening Ceremony and Welcome</b>	<b>3</b>	 <b>10am-3pm PA Market</b> Development team RBC  <b>10am-12:30pm Thames Valley Built Environment Discussion</b>	<b>4</b>
SAT			
 <b>11am-4pm PA Market</b> Development team RBC  <b>2:30pm-4:30pm Tree Art for Reading with Ethical Reading</b>	<b>5</b>		

## WEEK 2: Health and Wellbeing

TUE	WED
<p><b>11:30am-12:30pm</b> Open feedback forum with Compass Recovery College (CRC) <b>8</b></p> <p><b>1pm-2pm</b> Art Therapy Life drawing on experiencing grief with Oxford Community Centre (OCC)</p> <p><b>2:30pm-3:30pm</b> Mental Health &amp; Wellbeing with Reading Men's Group</p> <p><b>4pm - 5pm</b> Future City Portrait of Reading Interactive Workshop</p>	<p><b>10am-11am</b> Sight Health Awareness with Berkshire Vision <b>9</b></p> <p><b>11am-1pm</b> Memory/Reminiscence with Age UK Berkshire</p> <p><b>2pm-3:30pm</b> Fostering information session with Brighter Futures for Children</p>
THU	FRI
<p><b>12pm-2pm</b> Stakeholder drop in session Connect Reading <b>10</b></p> <p><b>2:30pm-4pm</b> Thriving Communities Social Prescribers Chatty Cafe with MERL</p>	<p><b>11am-12pm</b> Living with Dementia support for carers talk with Royal Berkshire Hospital <b>11</b></p> <p><b>1pm-2pm</b> Information and Registration with Compass Recovery</p>
SAT	
<p><b>12pm-1pm</b> Art Therapy Life drawing on experiencing grief with Oxford Community Centre (OCC) <b>12</b></p> <p><b>1:30pm-2:30pm</b> Climate Change Drop in with Reading Friends of Earth</p>	

## WEEK 3: Culture and Heritage

TUE	WED
<p><b>10am - 1.30pm</b> Public Realm Consultation with HSHAZ <b>15</b></p> <p><b>10:30am - 12pm</b> Afghan refugees project drop in with CRC</p> <p><b>12.30pm - 2pm</b> English Conversation (improvers) with Reading Learning Community Centre</p> <p><b>2pm - 5pm</b> MPR &amp; HSHAZ consultation</p> <p><b>3pm - 5pm</b> OHOS 'The Cave'</p>	<p><b>11am - 12pm</b> Global Reading talk with Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC) <b>16</b></p> <p><b>1pm - 3pm</b> Listening Exercise with UoR, Reading Museum Council &amp; Citizens UK Reading</p>
THU	FRI
<p><b>12pm - 4pm</b> Reading University Student Union (RUSU) Public Engagement <b>17</b></p> <p><b>4pm - 5:30pm</b> Youth Panel MERL</p> <p><b>3pm - 7pm</b> Museum Partnership Reading (MPS) / High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ)</p>	<p><b>10am - 5pm</b> Public Realm Consultation - HSHAZ <b>18</b></p> <p><b>10:30am - 11:30am</b> Reading Black History talk with RISC</p> <p><b>12pm - 5pm</b> Museum Partnership Reading (MPS) / High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ)</p>
SAT	
<p><b>10am - 12:30pm</b> Architecture walk with Terry Dixon (NOT IN SHOP) <b>19</b></p> <p><b>11am - 1pm</b> Queer Space in Reading with Double Okay</p>	

## WEEK 4: Climate Change

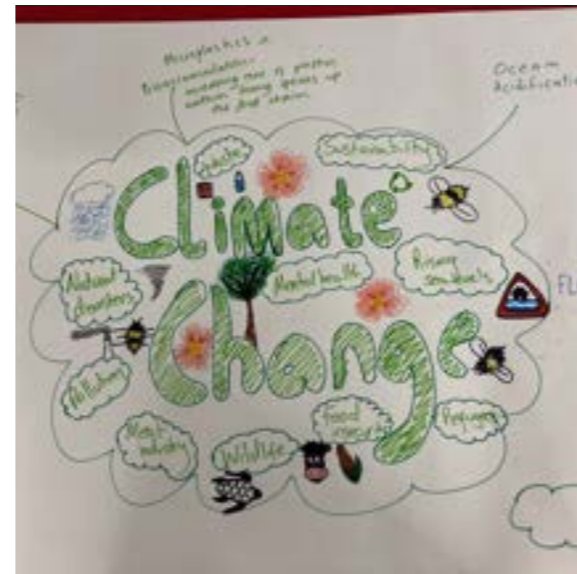
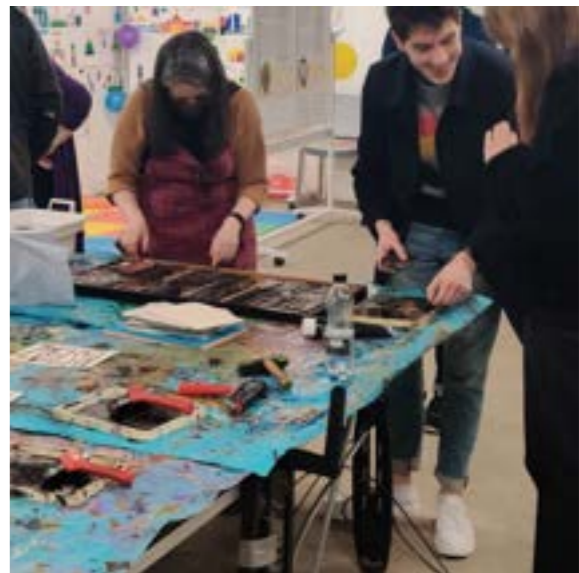
TUE	WED
<p> <b>10am - 2pm</b> Reading Climate Action Network (CAN) drop in</p> <p><b>22</b></p>	<p> <b>11am - 2pm</b> Reading CAN drop in</p> <p><b>23</b></p> <p> <b>11am-12pm</b> Food and Climate Change talk with RISC</p> <p> <b>1pm - 2pm</b> NHS Net Zero public engagement with Royal Berkshire Hospital</p>
THU	FRI
<p> <b>4pm - 5:30pm</b> Urban Room Steering Group 5th Meeting</p> <p><b>24</b></p> <p> <b>6pm - 7pm</b> Science Fiction and Architecture – Imagining Built Futures for Reading with Amy Butt</p> <p> <b>6pm - 7pm</b> The town that could be with Commando Jugendstil</p>	<p> <b>10am - 11:30am</b> Building Berkshire Together Discussion with RBH</p> <p><b>25</b></p> <p> <b>10am-12:30pm</b> Architecture walk with Terry Dixon (NOT IN SHOP)</p>
SAT	
<p> <b>11am - 12pm</b> Climate Change Project Consultation Mojatu</p> <p><b>26</b></p> <p> <b>10:30am - 11:30am</b> Clean Air drop in with Reading Friends of Earth</p> <p> <b>12pm - 4pm</b> Zero City+ Analog Board Game with Carolina Vasilikou</p> <p> <b>4pm - 5pm</b> Climate Change Project Consultation Mojatu</p>	

## WEEK 5: The Future of Reading

TUE	WED
<p> <b>11am-12pm</b> Incredible Edible Reading talk with RISC</p> <p><b>29</b></p> <p> <b>1pm - 2:30pm</b> Reading 2050: Past, Present and Future Reflections talk with Reading UK</p> <p><b>4pm - 7pm</b> Canny Insights Business Workshop with HSHAZ members</p>	<p> <b>10am-11am</b> Building Berkshire Together Discussion with RBH</p> <p><b>30</b></p> <p> <b>11:30am - 12:30pm</b> Reading Quality Of Life Workshop with Quality of Life Foundation</p> <p> <b>1pm - 2pm</b> Urban Living Research Group Meeting SBE Group</p> <p> <b>3pm - 4pm</b> Future City talk</p>
THU	
<p> <b>10am-12:30pm</b> Architecture Walk with Terry Dixon (NOT IN SHOP)</p> <p><b>31</b></p> <p> <b>1pm-2pm</b> Zero City+ digital feedback with Carolina Vasilikou</p> <p> <b>2:30pm - 3:30pm</b> Vu City Discussion with UoR</p> <p><b>4pm - 5pm</b> Vu City Discussion with Stakeholders</p> <p><b>5:30pm - 7pm</b> Closing Ceremony</p>	



# Events gallery



## Events highlights

### Working or volunteering with Royal Berkshire Hospital

A discussion for anyone in the community who is thinking of applying to work or volunteer at the Royal Berkshire Hospital. The hospital has lots of opportunities, people were able to find out more about what they can expect from a job within the NHS locally. From clinical roles to volunteer patient leaders or an administration role anyone could come and ask questions.



2.03

### Art Therapy - Life drawing to help with grief

Workshop run by the Oxford Community Hub. In the past 2 years, the whole world has been experiencing an unprecedented time with the Covid19 pandemic. Some have lost their lives because of it, some have been going through difficult experiences such as grief, loss, loneliness, self isolation, to name a few. This art therapy session aimed to help people to express how they have been feeling while experiencing the difficult times through life drawing.



12.03

### Museum of English Rural Life

Workshop run by the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) where participants created their own lavender bags. MERL tells the story of the history of rural England and its people.



15.03

### High Street Heritage Action Zone

Museums Partnership Reading aims to improve opportunities for diverse local communities to engage in arts, cultural and heritage experiences and learning opportunities. Through the High Street Heritage Action Zone they are delivering Discovering Hidden Histories to look with fresh eyes at local haunts and archives that tell the tales of Reading past, present and future.



17.03

### The Town That Could Be - Commando Jugendstil

A discussion with Commando Jugendstil. A Time-travel Journal from Reading 2045, is a Transition Bounce Forward project aimed at getting the people from Reading thinking and imagining together what they want the future of their town to look like and mapping out the steps to get there.



24.03

### Reading Friends of the Earth - Clean British Energy

Reading Friends of the Earth is a local group campaigning on environmental issues. In Reading air pollution causes death, illness and discomfort, especially near busy roads pollutant concentrations are higher than national and World Health Organization standards. The discussion focused on clean British energy.



26.03

### Zero City+ Analog Board Game with UoR School of Architecture

A workshop on designing carbon zero city through an analogue game with Carolina Vasilikou from Reading University School of Architecture. A workshop focused on how we can create a zero carbon city through a game



26.03

### Climate Change Project Consultation - Mojatu

Mojatu is a health and well-being community hub located at the heart of Reading. Their goal is to offer a range of services to the local community, tailored to the feedback and needs expressed by the community.

The consultations with Earth Ambassadors focused on climate change journalism, and educating and creating awareness on climate change issues especially on the local level.



26.03

## Reading 2050 vision

A discussion about the future of Reading with various key speakers on the panel: Reading Borough Council, Reading UK, Reading University and University College London. The guest speakers included Professor Lorraine Farrelly, Professor Tim Dixon, Kim Cohen, Nigel Horton, Frances Martin and Professor Mark Tewdwr-Jones.

The discussion covered Sustainable Urban Futures, Smart / Sustainable Cities and green BID, Urban Futures and perspective from another city, Reading 2050 Vision and Reading Towns Centre Strategy.



29.03

## Portrait of Reading - Interactive Workshop by the group Future City

Futurecity is a Cultural Placemaking and Public Art agency, appointed by Lincoln Property Company to develop a Public Art and Cultural Strategy for Station Hill. Futurecity believe in the impact of culture to unlock the potential of a place towards community's benefit.

Team members, Sherry Dobbin and George Kekatos, talked about creative ways in community consultation and stakeholder engagement, which aim to test the place making vision and principles for a place and seed ideas for future activations.



30.03

## Student Ambassador observations

I think the most important aspect of the Urban Room was the input of the people who visited and contributed to the heatmap and overall study. Seeing the connection people have with certain places within Reading was a realisation that everyone experiences the world differently with the same area having different meanings to people.

The skill I gained from participating in the Urban Room was talking and consulting with people. Being able to go out and talk to people about their values for Reading is hugely important, especially for a career that affects the urban landscape as much as architecture.

We had many people comment on the community aspect the Urban Room created, which also brought some people to visit multiple times and bring others. In my opinion, people want to have a place to talk about their community and town, with the Urban Room being a great medium to express these thoughts about Reading with everyone else.

Helping out in the Urban Room brought to light the different ways people perceive and experience the urban fabric, that being due to their backgrounds, health, and age, emphasising the importance of community consultations to have a wide understanding of the urban fabric being designed into."

- Alexander Haidoulis  
Student Ambassador, School of Architecture, University of Reading

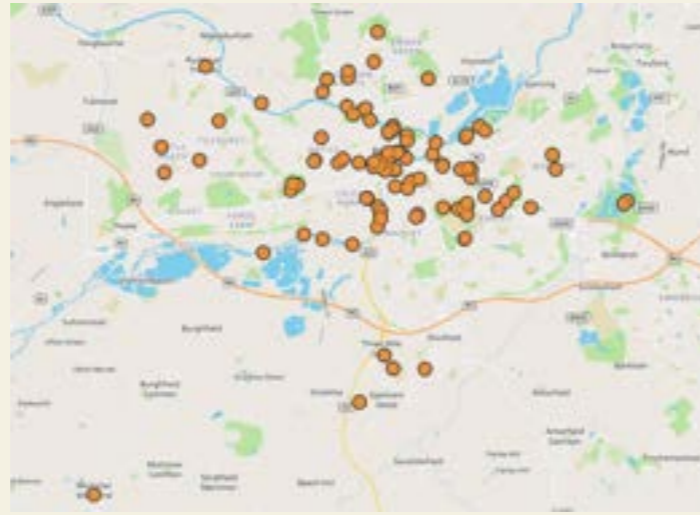


# Results of the digital mapping tool & Participation Survey

**Belonging - 156 pins**



**Health - 119 pins**



**Movement - 87 pins**



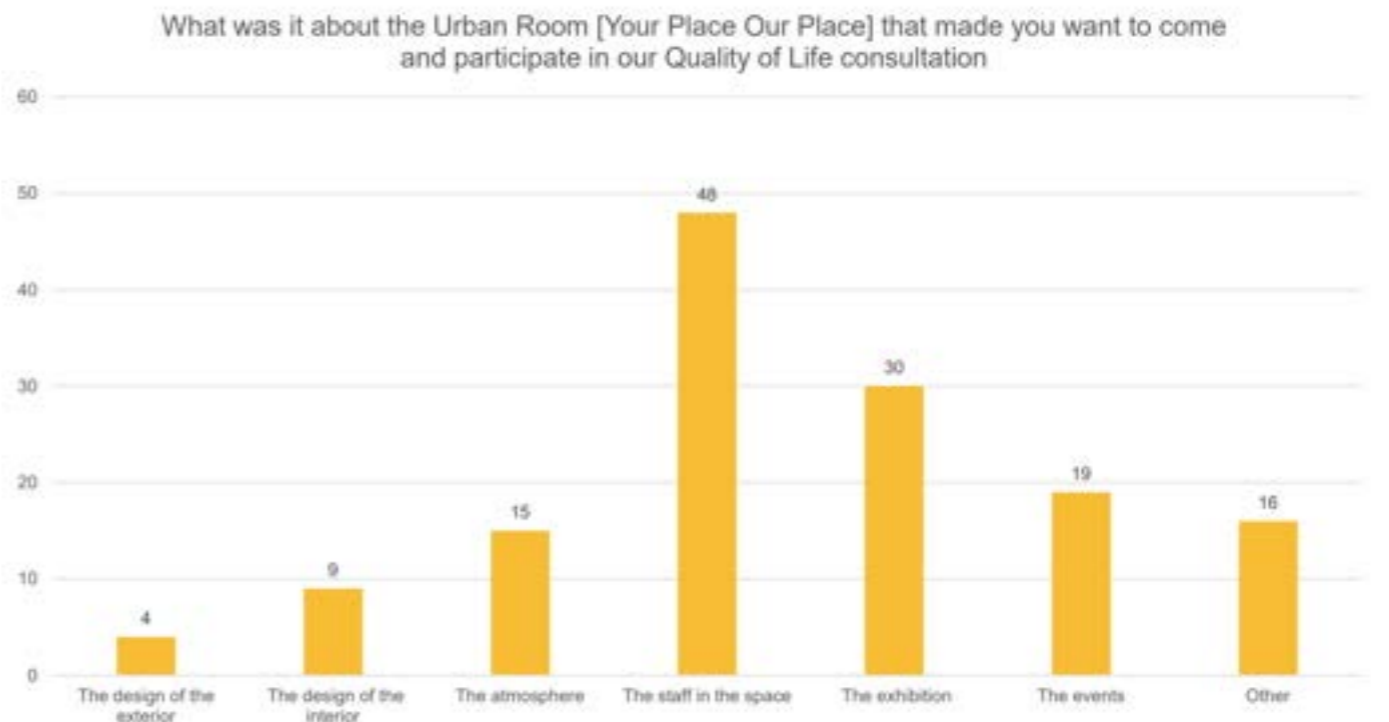
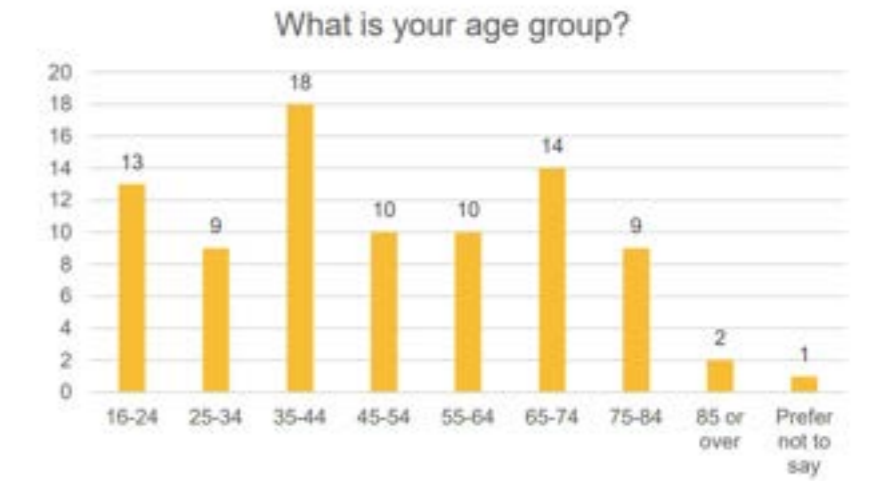
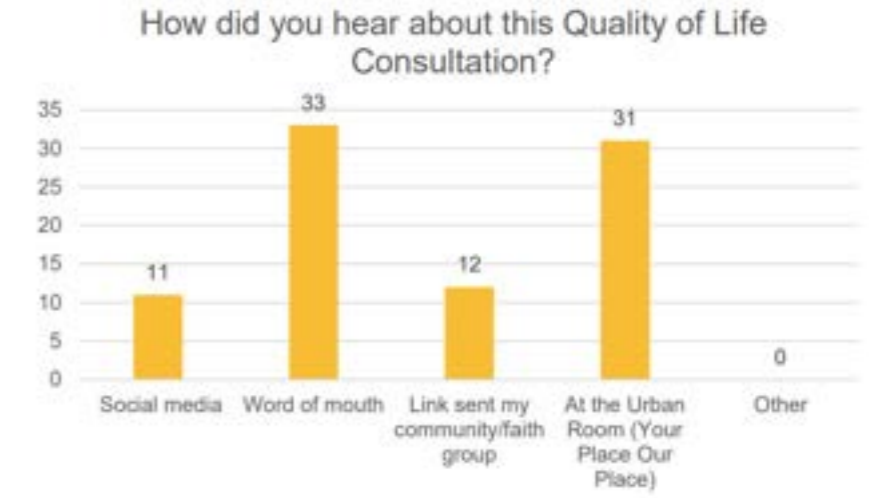
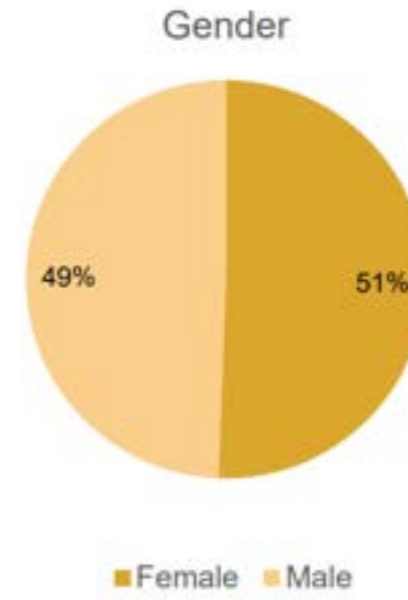
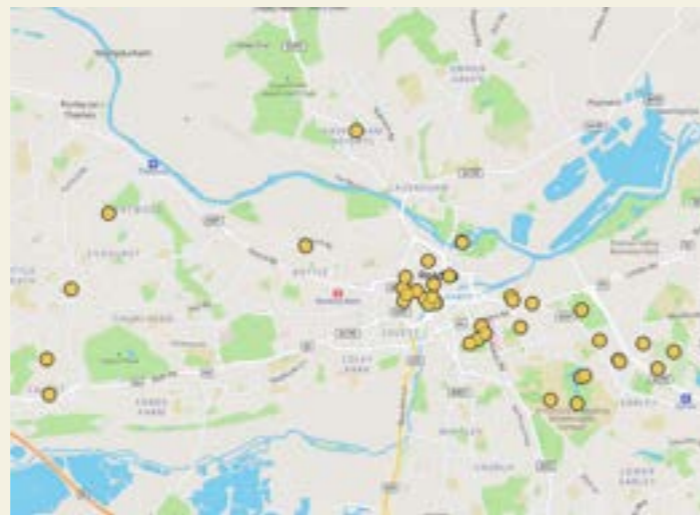
**Nature - 143 pins**



**Wonder - 102 pins**



**Control - 41 pins**

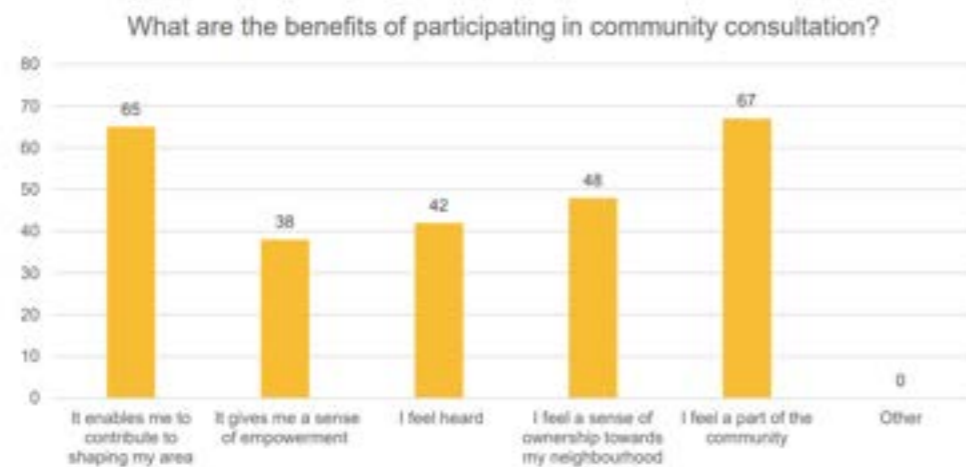
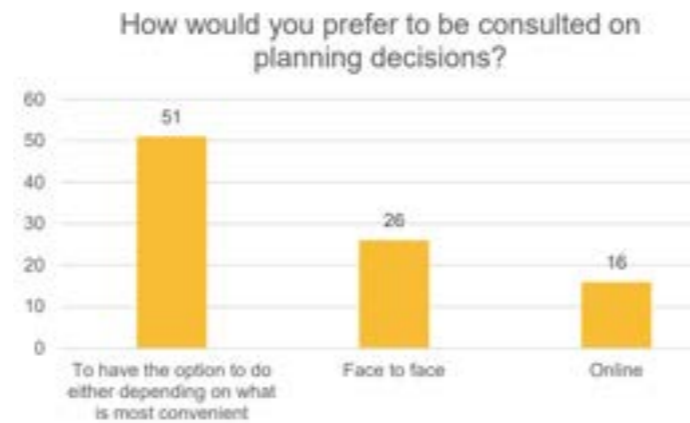
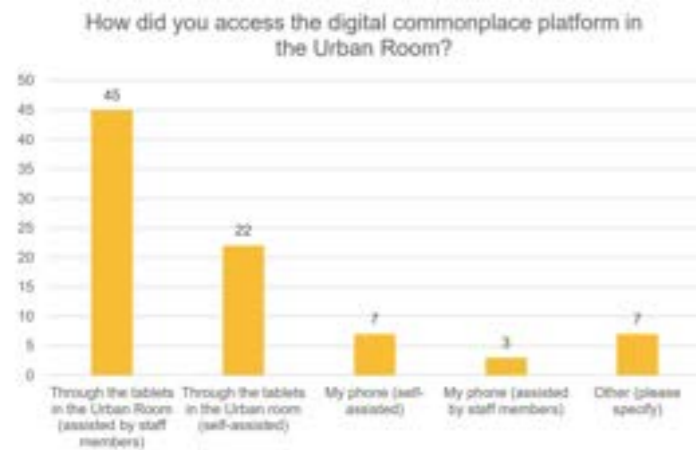
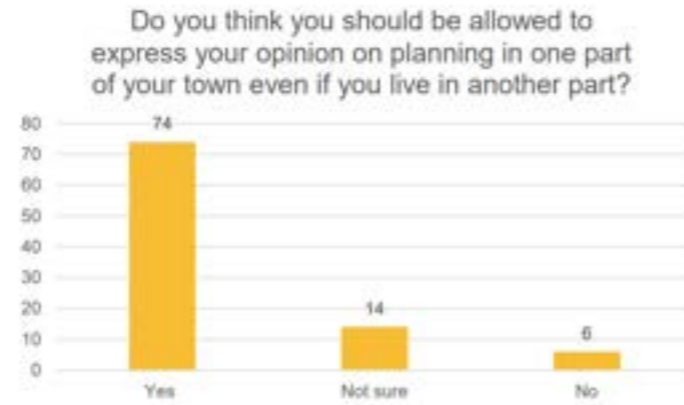
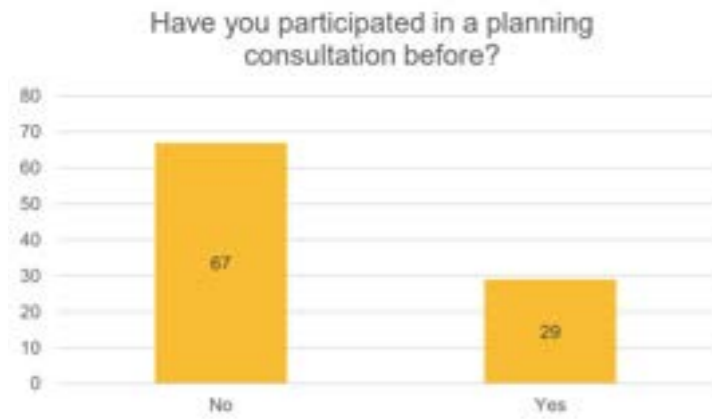


## Findings from the Urban Room

Various types of data were collected before, during, and post Urban Room to understand the process and its impact on the people who participated. The tools varied from observation (photography), daily reflections from team, surveys, interviews, etc. The data collected helped the team develop some findings that will be presented in the following pages.

### Post Urban Room Interview Methodology

Community members and organisations that were present in the Urban Room were invited for an interview to share their experiences. The purpose was to gauge if the Urban Room gave them an opportunity to meet different people from Reading, interact with other organisations, and if it helped the participants in any other ways. The interviews lasted 30 minutes on average and took place online or at a public space chosen by the the participants. The participants who were not able to attend an interview were asked to answer 10 questions through an online survey. Five participants answered the questions through a face to face interview and six participants filled in an online survey.



## Participant evaluation 1 - Heather

### Background and situation

Heather is a young woman who has lived all her life in Reading. She is a volunteer at the museum and attended the Urban Room during the third week which focused on the culture and heritage of Reading.

Heather has hidden disabilities which do not stop her from doing anything as she always tries to push herself. She provided the urban room team with great tips when they were setting up the exhibition and consultation space for neuro-diverse groups. Her feedback helped the team create a more inclusive space with a dedicated quiet area.

### First interaction with the Urban Room

Heather heard about the Urban Room through her work at the Museum. Due to not knowing the space and the people running the project, coming to the Urban Room for the first time was quite stressful for her.

*"I was a bit anxious to start off with, I was scared but I really, really wanted to do it and I thought it was a good opportunity for me to do it"*

### Participation in the Urban Room

The organisation she worked for provided the community an opportunity to engage in arts, cultural and heritage experiences. Heather helped with the workshop in which participants were looking at archives that would tell tales of the past, present and future. of Reading  
She felt that the urban room team was very helpful and made her feel involved with the project.  
*"Every time I came I really felt that you were encouraging and saying how you are grateful for me to be there and be able to help out"*

### Outcomes of participation

*"You never knew all the all the different areas and different companies and everything. But since doing that, yes I did learn more about what is going on there. The Urban Room here, I just feel really, I feel that it opened my eyes up on a lot of Reading"*

By participating in the Urban Room, Heather came out of her comfort zone. She described her experience of working with the urban room team as very enjoyable as she was able to be open with the team members and was able to push herself. Heather was born and raised in Reading, however, before attending the Urban Room she did not know about many of the organisations and what is available. The exhibitions, and events at the Urban Room gave her the opportunity to learn more about these organisations.

*"I feel that I was able to give you a lot of info about how to make the rooms better for people with disabilities. A lot more brighter, a lot more clearer. Because very rare, I very rarely know a place I go to that understands disabilities until I actually teach them."*

At first Heather felt like the space was not inviting and did not feel like she was being encouraged to go inside as it was not clear to her what the Urban Room was about. She provided the team with useful feedback on setting up the space to make it more comfortable for people with disabilities. Her suggestions helped them create a comfortable quiet space as well making it more inclusive. Heather felt that she was heard, and the atmosphere made her take more ownership of the space at "Your Place Our Place".

*"No one (earlier) would use the information I gave them, no one would ask me questions to ask me to help with. Your team asked me how I felt, how things went or how I felt they could improve or anything else. That was new to me, that really pushed me"*

### Challenges

*"If it is not inviting, if it is not open or comfortable. And quite a lot of people wouldn't come because of that. Before coming, I just taken that on myself to be comfortable. You just really need to make it brighter and make it encouraging to let more people in."*

Before hosting the workshops, Heather came to the Urban Room to familiarise herself with the layout as she was a bit anxious. Getting familiar with the surroundings made her feel more comfortable. She was really interested in doing the projects. She believes that the space needs to be inviting and comfortable for people to show up and that people need to feel encouraged to come inside.

*"I wouldn't let my disability, which is learning, anxiety and Asperger's, stop me from doing anything. I always want to try and push myself."*

### Community Consultations

Heather has never taken part in community consultations before, hence this was completely new experience for her. She gave quite a few suggestions on how this process could be improved. .

*"I would have made trying get the questions a little bit more simpler as well and more understandable because that's why you ended up helping me with it because I got really confused. And if I asked you a question, I felt I wasn't pushed away. I was helped"*

## Participant evaluation 2 - John

### Background and situation

John attended the Urban Room with the Compass Recovery Collage that offers a range of workshops meant to help with mental health challenges, through education. The focus of the workshops was on self-management skills and living well.

John was born and brought up in Reading. He went to the University in Nottingham, and lived in Bristol for a couple of years. Through his early twenties John lived in South London and then spent a year in Southampton. He then moved back to Reading. He describes Reading as a town which does not have a close community as seen in other parts of the United Kingdom.

*"I think Reading is kind of probably like many places in London, do I know my neighbours, I would wave hello to them, but do I know them? No. If I'm honest.*

*Definitely in Scotland everyone seems to know everyone. It's quite bizarre here."*

### First interaction with the Urban Room

John got involved with the Urban Room through his work at the Compass Recovery College.

From the start he thought that the idea of having a community space in Reading is brilliant and that it is something that the community needs.

*"Just fantastic because we do need to connect within Reading. I know people who live in Reading for 30 years yet won't know North Reading or they won't know South Reading because they only lived in West Reading. People I know never move South of the river because they're comfortable with where they are and what they know. So I thought the idea of connecting things and Reading was so important and because just to make people aware of what's available in Reading, what's available."*

However, John had some trouble finding the Urban Room in the Broad Street Mall as it was not in a place that was visible for anyone passing by.

### Participation in the Urban Room

John participation in the Urban Room included meeting with prospective clients and talking about what his organisation does as well as advertising it.

*"I love the idea of the Urban Room. I thought the idea was wonderful."*

### Outcomes of participation

After hosting the workshop John got involved with the Alliance for Cohesion and Racial Equality (ACRE) which aims to eliminate discrimination and promote positive relationships between communities.

John feels there is a real need to engage with communities after COVID, and the Urban Room gave that platform.

*"It is important because it is one of the things that hadn't really realized and hadn't really factored in. Is that you know you go into this sort of thinking that everyone's from Reading and knows where everything in Reading is, but you forget, you know what happened during COVID and that actually a lot of people don't know. And, there's a real need to engage with communities."*

### Challenges

John notices that Reading is a very multicultural society, however people within many social groups do not feel like they are connected to the local community. Thus, there are communities that are not able to get support. He noticed that through his work at the Recovery College most participants are White British while Reading

has a very diverse population with 35% now being Black and Minority Ethnic community (2011 Census, Office for National Statistics).

The location of the Urban Room was questioned by John who did not think that it was in the right space. He suggested that the Reading Town Hall would be an ideal location to host a permanent Urban Room as it is a building where people would feel welcome and because it is located in central Reading.

*"I know there's a stigmatization when you're in a shopping mall. People think that you're being sold something. When I first passed there I thought someone was trying to hand me a leaflet like, you know, come in and I'm like you know no thanks and then I realised actually I'm working there in a couple of days"*

Although, he adds that he is very supportive of the concept of the Urban room.

*"For me the idea is fantastic. It doesn't matter if you've got the best location in the world, but the idea is rubbish then it's not going to work."*

### Community Consultations

John has taken part in community consultations before, hence this was not a completely new experience for him. He was especially intrigued by the idea of the interactive map which helped him engage with the activity and other pins. His suggestion on improving the consultation process is to make it more engaging. The print map on the wall could be digital with a touch surface and lead to more interactions.

*"if you can persuade someone to put an interactive (digital touch) map of Reading on the side of a building as a sort of something interactive. And that kind of thing will make people see Reading like the multifaceted place that it really is."*



## Participant evaluation 3 - Paul

### Background and situation

Paul moved to Reading five years ago and got involved in sustainability projects. Paul now volunteers part-time as lead for the resources and consumption theme of Reading Climate Change Partnership/Reading Climate Action Network. The partnership and action network aims to make Reading a net zero carbon emissions town by 2030 by encouraging people working and living in Reading to connect and take action.

### First interaction with the Urban Room

Urban Room is a space where everyone should feel welcome and accepted. Paul felt that the staff were especially sympathetic and helpful.

*"They were very warm hosts, so when I came along and spent my day there, they were great. They were lovely. They made me feel welcome."*

### Participation in the Urban Room

Frank got involved in the climate week representing the Reading Climate Action Network. His work included building momentum around the shared aim of making Reading a zero waste town with a thriving circular economy. He also attended several other workshops such as the drop-in session discussing the Reading 2050 vision. He sees the Urban Room as an opportunity to engage with other groups that might not see themselves as being part of the plan and inviting them to work towards the shared aim.

*"It was good to see different groups represented in the space, the displays on the walls, the evidence of other groups having met there and done stuff and then through the social media."*

### Outcomes of participation

*"I think anything that works to bring people together, and you know, great relationships and catalyse the discussions is a great initiative."*

Reading is quite fragmented and in need of a space that will connect the community and organisations. That is why Paul thought that the Urban Room was a great space that allowed for people to connect and have conversations.

*"So it's not just a place to do projects that have been developed. You know it's not about just re-searching what Reading needs. It's actually about creating a space for conversation"*

### Challenges

The Urban Room was open during office hours during the week which limited people attending the sessions as there weren't a lot of opportunities to engage outside of those times. Building engagement takes time, because Urban Room was organised in such a short time, not many people attended the workshops.

*"I think the downside is that because it was set up in such short notice, to actually sort of build engagement requires a long time. So whilst I was in the day I spent there not very many people came through other than the people who were actually involved."*

## Participant evaluation 4 - Lorraine

### Background and situation

Lorraine has lived and worked in Reading for 20 years, having originally come to Reading for a short-term volunteering program with young people. She now leads a Connect Reading which interacts across sectors, positively impacting numerous community and environmental causes.

### Participation in the Urban Room

Lorraine helped with the Urban Room before it opened, bringing many of the participating organisations together. Lorraine also attended sessions run by other organisations, as well as running two events for her own organisation within the Urban Room. She commented that "there were loads of positive things about having a common space."

She also noted that *"It is important that people see Reading as the multi-faceted place that it really is."*

### Challenges

Upon reflection, Lorraine noted that many of those who attended the events of other organisations mostly did so because they already knew one another, outside of the Urban Room context.

She also highlighted the importance of location. In her opinion, a pop-up Urban Room would be more effective.

*"Where you locate something is key. My suggestion would be to look into using the empty spaces somewhere around Broad Street or on the thoroughfare between the station and the Oracle Shopping Centre."*

## Participant evaluation 5 - Grace

### Background and situation

Grace moved to Reading to go to the University. She now works at Connect Reading as the Projects and Membership Manager. At the Urban Room she represented the Reading University Student Union (RUSU) as she was the Welfare Officer responsible for representing all students of the University of Reading.

### First interaction with the Urban Room

She found the posters with listed organisation especially helpful as she was not aware about what is available and what the organisations do.

*"it was really nice to see all the different organisations and their posters being up. I found them very useful because although I would probably say I know quite a lot of the different organisations that took part, I didn't know exactly what they did or how."*

### Participation in the Urban Room

She was hosting a drop-in session with RUSU that is an independent student-led charity. RUSU focuses on supporting and helping students to use their voices to effect positive change. Anyone could come to the drop-in session to get more information about the organisation, discuss any concerns or learn about student life at the university.

She found the mapping exercise thought provoking as she lived in Reading and never really thought about why she has connections to certain places. It helped her realise what attracts her to Reading.

*"I really liked it as well because if you are stuck for inspiration, all you have to do is look on the wall and see what people had put and some people had put things that were really similar and I was like, oh, that's really nice, that's obviously a common theme for here, but others had put stuff that were so different about different places, so obviously that like reasoning for having a connection to a certain place this is like is very specific to them."*

### Outcomes of participation

Participation in the Urban Room helped her build connections with people from her organisation that she did not know before. She noted that she was in the Urban Room for only one day and she did not observe that it contributed to a sense of community as well she did not get to build connections with people from Reading outside of her organisation.

*"I did, however, get to know people who volunteered from RUSU who I didn't necessarily know. It probably helped me more like personally after because then I knew them and they felt more comfortable to come and have a chat because we'd had the whole day together"*

### Challenges

One of the biggest challenge was that people were not aware about what the Urban Room is as well as some confused it with the Vaccination Centre next doors. Grace observed that is was not a space that people would naturally just go in and sit down as it was very closed off. As a result, most people were passing by and not engaging.

*"it didn't necessarily bring people in at that time, because I think people were all walking past saying where do I get my vaccine? And we answered that question so many times."*

## Participant evaluation 6 - Alice

### Background and situation

Alice is a researcher, and an advocate for social justice. She advocates for the issues of refugees, women, children and young people. She works as a community researcher at the University of Reading as well is involved in the Race Equality at Reading Action Team (ACRE) which focuses on diversity and inclusion at the University.

### Participation in the Urban Room

Alice attended the Quality of Life discussion where participants talked about Reading, the urban room and what quality of life means to them.

*"It was their voice that mattered and how they wanted to express their views. The discussions which I attended 'INDABA' (Zulu/Ndebele) an African term meaning a Circle of storytelling was enriching as there was no power imbalance."*

### Outcomes of participation

Being able to talk to be people face-to-face was especially important for her. Due to her involvement in other organisations she knows that building community engagement takes time.

*"I have learnt that despite all the good work that was done at the Urban room, changing systems and structures will take a long time"*

### Challenges

The opening ceremony did not feel inclusive as Reading is a very diverse community which was not visible at the event.

*"I think at the beginning what did not reflect the community was the opening ceremony in which it was ALL WHITE people seemingly telling all the minoritized people that we have created a space for you, you are diverse and we understand you. It was very platonic and it could have been diluted with the very hierarchical things that many people feel have reached their sell-by date in the 21st Century. Reading is a diverse place and many of the 35% of people do not feel they have a voice and are labelled as deprived instead of DIS-ENFRANCHISED as services do not reach them or are not tailored for them."*

## Participant evaluation 7 - Lynn

### Background and situation

Lynn works as the Communications and Engagement Officer for Building Berkshire Together programme. She is responsible for developing and delivering communications and engagement strategies that effectively promote the programme. Their objective is to develop and deliver NHS services that are more fit for the future, and that will play a part in the growth of the local economy.

### Participation in the Urban Room

Lynn attended a couple of workshops. She found the posters on the walls especially helpful as she could learn more about the organisations in Reading.

*"It was a great place to find out about the community organisations all in one place and see the breadth of what is happening in Reading."*

### Outcomes of participation

When she attended the events she met people from different organisations and made connections.

*"That face to face is the best way to engage with the public wherever you can"*

### Challenges

Lynn found the location of the Urban Room not inviting and felt that communities were not keen to come and engage with the organisations.

*"Unfortunately I would say we were disappointed with the footfall - it could have done with being in a much more prominent place for the public to have engaged more."*

## Participant evaluation 8 - Davide

### Background and situation

Davide is an artist, illustrator and a graphic designer. He works on Commando Jugendstil, a communication project that uses new technology to build energy-generating posters on empty walls through the city. The posters produce energy in a free and renewable way, and give a completely new meaning to the city's streets. The aim is to transform the city into its sustainable version and help with social cohesion.

### Participation in the Urban Room

Davide hosted a session focusing on the project *The Town That Could Be* which aims to invite people to think and imagine what they want the future of their town to look like and map out the steps to get there. His involvement reinforced his belief that urban planning should be done from the ground up, involving the citizens in order to be effective.

### Outcomes of participation

Because of his involvement in the Urban Room he has been put in contact with several other people and organizations which might lead to future collaborations.

*"We had the chance to get in touch with professors from the School of Architecture of the University of Reading, and to reconnect with several friends and acquaintances from the town."*

## Participant evaluation 9 - Kathryn

### Background and situation

Kathryn is a sustainability team volunteer at Ethical Reading, a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to making Reading a better place to live and work by encouraging organisations become more ethical.

*"We want to mobilise people and organisations across Reading to embed ethics into decision-making processes and everyday actions and kick-start an Ethical Cities movement in the UK and beyond."*

### Participation in the Urban Room

Kathryn hosted a drop in session called the Urban Tree Art.

*"It wasn't very well attended but a few children had a go at creating something and seemed to enjoy it. It was great chatting with parents too. For me the best thing was the table where people could write comments about Reading. It was so heart-warming to see all the lovely things people wrote, especially about how diverse and inclusive it is."*

### Outcomes of participation

Being involved in the Urban Room allowed Kathryn to make connections with other organisations such as Connect Reading, which resulted in talks how they can collaborate. She describes her overall experience as a really positive one as she not only enjoyed hosting her session but also attending other events.

*"A chat with people from Connect Reading, resulted in some further interesting discussions, looping in other local organisations with an interest in sustainability to talks on about how we might work better together."*

### Challenges

She found the location of the Urban Room not ideal as it was not inviting hence not a lot of people came to engage with the events.

*"The staff were very warm and welcoming, which helped a lot too, especially as the actual space was chilly and not exactly inviting."*

### Community Consultations

Kathryn enjoyed the interactive map where people added post-it notes to explain which places are important to them and why. She preferred the tangible map to the online version as it was interesting for her to see what places other people value in Reading.

*"It all made me feel quite emotional and really gave me a lovely sense of connection and community - much more so than the online version."*

## Participant evaluation 10 - Aisha

### Background and situation

Aisha works at the Reading Community Learning Centre (RCLC), a charity helping ethnic minority women and their families. RCLC offers programmes of learning classes, activities and workshops aiming to help marginalised women from Black, Asian or Minor Ethnic backgrounds.

### Participation in the Urban Room

Aisha came to the urban room with migrants, refugees and asylum seeking women from the Reading Community Learning Centre she works at. People she brought to the Urban Room got involved in the projects and gave their feedback about living in Reading, what they liked and what could be improved in terms of their quality of life.

*"The sessions were led by Nisa Unis and it really made the women who attended feel supported, valued, and listened to."*

### Outcomes of participation

*"I have learnt that there are many diverse ideas and thoughts about what people want from their town. However there are many things which are important to everyone such as safe and clean streets, green spaces for their children, good, affordable and accessible public transport, good quality homes for families, and services such as schools, shops, doctors etc. which they can travel to easily and have enough space for them."*

Aisha felt that the way the consultation process was carried out, a diverse local community was able to get an opportunity to voice their opinions about Reading.

*"This really helps to empower the people in the community and give them ownership as it made them feel valued to have their say and voice their thoughts in such an important consultation which will affect them and their families."*

## Participant evaluation 11 - Dave

### Background and situation

Dave works at the Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC). He attended the Urban Room to host a session on Global History and Climate Friendly Diets.

*"It will be very interesting to see whether this is adopted more widely or if it does change public consultation in planning process. Real community engagement is time & resource intensive, especially if you are to reach the people who would not have the time of motivation to go online & engage with the website."*

### Outcomes of participation

By participating in the Urban Room, Dave developed a new partnership with the Reading UK members that has enabled him to push forward the Incredible Edible concept. He agrees that an Urban Room is needed to encourage conversations between the public and various stakeholders.

## Key findings - Reoccurring themes

As mentioned earlier, the feedback collected before, during and post urban room helped the team come up with a range of findings on the impact that the Urban Room had on its participants. The interviews show that people feel welcome and accepted and this is a key factor in their continued participation. Participants have also described the new opportunities that opened up to them and how they met new people from their community that they wouldn't have met otherwise. There is a growing need of a permanent urban room in Reading, and the location of this is very important to the process. The following pages detail these findings through quotes from the participants.

1. Feeling Accepted
2. Feeling Welcome
3. Increase in Confidence
4. Closing the Loop
5. Sense of Community
6. New Opportunities
7. Location
8. Interactive map
9. Permanent Urban Room

## 1. Feeling accepted

Participants describe that they were listened to and encouraged by the staff and people hosting the events. They felt that people they talked to were interested in them and their ideas. Feeling included and absence of judgement opens up the possibility for meaningful interactions with others. Additionally, feeling accepted puts people at ease and increases their confidence.

"Your team asked me how I felt, how things went or how I felt we could improve or anything else. That was new to me, that's really pushed me."

"Every time I came I really felt that you were encouraging and saying how you are grateful for me to be there and be able to help out."

"The staff were really warm and welcoming"

"Nisa and the other helpers were very warm and welcoming, which helped a lot too, especially as the actual space was chilly."

"Every time I came I really felt that you were encouraging and saying how you are grateful for me to be there and be able to help out."

"Your team asked me how I felt, how things went or how I felt we could improve or anything. That was new to me, that's really pushed me."

"The sessions were led by Nisa Unis and it really made the participants who attended feel supported valued, and listened to."

## 2. Feeling welcome

Being welcome is the first step for residents to walk into an Urban Room. Knowing that they will not be judged and feeling safe is very important for people.

People who walked past the Urban Room were usually curious due to the space being new and the big colourful posters at the front of the room. The staff explained to people walking by and new arrivals what the idea being the Urban Room is all about and how they can participate. People could choose what events they wanted to participate in depending on their interests and needs.

Feeling welcome from the start is crucial and this was led by Nisa Unis, the Community partnerships manager and rest of the team.

## 3. Increase confidence

Many participants described that one of the outcomes of participation in the Urban Room was an increase in confidence. They felt that they were more confident to try new things they have never done before. They were more confident and willing to engage in discussions and state their opinions as well as perform in front of others. From the first contact with the Urban Room the participants confidence increases due to feeling welcomed and accepted. They were able to meet new people in a comfortable space and were able to be themselves. The interviews show that participation helped people in coming out of their comfort zones.

"I got to know people who volunteered from my organisation. It probably helped me more like personally after because then I knew them. they felt more comfortable to come and have a chat because we'd had the whole day together."

"I'm feeling grateful, because when I first knew we were doing a workshop in the urban room I was unsure. But because I showed up and came to see the area, see you, or the staff that were working there.. I felt confident to comeback "

"So I've come out of my comfort zone that has been quite affecting here. I'm always in the same area, always in the same building and everybody else knew me but here it is different"

## 4. Closing the Loop

After being involved in the Urban Room, participants describe that they would like to know the results of the consultations. People want to know what others value in their community as well as keep in touch to learn what is the outcome of the project. Sharing that information, as one participant describes, would allow for the next stage of conversation.

"Would say one of them would be to take the mapping exercise and then use it as a catalyst for the next conversation. So there's a sort of a next stage of conversation. I think there should also be a feedback loop to the people who contributed."

"Arguably as a member of the community, it for me reinforces the sort of we'll just gather information off you, and then we'll pass it on to somebody else, but we won't come back to you to tell you what we did with the information we collected from you. So you know if you're wanting to, if we are going to build a relationship with communities, that say you are involved in the future of this place. I think, you know, we should be feeding back. We should inform and going back to your thing about what would be the role of an urban room."

"Yes, and I would love to see it if you got a copy because it would help us with mapping out organisations existing here in Reading"

## 5. Sense of Community

For many it is difficult to meet other people in their community. An Urban Room is a space that provides residents with an opportunity to connect with various groups of people. The interviews indicate that there is a strong need to bring different groups of people together as Reading is a very diverse but divided town.

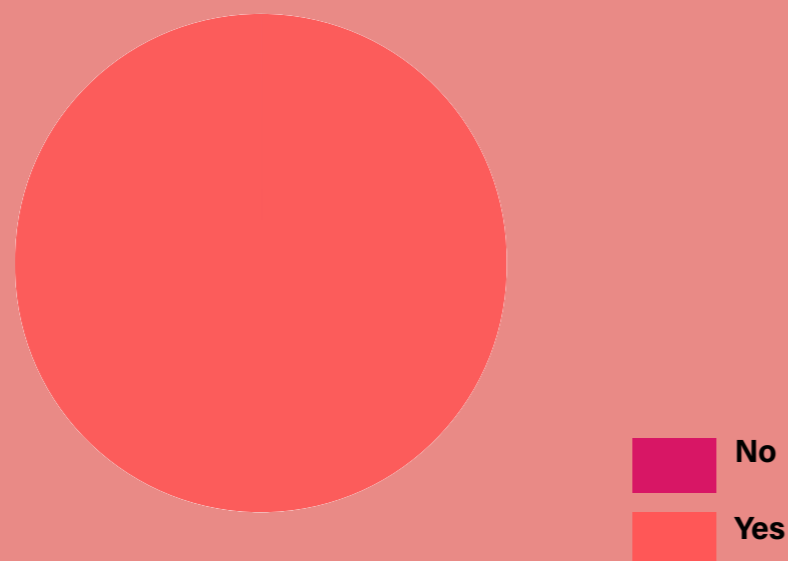
"I think the way the consultation was done was good that it really involved the diverse local community who were able to get an opportunity to voice their opinions on what they liked and what could be improved about the town. This really helps to empower the people in the community and give them ownership as it made them feel valued to have their say and voice their thoughts in such an important consultation which will affect them and their families."

"It was good to see different groups represented in the group in the space, so the displays on the walls, the evidence of other groups having met there and done stuff and then through the social media."

"But I think like via the workshops and stuff, I'm sure it did obviously bring different groups of people together. That probably didn't necessarily know each other or know what like community is"

"There was kind of people who were moving about and people who were busy. I was going to say I suppose, but I already knew the people who were there so it wasn't like I wasn't really making new contacts, but I did know that people were there and I was quite interested to see what organizations were there as well."

**Do you think the Urban Room at Reading (Your Place Our Place) contributed to a sense of community in Reading?**



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## 6. New Opportunities

Participation opened up new opportunities for many. By meeting new people and making connections, participants built social networks which might be beneficial in the future. Mostly, the organisations were able to connect with other groups which can lead to collaboration and therefore improvement in local environment and community.

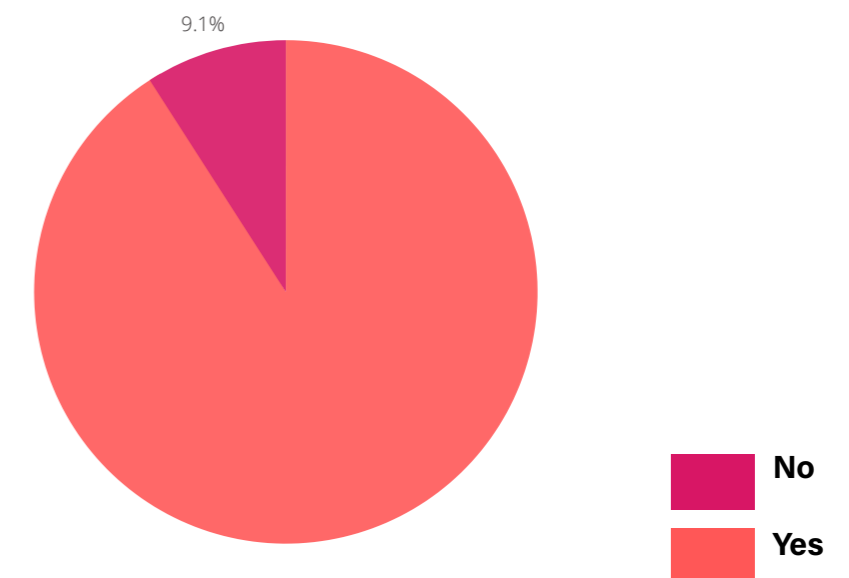
"A chat with a person from Connect Reading, resulted in some further interesting discussions, looping in other local organisations with an interest in sustainability to talk about how we might work better together.....  
... it was a start."

"We have been put in contact with several other people and organizations: hopefully these links will turn into fruitful collaborations."

"New partnership with Reading UK members that has already enabled us to push forward with Incredible Edible concept. Very good dialogue with Reading UK that is leading to new partnerships & hopefully bringing the Incredible Edible Reading concept into RBC policy making"

"We had the chance to get in touch with professors from the School of Architecture of the University of Reading, and to reconnect with several friends and acquaintances from the town."

**Has your involvement in Your Place Our Place opened up any new opportunities for you or your organisation?**



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## 7. Location

The quotes are samples of frequent observations about the location of the Urban Room not being ideal. Broad Street Mall is a shopping mall and many people felt that it is not an area that is welcoming.

The room was located next door to the COVID vaccination centre which stopped some people from coming in. Many passers-by thought that the Urban Room was the vaccination centre and the Student Ambassadors were often confused with the NHS workers.

Organisation members coming in to host the workshops and discussions found it hard to locate the room was located as it was quite difficult to find and there was not a lot of signage around the shopping centre. This part of Broad Street Mall is not a sort of place that people pass by mistake, hence only those members of the community who knew about the Urban Room beforehand were able to join the sessions. If the location was less closed off and in an area that people walk by, more people would be able to engage.

Unfortunately I would say we were disappointed with the footfall - it could have done with being in a much more prominent place for the public to have engaged more."

"I was brought up in Reading and the Broad Street mall is not an area of natural beauty. It's not an area that's welcoming. I know there's a stigmatization when you're in a shopping mall. People think that you're being sold something. When I first passed there I thought someone was trying to hand me a leaflet like, you know, come in and I'm like you know no thanks and then I realized actually I'm working there in a couple of days."

"It wasn't necessarily place that you would be happy to like sit down and because it was quite a closed door to get into the space people weren't naturally just going in, people were mostly just passing by."

"Broad Street Mall is a shopping mall and it's not Community Centre. and it's not an area where people gather or walk past. I wouldn't see the Broad Street mall as being an area that would people congregate in."

"I did think the idea was brilliant, however, sadly, the room wasn't in the right place."

"Broad street mall is a shopping mall, a shopping centre. People go there just for the pure reason of going to go and shop, pick up stuff and they're not going to stop by and they're not going to probably engage."

"In one way certainly I would say I went along at the weekend to try and work out where I was going during the week. And there was no signage, so I had to ask one of the security guards where this place was. So if you if it wasn't open, there was no way of you knowing where it was. The fact that it was next door to the COVID vaccination centre did cause some problems."

"Broad Street itself, I think is a good shout, but to go in between where the station and the Oracle is. That's like the main flow"

## 8. Interactive Map

One of the most commonly reoccurring topic was the big physical map located on the back wall of the Urban Room. Because of the map, people wanted to participate in the community consultation as the process was fun and engaging. Participants were able to see what others have put down and it opened an opportunity for a discussion between residents. Compared to pinning down the answers on a map on an I-Pad, most people preferred to do it by hand as it was easier for them to visualise and realise what areas they value in their town. Participants describe the activity of putting the post-it notes on the map as really thought provoking as many of them never thought about why they connect to and value certain places.

"I did the map, the physical and also the on the I-Pad. And it was really like thought provoking, which was quite nice because I've lived in Reading, not as long as a lot of people probably have, but I never really thought about why I have connections to certain places."

"There would be a perfect idea to have an interactive board. If you had an interactive board where you could put places on, you could say you had a list of places and it would be highlighted. A massive interactive map would have been perfect. People would be also more willing to come."

"I also loved the map where people had added Post-It notes to explain which places are important to them and why. It all made me feel quite emotional and really gave me a lovely sense of connection and community - much more so than the online version."

"if you can persuade someone to put an interactive (digital touch) map of Reading on the side of a building as a sort of something interactive. And that kind of thing will make people see Reading like the multifaceted place that it really is."

"And I love the big map. I thought it was brilliant and I thought that was what community needs. Just fantastic because we do need to connect within Reading. I know people who live in reading for 30 years yet won't know North Reading and they won't know South reading because they only lived in West Reading. People I know never move South of the river because they're comfortable with where they are and what they know. So I thought the idea of connecting things and Reading was so important and because just to make people aware of what's available in Reading."

"So if you had an interactive map in the town hall, you could also advertise it then for learning and education because we need to learn more about our local history."

"I really liked it as well because if you are stuck for inspiration, all you have to do is look on the wall and see what people had put and some people had put things that were really similar."

## 9. Permanent Urban Room

The interviews indicate that the community strongly feels that a permanent Urban Room is needed in Reading. The Urban Room "Your Place Our Place" was opened during office hours and many felt that there was not a lot of opportunity to engage with it. Having a permanent Urban Room that would be open on weekends would open an opportunity for more community engagement.

In order to create community cohesion people need a space where they can access information and connect with organisations in their town. However, there are communities in Reading that the only way to engage with them is by going to their place. Hence, permanent Urban Room might not be necessary but rather a pop up would be more suitable in order to engage communities that might feel isolated and would not come and participate otherwise.

"If you did it more regularly, I think you get more and more people interested in coming in. You'd also get more disabled people possibly wanting to come and have a look to see what the Urban Room is."

The Broad Street Mall, I think you need to be more centre, but where everyone can if they're coming on the train, it's easy to get through, so I need you to provide easier access I felt that you were being a bit hidden, you need it more centred, like on the Broad Street itself"

"But if you encouraged it you could get more people in evenings. Now recently (post-pandemic) you'll get people that come up. Will be encouraged to come in and they will sit and stay longer."

"You just really need to make it brighter and make it encouraging to let more people in. Having a sofa would make it more encouraging. I think if I had that if I would come to an Urban Room for the first and I would see a place of comfort or refreshments, tea and coffee and if it was more colourful, bright, simple word, I would probably have no issue on how I would feel."

"But if you would it need to permanent place I wouldn't go to a shopping mall because effectively it's high turnover. Town hall is that purpose of engaging with the community. That's why people go there."

"It needs to be based within the Community Centre or Community area, say, like the town hall or somewhere like within the Civic Centre or within somewhere where you could operate where people could stay and spend a bit of time. The two places that I would hold it. First one would definitely be the town hall, it's an old building it's a nice building where people would feel welcome."

"I feel the best place for the urban room would be in the town hall in the centre of Reading because it we could be uses as a place of learning. If you're going to take it somewhere for a month, that would be the Oracle Centre for me."

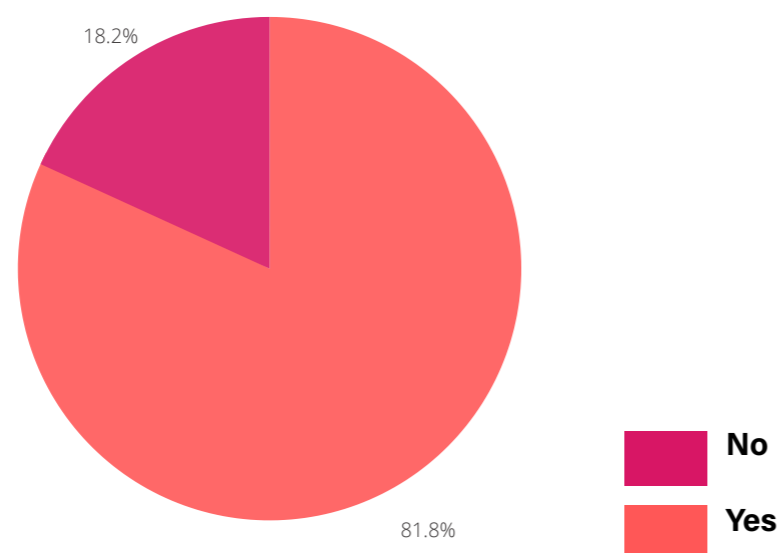
"I think specifically targeting community spaces for particular communities, where those communities can overlap, interact and do stuff together. I think it's far more effective personally than having a general space."

"I think temporary and then you can move around and see what kind of people you get in different places. So if you did like one a year in different places around reading, you could really engage with different communities much more strategically, and gather them around a theme and give them notice."

"A downside to having a physical base is that you then have to justify having that physical base, and there's a lot of communities that the only way you will engage is by going to their place and initially so if it became a sort of by having an urban room that became the place that everything happened at the expense of outreach, or sort of going and doing stuff in spaces that already exist elsewhere."

"It would be great to have a permanent Urban Room. I think it needs to be quite active, and would need a really sort of active engagement programme. It's a start for a conversation, so if it was about thinking about different ways, of how do you get people talking and engaging in having conversations about the future of their place and their agency in influencing what that might look like. And recognising that that conversation might sometimes start somewhere else and end up in the Urban Room. Then I think it could be a really exciting model, I think."

**Do you think a permanent Urban Room is needed in Reading?**





## Conclusion and Future - Next Steps

1. **Comfort**
2. **Permanent Urban Room**
3. **Communication Strategy**
4. **Interactive wall map**
5. **What next ?**

## 1. Comfort

The Urban Room attracted people from all demographics. In order to accommodate the needs of all the residents, the Urban Room has been rearranged from the initial layout plans. Additional spaces were created such as the quiet zone and the play zone.

By welcoming kids in the Urban Room parents were able to attend sessions, which would have been difficult otherwise. A space for kids was created while the project was running after realising how important it is especially for single parent families to be able to join the Urban Room with their children.

However, there wasn't a space in the room where one could sit and relax. The interviews indicated that such space of comfort is needed as people would be more willing to come in and stay longer. Participants also felt that having refreshments, such as tea or coffee would make their experience better.

**“Having a sofa would make it more encouraging. I think if I had that if I would come to an Urban Room for the first then I would see a place of comfort. In addition if it had refreshments, tea and coffee and if it was more colourful, bright, information and exhibition in simple language, I would probably would have no issue on how I would feel.”**



## 2. Permanent Urban Room

One of the reoccurring themes in the interviews was the location on the Urban Room, where it was and where a permanent one could be located in the future. There were suggestion of locations that would attract the most visitors as well as suggestions on buildings that could be used.

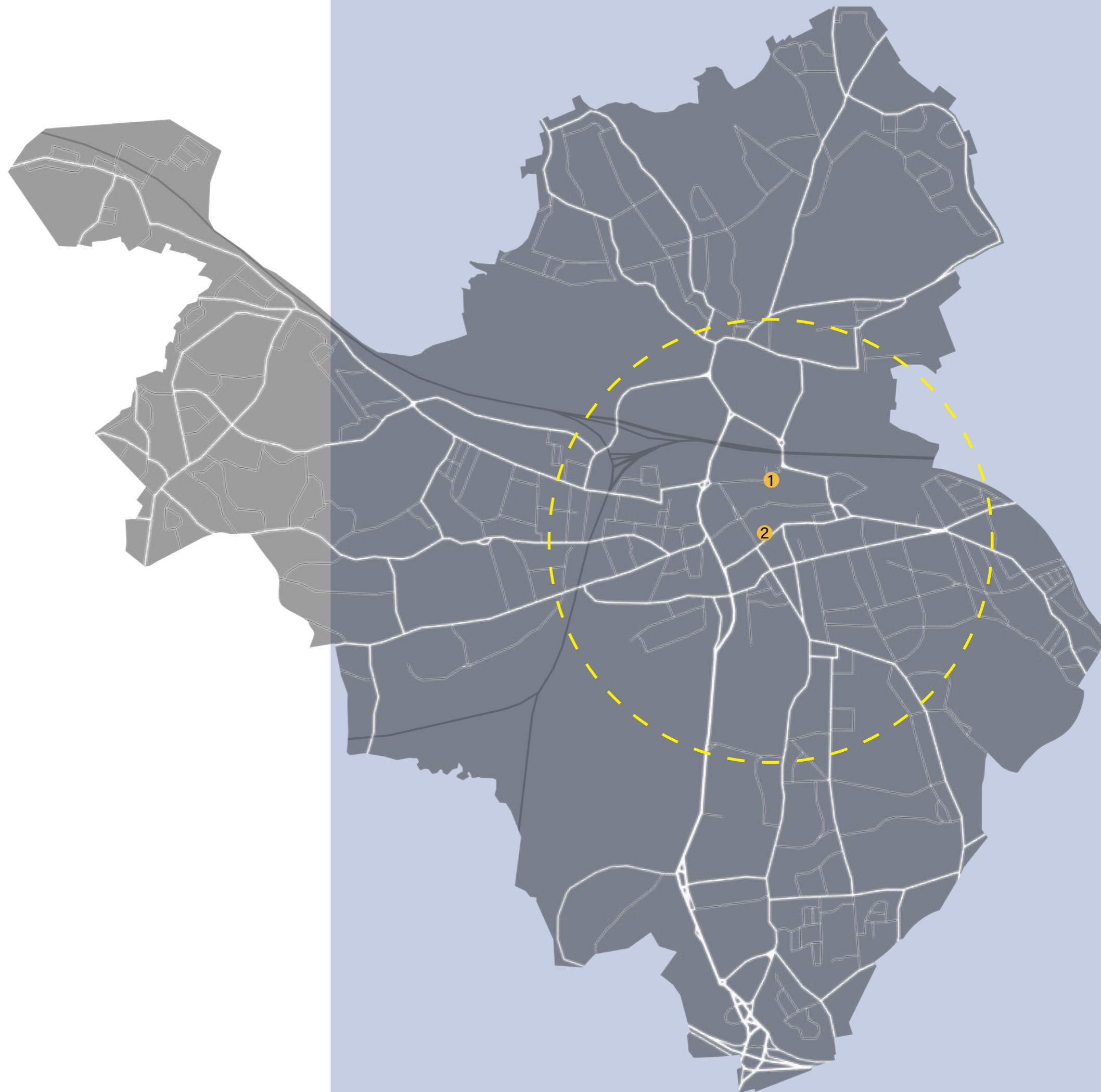
The Urban Room needs to be easily accessible, not in an enclosed location. It needs to be located in a place local people pass by, so they do not have to go out of their way during their daily lives.

The map highlights the locations suggested by the interviewed participants. The Town Hall (no. 1 on the map) was suggested as the best place a permanent Urban Room since its purpose is to be a community hub. The Town Hall is a historic building from 1786. It is located in Central Reading with an easy access from the station. Additionally, the Pantry Cafe and Kitchen inside the building would allow for people to grab a refreshment and stay for longer.

The Oracle (no. 2 on the map) is another location indicated by the participants. The shopping mall is much larger than the Broad Street Mall, hence there are more passer-bys that would walk past the Urban Room and possibly engage with the activities inside. The mall is in central Reading in an area that people congregate in.

### Bringing the Urban Room to the communities

Community consultation must be tailored to the communities in which it is conducted. One of the ways to achieve that is to make projects and activities a normal part of people daily lives. As seen on the map, the locations of the suggested venues for a permanent Urban Room are far from many places in the town. Highlighted with the dashed line is a walkable distance to the city centre (around 15 minutes). Hence, if someone is not already in the area it might be a barrier for them to get to the Urban Room. Therefore the idea of a pop-up Urban Room would allow for engagement with isolated communities that otherwise would not participate. The venue should be located closer to where the various communities live so that they do not have to travel further.



### 3. Communication Strategy

The activities in the Urban Room are meant to be appealing to all residents in neighbourhoods, hence, the communication with the community should be designed on the same basis, targeting all the residents without excluding any. Communication with the community should therefore be attractive and framed as an invitation. There is a number of ways in which this could be improved.

#### Flyers and posters

One of the main communication tools that was used were colourful posters which promoted the events in an attractive and inviting way, they were displayed in front of the Urban Room. Pamphlets were also used as a mean to invite the public to join the events, these were handed out by the Student Ambassadors.

However, the posters were mostly located at a close proximity to the Urban Room, hence only those who were walking past that part of the mall were able to read them. Putting posters around different areas of the town or the university campus would allow for bigger engagement with the community. In order to invite individuals who would not be able to learn about the project from other communication strategies, pamphlets could potentially be door-dropped to households in the town.

#### Social media

An online presence is essential. Instagram was used to document the process of running the Urban Room. The account launched on January 6th and collected almost 250 followers. Short films were used to showcase the past events and invite the public to upcoming ones. However, to gain more engagement, social groups and organisations in town could be asked to advertise the account which would result in more people knowing about the project therefore the turn over at the events would be higher.

#### Newspapers

Newspapers are an important part of the communications strategy. In order to build community engagement, an invitation to the urban room could be placed in a local newspaper or an online website such as Berkshire Live



#### WHAT IS YOUR PLACE OUR PLACE?

Your Place Our Place is one of the first pilot of the CCQoL project. It involves community consultation through activities at an Urban Room and a digital mapping tool.

#### WHAT IS AN URBAN ROOM?

Urban rooms are spaces in towns and cities which offer local communities a place to exhibit and discuss issues that affect the community around future development.


This Urban Room in Broad Street Mall will be providing information to the local community about key issues such as the Reading Town Centre Strategy, offering a place for discussion to encourage awareness and connection between various communities. The activities in the Urban Room are based on the weekly topic decided from our analysis of the Quality of Life framework and the Reading Town Centre Strategy by the local council. Quality of Life framework is a set of principles established by the Quality of Life Foundation.

Once this pilot is completed at Reading, similar 3 Urban Rooms will be tested in Cardiff, Edinburgh, and Belfast.

HAVE YOUR SAY ABOUT YOUR PLACE READING

<https://ccqolreading.commonplace.is>

 yourplaceourplace

 ccqol your place our place



#### YOUR PLACE OUR PLACE PROGRAMME MARCH 2022 WEEKLY TOPICS

##### WEEK 1 Introduction and Business Community

The first week we will introduce the community consultation and have workshops focussing on business in Reading and the Region

##### WEEK 2 Health & Wellbeing

The second week the focus will be on Health and Wellbeing and a range of community groups and organisations will have workshops and discussions on this theme and important issues in Reading

##### WEEK 3 Culture & Heritage

The third week of the programme will focus on culture and heritage projects in and around Reading and there will be workshops, talks and activities to engage our community in creative activities around Reading.

##### WEEK 4 Climate Change

The fourth week of the programme will have discussions activities and workshops related to climate change and its impact on our community.

##### WEEK 5 The Future of Reading

The final week of the programme is about looking forwards to consider what the future could hold for communities in Reading.

Your Place Our Place would like to thank the following partners for their support

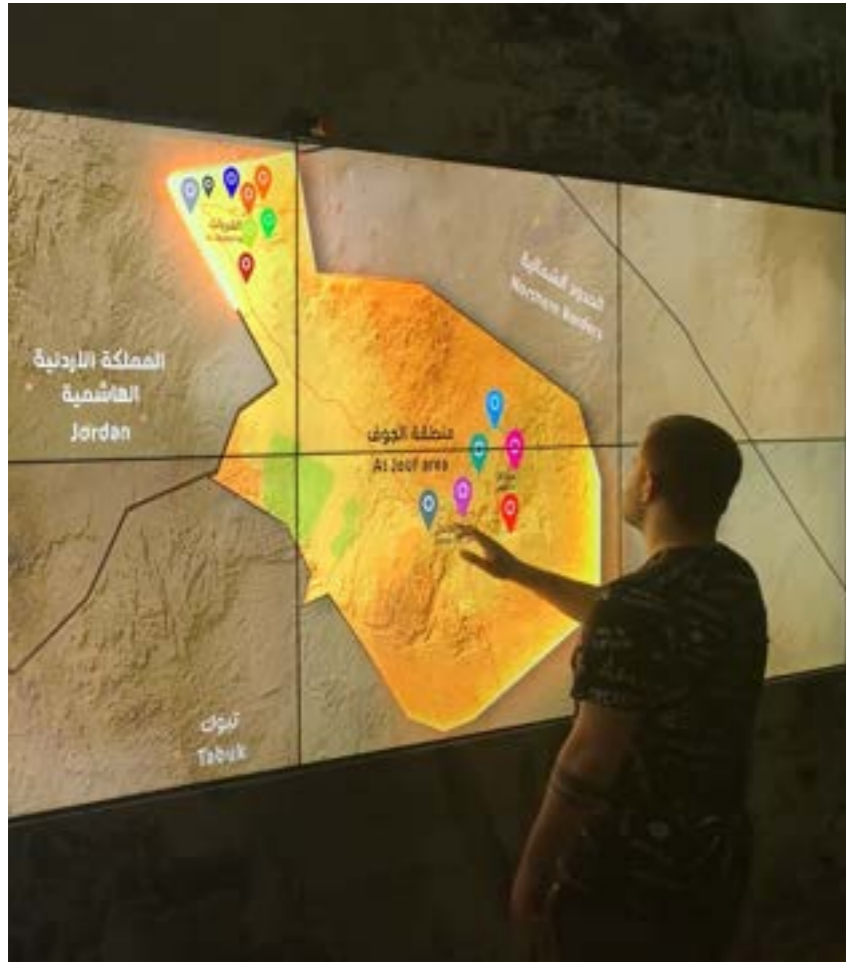


## 4. Interactive Wall Map

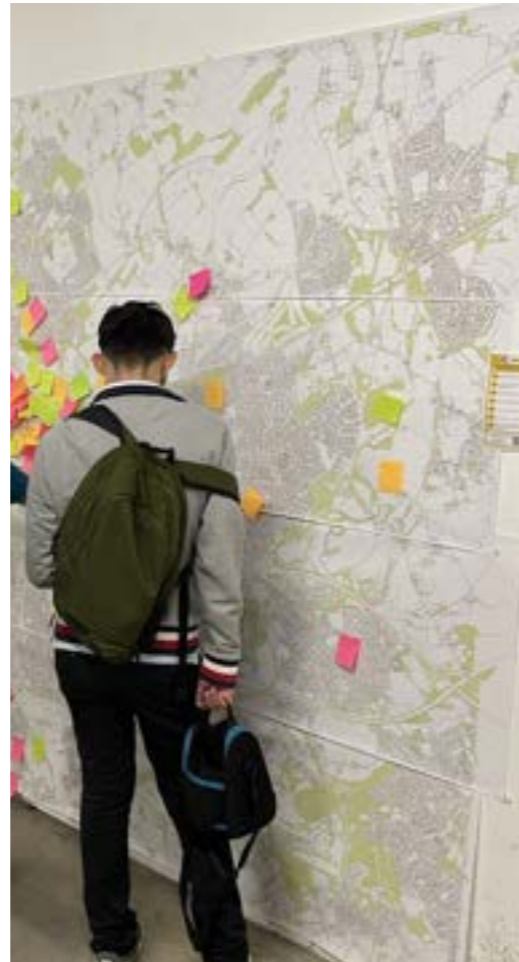
Many participants felt that having an interactive digital touchscreenmap would be a great idea to engage the wider public in a discussion about the future of their town. The suggestions have been made that such map could either be located in a permanent Urban Room or in a place people pass by. By having a map in an open area, the barriers to participate are lower, hence more members of the community could participate. People tend to like doing interactive activities, therefore, they would be more willing to participate and put their own opinions on the map and read opinions from other members of the community .

An interactive map could be also used for learning and educational purposes. Such maps are often used in museums and could provide a great way to gain community engagement.

Interactive wall map in a museum in Saudi Arabia



Quality of Life map in Reading



## 5. What next?

The various groups that have contributed to the pop-up Urban Room were essential for its success- the space only worked because they were interested to support with the programme of events and activities.

The steering group for the Urban room in Reading is still in place and we will review the comments and feedback from all the contributors as we consider how and where we can continue a shared community space in Reading for the communities of Reading.

Thank you to all the contributors for your support of the Urban Room project in Reading.

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## Illustrations

Page 9 - Illustrations by Lizzie Lomax, from The Quality of Life Framework Evidence Review

Page 4 - Design by Gina Dinesen and Kim Pearce

Page 16 - Calendar by Gina Dinesen and Kim Pearce

Page 68 - Poster by Gina Dinesen and Kim Pearce

Page 69 - Interactive map in a museum in Saudi, by Lumioton, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mcxc5N1o\\_O0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mcxc5N1o_O0)

# YOUR PLACE OUR PLACE PROGRAMME

## WEEK 1

### INTRODUCTION AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY

The first week introduced the community consultation and had workshops focusing on business in Reading and the region.

## WEEK 2

### HEALTH AND WELLBEING

During the second week the focus was on Health and Well-being and a range of community groups and organisations will had workshops and discussions on this theme and important issues in Reading

## WEEK 3

### CULTURE AND HERITAGE

The third week of the programme focused on culture and heritage projects in and around Reading and there were workshops, talks and activities to engage the community in creative activities around Reading.

## WEEK 4

### CLIMATE CHANGE

The fourth week of the programme had discussions activities and workshops related to climate change and its impact on our community.

## WEEK 5

### THE FUTURE OF READING

The final week of the programme was about looking forwards to consider what the future could hold for communities in Reading.

## Connect Reading

### Who are we?

At Connect Reading, our aim is to bring sectors together for mutual benefit in Reading, including businesses, charities, education and the public sector.

### This is what we do

Each of our members has a unique and valuable contribution to make. We love getting to know our organisations, so we can help them build meaningful connections with long-term impact. We host monthly member networking events as well as yearly projects including The Giving Tree, Reading RESCUE, and the Easter Egg Appeal.



Contact us!

<https://connectreading.org.uk/>

## Thames Valley Built Environment

### Who are we?

Think Built Environment, think University of Reading! TVBEHub followers are part of a growing network, where the Thames Valley Built Environment community can collaborate and stay on top of the latest research and thinking relating to the design, construction, management, and operation of everything 'built environment' – homes, buildings, places, and spaces.

### This is what we do

TVBEHub brings together a diverse community of experts and networks from business, community and academia, making it easy to exchange knowledge and access breakthrough thinking. Together, we're tackling real-world problems



Contact us!

[frontdoor@reading.ac.uk](mailto:frontdoor@reading.ac.uk)



## Personal Assistant Team at

### Who are we?

We provide support and guidance for both Personal Assistants who work in the care sector, and residents who employ Personal Care Assistants.

### This is what we do

We are developing a thriving PA market in Reading. Being a PA can be an exciting career option and we're here to let you know about the opportunities. We would also like to speak to people already receiving care via Reading Borough Council. Hiring your own Personal Assistant can be a great way to meet your care and support needs, and allows you to be in control of the support you receive.



Contact us!

[www.readingportal.co.uk](http://www.readingportal.co.uk)

## Ethical Reading

### Who are we?

Ethical Reading exists to help organisations in Reading and their teams do the right thing by each other, the wider community and the environment and to thrive in the process.

### This is what we do

Through our Trees for Reading initiative we give businesses and individuals the opportunity to make a positive contribution to our town by helping to fund the planting and care of urban trees. Partnering with Reading Borough Council and Reading Tree Wardens, we bring more substantial young trees to the parts of town that need them most.



Contact us!

[ethicalreading.org.uk/trees-for-reading](http://ethicalreading.org.uk/trees-for-reading)

## Berkshire Youth

### Who are we?

We are a youth charity which aims to be THE voice for local young people. We support youth leaders and young people through challenging life transitions and events to help them make the right choices, grow resilience and mature as individuals and members of society.

### This is what we do

We offer a variety of affordable and engaging opportunities for youth workers and young people. Many of the young people we work with are vulnerable or disadvantaged, often unable to access help elsewhere. We focus on prevention and helping young people who are missing out, not yet in crisis or face barriers to access.



Contact us!

[admin@berkshireyouth.co.uk](mailto:admin@berkshireyouth.co.uk)

## Oxford Road Community Hub

### Who are we?

We are a health and wellbeing community hub at the heart of Reading. We are partnered with ACRE, Mojatu foundation and Utulivu women's group. Our goal is to offer a range of services to the local community, tailored to the feedback and needs expressed by the community.

### This is what we do

We offer a range of services to aid in the promotion of equality, community empowerment and community cohesion. We can offer individual support to people in need including legal support, mental health signposting, training and employability skills. Our journalists aim to amplify community voices through Mojatu magazine.



Contact us!

[ethicalreading.org.uk/trees-for-reading](http://ethicalreading.org.uk/trees-for-reading)

### Who are we?

Sensory Street is a Wellcome Trust funded research and engagement project based at the Universities of Oxford and Reading. We aim to increase understanding of sensory processing difficulties in autistic people.

### This is what we do

In 2021 we ran a series of focus groups with autistic people to find out how the sensory aspects of public spaces (such as restaurants, supermarkets and cafes) impact them. We are now working with the autistic community to create an immersive event in summer 2022 to help people learn more about sensory processing difficulties in a creative and interesting way.



Contact us!

[www.sensorystreet.uk](http://www.sensorystreet.uk)

## Reading Friends of the Earth

### Who are we?

We are a local group campaigning on environmental issues.

### This is what we do

Air pollution in Reading causes death, illness and discomfort. Especially near busy roads pollutant concentrations are higher than national and World Health Organisation standards. Nitrogen Dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), is a toxic gas which inflames the lungs and reduces immunity to lung infections such as bronchitis. 5.6% of deaths in Reading are attributable to micro-particles PM<sub>2.5</sub> which have cardiovascular and respiratory health impacts. Reducing traffic – particularly ‘dirty diesels’ – would help but the Council says it needs funding to impose a ‘Clean Air Zone’.



Contact us!

[www.readingfoe.org.uk](http://www.readingfoe.org.uk)

## Age UK Berkshire

### Who are we?

Age UK Berkshire is a charity supporting older people (age 50+), we aim to improve life for older people in Berkshire.

### This is what we do

We deliver a wide range of services designed to empower and support older people’s health and wellbeing ensuring that they love later life. This includes information and advice, defriending, practical support and support for people with dementia and their carers.



Contact us!

[info@ageukberkshire.org.uk](mailto:info@ageukberkshire.org.uk)

0118 959 4242

## University of Reading

### Who are we?

The University of Reading has been at the forefront of UK higher education for nearly a century. Over the decades we have become innovators and pioneers, pushing academic boundaries and leading social change.

### This is what we do

We strive to create a stronger, better University of Reading, building on our past to create an exceptional future. By attending university, our students are making a considerable investment in their future, both in time and money. University is a hugely personal experience and there are a range of ways that we provide good value for money.



Contact us!

[abc@reading.ac.uk](mailto:abc@reading.ac.uk)



## Public Health & Wellbeing Team - Reading Borough Council

### Who are we?

Our team includes Reading's Public Health Consultant, a Public Health & Wellbeing Manager, Senior Public Health Programme Officers, a Trainee Public Health officer, Reading's Engagement & Consultation Officer, specialist officers & managers providing insight into local data and information; prevention and community wellbeing, services for people misusing drugs and alcohol and through the Compass Recovery College, support and expertise in mental health issues.

### This is what we do

We work with our partners including health services, community groups and local residents to help improve and protect the health and wellbeing of people in Reading and to reduce health inequalities.



### Contact us!

[Wellbeing.service@reading.gov.uk](mailto:Wellbeing.service@reading.gov.uk)

### Who are we?

Autism Berkshire is the leading autism charity in Berkshire, supporting autistic people of all ages and their families throughout the county.

### This is what we do

We provide specialist advice and support services, training and social and leisure activities, working with the NHS, local authorities and other voluntary sector organisations, with the aim of improving the quality of life of autistic people in Berkshire and giving them maximum independence.



Talking sense about autism.

### Contact us!

[www.autismberkshire.org.uk](http://www.autismberkshire.org.uk)

## Compass Recovery College

### Who are we?

At Compass Recovery College, we run free mental health and wellbeing workshops.

### This is what we do

Our workshops focus on self-management skills and living well. All our workshops are delivered by people with lived experience of mental health challenges together with mental health professionals. Our aim is for everyone to feel listened to a safe environment. Everyone is welcome and everyone is a participant, whether affected directly or indirectly by mental ill health. So whether you are struggling yourself, or perhaps you are a carer, family member or professional who would like to know more about mental health and wellbeing, we can help.



### Contact us!

[Compass.Opportunities@reading.gov.uk](mailto:Compass.Opportunities@reading.gov.uk)

## Oxford Road Community Hub-Art Therapy

### Who are we?

We are a health and wellbeing community hub at the heart of Reading. We are partnered with ACRE, Mojatu foundation and Utulivu women's group. Our goal is to offer a range of services to the local community, tailored to the feedback and needs expressed by the community.

### This is what we do

We offer a range of services including community wellbeing conversations, coffee mornings, art therapy sessions. Our art therapy sessions are held every month and include art supplies, prompts, and a licensed CBT therapist who is willing to take questions. The sessions aim to explore feelings of anxiety and depression through artistic mediums.



### Contact us!

[admin@utulivu.co.uk](mailto:admin@utulivu.co.uk)

## Studio B.A.D

### Who are we?

Studio B.A.D. Architects is formed from talented number of collaborators who cross a wide range of disciplines including architecture, art, illustration and teaching and are interested in the social value of architecture, and in bringing about positive social and economic change through practice, education and research.

### This is what we do

Studio BAD engages in community and church projects, residential, commercial projects, redevelopments, listed buildings, housing schemes and urban reactivation projects across the UK and internationally. The studio is currently actively engaged with Go Southampton, Gosport and Eastleigh in city planning and reimagining. The studio also deliver lectures and talks for creative learning.



### Contact us!

<https://studiobad.co.uk>

### Who are we?

We are Reading University Students' Union (RUSU), an independent student-led charity, based on the Whiteknights campus. We exist to make sure students at the University of Reading have the best time.

### This is what we do

We deliver essential and relevant services for students in an accountable, inclusive and dynamic way. We are always innovating and ensuring students have the opportunity to be active members of the students' union and the wider community. Whether it's through our free advice service, club nights, volunteering opportunities or something else, there are ways for all to get involved and all of the money that is spent in RUSU is reinvested back into those services.



### Contact us!

## Museums Partnership Reading

### Who are we?

Museums Partnership Reading is a collaborative, wide ranging programme of activities by Reading Museum (Reading Borough Council) and The Museum of English Rural Life (University of Reading). Our partnership is made possible by the Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisation programme and through High Street Heritage Action Zone Reading.

### This is what we do

We work together as Museums Partnership Reading to improve opportunities for diverse local communities to engage in arts, cultural and heritage experiences and learning opportunities. Through the High Street Heritage Action Zone we are delivering Discovering Hidden Histories to look with fresh eyes at local haunts and archives to tell the tales of Reading past, present and future.



### Contact us!

[a.jones6@reading.ac.uk](mailto:a.jones6@reading.ac.uk)

## KATESGROVE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

### Who are we?

Katesgrove Community Association are a community group in Katesgrove Ward, Reading. We are active in the community and have several different groups and work parties. We have a committee made up of local residents, agreed at our AGM in January 2022. Every member of the committee gets involved when they can.

### This is what we do

KCA likes to hold events and activities throughout the year to encourage community growth; the more people who get involved with KCA the more we can do. Obviously due to Covid 19, things have been a bit different, but we have been doing our best to keep things going with virtual meetings.



### Contact us!

<http://www.katesgrove.org.uk/>  
[katesgroveresidentsassociation@gmail.com](mailto:katesgroveresidentsassociation@gmail.com)

## RBC – Community Partnerships

### Who are we?

At Reading Borough Council we believe we can help Reading realise its potential – ensuring that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success. People have told us what is important, and we are prioritising the issues that matter, including community safety.

### This is what we do

In 2021 Reading was successful in bidding for Safer Streets funding from the Home Office to tackle neighbourhood crime issues in Coley and Oxford Road. Reading Borough Council, Thames Valley Police, the Police and Crime Commissioner and local residents are working on a number of activities to reduce crimes in these areas.



### Contact us!

[csp@reading.gov.uk](mailto:csp@reading.gov.uk)

### Who are we?

Double Okay is your dream queer & trans\*artist trio, comprised of Ollie Musson, G K Field & Oren Shoesmith.

### This is what we do

We are Reading based & host experimental cabaret nights, workshops & arts events as a point of local resistance & solidarity. We began in 2018 in response to a lack of queer spaces - since then we have worked closely with local venues & organisations within Reading, creating bridges between both local queer & arts communities. We host a range of events, from cabaret nights & exhibitions to zine workshops, privileging LGBTQIA+ people & artists within our experimental creative spaces.



### Contact us!

[doubleokaygroup@gmail.com](mailto:doubleokaygroup@gmail.com)

## Station Hill

### Who are we?

Station Hill is a transformational development for Reading and the Thames Valley, a new centre of activity creating a connected live-work-play experience. Station Hill is creating a Public Art and Cultural Strategy.

### This is what we do

The cultural vision for the development is "Painting a Portrait of Reading". Station Hill will be the 'hello' at Reading's front door; local cultural partnerships will create and care for this place and its legacy. Cultural projects at Station Hill will Define the Destination, Create the Journey and Activate the Space. The strategy also sets the Artistic Criteria for Station Hill, which represent the characteristics of place that will later inform artist brief documents: A Front Door to Reading, Contemporary Portraiture, Mirror Image, Responsive Design, Trendsetter.



### Contact us!

<https://www.stationhill.co.uk>

## Reading Biscuit Factory

### Who are we?

We are a three-screen cinema, bar, coffee shop, live performance space and community hub situated at the heart of Reading's town centre.

### This is what we do

Our aim is to offer a fantastic and welcoming venue and create a setting where everyone can relax, work, meet and create – all under one roof. Hopefully anything you like! We show films throughout the week, but we also have several events spaces for hire (including our screens), so if you would like to organise a class or workshop, rehearse, perform, deliver a presentation or celebrate a special occasion we would love to help.



### Contact us!

<https://readingbiscuitfactory.co.uk/events@readingbiscuitfactory.co.uk>

## Design Nature CIC

### Who are we?

Design Nature CIC is a Reading based Social Enterprise enabling young people, educators and organisations to embed creativity, design-led thinking and action learning, problem-solving, communication and critical thinking skills, for each other and for a sustainable planet.

### This is what we do

We connect STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) with action learning and the Sustainable Development Goals, leading to outcomes of empowered social and environmental action, ethical enterprise, and more widely improving the wellbeing of people within the local and global community.



### Contact us!

<https://designnature.world/>

## Sustainable & Equitable Resource Consumption research group

### Who are we?

The Sustainable and Equitable Resources Consumption (SERC) research group examines patterns of resource consumption and the environmental impacts from these can be reduced while maintaining well-being.

### This is what we do

Focusing on urban areas, SERC uses life cycle assessment and urban metabolism as frameworks for exploring consumption and access to resource flows within our society. Our work seeks to understand how these can be mitigated and more equitably distributed towards a sustainable, prosperous mode of living.



### Contact us!

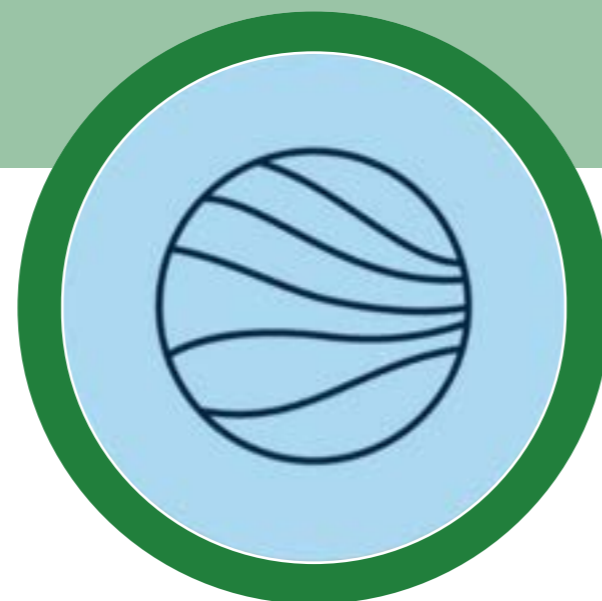
<https://www.reading.ac.uk/en/cme/staff/dr->

### Who are we?

Technical Nature is a small independent (Re) Design Studio established in 2014 to cultivate considered design and technology for life. Helping seed, nurture and grow ideas and organisations for the Earth, each other and ourselves into positive impact.

### This is what we do

We run workshops, deliver talks and develop projects that inspire and empower designers, engineers, start-ups, businesses and the community, to explore sustainable and circular design, strategy and action. We also run the local Reading branch of the voluntary Circular Economy Club and Circular Coffee Conversations.



### Contact us!

<https://technicalnature.org.uk/>

## Commando Jugendstil

### Who are we?

We are a solarpunk creative collective. Our projects conjugate technology, art, narrative and bottom-up speculative design practices to transform the city in its sustainable version, to help communities achieve social cohesion, and eventually to stimulate a Just Transition that can spark from the ground up.

### This is what we do

The Town That Could Be - A Time-travel Journal from Reading 2045, is a Transition Bounce Forward project aimed at getting the people from Reading thinking and imagining together what they want the future of their town to look like and mapping out the steps to get there.



### Contact us!

[commandojugendstil@gmail.com](mailto:commandojugendstil@gmail.com)  
Facebook & Twitter: @CJugendsti

## Reading Climate Action Network

### This is what we do

Our goal is to become a net zero, climate change resilient town by 2030.

TO DO THIS THOSE WHO LIVE, WORK OR STUDY READING WILL NEED TO:

- Use less energy Use 100% renewable energy
- Switch to more sustainable and active modes of transport
- Deliver water saving improvements
- Adopt a more plant-based diet
- Create a circular town; reduce, reuse, repair and recycle
- Increase carbon storage and biodiversity on our green space



### Contact us!

[www.readingcan.org.uk](http://www.readingcan.org.uk)

## Safer Reading - Reading Borough Council

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### Contact us!

[csp@reading.gov.uk](mailto:csp@reading.gov.uk)

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### This is what we do

While the hub has many projects, we are Earth Ambassadors focussing on climate change journalism. Our project focusses on educating and creating awareness on climate change issues especially on the local level. We write weekly articles and hope to further engage with the community empowering them to take action.



### Contact us!

[alex.veal@kutambua.com](mailto:alex.veal@kutambua.com)

## Catalyst Housing- Dee Park Community

### Who are we?

Catalyst are a provider of social housing and affordable housing in and around Dee Park. In total, Catalyst have over 37,000 homes in and around London and the Home Counties. We work closely with our customers to build homes that people love.

### This is what we do

We are currently building a community centre in Dee Park. We would love to hear your thoughts about what you want to see more in the community centre!



### Contact us!

<https://www.chg.org.uk/building-homes/regeneration/dee-park-reading/>

## Reading Borough Council

### Who are we?

Reading High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) project

### This is what we do

The HSHAZ scheme is a regeneration initiative lead by Historic England, working with local councils and the community to create economic growth and improve the appearance and quality of life in historic high streets. The programme's goal is to make the high street a more attractive, engaging and vibrant place for people to live, work and spend time. The Council, working with its partners will play a positive role in the recovery of Reading's high streets through delivering across three complementary strands: physical intervention; community engagement;



### Contact us!

[HSHAZ@reading.gov.uk](mailto:HSHAZ@reading.gov.uk)

[www.reading.gov.uk/hshaz](http://www.reading.gov.uk/hshaz)

## Ethical Reading

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### Contact us!

[ethicalreading.org.uk/trees-for-reading](http://ethicalreading.org.uk/trees-for-reading)