

Reading: centre of attention

In many ways Reading illustrates within a relatively small area the range of challenges and opportunities faced by partners across the region. It is the principal commercial and cultural hub in the Thames Valley, which in itself is a key driver of the South East and therefore the UK economy. The future success of the Thames Valley will depend upon the greater Reading area being able to deliver sustainable economic prosperity in the long term. The urban area spills over the tightly defined boundaries of the city into neighbouring authorities, meaning that the infrastructure and housing required to sustain the prosperity cannot all be accommodated within Reading's administrative boundaries, and must be planned and delivered strategically.

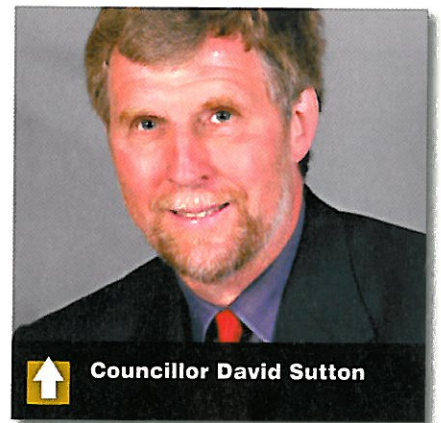
Investment


Over the last 10 years, a thriving Berkshire town has transformed itself into a sub-regional shopping and leisure destination. The biggest retail boost to the town came with the opening of The Oracle shopping and leisure complex in 1999 on the site of a disused

brewery and bus depot. It brought a host of top high street names to Reading which is now the second most popular retail location in the South East, after the Bluewater development, and is ranked 11th nationally. The Oracle also created a quality eating and drinking area along the newly opened up riverside, as well as providing a 10-screen cinema in the town centre. The Reading area has also attracted huge investment from an array of major international companies, such as MCI, Cisco Systems and Microsoft, which have set up their UK and European HQs in the area.

Councillor David Sutton, Leader of Reading Borough Council, said:

"Reading has developed from being an average British town in the 1970s to a flourishing, modern European City with a thriving centre. The last 10 years have been particularly exciting for Reading and there are a number of major projects in the pipeline which will keep Reading moving forward. The council will continue to work with partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors to ensure that all sections of the community benefit from Reading's ongoing renaissance."



 Councillor David Sutton

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Reading key facts:

Area - 4,044ha

Population - 144,000 (Aug 05)

Predicted number of jobs in Reading 2006 is 106,000, rising to 120,000 by 2016

20% of the population is in the age group 20-29

30% of households are single person