



**Friends
of
Reading
Abbey**

**SALE OF READING GAOL
FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY STATEMENT**

The Friends of Reading Abbey (FORA) are disappointed that the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) have rejected Reading Borough Council's bid to buy the Reading gaol site, which would have seen it prioritised for historical and cultural purposes. We do not know yet to whom the site has been sold, but recognise that a higher bid is likely to feature more commercial and/or residential development, which must be sympathetic to the Abbey Quarter and the adjacent Abbey Ruins.

The gaol site is an integral part of the Reading Abbey Scheduled Ancient Monument, and includes the Grade 2 listed Gaol building designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott. It is next to the Abbey Ruins. The gaol was built on top of the Lady Chapel of the Abbey church, and the Abbey infirmary and cemetery, which have never been the subject of archaeological investigation. The gaol car park covers the eastern end of the Abbey church Presbytery and Ambulatory, and includes the location of the high altar, to the west of which King Henry I was buried. The abbey site is of local, national and international archaeological and historical interest and sensitivity, which must be reflected in the proposals for its future development. This is recognised in the Council's local plan and planning brief for the site.

FORA expects any future development proposal for the gaol site to enhance the Abbey Ruins and the Abbey Quarter; to recognise and be sympathetic to the gaol's location within the Reading Abbey Scheduled Ancient Monument area; to assist and support the understanding of the history and use of the site, before the Abbey was built, during its monastic use, and after its dissolution; to provide funding for the necessary and significant archaeological investigations of a site of great importance which has had little or no previous investigation; and to open up the boundary between the Abbey Ruins and the gaol to establish through public routes from the Abbey Ruins into the eastern parts of the Abbey Quarter. We would hope and expect the Gaol building to be retained and promoted as an iconic building which enhances the local environment and facilities and acts as a focus for heritage, cultural and tourist activity and interest in Reading. We would also expect the design of any new buildings on the site to be of the highest aesthetic quality and to recognise, be sympathetic to and enhance the site's previous uses and architecture both as a gaol and one of the ten richest abbeys in pre-dissolution England.

FORA would be pleased to be involved in reviewing the development proposal, when known; will be happy to work with the Borough Council, Reading UK, and the Abbey Quarter BID, and other interested parties, in this regard; and will be active in ensuring that the Council's planning parameters for the site are applied and met.

John Painter
Secretary, Friends of Reading Abbey
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