



TAR report for 2018

December 2018

Hello all,

TAR would like to give you an update on our activities in 2018 as the year ends.

We finished **2017** with support from The Oscar Wilde Society for our vision of turning Reading Gaol into an arts hub.

We began 2018 by going out and about and briefing stakeholders about our progress including the LEP, Reading UK and Reading Football club.

Meanwhile board members and our chairman Melvin Benn held talks with other interested parties. We had extensive coverage from press, radio and TV.

We also had a successful round-table meeting with **ACE** and got support for accessing the gaol from boss Darren Henley and SE boss Hedley Swain.

We contacted MP for **Reading East Alok Sharma** about being unable to get into Reading Gaol to do our ACE-funded feasibility study and he kindly arranged with Prisons Minister Rory Stewart to let us have access.

In March we published our **Vision of Opportunities**, a document that revealed numerous ideas for the site including two theatres, a museum, an art gallery, restaurant and more.

In the summer our architects **Foster Wilson** finally got into the gaol along with TAR members **and Sir Howard Panter and Dame Rosemary Squire** from potential large theatre operators **Trafalgar Entertainment**.

The local **Labour party** published its manifesto which pledged to lobby the MoJ to turn the gaol into an arts hub.

In May we held a **forum** at the **penta hotel** with a panel of Melvin Benn, deputy council leader Tony Page and Miranda Laurence from Reading University. This was well attended – standing room only – and received national coverage from the press.

We also commissioned a project with **Henley Business School** students to work on how we took our aims forward and this resulted in a revealing report and a pledge that each year we would work with final-year students on TAR-related projects.

In July TAR chairman Melvin Benn hailed Reading Borough Council officers' report to the policy committee **endorsing TAR's 'Vision of Opportunities'** for the Reading Gaol site.

He has also praised that it will be put to the committee to approve RBC entering into plans to set up a charitable company with several partners to run the prison site. This was passed by the committee.

Talks had already begun with TAR lawyers **Harrison Clark Rickerbys** to set up this trust and the council was represented at these meetings.

Also in July **Reading West MP Matt Rodda** brought up in Parliament his support for TAR's gaol project and asked that the Government get behind this.

The charitable objects for the company to be called **Reading Gaol Arts, Museum and Theatre Company** were drawn up. Financial plans were also worked on. The company was registered in November.

Also in November, Foster Wilson shared their **first draft of the gaol feasibility report** with TAR. This report also had input from **Trafalgar Entertainment**. Feedback is still being compiled before a summary can be circulated.

In the background all throughout 2018, **TAR board members** were meeting regularly with potential investors, the university and Reading Borough Council. We also had continued conversations with theatres, industry professionals and theatre companies up and down the country in order to ascertain what sort of venue(s) are most successful.

The latest news is that the council has had a pre-application from the **MoJ**, a move prior to putting the site on the market, and also received the draft feasibility study. Talks are ongoing and further developments will be realised early in 2019. We also hope to have another forum in the spring.

TAR remains committed to seeing a **new theatre for Reading** and we hope to see our plans leap ahead in the New Year.

Meanwhile we would like to thank all of you for your support and ongoing enthusiasm for our aims.

We would also like to thank our supporters **Harrison Clark Rickerbys, penta hotel, Chris Barber**, a Reading resident and owner of CB Food Solutions for advice, **and Gareth Paine accountants**.

You can also check our website **www.theatre-reading.co.uk**.

Finally have a merry Christmas and a prosperous new Year. Let's hope 2019 sees us still looking at the stars!

THE TAR BOARD

Melvin Benn, Tim Burrage, Sally Swift, Trish Steinhardt, Toby Davies. Executive secretary: Hilary Scott