

Historic England response to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Conservation, Places and People on the value of the historic environment and how it can help to promote growth and regeneration.

Introduction

1 Historic England is the Government's adviser on all matters relating to the historic environment in England. We improve people's lives by protecting and championing our shared heritage. We are responsible for the stewardship of the National Heritage Collection of over 400 state-owned historic sites and monuments across England, which English Heritage cares for under a licence from us that runs until 2023. We are pleased to submit this evidence that relates to an issue that sits at the core of our function.

2 The heritage sector includes a wide range of private, third sector and public organisations at national and local levels, including businesses large and small, visitor attractions, membership organisations, research associations, local and community volunteer groups, all contributing educational and volunteering opportunities, social cohesion and well-being benefits.

3 The nation's heritage is an engine for good growth and plays a significant role in society, enhancing our well-being and quality of life.

- The **heritage sector is important economically**, producing a total GVA of £31 billion and providing over 464,000 jobs. In 2018, heritage-related construction activities generated £7.1 billion in GVA in England employing over 100,000 people. Heritage attracts millions of domestic and international tourists each year, generating 218.4m visits contributing tourist spend of £17.0bn.
- **Local heritage has a positive impact on people's quality of life.** 93% of residents say that local heritage raises their quality of life, while 80% think local heritage makes their area a better place to live¹.
- **Heritage can make a significant contribution to combatting climate change**, through re-use of buildings and managing our designed landscapes.

4. Historic England is also responsible for the development and implementation of the £95m [High Streets Heritage Action Zones](#) programme (HSHAZ) that will see 68 high streets regenerated, placing heritage and local character at the heart of what they offer visitors.

Heritage and the high street

5. Heritage plays an important role in the success of local businesses and of high streets:

- **Heritage density is positively and strongly related to the overall movement of businesses into an area.** Research shows that heritage assets are important 'pull' factors influencing business location decisions;

¹ This is based on a telephone survey of approximately 4,200 residents in 12 research locations which had received National Lottery Heritage Funding (previously HLF) all around Britain (NLHF 2015 and Britain thinks, 2015b).

- **Historic places are increasingly attractive to businesses.** Since 2012 the number of listed buildings occupied by a brand has increased by 154%;
- **Heritage influences the location choices of businesses.** One in four businesses in a survey of 122 businesses that had received investment in the historic environment agreed that the historic environment is an important factor in deciding where to locate;
- **Heritage enhances business opportunities.** In a telephone survey of 509 businesses located in listed buildings, 62% of the respondents replied that the historic nature of their building improved their business; and
- £1.7m of public money, invested in the heritage of the Cathedral Quarter (high street) in Derby, resulted in the reduction of the local vacancy rate from 40% (2008) to 0% (2017) and the creation of 42 new jobs. **The high street won Best City Location in the Great British High Street Awards in 2016.**

Our answers to the questions posed are outlined below and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss the issues these raise directly with the APPG.

- *What evidence exists of the economic, social and environmental benefits from the conservation, care and regeneration of historic buildings and areas, across the UK?*

6. There is a raft of evidence that supports the economic, social and environmental contribution of heritage. Much of this is outlined in the series of Heritage Counts², published by Historic England on behalf of the heritage sector. These reports evidence:

- The heritage sector is an important source of economic prosperity and growth, contributing a total Gross Value Added of £31bn;
- Heritage is an important employer, being responsible for 464,000 jobs;
- Heritage attracted (pre-Pandemic) millions of domestic and international tourists each year, with 218.4m visits, spending £17bn;
- Heritage has an important role to play in our individual mental well-being;
- Visiting heritage can ease the challenges associated with dementia and Alzheimer's;
- A study of 1,731 adults in England showed that there is a clear consensus for preservation, with 87% agreeing that finding a new use for historic buildings is better than demolishing them; and
- Traditional buildings tend to heat up and cool down more slowly than their modern counterparts. Their capacity to even out changes in temperatures and humidity can be beneficial in terms of both energy efficiency and comfort

- *How can the conservation and regeneration of historic areas contribute to the wider agendas of governments across the UK to equity and 'levelling up', along with their focus on high streets revival?*

7. The regeneration of historic areas has an important role to play in supporting government's key levelling up agenda. This fact is recognised by government in both Towns Fund, where the

² <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/heritage-counts/>

importance of heritage to places is recognised in the Prospectus³ and in the direct investment in historic high streets (including £92m for Historic England’s High Streets Heritage Action Zones) as part of the wider Future High Street Fund programme. Given that this contribution has been recognised in this way, it is worth clarifying how this contribution is manifested.

8. Everywhere has a unique heritage which is reflected in buildings and places. **Every place has the potential to put heritage at the centre of programmes of regeneration to enhance that local distinctiveness in ways that attracts both people and investment** (see the answers below).

9. New, unpublished research from Historic England and the British Council shows that heritage can support “inclusive growth”. Using case studies, the research provides concrete examples of cultural heritage as a driver for inclusive growth. In Great Yarmouth, for example, unskilled people continue to be trained in restoration work long after the end of the initial project, bringing both skills and places back to life. In Nottingham, gathering the stories of black and Caribbean miners in Britain allows an untold narrative to weave itself into well-told ones, fostering new exhibitions that bring both new and repeat footfall to an established museum. Heritage can be a contributor to inclusive growth but it is not automatically the case. Best practice in the sector involves implementation of strategies for achieving inclusive growth.

“When people engage with, learn from, value and promote their cultural heritage, it can contribute to both social and economic development. Heritage in this way can be a source of sustainability, a way to embed growth in the fabric of society and to celebrate the past in today’s evolving world.” (British Council, 2017).

10. There exists, however, barriers that have historically meant that these solutions are easier to achieve in some places than in others. For example, every building has a critical viability point which varies considerably from building to building and from location to location. In places where property prices are lower, that viability point will be harder to achieve. Where the cost of repair and conversion is greater than the completed end value the property will require intervention of some form i.e. grant or enabling development assistance. Whilst such barriers exist, there are steps that could be taken to support places overcome them.

Community engagement

11. Engaging communities in the process of change can help build momentum behind the regeneration of places and buildings. Community ownership sometimes provides the catalyst for positive change, but ownership is not the only model of community engagement. The creation of local lists can give communities a more meaningful role in the stewardship of their local heritage and therefore greater ownership in how it changes.

12. The success of masterplans and design codes often rely on the extent and depth of public engagement. Whatever the ‘access points’ for community engagement, it is important that it is more accessible and so proposals included in the Planning White Paper for an increased use of online solutions is to be welcomed (though this should be part of wider engagement strategies).

Fiscal incentives

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/924503/20191031_Towns_Fund_prospectus.pdf

13. The heritage sector has long advocated for zero rated VAT for repair and maintenance of the built historic environment. Reducing VAT on heritage assets can have direct short term and long-term impacts on the recovery of the sector:

- VAT cut on home improvements could generate £15bn in new taxes, create 95,000 jobs and unlock £1bn green revolution ([FMB, 2019](#)).
- VAT relief will encourage retention, repair, maintenance and retrofit, and enable the nation to meet our 2050 carbon targets.

14. There is also the potential to look at other ways to incentivise the renovation of historic buildings through fiscal reform. For example the [Business Premises Renovation Allowance](#) was a 100% tax allowance for certain spending when converting or renovating unused qualifying business premises in a disadvantaged area. Whilst there were issues with this specific allowance a more imaginative look at incentives could prove hugely beneficial.

De-risking development - data

15. The emphasis on the improved use of data in the recent Planning White Paper presents the heritage sector with real opportunities relating to how we better use evidence and how we utilise technologies to improve data standards and use. For examples, in terms of archaeology, we are looking at mapping solutions to maximise awareness and making better use of existing knowledge.

- *Is there a case for further increasing the level of investment in the heritage and infrastructure of places outside London and the south east of England to assist the ‘levelling up’ of lagging regional economies?*

16. Further investment in areas outside of London and the South East would serve to support those parts of the country ‘lagging’ behind in terms of productivity. This was a factor in the distribution of funding for Historic England’s High Streets Heritage Action Zones programme, which targeted funding towards those areas where the need is most acute:

	% of total applicants (HSHAZ)	% of successful applicants by place (HSHAZ)	% of successful applicants by grant value (HSHAZ)
North West	18%	21%	20%
North East and Yorkshire	14%	18%	20%
Midlands	24%	18%	19%
South West	16%	15%	16%
London and South East	20%	18%	17%
East of England	8%	10%	8%

17. However, much of the literature on levelling up highlights the fact that it is not an issue that can be resolved just through a redistribution on public spending.

- *How can regeneration of the historic environment contribute to and interact with efforts to revive local economies in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent recession?*

18. Regeneration of the historic environment can make a significant contribution to the recovery of places and the communities in them. Rather than cause new problems for our places, the pandemic has served to catalyse existing threats that many were already grappling with.

High streets and town centres

19. In our towns and cities, changes to shopping habits were resulting in reduced footfall on our high streets, which in turn was leading to increased vacancies and a marked degradation in the built fabric of these important places. The pandemic and resulting lockdown massively increased this problem⁴. Pre-pandemic, interventions had been developed to help high streets adapt to these changes in behaviour. Among these was Historic England's High Streets Heritage Action Zones programme. This positioned the importance of environmental quality, in particular historic character, as a key tool for attracting people back to these spaces for reasons other than shopping. As Covid-19 has accelerated many of the problems high streets have been experiencing, the need for these responses has been increased and in fact we need to scale up these solutions.

20. There is a need to either increase investment in those pre-pandemic schemes, or develop ways in which the learning from these schemes can be effectively shared. In their analysis on high streets and the effect of Covid-19, the Institute of Place Management (co-chair of the High Streets Taskforce) identified the following step that would aid the post pandemic recovery:

"The utilization of culture and heritage to bring people back to high streets. Steps will need to be taken to bring people back to these spaces and the cultural and heritage offer will be important in making that happen. Depending on how long social distancing rules might be in place, events programs will have a role to play." (<http://blog.placemanagement.org/2020/04/02/the-time-to-act-is-now-a-framework-for-post-covid-19-recovery-for-our-towns-and-cities/>)

21. **The expansion of schemes like High Streets Heritage Action Zones, which includes an embedded Cultural Programme and targets bringing people back to these places, can play an important role in supporting the recovery of high streets and we would ask the APPG to consider this.**

Parks and green spaces

22. Evidence⁵ shows that there existed an inequity of access to green space across communities and amongst different demographic groups. Over the summer, during the pandemic, this was brought into stark relief as we witnessed overcrowding issues in our urban green spaces⁶. **We would urge the APPG to examine closely the importance of local and big parks and green spaces for communities as highlighted by the pressure placed on them during lockdown.** Many of these parks and green spaces are of historic interest, even if not designated as registered sites, and there is an opportunity for the Group to work in partnership with the new APPG for Public Parks on this shared issue.

⁴ <https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/covid-19/footfall-in-england-covid-19-and-reopening-of-retail/>

⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/accesstogardensandpublicgreenspaceingreatbritain>;
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904439/improving_access_to_greenpace_2020_review.pdf

⁶ <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/will-covid-19-make-parks-even-less-accessible/>

23. Beyond urban areas, other historic parks and garden properties have been deeply affected by the pandemic. Smaller properties dependent on events such as weddings are facing serious funding issues. Beyond the immediate financial issues, 2021 and 2022 are likely to be precarious for some properties (and organisations). It is worth reflecting on the fact that these pandemic impacts come at a time when future funding like agri-environment schemes is veiled in uncertainties.

- *What evidence exists that historic buildings provide flexible, low rental space for start-up businesses, social enterprises and community facilities, thereby helping to stimulate local economies, particularly in more peripheral neighbourhoods?*

24. As Heritage Counts 2018 identified, there are 142,000 businesses operating in listed buildings across England.⁷ This figure indicated an increasing interest from the commercial sector for locating in historic buildings (a Heritage Lottery Fund report concluded the figure was 130,000 in 2013). Clearly there is value for businesses in locating themselves in buildings that possess historic character and interest. Many of these will be office spaces - as a growing number of firms are no longer tied to traditional office spaces, historic buildings and places offer something different.

25. This theme was explored in a paper commissioned by Historic England from Ramidus Consulting in February 2018⁸. The overriding purpose of the commission was to explore and discuss the potential for agile working in historic buildings. The paper was able to point to evidence of the importance of 'ambience' of an area in when and how businesses choose buildings to occupy. It also lists different attributes, inherent in historic buildings, that serve as attractors for businesses. These include:

- Caché – a result of their rarity value, their general appearance, and often their location;
- Alternative style – historic buildings can express a positive impression of those that occupy them;
- Community – by their physical characteristics, they can engender a sense of business community; and
- Quality – historic buildings tend to be built with structures material that convey quality (they have, by their definition, stood the test of time).

- *How has heritage regeneration helped to boost the image and social cohesion of the areas they are located in, attracting investment and providing a catalyst for reversing economic decline?*

26. Heritage makes places special and attracts and attaches people to place. Yet **the value of heritage and heritage-led regeneration is not fully reflected within our current economic system and economic policies**. This is because heritage assets and services are often not fully traded in competitive markets. Heritage has so called non-use values which are not traded in markets but that are critical to the quality of our lives. Heritage tells the story of who we are and connects us to

⁷ <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2018/hc2018-heritage-in-commercial-use/>

⁸ <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/research/agile-working-historic-buildings/>

people, provides us with a shared identity and collective memories; it helps create the area's identity.⁹

27. New evidence from Demos (2020)¹⁰, demonstrates that people in towns are divided with diametrically opposing views on what the future of the places they live should look like post COVID-19. However, critically where heritage is concerned, people are united and they are jointly clear in their message: over 70% want their towns to retain their historic character and not have too many new buildings; 76% want town centres that are less anonymous and with more independent shops and 76% want to attract more traditional High Street type shops. **Heritage is a rare uniting factor identified in this very thorough research piece.**

28. In the wake of COVID-19, now more than ever we need to be able capture the competitive advantages of heritage in the regeneration and recovery of our cherished local economies. **We need to move beyond purely market based transactions in what and how we define economic development opportunity, and we need to be inclusive in our approaches to reflect the preferences of local people and the energy that local communities can bring to the regeneration of their special places.**

29. We have numerous examples of where this has happened, in particular from Historic England's Engines of Prosperity: new uses for old mills publication¹¹. Textile mills were the original Northern Powerhouse. From the late 18th century onwards, they drove forward the industrial revolution. They triggered technical innovation, stimulated new trade and transformed the transport network. Silk, cotton and woollen production shaped the landscape, economy and communities of Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and West Yorkshire. However, with the 20th century decline in national textile manufacturing, many of these monumental and characterful buildings face uncertain futures. However, research commissioned by Historic England showed how they could be the powerhouses for growth in the 21st century. That research showed how their capacity to accommodate new uses, attract investment in areas wide regeneration could create jobs, accommodate homes and businesses and play a hugely positive role in forging community identity, creating vibrant and exciting places for people to live and work.

30. Away from the north, we can point to further examples like the regeneration of Margate. One of England's earliest and foremost seaside resorts, Margate became a magnet for day trippers and holiday makers during the 19th and much of the 20th century, but by the end of the 20th century a lack of investment, poor quality accommodation and outdated and dilapidated facilities all contributed to its demise. Historic England, working in partnership with Thanet District Council and others, managed to more than £1.5 million in additional funding for heritage related projects in the town. Today Margate is a characterful place of narrow streets and historic buildings with very high occupancy rates. Many of the shop fronts have been renewed to historic patterns and the public realm improved.

⁹ <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2020/heritage-and-society-2020/>

¹⁰ <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/The-Future-of-Towns-Report.pdf>

¹¹ <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/engines-of-prosperity-new-uses-old-mills/>

- *How can the care, repair and regeneration of the historic environment help to meet the UK's commitment to sustainable development, including cutting emissions to net zero by avoiding the use and waste of scarce resources associated with demolition and redevelopment?*

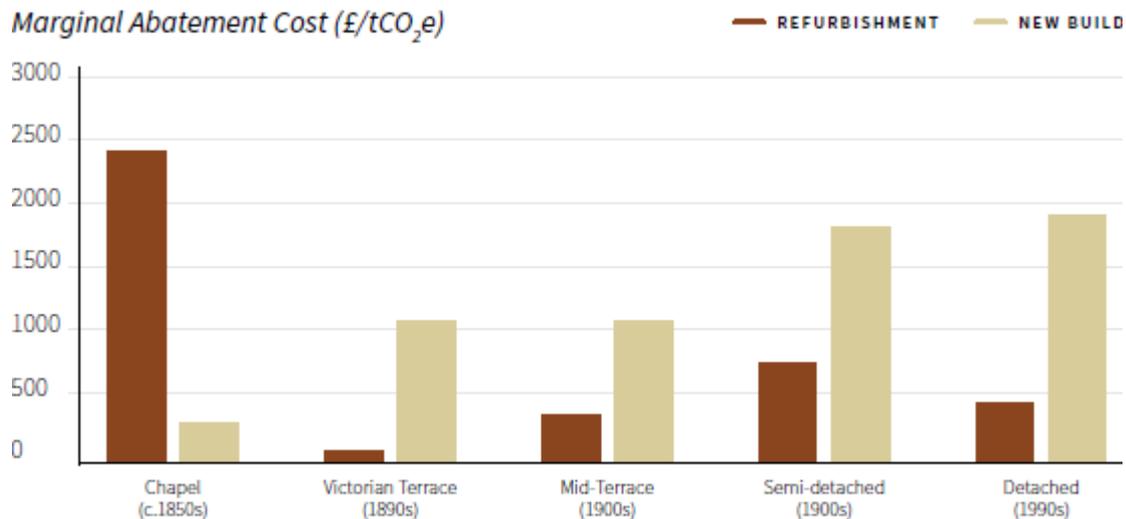
31. **Heritage is an underestimated contributor to a low carbon economy.** Conservation is defined as “the prevention of wasteful use of a resource”. Through the conservation of heritage assets we reduce waste, we recycle and re-use materials, we elongate the lifespans of assets and we reduce the demand for new, carbon producing goods. This applies particularly to the built historic environment which accounts for a huge proportion of our current building stock. Heritage assets provide valuable homes, workspaces and leisure spaces: 20% of all homes in the UK are historic (built over 100 years ago); over 48% of our retail stock is historic (pre-1919) as are 33% of all our offices (VOA data in Whitman et al.2016). This is significant and important. **By reusing these assets to their maximum capacity we can meet the evolving needs of our society and at the same time reduce the pressures for new products, new materials and new high carbon production processes.**

32. Repairing, reusing and retrofitting old buildings is more labour intensive than constructing new buildings and results in the creation of more jobs. It has been estimated that for every €1 million invested in energy renovation of buildings, an average of 18 jobs are created in the EU (Wade, 2020). This is roughly equivalent to the number of new jobs created per £1 million of UK Government grant funding invested in new innovation sectors such as biotechnology, medical equipment engineering, high-tech manufacturing (Wade, 2020).

33. Research shows that when a typical historic building – the Victorian Terrace- is sympathetically refurbished and retrofitted, it will emit less carbon by 2050 than a new building¹². Demolishing a historic building and replacing it with a new building can result in greater carbon emissions by 2050. If we reuse what is already here we can avoid carbon emissions.

34. We can achieve greater emissions reductions at lower cost if we prioritise retrofit and refurbishment over building new. Marginal abatement costs (MAC), in general, measures the cost of reducing one more unit of pollution. MAC results show that the cost of achieving the lower emissions associated with New-Build is much higher than the costs associated with refurbishments.

¹² <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2019/hc2019-re-use-recycle-to-reduce-carbon/>



SOURCE: DUFFY, NERGUTI & PURCELL, 2020

35. Retrofitting historic buildings results in carbon savings and reduces the social cost of carbon. Modelled evidence of retrofitting scenarios for the built historic environment demonstrate that retrofitting and refurbishing 25% of all historic buildings over a 25-year period will reduce carbon by 15.5 million tCO₂ and result in £2.5 billion savings in offsetting climate change (Historic England, 2020).

36. Heritage led regeneration that focuses on upgrading and investing in heritage assets will support the green recovery and the low carbon economy.

- *How can conservation-led regeneration of the historic environment help to promote sustainable patterns of development, striking the right balance between economic growth and social equity, while also curbing wasteful emissions?*

37. The conservation, use and re-use and regeneration of our precious heritage assets exemplify the fundamental principles of the circular economy. Shifting towards a more circular economy will mean we optimise our use of resources within the economy by increasing the duration of a product's useful life and ensuring when a product has reached the end of its life its resources can be productively used repeatedly, so creating further value. (Defra 2020)

38. Historic England, heritage partners and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) have recently launched a culture and heritage capital framework (DCMS, 2021; Historic England 2021), with the aim to enable a more sustainable pattern of development that considers the social and environmental dimension as well as the economic and financial. By adopting this approach we hope to move towards a system that better recognises what people value in the regeneration process.

39. Academic and empirical research shows heritage has significant economic regeneration and socio-economic benefits. Historic England's own research¹³ has shown that for 69% of commercial listed building occupiers "Historic buildings give a positive image to customers and clients", and

¹³ <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2018/heritage-and-the-economy-2018/>

similarly 62% of the respondents replied that the historic nature of their building improved their business. Additionally, Heritage enhances business opportunities. In a telephone survey of 509 businesses located in listed buildings, 62% of the respondents replied that the historic nature of their building improved their business.

40. Moving towards a circular economy means working harder to optimise the productivity of our existing heritage assets and capturing the value of what is already here. The adaptive reuse of heritage can be a source of regional regeneration and competitive advantage ([Gustaffson, 2019](#)). The value of heritage led regeneration has been identified in a variety of independent studies:

- Research by Kourtit and Nijkam (2018) published in the Journal of Regional Studies, shows that creative actors are attracted by cultural and heritage assets because of their inspiring effect. “Public investments, aimed at enhancing the attractiveness and quality of cultural-heritage assets, are fundamental for flourishing, vibrant cultural-creative complexes and for cultural led development.”
- Heritage density is positively and strongly related to the overall movement of businesses into an area. Using cross sectional and longitudinal local authority data, researchers conclude that heritage assets are important ‘pull’ factors influencing business location decisions (TBR 2016).
- Using the historic environment as an asset, and giving it new life, has also been one of the cornerstones of the economic and social revival of our towns and cities” (Deloitte 2017).
- The renovation and restoration of historic buildings creates new jobs. In 2017 the National Lottery Heritage Fund reported the findings of an impact evaluation of grants distributed between 2002 and 2007. The findings show that 60% of the projects led to the creation of new jobs and 22% reported regeneration impacts. By enhancing the character and distinctiveness of their local areas through the renovation, restoration and improvement of heritage assets, places were seen as more inviting and attracted further investment.
- Places that are aesthetically pleasing have an attractive power that encourages people to congregate there. (National Trust, 2017)
- The built historic environment influences perceptions of the quality and attractiveness of place. 68% of the public agree that historic buildings are built to a high standard compared with only 27% agreeing with the same statement about new buildings. This evidence is based on a national omnibus survey of 1,043 adults across England in 2018. It found that amongst members of the public, older buildings convey a sense of ‘grandeur’ and longevity (YouGov 2018).
- Investing in the historic environment generates economic returns for local places. On average, £1 of public sector expenditure on heritage-led regeneration generates £1.60 additional economic activity over a ten year period. These findings are based on a weighted average of the benefit-cost ratio of cumulative net additional GVA to public sector costs (AMION and Locum Consulting, 2010).

41. There also exists empirical evidence of specific regeneration and heritage investment programmes also demonstrates the positive effects of heritage regeneration, and excellent example of which is the Piece Hall in Calderdale.

42. The Piece Hall is a grade I listed building, located in Calderdale, Halifax, West Yorkshire. Built in 1779, it is a rare architectural asset and a unique asset as the sole survivor of the great 18th century northern cloth halls. The Piece Hall closed for restoration in 2014 after securing a £22m joint funding programme (Chamberlain Walker, 2019). A detailed assessment of the economic impact found that overall the regeneration of the Piece Hall is estimated to have increased Calderdale's local GVA by £26 million since opening. This figure includes the direct and indirect economic contributions plus the non-use values and externalities. For every £1 of operating costs for The Piece Hall, the local economy benefits at least from £5.30. £3.30 is directly produced and £2.00 is indirectly generated by the Piece Hall (Chamberlain Walker, 2019).

43. The returns on heritage-led regeneration projects will often outstrip costs. Using a Transparent Economic Assessment model, in 2017 the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) conducted an ex-post evaluation of six case studies from NLHF's Heritage Grants Programme (2002-2007). The combined grant awarded to these six projects was £27.5m, the estimated GVA over 10 years is estimated at £84m which is a return of over three times what was originally invested. (National Lottery Heritage Fund, 2017).

- *What are the implications of the government's reforms to the English planning system, proposed in the planning white paper, for the conservation and regeneration of historic areas?*

44. The Planning White Paper (PWP) recognises the importance of the historic environment in continuing to shape the future of development in England, and the role that planning plays in its protection. It also recognises the role heritage can play in sustaining and regenerating historic places. We welcome the commitment, in the PWP, that robust protections will remain in place. **An understanding and appreciation of the historic environment is essential in shaping places for future generations.** Far from being a constraint, it is an economic driver, and is an opportunity and potential source of inspiration for new development.

45. However, we believe the references to the historic environment in the PWP are too in the narrow context of listed buildings or conservation areas rather than the usual understanding of historic environment which is made up of a whole range of designated and non-designated heritage assets, including archaeological remains and historic landscapes. The PWP also regards the historic environment as being in distinct areas capable of protection, rather than being interwoven into the fabric of our built and natural environment.

46. Whilst unintentional, if carried forward, this may result in missed opportunities to realise the historic environment's potential to contribute to the shaping and regeneration of places. Conservation of historic buildings and places is also an inherently sustainable activity, and the role that retaining and repairing historic buildings can play in combatting climate change was not sufficiently recognised in the PWP.

47. central element of the proposals in the PWP is a shift to a more area-based planning system (with Growth, Renewal and Protected areas), with potentially different forms of permissions in each (for example, in-principle/automatic permissions in some areas). It is also the intention that area-based plans are clearer and in-parts more binding; giving more certainty to developers and communities alike. It is essential that those plans are sufficiently evidence-based and are informed

by a full understanding of the historic environment, but also that the subsequent permission processes retain sufficient flexibility for the actual impacts of site-specific proposals to be assessed, or any other factors (such as non-designated archaeology) to be taken into account.

48. The increased use of more-automatic permissions, or permitted development, may have unintended impacts on the historic environment if appropriate control measures are not put in place.

49. The proposals in the PWP offer an opportunity for communities to engage more fully in the planning system and, with increased use of digital technology, to enable more informed plan and decision-making, as well as the creation of a more effective and efficient planning system.

50. We will continue to work with MHCLG, alongside the heritage sector, to ensure any reforms to planning system maintain, if not strengthen, protection of the historic environment, so it continues to play its important role in the conservation and regeneration of historic areas.

51. Our consultation response to the PWP is available [here](#).

- *What have been the impacts of cuts in local government to the capacity of planning departments to facilitate the conservation and regeneration of sensitive historic areas?*

52. **An informed local authority planning service is an essential protection for the distinctive character of the local historic environment, for securing the contribution of heritage to regeneration, and managing change to individual sites and buildings affected by proposed development, in the interests of the public.** Planning services fulfil this role most effectively when they have access to specialist advice in built environment conservation and archaeological advisory roles. Typically, though not exclusively, this is through heritage-trained staff in-house, or through service level agreements between authorities. Some, but not all heritage teams are based in the planning team within a local authority.

53. Cuts to local authority funding impact capacity in two ways. They feed through to reduction in staff numbers, whilst also putting pressure on resources for training and other professional development, so that staff experience lost through redundancies and retirement are not replaced. Together the loss of staff skills affect the capacity of the heritage specialists to advise the planning services on conservation and regeneration.

54. Historic England has been tracking the staffing numbers in local authority heritage teams since 2006. Between 2006 and 2018 the overall national picture was of a decrease in access to specialist staff of 35% in both conservation and archaeological specialist teams. In 2020 Historic England commissioned new research into staffing levels and the quantitative results are due shortly.

55. The 2020 research also provided the opportunity for qualitative feedback and responses indicated that, in addition to the decline in numbers, we have also seen a decline in skills and experience. This also represents a source of significant concern. Historic England, to maximise our ability to provide support for local authority heritage teams, will publish a new Local Authority prospectus later this year, developed with comment from the LGA, to gather in one place the range of support and services. We hope this will help support skills development, as it is a priority area for further attention.

- *How can post pandemic efforts to boost skills training support efforts to revive neglected crafts key to historic building conservation?*

56. In response to the pandemic, on the basis of survey evidence and discussion with the sector, Historic England quickly developed the Covid-19 Emergency Response Fund¹⁴ to offer a safety net to the 40% most vulnerable group of small craft and professional service businesses. This resulted in awards of £1.8 million to assist small businesses with major cash-flow problems and funding for projects which can be delivered in the short term, to stimulate economic activity.

57. Government went on to provide £1.57billion rescue package of which Historic England is helping to distribute to safeguard cultural and heritage organisations from the economic impact of COVID-19. Funds are being distributed through the Heritage Stimulus Fund and the Culture Recovery Fund for Heritage, which is administered in partnership with National Lottery Heritage Fund. This funding is providing lifeline grants to ensure that jobs and access to heritage in local communities are protected in the short term, although further investment is likely to be required if the heritage construction industry is to be sustained fully until the market recovers.

58. Research continues to show that longstanding shortages of craft skills are felt across the construction industry, and very acutely in the heritage sector. This is because construction is a fragmented industry dominated by small and medium sized enterprises (SME) that struggle to create the apprenticeship and vocational training opportunities that the industry needs for sustainable and productive growth. Post-pandemic efforts to boost skills training should establish sustainable models that overcome this key challenge. As well as making use of existing vocational standards and qualifications, they must allow SMEs to deliver vocational training flexibly, when and where they have capacity, and in a way that clearly contributes to individual career progression. SMEs should be able to quickly and simply offer short term placements, open sites up for educational visits and engage in online sessions. This model would require a central organisation to recruit participants very openly, co-ordinate their training, and ensure they were able to exploit the opportunities afforded by SMEs to progress their own careers.

- *How can the conservation and restoration of historic parks and other important green spaces contribute to efforts to encourage exercise and thereby promote health and well-being?*

59. The value of our historic parks and open spaces has really come to the fore during the pandemic. They have been essential for providing safe places for people to exercise, engage with each other and with their local environment, helping to reduce the negative impact on their physical and mental well-being caused by the pandemic. People have reconnected with their local places and realised the value of the heritage on their doorstep.

60. Beyond this most recent reminder of their importance, there is a substantial body of evidence on the contribution that historic parks and other important spaces make to health and well-being. These are collated in the Communities and Local Government Select Committee Report¹⁵. More recently there is the comprehensive review undertaken by Public Health England

¹⁴ <https://historicengland.org.uk/coronavirus/culturerecoveryfund/closed-emergency-funds/resilience-grants/>

¹⁵ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmcomloc/45/4502.htm>

and Natural England. Of course, health and well-being are at the heart of the genesis of public parks, budget cuts in the 1980s led to a significant loss of many public park recreation facilities and parks found themselves competing for budgets (and land) with new local authority facilities like leisure centres. There is substantial scope to make more use of our public parks and this requires good standards of maintenance which helps attract people to make use of and enjoy their local parks.