Placing heritage at the heart of communities

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We compare the findings of our two £22m Great Place Schemes to learn how culture and heritage can drive positive change locally.

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Between August 2016 and March 2018, our Great Place Scheme funded 16 projects in England and 18 projects in the devolved nations. We funded the projects in England in partnership with Arts Council England and Historic England.

The aim of the schemes was to help cultural and heritage organisations make a step-change in how they work together, with organisations in other sectors, policy makers and the wider community. We wanted to see culture and heritage contribute more to meeting local social and economic objectives.

Most of these projects have now completed. We commissioned BOP Consulting to evaluate the success of the England scheme and The Audience Agency to evaluate the Nations scheme during their delivery.

What we found

There were many similarities in the findings of projects' experiences, successes and challenges across the England and Nations schemes, including:

- all aspects of heritage and how it can be repositioned need to be considered at the start of the process
- strong cross-sector partnerships are crucial to ensuring a range of skills and experience and strong decision making
- heritage is a good mechanism to bring people together – at both policy and community level

- heritage has potential to help deliver different types of strategies, including improving wellbeing, skills and employability
- the projects saw an increase of pride in, and 'ownership' of, community heritage, as well as an increase of diversity of audiences engaging with heritage
- the pandemic provided opportunities for greater learning, particularly around digital
- ongoing investment, support and time is required to deliver longer-term visions that centre heritage

In the devolved nations, projects were able to lay the foundation for strategic change, but there were mixed results for how heritage has been incorporated into local plans and strategies.

However, in England, projects were more successful in driving change. Collectively they were able to embed heritage and culture in:

- 10 cultural strategies
- six health and wellbeing strategies
- two mental health strategies
- four children and young people strategies

For both the England and Nations projects, legacies have been put in place to continue the work started through the Great Place Scheme.

Recommendations

There was much commonality across both reports about what could help drive positive change for places around the UK, including:

- providing a clear definition of place
- support and advice for projects to build strategic partnerships
- allowing projects to adapt and change as local and national circumstances change
- more funding for smaller, local projects – including micro-grant distribution – that contribute to wider place strategies
- facilitating the sharing of knowledge and good practice, both between projects and within partnerships
- supporting projects to set clear targets, establish baselines, identify outcomes and evaluate their success
- encouraging and supporting applicants to be even more ambitious

Eilish McGuinness, Chief Executive of the Heritage Fund said: “Since the Great Place Schemes began, the importance of placemaking has only increased. Our investment across the UK has demonstrated how culture and heritage can play a central part in making thriving places to live, work and visit.

“Our targeted support for places previously under-served by our funding continues to be a key priority in our Strategic Funding Framework 2019-2024. And as we continue to recover from the pandemic, we’ve prioritised funding for projects that demonstrate the value of heritage and support local economies, places and communities.

“We are committed to helping the sector adapt and thrive again. Ensuring that our investment delivers real impact for heritage, connects with policy makers and communities, and drives positive change for local places, is a key part of that commitment.”

Our research and evaluation



Thriving Places