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The Heritage Places Strategic Initiative: Interim Evaluation Report, Year Two

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1.1 Executive Summary

1.1.1 Overview

Year Two of the Initiative (January 2025 to January 2026) **builds on foundational work in Year One**, with **both years** together representing **a critical formative stage for long-term success**. The first tranche of Heritage Places (Tranche One) remained focused on scoping work, relationship-building and strategic alignment - hallmarks of Year One delivery - but at increasing depth and breadth to draw partners and communities closer to determining the long-term priorities and programme for Heritage Places and heritage-led placemaking. A second tranche of six Heritage Places (Tranche Two) was also announced in autumn 2025.

As such, this interim evaluation assesses progress primarily in terms of the **foundations for long-term change**, testing the Initiative's assumptions and early direction of travel, rather than expecting large-scale delivery and widespread impact.

1.1.2 Initiative aims

The Heritage Places Strategic Initiative (the Initiative) is a ten-year, place-based investment (2023–2033) by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (the Heritage Fund) designed to embed heritage at the heart of local placemaking and long-term transformation. The Initiative has **four core aims**[1]:

- Target place-based investment that increases pride in place and connects communities and visitors with heritage.
- Increase the capacity of local heritage to maximise its contribution to places and communities and enhance the wide-ranging benefits it can bring.
- Create integrated and holistic schemes across the breadth of heritage, including, anchor institutions, cultural heritage, and the natural environment.
- Take a people-centred approach enabling everyone's heritage to be recognised.

1.1.3 Local context for delivery

Delivery in Year Two has taken place within a **complex, evolving and often challenging local operating context.** Many of the contextual factors identified in the Year One evaluation - such as variation in the scale and type of heritage need, levels of prior investment, the maturity of the heritage sector, and dispersed or complex geographies - continue to shape progress. However, Year Two has also seen **intensification of pressures and clearer differentiation between the Heritage Places.**

The **internal and external contexts for local authority lead organisations** remains a decisive influence. Financial constraints, recruitment challenges, internal restructures and the demands from managing multiple place-based funding programmes have constrained pace in several Places. **Political developments**, including Local Government Reorganisation and changes in local and mayoral leadership, have introduced uncertainty while in some cases accelerating decision-making. These dynamics have required lead organisations and Heritage Fund teams to balance long-term planning with heightened expectations for visible progress.

At the same time, there is stronger evidence in Year Two that **Heritage Places is actively shaping its local context**, not only responding to it. Scoping grants have contributed to strengthened policy environments in several Heritage Places, embedding heritage more firmly within new or updated local strategies. Heritage ecosystems are also broadening, with grassroots, creative and community-based

[1] **Heritage Places | The National Lottery Heritage Fund**

organisations becoming more visible and influential in shaping local heritage agendas.

1.1.4 Management and delivery of the Initiative

Year Two shows a **more confident and coordinated approach to delivery by the Heritage Fund**, particularly through Area and Nation teams increasingly familiar with the Initiative's flexibility and long-term horizon. Teams are planning more intentionally across whole Places, positioning early awards within emerging long-term pathways rather than as standalone interventions. Structured knowledge-sharing and peer learning are supporting more consistent practice across regions.

The Initiative's **decentralised, relationship-led management model** is widely regarded as a strength. Area and Nation teams' close engagement with lead organisations, contextual knowledge and ability to adapt their level of involvement have been crucial to progress, particularly in complex or capacity-constrained contexts. The Initiative's flexibility - supported by mechanisms such as fast-track routes and additional capacity investment - has enabled responsive delivery where conditions allowed.

However, Year Two also highlights **persistent challenges**. Capacity constraints within both lead organisations and Heritage Fund teams continue to limit pace. In addition, inconsistent guidance to local partners in the Heritage Places - particularly regarding lead organisation roles, project pipeline management and endorsement processes - has created uncertainty and administrative strain. While relational support is strong, clearer and more consistent expectations – in relation to lead organisations as well as the role of Area and Nation teams - would further strengthen delivery confidence and coherence across the Initiative.

1.1.5 Increasing the capacity of local heritage to maximise its contribution to places and communities

By the end of Year Two, there is **clear progress in strengthening the capacity of local heritage systems**, though uneven across Places reflecting different starting points and contexts. Scoping and early delivery work has significantly deepened understanding of local heritage ecosystems, community and heritage needs, and opportunities for systemic change. Lead organisations and partners are better placed to identify where heritage can contribute to wider objectives such as regeneration, wellbeing, climate resilience and local economic development.

Capacity gains are evident at multiple levels. Community and voluntary sector organisations are increasingly engaged, better networked and more confident to take part in heritage activity. Training, new roles, volunteer recruitment and community grants are strengthening organisational capability and creating pathways toward larger-scale work. Cross-sector partners are also beginning to recognise heritage as a strategic lever rather than a standalone agenda.

Despite these gains, **capacity remains a critical constraint**. Local authority pressures and short-term staffing arrangements limit continuity and organisational memory, particularly given the Initiative's long horizon. Sustained attention to capacity needs - both within Places and within the Heritage Fund - is therefore essential to maintain momentum and translate foundations into long-term impact.

1.1.6 Encouraging a people-centred approach enabling everyone's heritage to be recognised

Evidence from Year Two shows **meaningful early progress toward more inclusive, people-centred heritage practice**. Across many Places, organisations are changing how they work with communities - engaging earlier, using more inclusive methods, and collaborating with a wide range of voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations. These shifts represent a move away from institution-centred models toward participatory, community-responsive approaches.

Skills, confidence and organisational culture are also evolving. Staff, volunteers and trustees are gaining experience of co-production, working with diverse communities and adapting practice based on lived experience. Heritage activity is increasingly being shaped with, rather than for, communities, surfacing stories, identities and forms of heritage that were previously under-represented.

While community ownership or management of heritage assets remains limited at this stage, early examples point to longer-term potential. Overall, Year Two indicates a **clear trajectory toward a more inclusive heritage system**, which a continued focus in the Places on people-centred practices can help to sustain and scale over time.

1.1.7 Creating integrated and holistic schemes across the breadth of heritage

By Year Two, the Initiative is beginning to support **more integrated and holistic approaches to heritage-led placemaking,** though maturity varies across the Places. Several Heritage Places are embedding heritage across wider local authority functions- such as planning, regeneration, tourism, environment and youth services - reflecting a growing understanding of heritage as part of interconnected place systems.

Work across the portfolio spans the **full breadth of heritage**, including natural landscapes, cultural memory, industrial heritage, civic buildings and community-defined heritage. The Initiative's flexibility is enabling Places to blend scoping, engagement, testing and early delivery, supported by emerging governance structures and cross-sector networks. Overall, the direction of travel is positive. **Year Two shows early formation of holistic, place-responsive models**, with greater integration expected as delivery accelerates.

1.1.8 Increasing pride in place and connecting communities and visitors with heritage

Direct impacts on pride in place and belonging remain **early and localised**, which is consistent with the Initiative's focus on groundwork rather than large-scale public-facing projects at this stage. Nonetheless, there are **promising early indications**.

Participation in Heritage Places activity is substantial, demonstrating strong engagement and growing attachment between people and local heritage. Early and imminent restorations of physical heritage assets which are valued by communities provide tangible foundations for future pride-related outcomes. The Initiative is also contributing to national and international recognition of local heritage, which plays an important symbolic role in civic pride.

Case studies highlight qualitative shifts in pride in place and connection to heritage. Participants report greater optimism about the future of historic high streets, areas and places, and increased belonging and pride. Volunteers describe a renewed attachment to local places. Local leaders observed heritage's growing role in community confidence and identity. Across several Places, heritage is also becoming more visible within public spaces, cultural initiatives and local narratives.

Overall, while pride-related outcomes are at an early stage, **Year Two shows that Heritage Places is creating the conditions in which pride can grow**, through deeper engagement, inclusive participation, visible heritage activity and renewed recognition of local stories. As delivery moves into later phases, these foundations are expected to translate into broader impacts on pride in place and connection to heritage.

1.1.9 Recommendations

The Year Two evaluation confirms that the Heritage Places Strategic Initiative is on **a strong trajectory**, and the value of it's long-term, flexible and place-led design. However, it also highlights **actions which would strengthen delivery** over the next phase.

The recommendations encourage the Heritage Fund to **continue and strengthen what's working well**. This includes continuing to resource additional investment in Area and Nation teams to sustain high-quality engagement and developmental support, particularly in an increasingly complex delivery environment. The Heritage Fund is also recommended to sustain and extend flexible grant making. This includes single stage fast-track mechanisms for larger awards above £250K and targeted capacity investment for lead organisations, to enable iterative development, and respond to locally specific needs while preserving the Initiative's long-term strategic intent.

Recommendations also highlight **areas for improvement**. Lead organisations and Area and Nation teams continue to seek clearer guidance on place-level governance, pipeline management, endorsement processes and how responsibilities are shared in practice. A central recommendation is therefore to address ongoing uncertainty about roles, expectations and responsibilities within the Initiative. The Heritage Fund is also encouraged to provide further clarity on what the ten-year timeframe means, particularly whether 2033 represents a completion point for delivery or a milestone by which transformational schemes should be securely underway.

Overall, **the recommendations signal a shift in emphasis: from establishing the Initiative, to sharpening its implementation, strengthening clarity, and actively managing the conditions for delivery over the remaining years**. Addressing these issues will help ensure that the Initiative's long-term, place-led ambitions are supported by commensurately robust systems, guidance and resourcing.

1.2 Introduction

1.2.1 Overview of the Heritage Places Strategic Initiative

1.2.1.1 Initiative aims and rationale

The Heritage Places Strategic Initiative ("the Initiative") is a long-term investment (2023–2033) of at least £200 million by The National Lottery Heritage Fund ('the Heritage Fund'), supporting up to twenty Heritage Places ('the Places') across the UK.

As a flagship element of the Heritage Fund's Heritage 2033 strategy, it seeks to embed heritage at the centre of local placemaking to strengthen pride in place, improve the condition of heritage assets, and catalyse long-term transformative change in the Places.

Specifically, **the Initiative aims to:**

- Target place-based investment that **increases pride in place and connects communities and visitors with heritage.**
- **Increase the capacity of local heritage to maximise its contribution to places and communities** and enhance the wide-ranging benefits it can bring.
- **Create integrated and holistic schemes across the breadth of heritage**, including, anchor institutions, cultural heritage, and the natural environment.
- Take a people-centred approach **enabling everyone's heritage to be recognised**.

A key feature of the Initiative is its commitment to a **flexible, nonprescriptive approach**, enabling local organisations, leaders, and communities to identify needs and codevelop solutions. This openness is intended to foster stronger local relationships and ensure sustainable, local outcomes.

1.2.1.2 Initiative design

Four core **design drivers** underpin the Initiative, which reflect an intent to shift the Heritage Fund's relationship with the selected places towards long-term strategic partnership:

- **Targeted geographical investment**, enabling resources to be focused where they can achieve the greatest impact;
- A **long-term commitment** aligned with the Heritage 2033 strategy;
- **Holistic, integrated schemes**, supporting the breadth of heritage;
- And a **responsive, locally led approach** that empowers Places to define needs and solutions collaboratively with local stakeholders.

Leadership arrangements for the Initiative are flexible, and can change over time. While local authorities are seen as well positioned to act as **lead organisations in each Place**, due to their scale and accountability structures, alternative models are also encouraged, including third sector or co-led partnerships, to leverage community knowledge and grassroots engagement. **The Initiative is delivered by the Heritage Fund through its Area and Nation teams**, supported centrally by the Business Innovation and Insight Department. The Department develops guidance and tools such as Place Frameworks to help guide place-based investment, while place dashboards assist local, data-driven engagement and investment.

Delivery is structured in stages to allow the Places to build foundations before progressing to large scale activity. Between the 2023 and 2026 delivery period, £3m was allocated for planning and capacity-building in 2023/24, followed by £20m for lead organisation "scoping" grants in 2024/25 and £30m for early project

delivery in 2025/26. All **funding is delivered through National Lottery Heritage Grants ("Heritage Grants")** with the expectation that Places apply the Fund's four **Investment Principles** to guide long-term transformation locally.

1.2.1.3 Selection process

To select the Places and align with the Initiative's core drivers, the Heritage Fund developed the **Place Index.** The Place Index is designed to identify local authority areas showing the strongest balance of need, opportunity, and potential for place-based investment. It draws on four factor groups:

- Heritage at risk and in poor condition;
- Social and economic deprivation;
- Low levels of past Heritage Fund investment;
- Levels of other cultural or place-based funding in the area.

Local teams, Heritage Fund Committees, and the Heritage Fund Board of Trustees add qualitative judgement, incorporating local intelligence to address Index limitations, particularly around assessing potential and opportunity. Additional criteria considered included evidence of local leadership, strength of heritage and cultural infrastructure, the breadth of heritage and tourism ecosystems, and the ability to make a visible, measurable difference. This recognised that strong strategic capacity increases the likelihood of successful place-based investment.

1.2.1.4 The Heritage Places

In October 2023, the first tranche of nine Places (Tranche One) was announced, namely:

- **Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (ABC) Borough Council Area** (Northern Ireland);
- **County Durham** (North), focused on the towns of **Shildon and Newton Aycliffe**;
- **Glasgow City** (Scotland), focused on **Sauchiehall Street Culture and Heritage District** (SSCHD);
- **Leicester** (Midlands & East);
- **Medway** (London & South);
- **Neath Port Talbot** (Wales);
- **North East Lincolnshire** (North);
- **Stoke-on-Trent** (Midlands & East);
- **Torbay** (London & South).

In October 2025, the second tranche of six Places (Tranche Two) was announced, namely:

- **Barking and Dagenham** (London & South);
- **Belfast** (Northern Ireland), focused on Belfast Historic Waterfront;
- **Dudley** (Midlands & East);
- **Ynys Môn / Isle of Anglesey** (Wales);
- **Orkney Islands** (Scotland);
- **Tameside** (North).

1.2.2 The Evaluation of the Heritage Places Strategic Initiative

1.2.2.1 Evaluation approach

The Heritage Fund appointed Fortia Insight (formerly ERS Ltd.) in March 2024 to conduct **an independent evaluation of the Initiative and generate learning** for key stakeholders. The evaluation will design and

embed a framework to measure long-term impact through to 2033, with Fortia Insight leading this work between 2024 and 2027.

The evaluation is guided by **7 key evaluation questions**, defined by the Heritage Fund:

No.	Evaluation Question
EQ1:	What are the key contextual factors influencing successes and challenges of the Initiative?
EQ2:	What are the benefits and challenges of the Initiative timeframe?
EQ3:	What are the benefits and challenges of a strategic, place-based initiative, including the relationship with other place work supported by the Heritage Fund?
EQ4:	How are partnerships developing and maturing in the Heritage Places? Is this what was expected at the start of the Initiative?
EQ5:	How are new community organisations and diverse local sectors engaging and collaborating?
EQ6:	What are the key delivery factors influencing successes and challenges of the Initiative?
EQ7:	What has been the impact of the Initiative (split into four sub-questions covering each of the strategic aims)?

The evaluation is structured into **four strands**:

Strand 1 (Year 1)	Strand 2 (Year 1)	Strand 3 (Years 1-10)	Strand 4 (Years 1-10)
Evaluation Planning and Framework	*Theory of Change Development and Toolkit*	*Data Collection and Analysis*	*Peer to Peer Learning*

Strands One and Two are complete, providing the theoretical and practical foundations for delivery of the evaluation over the remaining years of the Initiative, up to 2033.

The evaluation questions cover the period 2023-2033. In each of the Initiative's **first three years**, the evaluation reports provide **formative insights and learning** against each of the questions based on the evidence gathered to date. The final year three report will provide conclusions against each question, based on the first three years of delivery. **As the Initiative matures (2027 onwards)**, the evaluation toolkit provides the means for the Heritage Fund and Initiative grantees to continue collecting data on the impact of the investment up to 2033, enabling **a summative impact assessment to be conducted when the Initiative ends**.

The Initiative Theory of Change sets out the causal pathway between the inputs, outputs and outcomes of Heritage Places based on a clear rationale about the role of heritage within transformational place-making (see *Appendix 1: The Heritage Places Strategic Initiative Theory of Change*). Its underlying assumptions describe the conditions that must be present for activities to result in intended outcomes, these are:

- Selection and onboarding processes reduce the risks and barriers to success (A1)
- The scale and longevity of funding is sufficient to incentivise a more collaborative, inclusive and ambitious approach among local partners and stakeholders (A2)
- Flexible, long-term funding enables more locally responsive projects that make a bigger contribution to local priorities (A3)
- There is a lead organisation in each place which has the requisite capacity and capability to coordinate and facilitate the Heritage Place (A4)

- Local Heritage Place partnerships receive the training, support and data/insights needed to fulfil their remit (A5)
- Heritage Place leads and partners communicate effectively at multiple levels to engage communities, stakeholders and placemakers (A6)
- Increased engagement and involvement of local authorities results in heritage being pushed up the agenda in local government decision making (A7)
- Intensified engagement with the voluntary, community, and social enterprise sector (VCSE) results in a more inclusive range of heritage projects (A8)
- Co-production with local people increases the likelihood they will sustain and deepen their connection to heritage over the longer-term (A9)
- Wider local strategies and plans that incorporate Heritage Place investment and activity are implemented as intended (A10)
- Local implementation is responsive to cultural shifts and changing context over time (A11)

1.2.2.2 Aims and structure of this report

This report is **the second of three reports** which will be produced during Fortia Insight's contract period, and follows a Year One evaluation report published in May 2025[2]. The first report explored the context for the Initiative, and findings from the first year of implementation (defined as October 2023 to January 2025). **This second report revisits the context and delivery of the Initiative** in year two (January 2025 to January 2026), to generate learning in relation to the evaluation questions concerning process and context, and to test the Initiative's assumptions. In addition, it **draws together an early impact evaluation** of the Initiative aligned to its four aims and the Initiative Theory of Change.

The report proceeds as follows:

- **Chapter 2: Local and Strategic Context in Year Two**, identifying any shifts in the context in year two, and the influence of context on year two approaches and progress.
- **Chapter 3: Delivery in Year Two,** exploring delivery in year two, including an overview of Initiative grantmaking and experiences of year two delivery from the perspectives of lead organisations and Heritage Fund staff.
- **Chapter 4: Emerging Impacts in Year Two,** drawing together evidence from a mix of sources to identify the strongest impacts to date from the Initiative across years one and two.
- **Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations**, responding to the key themes and findings from year two in order to draw conclusions and make recommendations for the Heritage Fund to enhance its place-based practice.
- **Appendices:** The Theory of Change for the Heritage Places Strategic Initiative (1), Year Two Evaluation Methods and Data Sources (2), Example Tranche Two Indicators for Selection (3)
- **Annex: Heritage Places Case Studies**, five case studies of the Tranche One Heritage Places, presented as a standalone report.

Each chapter begins by highlighting the key evaluation questions addressed, and the associated assumptions underpinning the theory of change which are most relevant.

[2] Heritage Places: year 1 evaluation report | The National Lottery Heritage Fund

1.2.2.3 Methodology

The year two evaluation employed a mixed methods approach encompassing primary qualitative research with lead organisations[3], and Heritage Fund teams involved in delivery of the Initiative, as well as primary quantitative and qualitative research via an e-survey of Initiative grantees[4]. The evaluation also consulted secondary monitoring and evaluation data provided by the Heritage Fund. Details of evaluation methods, data sources and participants are set out at *Appendix 2: Year Two Evaluation Methods and Data Sources.*

Image 1: Dagenham Girls Pipers, pictures as part of a collection held in Barking and Dagenham at the Archives and Local Studies Centre at Valence House.

[3] In October 2025, six new Tranche Two Heritage Places were announced. Primary research for this report was undertaken between October 2025 and February 2026. As such, evidence from the Tranche Two Heritage Places is limited to their experience of designation and early onboarding as a Heritage Place, reflecting the early stage of their development at the time of reporting, and prioritisation of their capacity on preparing initial scoping applications to the Heritage Fund.

[4] Grantees were sent the survey if they were at least six months into project delivery. 16 responses were received of a possible 18. It is important to note that survey data was captured mainly from grantees that had not yet completed their projects. Only one project (Glasgow City's scoping project) was completed, with activities still underway in the remaining 17 projects. Delivery timeframes at the point of survey data capture (January/February 2026) shows that, across all survey respondents, project delivery was 65 per cent complete. Outputs and outcomes reported are therefore indicative of this profile of project completion.

1.3 Local and strategic context

This section draws together an assessment of **the contextual conditions in year two which are most and least favourable to progress** in the Tranche One Places. It also includes findings about **what contextual conditions in year one and two reveal about critical assumptions in the Initiative Theory of change.** The evidence and findings in this section come from thematic analysis of Tranche One lead organisation interviews and focus groups with Heritage Fund staff.

Evaluation questions which are discussed in this chapter:

No.	Evaluation Questions
EQ1:	What are the key contextual factors influencing successes and challenges of the Initiative?

1.3.1 Key Findings on the Context for Delivery in Year Two

Delivery of the Initiative in Year Two has taken place within **a complex, evolving and often challenging operating context, shaped by local political developments, shifting policy environments and organisational capacities, and wider place-shaping events**. While many of the contextual factors identified in Year One continue to exert a strong influence on progress, Year Two has seen intensification in some areas, new pressures emerging, and clearer evidence of how the Initiative is itself shaping the local context in which it operates.

Continuities with Year One

As in Year One, **wide variation in local starting points continues to shape the pace of delivery.** Differences in heritage condition, levels of prior Heritage Fund investment, governance structures, and the maturity of local partnerships remain central determinants of progress. Many Places with established strategies or legacy capacity (e.g., former Areas of Focus[5]) have been able to move more quickly, while Places with more fragmented ecosystems, reputational challenges or dispersed geographies continue to require longer periods of trust-building and alignment. **Lead local authority capacity, already identified as a constraint in Year One, also remained a decisive factor influencing progress in Year Two.** Financial pressures, recruitment challenges, competing demands on lead organisation teams, and slow internal funding approvals, all contributed to capacity challenges.

Shifts and Intensifications in Year Two

However, the context for delivery in Year Two is also shaped by **new dynamics and intensified pressures**.

- **Political developments**, notably proposed Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in several Places and changes in local and mayoral leadership, have created uncertainty and, in some cases, accelerated decision-making. Officers in affected authorities are simultaneously planning for potential structural change while attempting to maintain momentum within their Places, often under conditions of job insecurity and organisational flux.
- **Financial pressures** have deepened in some authorities, while the arrival of new place-based Government funding programmes (including Pride in Place) has stretched capacity further. These programmes create opportunities and routes for alignment but also intensify competition for officer time and departmental attention.

[5] Two of the Heritage Places – North East Lincolnshire and Neath Port Talbot, are former Areas of Focus. Areas of Focus ran from 2019 to 2025 and aimed to invest in local areas where the Heritage Fund has historically low levels of investment in order to build sector capacity to apply to the Heritage Fund and increase investment from these low starting points.

The Initiative as a Context-Shaper

Despite these pressures, **Year Two shows clearer evidence of the Initiative actively shaping the delivery context, not only responding to it.** Scoping grants have contributed to strengthened policy environments in several Places, embedding heritage more firmly in new and updated strategies. Heritage Places work is also broadening and diversifying local heritage ecosystems, with more grassroots, creative and community-based organisations engaging with heritage and contributing to shared agendas. This demonstrates how foundational work builds longer-term opportunities by improving the policy and partnership landscape for delivery of the Initiative locally.

Major place-shaping events, such as Stoke-on-Trent's Centenary, County Durham's Stockton and Darlington Railway bicentenary, and significant media attention in North East Lincolnshire, have increased public visibility of heritage. These moments have created platforms for alignment and strengthened the symbolic weight of heritage locally, while also, in some cases, raising expectations of what Heritage Places can achieve and testing local emphases on slow, deliberative groundwork.

The **Year Two delivery context is characterised by the Initiative operating at the intersection of shifting political priorities, resource constraints, competing programmes, and heightened public visibility**. While many of the foundational challenges identified in Year One persist, Year Two has also brought greater strategic alignment, widening participation, and growing recognition of heritage's role within broader local agendas. **Shifting local contexts - both favourable and challenging - underpin the importance of flexible, responsive grantmaking and relational working between Area and Nation teams and local partners.**

1.3.2 Reflections on the Year Two Context and the Initiative Theory of Change

No.	Assumptions
A1:	**Selection and onboarding processes reduce the risks and barriers to success** There is **moderate evidence** from the year two context that selection and onboarding processes reduce the risks and barriers to success. Selection: In the Year One evaluation, the Tranche One selection process was found to be successful in surfacing variation in the character and scale of need, opportunity and potential in the Tranche One Places. This **variety in contextual conditions continues to influence the pace of delivery, and the approaches being taken** by lead organisations and Area and Nation team to respond to the context in each Place. High levels of heritage need, and more complex geographies (dispersed, polycentric) continue to present early **challenges to reaching consensus on the long term vision and programme for the Initiative**. These do not indicate that the long term programmes in Places with these characteristics will necessarily deliver weaker impact compared to other Places over the long term, but that **increased recognition – in selection and onboarding – of contextual risks would help situate progress more equitably.** Onboarding: The **challenging internal context within local authority lead organisations** suggests that Tranche One **onboarding processes could have been improved** to reduce risks by: ▪ **Increasing early stage project grants for lead organisation capacity**, to ensure that the Places have sufficient leadership resource to recruit efficiently and effectively, and to absorb unexpected shifts in the local authority internal context e.g. restructures, and/or an influx of other place-based funding which can detract from Heritage Places work.

	▪ **Seeking early alignment with other place-based funding programmes** and processes, to quickly demonstrate the strategic added value of the Initiative's flexibility. ▪ Advising local authority lead organisation teams to invest early in **educating leadership teams and colleagues about the Initiative and its funding mechanisms**, particularly within local authorities with less prior experience of Heritage Fund grantmaking. ▪ **Encouraging lead organisations to prime internal governance processes**, to smooth approvals for the Initiative (both investment and expenditure).
A10:	**<u>Local implementation is responsive to cultural shifts and changing context</u>** There is **strong evidence** from year two that local implementation is responsive to cultural shifts and changing context: • **Additional investment** in local authority lead organisation capacity - responding to LGR, internal restructures and changes in political leadership - demonstrate the Initiative's responsiveness to evolving political and operational contexts. • Similarly, there is evidence that Area and Nation teams and lead organisations are **responding to the influence of wider place-based funding** on the local delivery context for the Initiative. o **Consultation processes are adapting** in the context of consultation-fatigued communities; and o **Opportunities are being grasped to lever processes and mechanisms** from wider funding programmes which can strengthen the partnership working context for the Initiative. The success of lead organisations and Area and Nation teams in responding to an evolving context underpins that **the Heritage Fund should continue to**: ▪ **Maximise the Initiative's flexibility**, investing in additional lead organisation capacity where this is needed, particularly in Places affected by LGR or changing political leadership. ▪ **Maintain high levels of Area and Nation team engagement** to monitor local contexts and actively shape and support delivery in their Places.

1.3.3 More Favourable Contextual Conditions, and the Initiative as a Context-Shaper

There are three contextual conditions emerging as most favourable to achievement of the Initiative's aims: an improved local policy context; a stronger local partnership working context; and wider initiatives which increase heritage visibility.

1.3.3.1 Local Policy Context

Across several Places, **new or updated local government strategies have shaped the local policy landscape for heritage and culture**, strengthening the strategic visibility of heritage and creating clearer routes for the Places to influence wider council priorities. These developments have been **influenced by Heritage Places scoping grants** which sought to embed heritage in dedicated strategies as well as embed heritage in wider departmental and whole-Council strategies. These shifts indicate heritage becoming more embedded in local government policy, which are now informing how the Initiative is interpreted, aligned and delivered. Examples include:

- **Leicester City Council** introduced a new Cultural and Creative Industries Strategy with a strong, inclusive heritage strand centred on neighbourhood-based engagement. This direction reinforces themes emerging from the scoping phase, and the new cultural strategy has shaped the emerging Community Heritage Champions model being developed for the Initiative.

- **North East Lincolnshire Council** updated its Council Plan early in 2025, which included a much stronger emphasis on heritage and culture, signalling a shift in internal recognition of heritage as an asset for regeneration, wellbeing and place identity. Embedding heritage in the Council Plan is helping lead organisation officers to find alignment between the Initiative and strategic priorities such as young people and health.

1.3.3.2 Partnership Working Context

Across nearly all the Places**, the heritage ecosystem is widening**, with new and previously under-represented actors becoming more active in shaping local agendas. Lead organisations highlighted the increasing influence of grassroots organisations, cultural entrepreneurs and creative practitioners, whose involvement is helping diversify perspectives on heritage, and Heritage Places work. Consultees describe a strong contribution from the Initiative to shifting the local context for partnership working, through a variety of supported activities including small community grants, network development and stakeholder consultation.

Some of the Places continued from year one to face challenges influencing the partnership context in their local areas. This was most apparent in Places with a historically more fragmented sector, and/or weaker starting relationships between lead organisations and the wider sector, as well as those with high heritage need and limited previous Heritage Fund investment. In these contexts, early investment in trust-building and systematic heritage and stakeholder mapping have been crucial to making progress. These foundational activities are helping these lead organisations to understand their local ecosystems more fully, build credibility among partners, and create a platform for more collaborative delivery in later phases.

Together, these developments suggest that **the Initiative is expanding who participates in local heritage systems, and also beginning to rebalance influence within them**.

Image 2: Aerial photograph of Torre Abbey, Torbay. Founded in 1196, the best-preserved medieval monastery in Cornwall and Devon.

1.3.3.3 Wider Initiatives: Place-Shaping Events, Celebrations and Moments

A number of Places delivered activity in year two within **a context of major place-shaping events, cultural celebrations and public-realm programmes**. These moments increased the visibility of heritage locally, while also shaping some public and stakeholder expectations about the pace and character of change that should occur through Heritage Places designation.

- In **Stoke-on-Trent**, the 2025 Centenary prompted wide-reaching public engagement, which raised awareness of local heritage. The subsequent declaration of a "Heritage Emergency" has rallied support around addressing the condition of Stoke-on-Trent's significant built heritage. However, it has also heightened political urgency and added pressure for faster visible improvements.
- In **County Durham**, the 200th anniversary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway boosted heritage visibility and engagement. Bicentenary activity has informed the emerging approach to the Initiative in Shildon and Newton Aycliffe, highlighting effective strategies to engage communities and ground Heritage Places work in heightened local interest in its industrial past.
- In **North East Lincolnshire**, national media coverage, including features in the Telegraph and BBC documentary programming, has amplified the area's cultural profile. This has strengthened external perceptions of the area's heritage and creative identity, offering opportunities to align Heritage Places activity with this heightened visibility.

Overall, **these place-shaping moments have generally amplified but also, in some cases, tested the Initiative**. They amplify Heritage Places work by raising heritage's profile, attracting public attention and providing platforms for alignment. But they can also compete with the Initiative's slower foundational processes, accelerating expectations and compressing timeframes. Where lead organisations have responded proactively, by aligning with celebratory activity, or leveraging national media, these moments have become opportunities for added value from the Initiative.

1.3.4 More challenging contexts, their impacts on the Places, and local responses

There are two contextual conditions emerging as least favourable to achievement of the Initiative's aims: an uncertain political context; and a challenging internal operating context for local authority lead organisations.

1.3.4.1 Political Context, and Local Government Reorganisation

The political landscape for several lead organisations shifted over 2025, creating uncertainty and some new directions for Initiative delivery. In three Places, local authority officers are awaiting Government decisions on proposed **Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)**, expected in spring/summer 2026. The prospect of structural change has already created some instability, with one Place reporting a first wave of redundancies, and job security a growing concern across all affected authorities.

LGR has prompted some teams to accelerate planning and decision-making, conscious that windows for strategic thinking may be shorter if there are changes to local authority boundaries. In one Place, heightened redundancy risks were regarded as potentially prompting lead organisation staff to yield more to **preferences for 'big projects' among political leaders**, potentially at the expense of completing slower, exploratory scoping work underway which is needed for long-term alignment. In some cases, **staffing risks have made investment in lead organisation capacity more urgent**, prompting lead organisations to use Initiative investment as an anchor for staff continuity during organisational upheaval.

'It's encouraging them to act a bit more quickly on some things … coming to conclusions or putting things in place a bit more quickly … because they know they've got the clock ticking on some of that thinking and planning time.'

(Area and Nation Team Consultee)

Wider political shifts have also shaped delivery conditions. Local and mayoral elections in May 2025 resulted in new political leadership in two Places, with implications for heritage still emerging. Legislative and electoral cycles in Scotland and Wales are similarly expected to influence heritage policy over the next 12 to 18 months.

Overall, political dynamics, particularly LGR, are **accelerating decision-making while creating tensions in some Places between immediate expectations and the long-term planning** required for transformational heritage-led change. Lead organisation and Heritage Fund teams are responding by **prioritising project funding for staff posts to protect lead organisation capacity, and using the Initiative's flexibility as a means to maintain stability and focus** during this period of local political flux.

1.3.4.2 Lead Organisation Internal Context: Finances, Processes and Resourcing

The **internal operating context of lead organisations** continued to shape delivery in the Places throughout 2025, with local authorities facing a combination of staffing change, financial pressure, competing programme demands and administratively burdensome governance processes. These dynamics influenced capacity, pace and the overall ability of teams to progress scoping and development work.

1.3.4.2.1 Staffing change and leadership transitions

Several lead organisations experienced **staff change and turnover**, that directly affected lead organisation teams. These changes created short-term uncertainty and, in some cases, contributed to delays as new staff were onboarded or internal structures adjusted.

1.3.4.2.2 Financial pressures and competing programme demands

Delivery unfolded against **mixed financial conditions**. One Place faces acute financial pressures, and risks of a Section 114 notice, which has heightened scrutiny of spending and slowed approvals on all expenditure, including protected budgets like Heritage Places. Many other Places contended with the cumulative impact of managing **multiple place-based funding programmes**, including the designation of eight out of nine Places as Pride in Place neighbourhoods by the Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government in 2025. Although these wider capital-led funding streams bring new and welcome opportunities, they also stretch officer capacity, particularly in smaller authorities. Capacity constraints were also compounded in **Places where lead organisations are still delivering earlier Heritage Fund projects** underway prior to designation as a Heritage Place.

Some Places report growing **alignment between the Initiative and wider Government place-based funding programmes**. In North East Lincolnshire, a proposed Grimsby Fund will channel £20m Pride in Place funding into a new community-owned fund. This is expected to ease resource competition within the local heritage community, which is impacting sector collaboration for the Initiative. In Neath Port Talbot, teams emphasised that strategy work supported by Areas of Focus[6] has steered capital investment from wider programmes, with Shared Prosperity Fund funding having been allocated towards priorities in the strategy. This demonstrates how long-term planning can help secure delivery in a fluid funding environment.

Heritage Fund Area and Nation team consultees described **lead organisation teams as being "pulled in different directions,"** however, with the Initiative potentially emerging as less attractive than other government programmes offering larger, more locally controlled funding packages.

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[6] Areas of Focus was part of the Heritage Fund's Strategic Funding Framework 2019-2024. 13 areas were identified that had historically received lower levels of investment and displayed the highest evidence of need based on data from the Index of Multiple Deprivation. The Heritage Fund's team worked with a wide range of stakeholders in the 13 areas to identify the best way to deliver positive outcomes through heritage.

‘The capacity in the organisation doesn’t necessarily grow to match the new opportunities, and the growing ambition, and the need to deliver at speed … these are great opportunities but ... The offer from the fund, and the way we deliver [it], looks a lot less attractive compared to some of the other UK government money where you get really big injections of capital funding which they have control over … in a way they don’t have with Heritage Places.’

(Area and Nation Team Consultee)

1.3.4.2.3 Internal processes as a determinant of pace

Both lead organisations and Heritage Fund staff highlighted that **internal governance processes in local authorities**, e.g. procurement, approvals and business cases, are **key determinants of pace**. Places that primed internal systems early to attune to Heritage Fund processes reported smoother delivery pathways.

1.3.4.2.4 Consultation fatigue and the shift toward deep-place approaches

Multiple lead organisations noted that the proliferation of place-based initiatives, each carrying **expectations for consultation, can risk overwhelming local communities**. Consultation fatigue has reduced appetite for traditional engagement methods in a number of the Places, and gives further encouragement to some Places to adopt more innovative, hyper-local approaches. These deeper approaches create environments for trust and meaningful dialogue, and are gaining traction where more traditional processes have become less effective over repeated cycles of community consultation.

Heritage Fund **Area and Nation teams have responded to these various contextual pressures by reinforcing engagement efforts**, recognising that consistent presence and communication help stabilise delivery. Collective efforts by lead organisations, and Area and Nation teams, to respond proactively to the evolving local context provide convincing evidence that **local implementation is responsive to cultural shifts and changing context.**

Meanwhile, the persistence of some contextual risks from year one into year two – both internal to local authority lead organisations, and external in terms of the place context (i.e. dispersed, complex geographies, and high heritage need) – suggests there is scope for **further improvements to selection and onboarding processes to reduce the risks and barriers to success.**

Image 3: Portland Basin Museum, Ashton-Under-Lyne. Announcing Tameside's designation as a Heritage Place, with Eilish McGuiness and Helen Featherstone, Heritage Fund.

1.4 Delivery of the Initiative in Year Two

This section provides insights into **delivery of the Initiative at the end of year two**. It begins by providing a **cumulative overview of Initiative grant making activity in the Places** across years one and two of the Initiative before exploring **experiences of year two delivery** from the perspectives of lead organisations and Heritage Fund staff. The evidence and findings in this section draw from a range of sources: lead organisation interviews and focus groups with Tranche One and Tranche Two Places; focus groups with Heritage Fund staff, and Heritage Fund grant making data.

Evaluation questions which are discussed in this chapter:

No.	Evaluation Questions
EQ2:	What are the benefits and challenges of the Initiative timeframe?
EQ3:	What are the benefits and challenges of a strategic, place-based initiative, including the relationship with other place work supported by the Heritage Fund?
EQ4:	How are partnerships developing and maturing in the Heritage Places? Is this what was expected at the start of the Initiative?
EQ5:	How are new community organisations and diverse local sectors engaging and collaborating?
EQ6:	What are the key delivery factors influencing successes and challenges of the Initiative?

1.4.1 Summary of findings on key features and characteristics of Initiative delivery in year two

1.4.1.1 Heritage Fund Delivery of the Initiative

Delivery in year two has been shaped by a **deepening appreciation among Area and Nation teams for what early-stage progress looks like, and stronger internal mechanisms for sharing learning across teams.** Area and Nation teams now have more experience working with the flexibility and long-term nature of the Initiative and are applying this learning in their engagement, investment planning and partnership development. The Tranche Two selection process also strengthened understanding of local systems and deepened collaboration with wider stakeholders, providing a strong platform from which to support Tranche Two delivery.

More confident, strategic cross-sector engagement

Year two saw stronger engagement and collaboration with wider stakeholders - Arts Council England, Historic England, NatureScot, enterprise agencies and others - supported by a longer time period to deliberate Tranche Two selections process. This has helped build shared understanding of local systems and is enabling more joined-up approaches to heritage placemaking.

Growing use of flexibility to shape localised delivery pathways

While grantmaking processes do not always fully support experimentation, Area and Nation teams have used the Initiative's flexibility to blend opportunistic early investments by the Heritage Fund with longer-term scoping work. The fast-track mechanism is also being applied more strategically to accelerate progress. The difference in starting positions across Places - strength of heritage networks, maturity of partnerships, geographical complexity, and capacity constraints - continues to influence delivery trajectories, and Area and Nation teams continue to work responsively to this.

Increasing attention to alignment with wider Heritage Fund investment

Teams are actively using the Heritage Place designation to make connections with wider Heritage Grants and Strategic Initiatives - such as Places of Worship, Nature, Towns and Cities, Landscape Connections, and Grants for Heritage - and build momentum for heritage placemaking. In Places with recent, visible

Heritage Fund investment, this has supported faster mobilisation. Elsewhere where such investments were not underway, teams emphasise the importance of early, visible awards to build confidence and local traction.

Intentional, place-wide investment planning

Teams are increasingly looking beyond individual projects to consider how the full suite of Initiative investments in their Places can contribute to long-term, cumulative impact. This includes more purposeful alignment of partner projects with lead organisation pipelines, and efforts to position early awards as part of a coherent 10-year initiative as opposed to standalone interventions.

Deepening relationship-based delivery models

Area and Nation teams in the Places continue to refine how and when they step in to support the Places and their lead organisations, and when they step back. This nuanced approach reflects their understanding of local conditions and the demands of working in diverse, often complex local systems. “Boots on the ground” engagement remains crucial, though resource pressures within each of these teams challenge this way of working.

Strengthening internal learning and collaboration

Knowledge sharing has become more structured, with whole-organisation briefings, peer-learning sessions and bilateral Place visits helping teams to spread good practice and troubleshoot shared challenges. This combination of centrally coordinated briefings and sessions, and bilateral knowledge sharing at the initiative of individual Area and Nation teams is contributing to a more confident, joined-up organisational approach to place-based working.

1.4.1.2 Lead Organisation Delivery of the Initiative

Lead organisation delivery across the Tranche One Places continued to mature in year two, shaped by the Initiative’s flexibility, varied starting conditions and lessons from early implementation. Although each Place is progressing at its own pace, **several shared characteristics define how lead organisations are delivering the Initiative on the ground**.

Delivery is increasingly structured around phased, long-term pathways

Lead organisations are using the early years to build the social, organisational and strategic foundations required for a long term programme. This includes deliberate sequencing of activity, extensive groundwork, and tailored phases appropriate to each Place.

Delivery models are becoming more relational, co-designed and community-embedded

Lead organisations are working in ways that privilege co-ownership, inclusive engagement and trust-building with communities, mirroring patterns seen in Area and Nation team delivery. This relational mode of working is now a defining characteristic of delivery across the Places.

Delivery increasingly blends strategic planning with hands-on testing and piloting

Lead organisations are combining strategic design with practical experimentation to test what works before committing to long-term delivery. Across Places, delivery is moving more fluidly between planning and doing, showing maturing use of the Initiative’s flexibility.

Internal organisational capacity is being reshaped to support place-based delivery

Lead organisations are creating new structures and roles to help sustain delivery over the longer-term. These shifts embed built environment expertise and capacity (e.g. the Heritage and Design Team in Torbay, and the Heritage and Design Officer in Glasgow City Council), and community engagement and volunteering resource (e.g. Neath Port Talbot’s new delivery model which include two community and

volunteer-facing posts). These shifts reflect the Initiative's influence in building organisational and sectoral capacity that extends beyond individual projects.

Cross-organisational structures and whole-system coordination are becoming more prominent

Lead organisations are increasingly delivering through cross-departmental working that integrate heritage into wider systems. This reflects a shift toward whole-system coordination in how Places organise delivery.

1.4.1.3 A shared pattern is emerging despite diverse delivery models

Although approaches vary across the Places, a **common set of delivery characteristics** is emerging across Places. Delivery is increasingly:

- Co-owned with communities and partners
- Iterative and exploratory
- Tailored to local systems and capacity
- Focused on building foundations for transformational change rather than isolated projects

Collectively, these pathways demonstrate how Initiative delivery is taking shape, as **a family of locally responsive delivery models rooted in deep engagement, building strategic coherence and partnership-centred practice**.

1.4.1.4 Five lessons learned from this emerging cross-portfolio approach

Flexible, place-based delivery works, and works best when supported by clear guidance

The decentralised, relational model is widely valued and has enabled responsiveness, trust-building, innovation and strategic alignment. However, unclear expectations, inconsistent guidance and varied interpretations of roles and processes constrain its effectiveness.

Capacity determines the pace, quality and confidence of delivery

Local authority constraints remain the strongest brake on progress. Where capacity is stable or strengthened, momentum accelerates; where it is thinner, delivery stalls.

The 2023-2033 timeframe unlocks opportunity, but requires disciplined pacing and communication

The long horizon enables deeper engagement, system-level alignment and iterative development not possible under short-cycle funding. But it also demands sustained capacity, continuity of relationships, and ongoing communication to avoid drift or loss of momentum.

Alignment with wider programmes working well, pipeline coherence within the Places less so

The Initiative is successfully leveraging other Heritage Fund and external programmes, helping build profile and early traction. Yet alignment within the Initiative pipelines locally is less coherent due to limited visibility to lead organisations of Heritage Fund pipeline management, unclear endorsement processes and uneven interpretation of national guidance.

Partnerships and participation are strengthening, but progress varies with local starting conditions

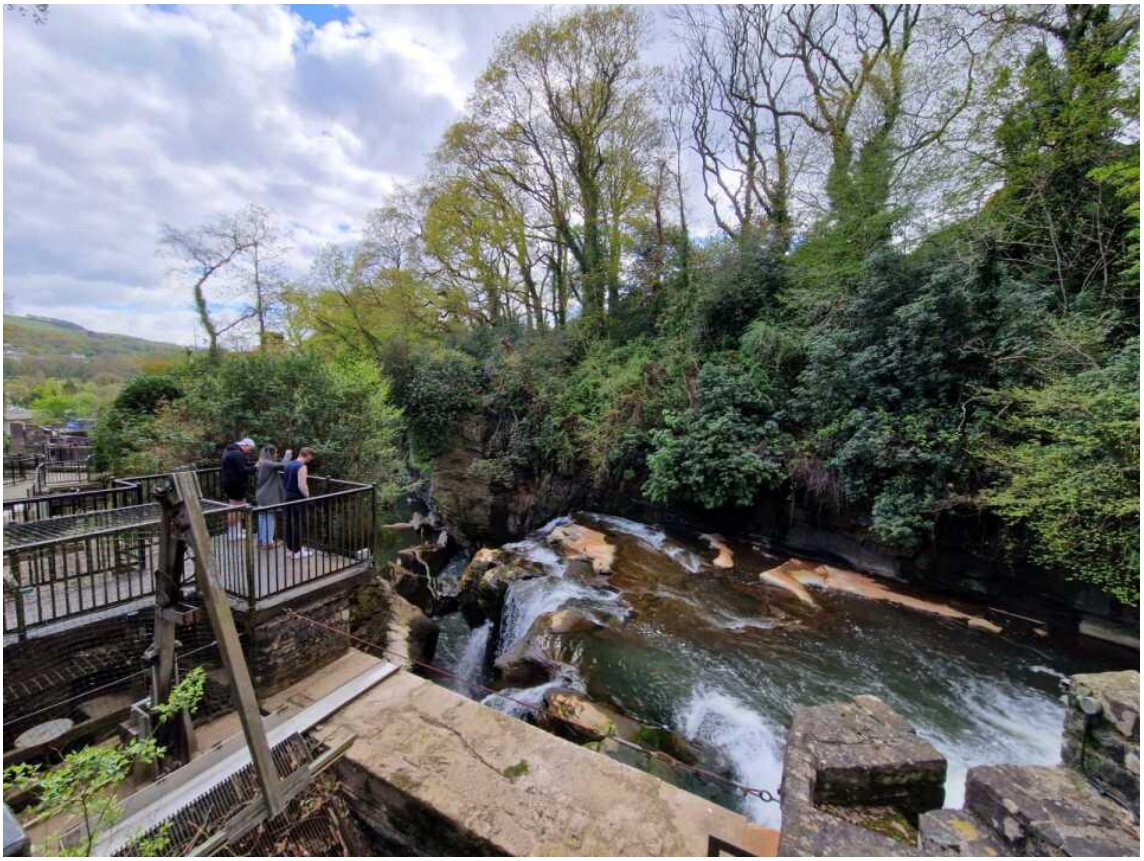
Where ecosystems are mature or well-networked, partnerships form quickly and VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise) engagement expands. Where ecosystems are fragmented or trust is low, partnership formation takes longer and requires sustained facilitation. Early, deliberative scoping work is vital in these contexts.

1.4.2 Reflections on Year Two Delivery and the Initiative Theory of Change

No.	Assumptions
A1:	**<u>Selection and onboarding processes reduce the risks and barriers to success</u>** There is **moderate to strong evidence** that delivery in year two has reduced the risks and barriers to success. • Area and Nation teams felt that **changes to the selection process for Tranche Two have reduced risks of slower, early progress** in this tranche. • An extended selection process allowed more discussion with leads and partners, and **Tranche Two lead organisations are mobilising early**, with a more confident interpretation of the Initiative's aims and funding mechanisms. • However, The Tranche Two reflections reinforce **a consistent cross-cohort message, that while relational support from Heritage Fund teams is a major strength of the Initiative, onboarding would benefit from greater clarity, standardisation and more written guidance**, enabling lead organisations to focus their limited capacity on building strong local foundations.
A2:	**The scale and longevity of funding is sufficient to incentivise a more collaborative, inclusive and ambitious approach among local partners and stakeholders.** There is **moderate to strong evidence** from delivery in year two that the scale and longevity of funding is sufficient to incentivise a more collaborative, inclusive and ambitious approach among local partners and stakeholders. • **The longevity of the funding was regarded as a key enabler** by lead organisations. • However, **limits on the size of early scoping awards (capped in most Places at £250k) was felt to constrain lead organisations' convening and leadership role.**
A3:	**Flexible, long-term funding enables more locally responsive projects that make a bigger contribution to local priorities.** There is **moderate evidence** from delivery in year two that flexible, long-term funding enables more locally responsive projects that make a bigger contribution to local priorities. • **Area and Nation teams reported greater flexibility in year two** to respond to evolving conditions in the Places, and highlighted the "fast track" grantmaking route as particularly valuable in the Places where it is has been used. • Lead organisations value the flexible outlook of Area and Nation teams, but continue from year one to describe **a grantmaking process that is not felt to align well with the iterative and adaptive nature of early place-based scoping work.**
A4:	**There is a lead organisation in each place which has the requisite capacity and capability to coordinate and facilitate the Heritage Place.** There is **moderate evidence** from delivery in year two that lead organisations have the requisite capacity and capability to coordinate and facilitate their Heritage Place. • Lead organisations invariably described **ongoing capacity challenges internally, which constrain progress**. • Some Area and Nation teams have **invested more heavily in capacity in year two**, which it is hoped will provided sufficient resources in year three and beyond to help overcome these challenges.
A5:	**Local Heritage Place partnerships receive the training, support and data/insights needed to fulfil their remit.** Since there are very few formal Heritage Places partnerships in place by the end of year two, there is **insufficient evidence** at this stage to test this assumption. Plans across many Places to establish such partnership in year three means the evaluation should be able to test this in the final, year three evaluation report.

A6:	**Heritage Place leads and partners communicate effectively at multiple levels to engage communities, stakeholders and placemakers.** There is **strong evidence** from delivery in year two that Heritage Place leads and partners communicate effectively at multiple levels to engage communities, stakeholders and placemakers. This has been a core area of activity across all the Tranche One Places in year two, with particular focus in all Places on **engaging stakeholders and placemakers, resulting in positive engagement.**
A7:	**Increased engagement and involvement of local authorities results in heritage being pushed up the agenda in local government decision making.** There is **moderate to strong evidence** from the year two delivery and context that increased engagement and involvement of local authorities results in heritage being pushed up the agenda in local government decision making. • Early evidence is convincing that local authority leadership increases the engagement and involvement of local authorities, and that this **helps to shape a policy context that can exert increasing influence on decision making.** • However, the extent to which this drives **shifts in resource allocation within wider local authority departments remains to be seen** as most early gains have been in policy change.
A10:	**Wider local strategies and plans that incorporate Heritage Place investment and activity are implemented as intended.** There is **insufficient evidence** at this stage to test this assumption. Investment by the Initiative now has stronger potential to deliver against priorities in wider local plans and strategies, owing to focused efforts on local government policy shaping across its early years. As these new and updated plans are delivered in the coming years, it will be possible to test this assumption.

Image 4: Members of Engagement Team for Wales, on a site visit to Margam Park and Margam Abbey, Neath Port Talbot.



1.4.3 Awards in the Heritage Places

1.4.3.1 Overview of Initiative awards[7]

1.4.3.1.1 Grantmaking headlines

Initiative grantmaking to date demonstrates that **Initiative momentum is gradually building, but remains at a slower pace than anticipated** in the Initiative business case.

Increased use of **the fast-track exception route**[8] is enabling **larger, more flexible awards for lead organisation scoping work**, addressing findings in the year one report that some lead organisations found the standard caps on single-stage awards[9] too small for the iterative, multi-activity scoping work required in the early years of the Initiative. The **range of grant sizes**, the **variation in the number of awards per place**, and the **mix of scoping grants and delivery grants**, **reflects the combination of approaches to investment across the portfolio.** These approaches are characterised by a more fluid approach to place-based investment in a handful of Places[10], versus a more staged/phased approach in most other Places.

- In total, **£8,917,923** had been awarded since the start of the Initiative. This compares to an allocation of £53m for the period from April 2023 to March 2026, which equates to **16.8 per cent of the forecast allocation.**
- **Ten of the fifteen** Tranche One and Tranche Two **Places have Initiative-supported projects underway.**
- **30 projects** are being delivered, by lead organisations and local partners
- **12 lead organisation scoping and capacity building projects** are underway, with **18 projects being delivered by local partners.**
- **Three projects have been awarded under the fast-track exception route**, enabling larger single-stage awards to lead organisations.
- **Year two awards have ranged in size** from a £41k award, to a £2.3m award.
- **A 'proof of concept' phase[11] is the largest award to date**, awarded via the "fast-track" route.
- The **number of active projects across the Initiative doubled** compared to the same time last year, when 15 projects were underway.
- The **number of projects per Place ranged from one up to eight.**

The table below, Table 1.1, displays Tranche One grantmaking in Year Two compared to Place benchmarks, while the infographic overleaf, Figure 1.4.1, visualises year one and year two grantmaking.

[7] Figures quoted relate to the period from October 2023 to 13 January 2026, when this analysis was conducted.

[8] In year two signposting to this route by the core Heritage Places project team was enhanced. This allows Heritage Fund investment managers to make larger, single-stage grants (above £250k) in exceptional circumstances. Large single-stage awards of £600k and £2.3m were made respectively to the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, and Glasgow Life.

[9] Upon designation as a Heritage Place, lead organisations are encouraged to apply for scoping grants to explore local heritage placemaking needs and develop shared long-term priorities. In year one, early investment was made primarily through single-stage scoping grants to lead organisations (up to £250k), alongside early project development or delivery grants which aligned with existing or emerging local strategies and priorities for heritage.

[10] For example, in North East Lincolnshire, Neath Port Talbot and Torbay.

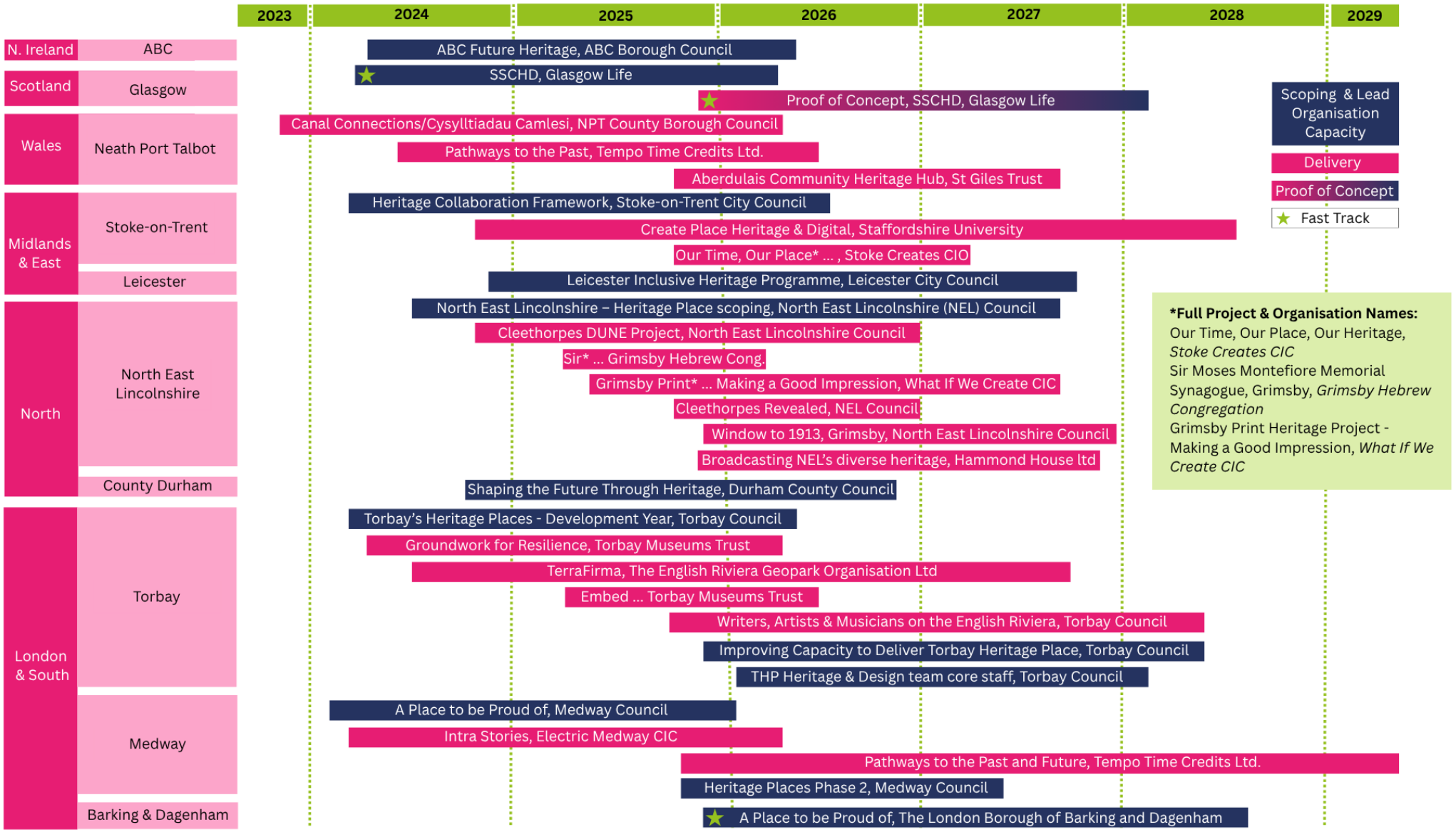
[11] The proof of concept phase is a new type of 'test and learn' scoping project, which bridges the completed scoping phase in Glasgow City (SSCHD), with the final implementation phase of delivery.

Table 1.1: Year Two grantmaking in the Tranche One Places compared to benchmarks

Local Authority Area	Benchmark average yearly number of projects[12]	Year 2 projects (#HP)	Year 2 total grant awarded (#HP)	Year 2 wider heritage grants (exc. #HP)	Other strategic initiatives
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council Area	8	0	£0	3	N/A
County Durham	23	0	£0	7	Landscape Connections x 1
Glasgow City	15	1	£2,352,763	13	N/A
Leicester	8	0	£0	9	N/A
Medway	5	2	£482,874	5	N/A
Neath Port Talbot	4	1	£249,106	0	Natures Towns and Cities x1
North East Lincolnshire	4	5	£704,383	1	N/A
Stoke-on-Trent	5	1	£131,514	6	N/A
Torbay	4	4	£818,570	1	N/A

[12] Average number of awards from 1996 to 13th January 2025

Figure 1.4.1: Initiative-supported Projects (Cumulative) in the Places.



1.4.4 Experience of delivery in Year Two

1.4.4.1 Selection and onboarding of the Tranche Two Places

1.4.4.1.1 The Selection process

In year two, the Heritage Fund **extended the Tranche Two selection period** so that the Heritage Fund's local teams could undertake deeper and broader engagement with partners and stakeholders in shortlisted Places, responding to year one learning about the value of local insight and deliberation. **A fourth qualitative criteria** was also added in year two, which sought to steer the Tranche Two selection process towards local areas which were readier to make a measurable, visible difference more swiftly. To that end, Area and Nation team shortlisting was encouraged to consider whether a greater impact could be made in **geographically smaller places**, taking forward learning from Tranche One that concentrating activity in more compact areas can support quicker progress, and increase the Initiative's visibility.

All Area and Nation teams felt that **the selection process improved in year two**, enabling the identification of Places where conditions were favourable for early progress and effective collaboration. The extended timeframe and **opportunity to undertake broader and deeper engagement with local authorities and other place stakeholders** such as a combined authorities, Historic England and Arts Council England were key to making robust selections.

'We're still going in the same direction but there was more time, more engagement … to make sure we'd done the right analysis, had the right conversations with the right people, before we went into the selection process."

(Core Project Team Consultee)

Across all six places, **the rationales for Tranche Two selections[13] substantively address all four of the qualitative selection criteria**. There were variations in the indicators used to assess the six local areas against this criteria, but this is consistent with the Initiative's design to blend Place Index data with local intelligence and professional judgement. Differences reflected context-appropriate evidence, applied within a consistent decision frame to reach final selections. Examples of how the criteria were interpreted are provided at *Appendix 2: Example Tranche Two Indicators for Selection.*

Selection Process Spotlight: Scotland

The selection process in Scotland illustrates how the process came together to steer decisions in Tranche One, compared to Tranche Two. For **Tranche One**, the speed of the process encouraged the team to prioritise places they knew well, where they were already working in a place-based way and had established relationships and projects in the pipeline which they could leverage. This resulted in a Tranche One selection of Glasgow City and Sauchiehall Street.

For **Tranche Two**, data updates to the Place Index brought rural and island communities further up the rankings in the Place Index, while the extended timeframe for engagement and deliberation meant they could spend more time on the ground, building relationships in new Places where Initiative funding could make a transformational impact in less well trodden territory. This has resulted in a Tranche Two selection of the Orkney Islands.

The **two Places contrast geographically** (i.e. location, size, rurality/urbanity, population density), but have in common **the potential to deliver measurable, visible change within the Initiative timeframe**, responding to its own set of unique place needs and opportunities.

[13] The rationales provided for the Tranche Two in Heritage Fund Area and Nation committee and board papers, reviewed by the evaluation team.

This **underscores the limits of quantitative measurement of place features and the value of triangulating data with local insight** within the Area and Nation teams, as well as deliberative discussion with local partners and stakeholders.

1.4.4.2 Initiative management, communications and sharing learning

The decentralised management model underpinning the Initiative, centred on Area and Nation teams, supported by a light-touch centralised support from the core project team, has shaped how management, communication and learning operate across the Initiative. Evidence from **Year Two highlights a set of clear strengths, as well weaknesses** that are shaping delivery.

1.4.4.2.1 Strengths of the model

Adaptive management and continuous learning: The long timeframe and flexible design have enabled the core project team to adopt a more adaptive, developmental management style, focused on equipping Area and Nation teams with tools, insights and peer-learning rather than imposing rigid, centralised project control. Whole-organisation knowledge briefings, lessons-learned sessions and peer-to-peer learning have supported continuous improvement across teams. These have been scheduled around key moments and milestones, such as the announcement of the Tranche Two Places, in order to consolidate learning and carry this forward into critical delivery periods. The Heritage Fund's good practice guidance provides a mechanism for continuous improvement, and incremental change to practice, based on learnings and insights gathered from evaluation and on-the-ground delivery.

"We've got time to do this well… We've got a bit of breathing room."
(Core Project Team Consultee)

Strong relational working with lead organisations: Area and Nation teams sustained high, hands-on levels of engagement, drawing on their contextual knowledge to judge when to step in and provide support, and when to step back and allow local activity to reach conclusions to guide next steps. Lead organisations consistently described strong, supportive working relationships with Area and Nation team officers, who often acted beyond a conventional funder role, problem-solving, advising and helping maintain momentum during early-stage delivery.

"It's entirely new … It's liberating … real transformational change isn't something that happened in three years … so to get into a relationship with a funder who understands that is an amazing opportunity for a city like Glasgow. We are responding to things on the ground, evolving the project as we go, and as we learn together. I can't think of another funder client relationship where that happens."
(Lead Organisation Officer)

System-shaping influence beyond individual projects: The model enables Area and Nation teams to exercise their strengths in devolved working, with teams increasingly acting across systems, rather than simply managing discrete projects. Examples include cross-team collaboration to maintain risk registers, strong relationships forming with Historic England, Arts Council England and the Community Fund, and bilateral visits that spread learning between the Places.

1.4.4.2.2 Weaknesses of the model

Capacity constraints and reliance on temporary posts: The success of the model relies on the resource availability of Area and Nation teams. Temporary senior posts were crucial in Year Two, but teams expressed concern about sustaining engagement levels once these posts end. Rising volumes of application across the wider Heritage Fund portfolio also limit teams' capacity to deepen knowledge of each Place.

“The work’s so constant, there isn’t the capacity or time to give this the attention it requires.”
(Area and Nation Team Consultee)

Ambiguity about role expectations and levels of presence among Area and Nation teams: Area and Nation teams reported an unresolved tension in acting as both project funder and developmental partner. Staff remain unclear on how visible or directive they should be (“doing it for them, with them, or to them”) and where boundaries lie between supporting partners in the Places and over-stepping. This more developmental role can also conflict with organisational priorities to reduce travel, subsistence and carbon emissions. As a result, Area and Nation teams are sometimes left uncertain about expectations, priorities and their appropriate level of presence in each Place.

“Where am I overstepping? Where am I not overstepping?”
(Area and Nation Team Consultee)

Variability and inconsistency in guidance to lead organisations: Tranche One lead organisations identified unclear or evolving Initiative guidance, particularly concerning their leadership role, expectations for managing Place-wide pipelines, and sequencing applications. They described how guidance published on the Heritage Places webpage during year two introduced what several lead organisations perceived to be new expectations and requirements, after they had been designated, and scoping projects were underway. This included lead organisation letters of support and governance roles, guidance on the £200, total allocation, direct applications from local partner organisations, and criteria for Heritage Places projects.

Peer exchanges between the Tranche One Places have highlighted that guidance can be interpreted differently across area and nation teams, such that advice oftentimes varies from Place to Place, and in some instances, from officer to officer within individual teams. Tranche Two leads echoed Tranche One’s experience of procedural challenges, highlighting that this remains an area for improvement. However, they reported a stronger grasp of the aims of the Initiative, and their interpretation of the £200m allocation, compared to Tranche One organisations at the same point in their journey, reflecting improved clarity of communication by the Heritage Fund on these aspects of the Initiative’s design.

Administrative strain where lead organisation core capacity is insufficient: Some lead organisations found the place-led model challenging when paired with limited internal capacity. Small teams struggled to balance engagement, governance development and early delivery, especially when funding mechanisms required two-stage processes or did not sufficiently resource core roles needed for scoping.

Overall, the Initiative management model is enabling flexibility, trust-based working and system-level alignment, all of which are widely and highly valued by lead organisations and Area and Nation teams. However, its **effectiveness is constrained by uneven capacity, unclear expectations, and inconsistent guidance, which limit how confidently teams can perform their roles.**

Image 5: The favourite chair of crime writer, Agatha Christie, a famous regular visitor to Paignton Picture House, Torbay.

1.4.5 Successes and challenges of the Initiative timeframe

1.4.5.1 Successes

1.4.5.1.1 A realistic and system-focused approach to place working

The 2023-2033 timeframe is widely regarded, by Heritage Fund teams and lead organisations alike, as one of the Initiative's most powerful features. The decade-long horizon continues from year one to provide a more **realistic and system-focused approach to place working**, particularly benefiting Places facing deeply entrenched or complex challenges. Stoke-on-Trent's declaration of a heritage emergency is held up as an example from the past year of how this realism is influencing local heritage leaders and their partners to articulate deep-seated challenges and mobilise partners around shared action.

'I don't think they would necessarily have started thinking about that long-term approach if we hadn't looked at things in that way ourselves. It's enabling people to think, stand back … about what they actually need, what is possible, and not to panic about doing it all in the first year, but to recognise that this is a journey … it enables more realistic and sensible conversations to happen that we just couldn't have with a shorter timeframe … that is a huge step forward in terms of confidence and realism.'

(Core Project Team Consultee)

"Real change takes years, not months; the ten-year commitment makes it possible to do this properly ... We're building a system that will outlive the Council as it is today."

(Lead Organisation Officer)

1.4.5.1.2 Unlocking confidence, collaboration and strategic commitment

Another success is the **increased confidence and commitment from wider partners and local authority departments** that the Initiative timeframe has catalysed. It signals that the Heritage Fund is committed for the long haul, which is influencing other funders, arms-length bodies and local stakeholders. In Stoke-on-Trent, the longer timeframe has encouraged local trusts and philanthropists to rally behind the heritage emergency. In Tameside, the long-term commitment is being communicated as a vote of confidence and a signal of intent to wider partners. In Torbay, Arts Council England have expressed willingness to invest over the long term alongside the Heritage Fund via the Initiative. Lead organisations further highlighted how the timeframe helps wider local authority departments see heritage as a strategically significant area of long-term work, rather than a series of one-off projects.

‘It allows us not just to think about the issues … but also the opportunities. The fact that we’re there for the long term signals to other funders and partners that if we’ve made a commitment, then it’s good for them to work there. Through a standard project, we wouldn’t always be able to act on those opportunities.’

(Core Project Team Consultee)

‘One of the challenges it’s enabled us to crack is, heritage is everything. That’s the lovely thing about our definition of heritage. We don’t prescribe what we mean by that, but that can cause us some difficulties because we can get boxed into different boxes. But with the opportunity of time, and the leverage of money, we can convene those broad, multi-sector conversations and that’s really useful.’

(Area and Nation Team Consultee)

1.4.5.1.3 Deeper trust-building, relationship-based working and more inclusive engagement.

Another success is the timeframe’s role in **enabling deeper trust building, relationship-based working and more inclusive engagement**. Lead organisations emphasised that the extended horizon has created the “breathing space” needed to rebuild or reset relationships, which is particularly important in Places where open collaboration between local authorities and wider heritage or community sectors had been challenging in the recent past. In County Durham it is enabling repeated cycles of deep listening in Shildon and Newton Aycliffe where trust in the local authority started from a low baseline. They described this work as impossible within conventional output driven grant-funding timelines. In Medway, the long timeframe is enabling deep trust building with communities who would not have engaged within shorter cycles and allowing ambitions to rise gradually across a mixed voluntary and professional sector. Area teams likewise observed that trust builds over multiple years, supporting more honest conversations about capacity, risk and ambition.

1.4.5.1.4 Working iteratively, and explore options before committing to delivery

The **ability to work iteratively, and explore options before committing to delivery** emerged strongly as a benefit of the timeframe, across both sets of consultees. Area and Nation teams noted that Places have used the long horizon to undertake deeper scoping, pilot ideas and adapt sequencing. In North East Lincolnshire, the long timeframe has enabled the area team to award a second, scoping grant focused specifically on natural heritage, which has been historically underfunded in the area. The timeframe was considered catalytic, opening up the opportunity for a large-scale natural heritage project and partnership supporting North East Lincolnshire’s internationally significant coastline. Glasgow City’s “proof of concept” phase for SSCHD, which was not anticipated in their initial planning for their Heritage Place, also exemplifies how a longer horizon allows Places to adapt plans, and test ideas in practice, before committing to the final programme of delivery.

‘Having the time to do a second scoping project just for natural heritage, and the support of our Head of Nature, Land and Sea, has been crucial. You just wouldn’t have been able to do that under the open programme [National Lottery Heritage Grants] without that [Heritage Places] designation. It’s allowed us to try and get a microcosm of all the Strategic Initiatives into that area because you’ve got that longer term approach.’

(Area and Nation Team Consultee)

“A lot of the outputs and outcomes so far weren’t planned at the outset … these things were unknown to us. But through the place-based approach, nothing’s untouched so as things come up, they’re really being grabbed onto and developed. The way we’ve been able to develop organically, and work with the Heritage Fund, has been really beneficial.”

(Lead Organisation Officer)

1.4.5.1.5 Maintaining continuity and momentum

The timeframe is also valued for **maintaining continuity and momentum.** With a full decade to work within, Tranche One lead organisations teams described how the Initiative avoids the stop/start patterns typical of annualised programmes, helps maintain a visible presence between phases, and enables them to return to communities repeatedly to test, refine and consolidate ideas. This has helped protect progress made in early stages, enabled smoother transitions between scoping and delivery, and ensured communities do not experience the loss of confidence that can happen when activity pauses. The extended horizon therefore strengthens the Initiative's ability to maintain relationships, keep partners engaged and carry learning forward steadily over time.

Across all sources, the dominant message is that the 10-year timeframe is not simply a longer funding window, but a **fundamental enabler of relational, strategic and systemic place-based working** that would not be achievable under conventional funding timescales.

1.4.5.2 Challenges

While the ten-year timeframe is widely recognised as a major strength, consultations with Area and Nation teams and with lead organisations emphasise that it brings a **distinct set of challenges**.

1.4.5.2.1 Ambitious versus practical realism

Heritage Fund and lead organisation teams **value the confidence, ambition and opportunity** that a decadelong commitment signals. However, they **caution that ten years is not long in practical terms** to deliver significant area-based change if capital projects are in scope, unless Places begin with capital ready pipelines. Many stressed that varying start positions make it unrealistic to expect all Places to achieve transformational outcomes by 2033. One Area and Nation team already anticipates delivery extending 5 to 7 years beyond the Initiative period due to early capacity setbacks, reframing 2033 as a milestone for commitments rather than achievement of outcomes.

'The long timeframe is about what opportunities we can foster and facilitate … You can be flexible and you can move as fast … but you still might not get the same impacts as you get, say, for a massive natural heritage project in North Yorkshire which would have massive implications.'

(Area and Nation Team Consultee)

1.4.5.2.2 Continuing uncertainty about expectations for 2033

Area and Nation teams also raised the need for **greater clarity from the Heritage Fund board on expectations for 2033**. Area and Nation teams described a tension between the board's desire for earlier, visible change and the time required to reach well-supported local conclusions about long-term delivery programmes. This has created pressure in Places where scoping phases are necessarily slow and relational. As one team put it, there is an ongoing balance between "doing it quick" and "doing it right."

'It's time ... our organisation allowing them to have that time whilst also parts of our organisation wanting to see bigger bucks going out of the door. There's a perception that they might lose it, but also if they spend it wrong, there's no point in doing it.'

(Area and Nation Team Consultee)

1.4.5.2.3 Mismatch between long-term vision, and internal systems geared to shorter-cycles

A second set of challenges arises from the **mismatch between a long-term vision and shorter-cycle grantmaking and administrative systems** both at the Heritage Fund and within local authority lead organisations**.** Although the Initiative spans 2023-2033 and there is a commitment to major investment in each Place over this timeframe, in practice Initiative funding is not ringfenced per Place, and is drawn down

through an open process instead by leads and partners in the Places over shorter timeframes within that period. Local authority governance processes are similarly geared toward shorter-term approvals.

In several areas, consultees described navigating layers of business-case approvals, political sign-off, and corporate scrutiny designed for competitive short-term funding rather than the long-term commitment signalled by Heritage Places designation. This misalignment can slow progress, pull attention away from strategic work and limit the flexibility that the longer timeframe is intended to provide. This highlights tensions between the Initiative's long-term intentions, and the realities of how local authority systems and processes respond to shorter-term, competitive investment mechanisms.

1.4.5.2.4 Longer timeframes can exacerbate uncertainty

A central concern with the timeframe relates to **continuity over time**. Many lead organisations, particularly smaller ones, depend on short-term contracts or overstretched teams. This makes it difficult to maintain organisational memory and preserve the relational work that underpins place-based delivery year after year. These pressures are experienced more acutely in organisations navigating local government reorganisation, restructures or political transition, where long-term planning is undermined by uncertainty about future boundaries, roles or internal capacity. Confidence developing multi-year delivery plans has also been undermined in some Places by lack of clarity about how the place-level pipeline of projects will be managed.

1.4.5.2.5 Balancing the long timeframe with quick wins

Several consultees also noted that the extended timeframe can unintentionally create a sense of "plenty of time," increasing the risk of prolonged planning phases without visible progress. Sustaining interest in the Initiative among policymakers and communities within a fast-moving external environment also becomes harder over a long timeframe, especially once the initial burst of investment and activity settles into a steadier delivery rhythm.

Consultees stressed the importance of **carefully sequencing early wins to maintain stakeholder and community confidence while still protecting the Initiative's commitment to deliberative, place-led development.** They also reinforced the importance of close collaboration with lead organisations, local partnerships and the Heritage Fund's communications teams to amplify allied, local voices and highlight emerging impacts. These impacts include early wins, as well as the leverage of Heritage Places designation to draw in wider Heritage Fund investment, and the meaningful progress towards long-term transformation that is building steadily over the medium term.

These reflections show that while the 10-year timeframe is a vital enabler of relational, systemic, place-based work, it also demands **clarity, stable capacity, steady communications and alignment of processes** if its full potential is to be realised

1.4.6 Successes and challenges of a flexible, place-based approach

1.4.6.1 Successes

1.4.6.1.1 The Heritage Fund's devolved engagement function

The flexible, place-based approach has enabled Area and Nation teams to harness, and showcase, the strengths of **the Heritage Fund's devolved engagement function**. Consultees highlighted the critical role of engagement colleagues, working collectively in many areas and countries with wider devolved teams, in establishing the Heritage Fund as an active, credible and visible presence in the Places. This has had wider benefits for the organisation, opening doors to new conversations with other arm's-length bodies and agencies. Teams described gaining access to broader, cross-sector discussions, encompassing nature-based investment, tourism and wider place strategies, where the Heritage Fund would previously have been perceived primarily as a project funder.

‘Rather being aligned only with their grant funding, suddenly we’re talking to people around place-based working … I don’t think we would necessarily have had a seat at the table or been taken seriously before, it’s unlocked opportunities for that wider intelligence, and building context around the place.’

(Area and Nation Team Consultee)

1.4.6.1.2 Flexibility allowing fluidity and innovation

Area and Nation teams also report that the Initiative’s flexibility enables **fluidity and innovation in the Heritage Fund’s grantmaking practice**. Several Places have made awards to lead organisations and local partners before scoping work is completed, enabling visible, early activity while longer-term priorities emerge and are confirmed. This has helped establish confidence early among partners and communities, and demonstrate the potential of Heritage Places designation. In London and the South, the team has also been able to bolster lead organisation heritage and design team capacity in Medway and Torbay through additional awards, responding to the evolving local context of LGR.

Innovative use of the fast-track, exceptional, single-stage route has also been valuable where Places needed to move quickly on capital-led or time-sensitive work. In Scotland, it enabled an unprecedented use of the mechanism to fund pre-development, development and early delivery concurrently. In this case, this route is supporting a ‘test-and-learn’ model of programme development which is useful in place-based approaches; where local contexts and delivery approaches are highly interdependent, and it is difficult to predict the outcomes of interventions based on what’s worked in other places.

‘What’s been useful is the much more flexible approach we’ve been able to have to delivering the funding … It’s a different model of working that allows us to move at a rapid pace because 10 years is quite a short time when the project is capital-led … This kind of strategic developmental project in Sauchiehall Street, we would never have gone straight to delivery before.’

(Area and Nation Team Consultee)

1.4.6.1.3 Supporting a whole-place, whole-system approach

Lead organisations reinforced that the Initiative’s flexible aims and place-led approach is helping them work in a **whole-place, whole-system way**. In year two, **strengthening cross-council collaboration** has been key to laying the foundations for a longer-term, place-wide approach. Lead teams have identified collaborators that reflect the emerging heritage priorities for their place, and established effective cross-departmental working relationships.

In **Leicester**, the approach has deepened collaboration across arts, museums, conservation, planning and community cohesion teams, and encouraged shared consultation across Heritage Fund investments. In **ABC Borough Council Area**, lead team engagement activity has brought about collaboration with parks and green spaces, and community planning teams, which is shifting how these wider teams understand the contribution that heritage, and the Initiative, can make to wider policy agendas. In **Medway**, scoping working has embedded heritage across regeneration, planning, public health and tourism, enabling collaboration that was previously difficult to achieve. In **County Durham**, close working with the regeneration team developing the Shildon Place Plan has been mutually reinforcing, connecting both heritage and place-level regeneration with economic drivers, community safety, young people’s needs and community priorities.

“For us within parks and open spaces, it’s been eye-opening … maybe we should be looking at things through this lens … how does that fit in with heritage, and what does that look like in the future? The awareness and the opportunity that heritage, as that umbrella definition, brings, it’s been really valuable.”

(Lead Organisation Officer)

1.4.6.1.4 Facilitating deep and inclusive community engagement

The place-led, flexible approach has also enabled **deep and inclusive community engagement**, giving teams the mandate and the means to involve organisations and residents who do not engage through traditional consultation routes.

Medway described reaching groups who "wouldn't come to town hall events" through drop-ins, open-space sessions and community mediators, broadening participation. In **Stoke-on-Trent**, the place-based model has brought non-traditional and intangible heritage to the forefront and helped previously disconnected groups feel recognised and part of the conversation. In **Glasgow City**, a shop-front has been established on Sauchiehall Street for its Heritage Place, which roots engagement in the flow of daily life on the street and captures wide-ranging community voices.

These successes show that the Initiative's **flexible, place-led model is enabling more responsive, collaborative and inclusive practice**, and supporting **whole-place approaches that would not have been possible through more traditional, centralised funding mechanisms**.

1.4.6.2 Challenges

1.4.6.2.1 Tensions between place-led working and expectations of more uniform progress

Area and Nation teams are working hard towards **upholding the Initiative's commitment to a responsive, place-led approach, while also navigating a growing emphasis on achieving early, visible progress** in the Tranche One Places. Balancing these priorities is challenging in place-based practice, when progress varies across the Places, reflecting different starting points, local contexts and ambitions. These challenges are particularly acute in Places where complex geographies, political conditions and a more fragmented heritage sector complicate reaching early consensus on priorities and approaches for the long-term Heritage Places programme. This raises questions for some as to whether the Initiative is about heritage placemaking in its broadest sense, or whether a narrower framing of heritage-led regeneration would be more appropriate.

Some reflect that, if there are expectations of a less place-responsive and more uniform pace of progress across the Initiative, this ought to have been explicit from the outset via Initiative-wide milestones, success criteria, recommended place-making methodologies, and supported by resourcing for engagement activity that would be commensurable with this delivery profile. **Introducing new expectations retrospectively creates pressure for Area and Nation teams and Heritage Place lead organisations still consolidating their foundations**. In the absence of tightly prescribed success criteria and methodologies at the outset, Area and Nation teams cite opportunities to get together and share learning with one another as guiding evolving local approaches.

1.4.6.2.2 Local leadership needs to operate within clearer parameters

The Initiative's open, flexible and place-led approach was similarly identified by lead organisations as creating **pressures to interpret place leadership roles or requirements without consistent guidance**. In year two, lead organisations are focusing increasingly on the wider role of local partners in delivery of the Initiative locally, and what this means for their placemaking role. Many are unclear about how the lead organisation endorsement process is expected to work in practice, and how direct applications from the partners to the Heritage Fund are triaged into Initiative grantmaking or standard Heritage Grants. This creates uncertainty about resource availability to lead organisations and partners over the long-term.

1.4.6.2.3 Tensions between the place-based approach and grantmaking practice

Some consultees highlight a **tension between a targeted investment in selected places, and Initiative grantmaking process.** They highlight that a robust selection process has established the mandate for place-based leadership in the selected places, and yet grantmaking processes for the Initiative require lead organisations to reapply for funding for key staff posts to resource their leadership roles over short,

repeated cycles. They question whether a larger, upfront investment in lead organisation capacity would be better suited to the Initiative's expectations for local leadership, and the timeframes needed for scoping work.

Area and Nation teams underscored that they continue to welcome applications from lead organisations for staff posts, but that the open, competitive funding process may make lead organisations reluctant to request the level of funding they genuinely need for this work. Whilst every effort is being made by local teams to overcome the lead capacity challenge, the Heritage Fund is encouraged to consider the mechanisms for investment in staffing for foundational work and the advantages of different models.

1.4.6.2.4 Breadth of heritage slowing prioritisation and diluting visibility

The place-based, full-breadth of heritage approach also surfaced challenges related to the **volume and diversity of emerging priorities**. In County Durham, extensive engagement and asset-mapping revealed far more potential directions - spanning buildings, green spaces, heritage stories and community needs - than could feasibly be pursued at once. This makes prioritisation difficult and requires careful sequencing of effort. In Stoke on Trent, the depth of community-led engagement demanded substantial coordination and capacity over time, with some longstanding groups still feeling under-represented. Some Area and Nation teams are finding that **advocating for the full breadth of local heritage to drive placemaking outcomes** is challenging when competing with the local influence and priorities of larger, national heritage bodies with narrower remits.

These challenges highlight that **delivering a genuinely place-led approach requires clarity of roles, proportionate resourcing, and realistic expectations about pace**, acknowledging that the diversity of local contexts will inevitably produce uneven progress, complex leadership demands and difficult prioritisation choices as Places work to translate broad ambitions into long-term, locally grounded programmes.

1.4.6.3 Alignment between Heritage Places projects, and with other place work supported by the Heritage Fund

1.4.6.3.1 Working well - alignment between the Initiative and wider investments

Area and Nation and lead organisations teams are increasingly **leveraging National Lottery Heritage Grants and other Strategic Initiatives to reinforce the mandate and visibility of Heritage Places**, and amplify the Initiative's place impact ambitions.

- In Torbay, the Heritage in Need **Places of Worship Strategic Initiative** has been used to demonstrate to partners that designation brings broader advantages and can help concentrate resources to maximise impact. The London and South team is also encouraging wider **National Lottery Heritage Grants** applicants to engage with the lead organisation's emerging Heritage Place priorities, helping to create more coherent, place-based outcomes across different funding streams.
- In Wales, the team is taking a holistic approach to the Initiative, promoting wider investment in Neath Port Talbot to maximise the place impact of both Heritage Places designation, and other strategic initiatives. This thinking was factored into decision making for **Nature, Towns and Cities (NTC)**, with Neath Port Talbot's success owing in part to the perceived placemaking potential of co-funding NTC and the Initiative in the local area.
- In County Durham, team-led talks, project-planning workshops and outreach to grassroots groups are leveraging and broadening awareness of Heritage Places designation to stimulate a wider county-level pipeline for standard **Heritage Grants**. Stoke-on-Trent is similarly seeing increased interest in Grants for Heritage as engagement activity has intensified and the profile of heritage grows as a result of Initiative engagement work.

“It was clear through that whole process … that people wanted to give it the chance … it’s just part of what we do in a way that hasn’t happened with previous programmes.”

(Area and Nation Team Consultee)

The presence of **other active, area-based Heritage Fund investments also helps the Initiative gain early traction**. In London and the South, area teams noted that being able to point elected members and local stakeholders to major projects already underway in their two Tranche One Places provided a tangible way to illustrate the potential of the designation and build early interest. In ABC Borough Council Area, the team highlighted the success of recent Townscape Heritage schemes as another example where a visible, high-profile investment helped strengthen the lead organisation’s early engagement with the Initiative. Conversely, in Places without such recent anchors, teams emphasise the importance of “getting a stake in the ground” and making early, visible investments to mobilise partners and build confidence in the Initiative.

“One of the things that we’ve learned is that you need to make some investments pretty fast to gain the traction you need. We’re competing with other pots of money, other stakeholder interests, so getting that stake in the ground, making early investments really does bring a range of benefits … and having that early engagement, time-intensive though it is, can really help.”

(Area and Nation Team Consultee)

1.4.6.3.2 Working less well - alignment between Initiative projects

Area and Nation teams describe varied but intentional approaches to aligning projects. Teams are drawing on the Place’s emerging Heritage Places vision or heritage strategies, using these frameworks to guide decisions about compatibility and cumulative contribution. In other Places, alignment is achieved by assessing partner applications alongside the lead organisation’s own Heritage Places project pipeline to ensure complementarity.

However, these Heritage Fund processes and approaches were not sufficiently visible to many of the lead organisation consultees. Several leads noted that they began receiving notification of partner applications before putting their own processes in place to identify duplication, understand how proposals related to local priorities, or assess the appropriateness of issuing letters of support for these projects. Visibility of applicants and applications was widely viewed as essential for understanding how different proposals relate to one another within a Place.

Lead organisations noted that, **without clear criteria or consistent national guidance, issuing or declining letters of support presented risks:** making inconsistent decisions, appearing politically aligned or biased, inadvertently endorsing proposals that duplicate existing plans, or rejecting proposals that the Heritage Fund might later approve. The absence of a shared, national interpretation of the endorsement requirement also heightened this sense of risk, as different Places appeared to be applying the requirement in different ways. These dynamics highlight that alignment between projects within each Place is not only a technical process but also one that relies on careful relationship management.

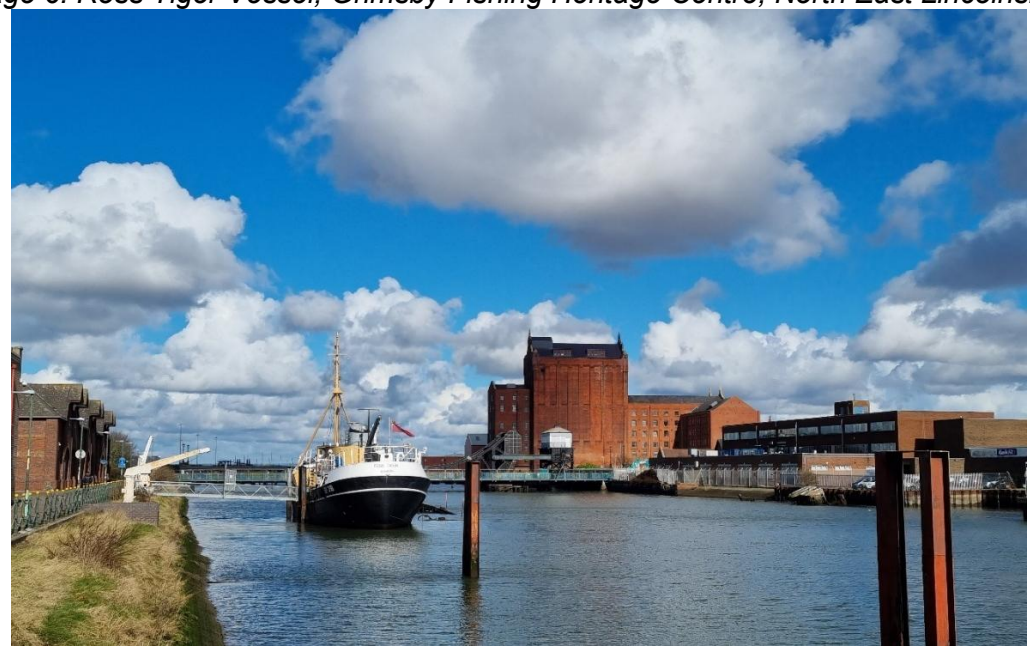
Participants also highlighted **inconsistencies in guidance they received from the Heritage Fund about what “counts” as a Heritage Places project**. Several noted that messages sometimes differed between teams, and that informal communication between lead organisations revealed variation in how project triage was being applied nationally. This further complicated efforts to maintain coherent alignment across Heritage Places pipelines.

Overall, these findings show that **alignment between the Initiative and wider Heritage Fund investments is emerging as a clear strength of the Initiative**, helping to build early momentum, broaden visibility and reinforce placemaking ambitions across multiple funding streams.

At the same time, **alignment within the Initiative portfolio is less transparent and consistent**, with limited visibility of partner applications, variable interpretations of national guidance, and uncertainty around endorsement processes creating avoidable risks and administrative strain for lead organisations.

Together, this **highlights the need to sustain the strengths of cross-initiative alignment while strengthening national clarity and guidance to ensure coherence, confidence and fairness in how Initiative pipelines develop across the portfolio.**

Image 6: Ross Tiger Vessel, Grimsby Fishing Heritage Centre, North East Lincolnshire.



1.4.7 Partnership approaches

1.4.7.1 Heritage Places Partnerships and Governance

Partnership development across the Tranche One Places continues to progress from year one activity, but **at differing speeds, reflecting the diversity of local contexts, capacities and starting points.** By the end of year two, few Places had fully established formal Heritage Places partnerships. Instead, most were still building on year one progress to build relationships, shared priorities and organisational readiness needed for long-term, place-based collaboration.

The following Place examples illustrate the **varied pathways that Tranche One Places are taking toward building durable local partnerships** that will underpin delivery in later years.

Small, defined geographies enabling faster partnership formation	Large, complex geographies requiring longer-term partnership building	Places where partnership development is underway but requires further support
Glasgow City (SSCHD): a compact geography and a concentration of cultural organisations is accelerating partnership development. Longstanding collaboration between Glasgow Life and	**ABC Borough Area:** a large and dispersed geography naturally contributes to a slower pace of partnership formation, with current effort focused on finalising its second Heritage Places application before	**Leicester:** has made early progress in convening a broad and diverse interim steering group, with strong representation from both major institutions and grassroots organisations. Partners noted that the group

Glasgow City Council supported an early governance vehicle of the two main partners. Representation is now broadening as the Place moves into its next 'proof of concept' phase. **Shildon and Newton Aycliffe (County Durham):** Early engagement with local organisations helped shape a collaboratively designed scoping project, and continued activity throughout the scoping phase has broadened involvement to include new voluntary and community sector organisations. The next phase presents an opportunity to formalise this emerging network into a wider partnership spanning both heritage and VCSE stakeholders.	establishing a formal partnership structure. Strategy development has helped involve a breadth of stakeholders, and partnership formation will accelerate over the next year. **Torbay:** historic governance challenges within its cultural sector, shape the pace of scoping activity. Joint investment from Arts Council England and the Heritage Fund is supporting a review of the local cultural forum to strengthen partnership working and establish a more coherent structure for future collaboration. In **Stoke-on-Trent:** the city's complex geography means partnership formation requires long-term relationship-building to draw together stakeholders across multiple town centres. In time, new structures (Development Trust and pending Culture & Heritage Compact) can be leveraged to support local governance for Heritage Paces.	has expanded over time, with members actively identifying gaps and helping bring new voices into the process, strengthening local buy-in. While this foundation is positive, the partnership is still at an early stage and faces pressures related to limited capacity and evolving expectations, with Leicester City Council indicating that additional resource will be required to support, stabilise and further strengthen the partnership as it moves into its next phase.

Two core findings emerge:

- **Partnership formation is not uniform and is influenced by starting conditions**
  In several Places, the combination of complex governance landscapes, fragmented communities, or challenging external conditions has required more time and careful facilitation. Conversely, hyper-local or well-networked contexts have enabled partnerships to coalesce more rapidly.

- **Scoping work catalyses partnership formation**
  Where early engagement has been wide-ranging and well-supported, scoping activity has successfully acted as a catalyst for partnership formation and clearer collective direction.

1.4.8 Collaboration with diverse local sectors

1.4.8.1 Community and voluntary sector engagement and collaboration

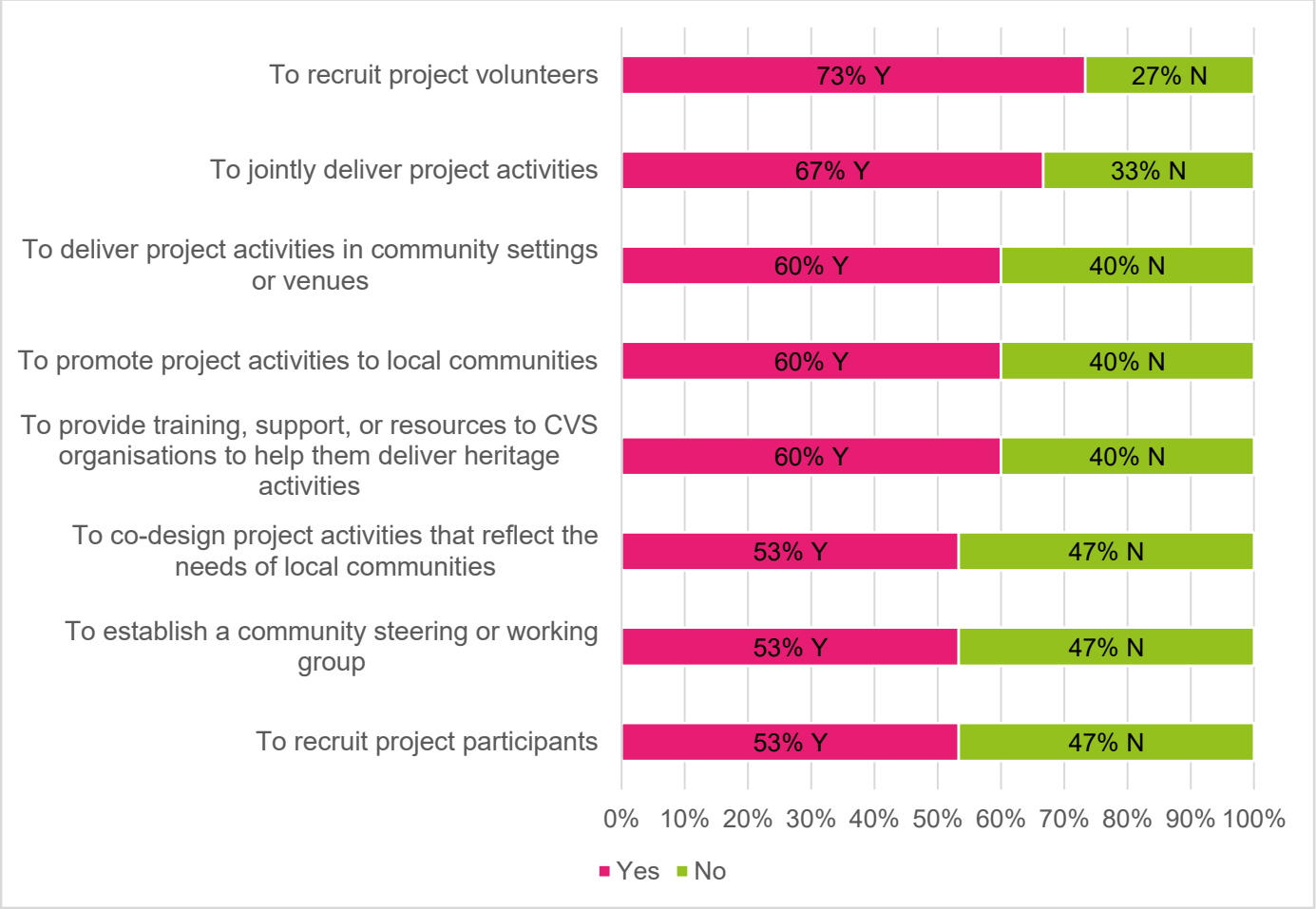
Engagement with community and voluntary sectors has accelerated in year two, and will continue into year three, of the Initiative. Across the Places, engagement is expanding, driven by mechanisms that lower barriers to participation and draw new groups into heritage conversations. This shift is visible in the types of organisations now engaging and in how they understand their role within local heritage ecosystems. In other places, where VCSE groups have more established links with lead organisation teams and experience of delivery for local heritage, the Initiative has raised ambitions further and routes to funding are being strengthened to match this.

- In **Leicester**, the expanded interim steering group has brought in community-rooted organisations, which had not previously been involved in local authority-led heritage activity. Their presence has widened the cultural perspectives shaping delivery and helped surface issues and stories that were previously absent from strategic discussions. Engagement is expected to deepen further through the forthcoming Community Heritage Champions model, which will embed community researchers within ten local organisations.
- In **Medway**, small-scale development grants and community consultations led by Medway Diversity Forum have brought culturally diverse community and faith organisations into the heritage conversation for the first time. Through this work, joint projects are emerging around industrial heritage, cultural traditions and community identity.
- In **County Durham**, in **Shildon and Newton Aycliffe**, asset-mapping and on-the-street relationship building surfaced partners beyond traditional heritage groups. Early collaborative work during the scoping phase identified young people and skills development as a shared priority. This provided a clear starting point for community engagement in year two, enabling local youth workers and voluntary organisations to play a more active role in shaping the Heritage Place's emerging programme.
- In **SSCHD**, in **Glasgow City**, the scoping phase focused on VCSE organisations within SSCHD - reflecting the hyper-local, place rooted approach. As the Place moves into the Proof of Concept phase, community and voluntary sector engagement will widen, recognising that addressing vacancy and revitalisation in the district will require engagement from organisations and communities beyond those already active in the immediate area.
- In **North East Lincolnshire** - also a former Area of Focus - community grants have continued from Areas of Focus into, and VCSE organisations have welcomed the shift toward larger, developmental 'seed' grants that better support early-stage project development and position them for a bigger Heritage Fund application. Capacity and resourcing challenges persist across the cultural sector and Heritage Places designation has raised ambition and expectations among local organisations. Area and Nation teams are working with the lead organisation and other local funders and partners in trying to ensure clear progression pathways which can keep pace with VCSE ambitions.

Surveyed grantees were asked about co-delivery of their project activities with VCSE organisations. 92 percent of surveyed grantees (n=15) confirmed that they worked with community and voluntary sector organisations to deliver project activities.

Grantees worked with community and voluntary sector organisations in a wide variety of methods, as shows in Figure 1.4.2, with over 50 per cent of grantees responding yes to each of the methods presented in the survey, demonstrating the extent and variety of collaboration happening with the VCSE across the portfolio. The most common methods were recruitment of project volunteers (73 per cent) and to jointly deliver project activities (67 per cent).

Figure 1.4.2: Ways in which grantees have worked with VCSE organisations (n=15).



The Initiative is working successfully in year two to **broaden VCSE engagement with heritage**, shifting who sees themselves as part of heritage and how they can contribute, **while also highlighting ongoing funding and capacity challenges in the sector, and the need for sustained resourcing and support to match rising ambition.**

1.4.8.2 Engagement and collaboration with wider sectors

Engagement with wider sectors has strengthened in year two - across both Tranche One and Tranche Two – demonstrating the value of the Initiative as a mechanism for convening cross-sector partners around shared place-based ambitions. The strongest engagement has been with heritage and heritage-adjacent sectors. There has been less widespread engagement to date of the private sector, reflecting both the differing size and strength of this sector across the portfolio, and the nature of early scoping work which has focused less on attracting private sector investment and engaging private landlords of historic buildings.

Sector	Level of engagement	Evidence
Heritage and heritage-adjacent	Extensive	Several examples across the portfolio of engagement including: ▪ Arts Council England ▪ Historic England ▪ Historic Scotland ▪ Architectural Heritage Fund ▪ Anchor arts and cultural organisations

		▪ Community grants supporting local, grassroots arts and cultural organisations, and artist practitioners. ▪ Heritage networks which engage local, grassroots arts and cultural organisations, and artist practitioners. ▪ The National Lottery Community Fund.
Environment and climate change	Moderate to extensive	Several examples from Glasgow City (SSCHD), North East Lincolnshire, Medway, ABC Borough Council Area, Neath Port Talbot, Torbay ▪ NatureScot ▪ UNESCO English Riviera Global Geopark ▪ Statutory and non-statutory partners on the Cleethorpes DUNE steering group ▪ Local authority departments (e.g. parks and green spaces) ▪ Community grants supporting organisations in the environment / climate change space.
Children and young people	Moderate to extensive	Examples include Medway, North East Lincolnshire, Torbay, ABC Borough Council Area, Shildon and Newton Aycliffe (County Durham): ▪ Schools and colleges ▪ Local authority children's services departments ▪ Community grants supporting organisations which serve children and young people.
Private sector	Moderate to limited	Isolated examples in Glasgow City (SSCHD), Medway and Torbay: ▪ Business Improvement Districts ▪ Private landlords and investors ▪ Construction skills providers ▪ Visitor economy agencies ▪ Local authority departments (e.g. local economic development and regeneration).
Health	Limited	Mainly limited to local authority public health departments, with emerging engagement in Medway and North East Lincolnshire.

These examples demonstrate how, by year two, the Initiative is beginning to **create new connections in wider placemaking systems** at the local level, and **position heritage as a lever for broader social, economic and environmental impact**. Collaboration across local authority departments and VCSE organisations has been typically led by lead organisations, while Area and Nation team have undertaken a more strategic engagement role, bringing wider funders and Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) into the ambit of the Initiative.

1.5 Impacts Emerging in Year Two

This chapter draws together an **early impact assessment of the first two years of the Initiative**. It addresses the four aims of the Initiative and also considers the impacts of foundational work by lead organisations to prepare their Heritage Place for longer-term, transformational change up to 2033. **The impacts described are aligned to the Initiative Theory of Change.** We also draw together **insights from this assessment about the assumptions which underpin expectations about the added value of a strategic investment in place.**

1. Evidence and findings in this section are drawn from a synthesis of a wide range of primary and secondary sources for the evaluation:
   - Interviews with lead organisations and Area and Nation teams;
   - An e-survey of grantees actively delivering their projects[14]; including outcomes achieved from direct delivery as well as delivery by third party community grant holders;
   - Case studies of six of the Heritage Places;
   - Heritage Places project monitoring and evaluation reports.

Evaluation questions which are discussed in this chapter:

No.	Evaluation Questions
EQ7:	What has been the impact of the Initiative (split into four sub-questions covering each of the strategic aims)?
EQ7a:	Has the Initiative increased the capacity of local heritage to maximise its contribution to places and communities and enhance the wide-ranging benefits it can bring?
EQ7b:	Has the Initiative encouraged a people-centred approach enabling everyone's heritage to be recognised?
EQ7c:	Has the Initiative created integrated and holistic schemes across the breadth of heritage, including, anchor institutions, cultural heritage, and the natural environment?
EQ7d:	Has the Initiative increased pride in place and connection to heritage?

Limitations

The majority of Heritage Place projects have not yet completed their project evaluations[15]. Project-level evaluators have been encouraged to consult an Initiative-level evaluation toolkit to align their project evaluations with the Initiative theory of change. In particular, the Initiative-level evaluation will synthesise project evaluations to produce an assessment of impact against the aims to boost pride in place and sense of belonging. This approach gives sovereignty to places to design evaluation methodologies which reflect the nature of their projects, their beneficiaries, and the local context for delivery.

The available evidence to assess these impacts is therefore more limited, until more project evaluations are completed. In the final year three Initiative evaluation report, we expect more project evaluations to be completed which will strengthen assessment of the Initiative's contribution to this aim in its first three years of place delivery.

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[14] Projects received the survey if at least six months had elapsed since the date their grant application was approved, allowing time for projects to gain permission to start, commence their activities, and for outputs and outcomes to begin to emerge. Of the 30 Heritage Places projects, 18 received the survey and it was completed by 16 of these grantees. Outcomes reported in the grantee e-survey pertain to both outcomes achieved by direct delivery by lead organisations and partners, as well as outcomes achieved by community grantees, in those Places where lead organisations are driving impact through third party delivery via community grant schemes.

[15] Only two scoping project evaluations completed by Medway and Glasgow City (SSCHD) by 13th January 2026.

It should also be noted that the e-survey is distributed annually in January each year, as well as at the end of project delivery. In year two, it captured outputs and outcomes from projects which – in most cases – had not completed their projects. Only one of the 16 projects that responded to the survey had finished their project. An analysis of the timeframes for delivery highlights that, collectively, projects were around two thirds of their way through their expected timeframes. Evidence from the e-survey is therefore indicative of what has been achieved, against this rate of completion.

1.5.1 Reflections on year two impacts and the Initiative Theory of Change

No.	Assumptions
A8:	**Intensified engagement with the voluntary, community, and social enterprise sector (VCSE) results in a more inclusive range of heritage projects.** There is **moderate evidence** at the end of year two to test this assumption. • Many lead organisations have **intensified their engagement with the VCSE,** and **projects are working with the VCSE sector in a wide variety of ways to involve diverse communities.** • However, few of these activities with VCSEs have been geared towards generating an early pipeline of local projects. • A handful of Places have operated community grants schemes, and there is evidence that these community projects aim to be inclusive across the breadth of heritage, and a range of communities. • Once community grant making and networking schemes are more embedded in later years of the Initiative, these are expected to drive applications into the Heritage Fund, and it will be possible to test this assumption further.
A9:	**Co-production with local people increases the likelihood they will sustain and deepen their connection to heritage over the longer-term.** There is **insufficient evidence** at the end of year two to test this assumption. However, projects that reported evidence on the benefits of co-production with local people provided isolated examples which demonstrate this assumption is holding true. In these cases, co-productive approaches have generated deeper and longer engagement in activities, and the local people that have taken part have been eager to know what's happening next, and how to get involved again.

1.5.2 Building the foundations for impact

1.5.2.1 Summary of the findings

To date, the Heritage Fund has invested **£5,863,286 supporting 13 lead organisation scoping, proof-of-concept and capacity-building projects out of the 30 awards made to date**, which equates to 66% of the total investment. This demonstrates the Heritage Fund's commitment to investing in the groundwork that is expected to lay the foundations for long-term impact.

By the end of Year Two, the Initiative has made **substantial progress in building the early foundations required for long-term impact**, though the strength of these foundations differs across the Places and work remains ongoing in several areas. **No Places have moved fully into delivery** (indicated by the absence of continued scoping or proof of concept phases).

Evidence shows that Places now have a **much stronger understanding of the issues and opportunities shaping local heritage, communities and place**, developed through detailed scoping activity, expanded community engagement, cross-departmental collaboration and test-and-learn delivery approaches. This

deeper insight marks a significant shift from Year One, demonstrating that the Initiative is enabling Places to see their heritage systems more clearly, more inclusively, and with greater strategic coherence.

There is also clear evidence of **increased capacity and buy-in to heritage among communities, partners and stakeholders.** Participation is broader and more representative, community-led activity is strengthening local capability, and multi-sector partners are increasingly recognising heritage as a lever for wider social, environmental and economic outcomes. These developments show that heritage is becoming more visible, more relevant, and more embedded in local systems, even though progress varies according to each Place's starting point, political context and sector maturity.

Finally, **many Places are beginning to form a shared vision for heritage and its contribution to placemaking**, where existing strategies were not in place or sufficient to guide investment. **Places are also developing their approach to the Initiative specifically**, and it can contribute to local visions alongside other funding programmes. These outcomes are supported by strategy development, inclusive engagement and emerging cross-council alignment. However, some Places remain at earlier stages of consensus-building, and Area and Nation teams report ongoing ambiguity about the Heritage Fund's own expectations for placemaking within the Initiative. As a result, shared visioning is progressing, but it is doing so at different speeds and levels of clarity across the Places.

Overall, **the foundations for impact are demonstrably stronger at the end of Year Two** than at the outset of the Initiative: understanding is deeper, capacity is growing, and shared visions are emerging. With continued effort, clarity, trust-building and support, the Places expect these foundations to mature further over the next 12 months.

1.5.2.2 The issues and opportunities for heritage, communities and places are better understood

Evidence across Year Two indicates that both Area and Nation teams and lead organisations have developed **a much deeper and more shared understanding of the issues and opportunities shaping local heritage, communities and place** by the end of the second year of the Initiative.

1.5.2.2.1 Year Two has strengthened insight into place systems

Foundational, scoping work has generated a more accurate and nuanced picture of community needs, organisational readiness within lead organisations and the wider sector, and systemic opportunities for heritage to unlock bigger benefits for placemaking. Specifically, cross-council collaboration has widened understanding of where heritage can contribute to regeneration, health, climate, youth provision and community cohesion. This has broadened the "opportunity space" for heritage beyond cultural sectors.

1.5.2.2.2 Deep, relational and community-embedded engagement has surfaced new perspectives

Lead organisation community engagement has revealed lived experiences, patterns of behaviour, and community priorities that were not visible through traditional consultation, widening understanding of what matters to communities locally.

"This is the first time we've been given the financial and human resources to be out and properly engaging with people about heritage. We were adamant we weren't just going to do workshops. We were going to get to people where they are, these hard to reach groups."

(Lead Organisation Officer)

By the end of Year Two, both the issues and opportunities for local heritage, communities and place are more clearly understood across the Places. This improved understanding stems from:

- Deeper diagnostic work into how heritage can support placemaking;
- Richer and more inclusive community engagement;

- Cross-sector and cross-departmental collaboration;
- Iterative and experimental delivery.

While the work of scoping and building foundations remains ongoing in many Places, the Initiative-level picture shows a significantly **enhanced grasp of place-specific challenges and the emerging possibilities for long-term, transformational heritage-led change.**

1.5.2.3 Increased capacity and buy-in to heritage among communities, partners and stakeholders

By the end of Year Two, evidence across multiple Places shows **clear and growing increases in capacity, confidence and buy-in to heritage** among communities, partners and local stakeholders.

1.5.2.3.1 Community-led activity is strengthening local capacity

Across the Places, delivery models have equipped grassroots heritage groups with the skills, confidence and partnerships which support progress into larger heritage projects.

1.5.2.3.2 Sector and stakeholder buy-in is broadening and deepening

Multi-sector conversations and evidence that heritage is increasingly embedded in regeneration, visitor economy, parks and green spaces, planning, public health and youth agendas, signal that heritage is now recognised as a lever for broader social, economic and environmental impact.

1.5.2.3.3 Increased confidence is supporting longer-term ambition

Many Places describe a growing belief among local stakeholders - communities, voluntary groups, anchor institutions and elected members - that heritage can drive broader placemaking outcomes over the long term, lifting the level of local ambition for heritage and its contribution to placemaking.

By the end of Year Two, **community engagement is broader and deeper, organisational capacity is growing, cross-sector partnerships are strengthening, and there is clear momentum and buy-in to heritage across local systems**. This increased capacity and confidence is not uniform across Places, reflecting varied starting points, governance environments and sector maturity, but the direction of travel across the Initiative is consistently positive.

1.5.2.4 There is a shared vision for heritage and its contribution to placemaking

All the Places have made **progress toward establishing shared local visions for heritage and its role in placemaking**, where these were not already established prior to the Initiative. The Places continue **refining their approaches to how the Initiative contributes towards these visions.**

At the level of the whole Initiative, both Heritage Fund delivery teams and lead organisations report ambiguity, uneven interpretation, and evolving expectations around the placemaking purpose of the Initiative. This lack of clarity does not undermine progress, but it does mean that while shared visions are advancing at the Place level, confidence delivering on these visions would benefit from greater clarity at the Initiative level about what heritage placemaking means to the Heritage Fund. Peer learning and shared practice have strengthened interpretive clarity.

Factors influencing progress towards shared visions:

- Strategy processes and scoping phases contribute to clarity on long-term direction.
- Peer learning helps leads to test their assumptions about how the Initiative can drive placemaking, refine approaches and compare interpretations of guidance. This has helped create a more consistent understanding of what heritage-led placemaking means in practice across the Initiative.

- Progress varies between Places depending on starting conditions. Thus, while visions are emerging, they are emerging at different speeds and at different levels of refinement across the portfolio.

1.5.3 Increasing the capacity of local heritage to maximise its contribution to places and communities and enhance the wide-ranging benefits it can bring

1.5.3.1 Summary of the findings

At a glance….

473 volunteers added	**1,000 training hours delivered**	**23 new jobs created**	**16 traineeships created**
£321k invested in community grants	**97% community grantees had never received Heritage Fund support previously**	**62% community grantees more likely to make an application to the Heritage Fund over the coming year**	**£315k invested in network building**

By the end of Year Two, the **Initiative has made meaningful progress in strengthening the heritage sector's capacity, connectivity and strategic role**. One of the clearest achievements is the growth and diversification of **local heritage networks**. More than half of surveyed grantees have created, strengthened or expanded networks that bring together heritage organisations, creative practitioners, volunteers and community groups. These networks are enabling collaboration that did not previously exist, drawing in new voices and widening access to heritage activity.

Alongside these networks, the Initiative is supporting **increases in skills, resourcing and workforce capacity. New heritage roles have been created** across multiple projects, **473 volunteers** have been recruited, and more than **1,000 hours of training** have been delivered to staff, trustees and volunteers. These investments are strengthening organisational confidence and equipping teams with practical capabilities and skills needed to engage communities, manage heritage assets and contribute to wider place ambitions.

There are also strong signs of **growing sector capability for placemaking**. Surveyed grantees reported improvements in networking, collaboration, understanding of heritage assets and audiences, and willingness to try new ways of working. Community grants in several Places are helping organisations undertake feasibility work, test ideas and build partnerships, creating a pipeline of groups more prepared for future, larger-scale applications. Early evidence shows that this is already leading some organisations to consider or prepare for Heritage Fund bids.

Policy influence is another emerging achievement. Three-quarters of surveyed grantees report that their projects have contributed to strengthened local policy frameworks for heritage, whether through new heritage strategies or deeper integration of heritage into wider local plans. This improved policy environment is a crucial foundation for long-term place-based change.

By the end of Year Two, around a third of surveyed grantees report some **early reductions in heritage risk**. The UK Government recognises that reducing risks to heritage is vital work to safeguard the full breadth of our diverse national heritage and allow placemaking benefits to flow from these assets[16]. Less widespread reports of risk reduction across the Places are expected given the Initiative's strong focus in its

[16] DCMS Culture and Heritage Capital Programme (accessed 25th March 2026) at https://www.gov.uk/guidance/culture-and-heritage-capital-portal

early years on scoping, engagement and foundational work. **Early, isolated evidence of alleviation of the physical risks to heritage** (i.e. completion of urgent repairs, enhanced environmental controls, and/or assets moving off risk registers) **is encouraging and indicative of the strengths of the Initiative's place approach** which allows Places, which have the mandate and capability, to progress this fabric work alongside early foundation work.

Indirect reductions in the risks to heritage stem from the achievement of outcomes such as increased community engagement, greater awareness of heritage significance, and better identification and interpretation of heritage, which reflect the Initiative's early stage.

Although progress varies across Places, **Year Two has convincingly strengthened the systems, relationships and skills that will underpin collaborative, transformational placemaking in the years ahead.** There is also evidence of **early 'quick wins' which reduce risks to the fabric of local heritage,** which can unlock benefits from these assets in future years.

Image 7: Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council engagement event to inform its draft Heritage Strategy.

1.5.3.2 The heritage community is stronger

1.5.3.2.1 Networks and Collaboration

More than half of grantees surveyed (56 per cent) have supported the creation, development or coordination of a local network[17] of heritage organisations and/or professionals, while a further 19 per

[17] In this instance, a network is defined as a group of three or more organisations, and/or heritage professionals, that have come together to collaborate towards a shared goal.

cent of grantees state that they have plans to do this as part of their project (n=16). The **Initiative has invested £314,763 in network building**, of a total investment of £364,098 (86 per cent of the funding).

- **Eight** projects have **created new heritage networks**
- **Four** projects have **strengthened existing heritage networks**
- **Two** projects have **expanded existing heritage networks**

Across the Places, **a diverse range of heritage networks are being established or strengthened**. Creative and artist networks interested in heritage are emerging in some Places, particularly within print and visual arts communities, where early collaboration and skills-sharing are already taking place. In Neath Port Talbot, the Pathways to the Past Heritage Network complements existing strategic groups, improving access for smaller organisations and new volunteers, and focusing specifically on engagement, volunteering, and community voice. Leadership cohorts and development programmes are being established elsewhere, in Torbay and Stoke-on-Trent. Advisory groups are also being formed to support specific place ambitions in relation to natural heritage, the visitor economy and planning for upcoming anniversary celebrations. Others, like ABC Borough Council Area and North East Lincolnshire, have introduced or strengthened regular local authority-wide networking events to sustain engagement and strengthen relationships across the local heritage ecosystem.

"Even if you're not at all the meetings, just having that network and feeling part of a bigger initiative has been beneficial. You feel momentum because lots of people are aware of each other and the big things happening."

(Local Network Member)

Network Spotlight: Pathways to the Past network in Neath Port Talbot

The Pathways to the Past network in Neath Port Talbot has played a central role in **strengthening collaboration and shared practice across heritage organisations, community groups and volunteers**. A key achievement is the **creation of cross-organisation volunteering pathways**, allowing volunteers to move between sites and roles, which has **improved retention, expanded skills and encouraged collective working** rather than competition.

The network has supported **joint community engagement initiatives, enabling organisations to pool resources and reach under-represented groups** they could not have accessed alone. Regular facilitated sessions have established **a strong culture of shared learning**, with partners exchanging practical insights on volunteer recruitment, accessibility and engagement, and adapting their programmes based on what they learned.

Collaboration has also extended to **co-produced volunteering, with residents shaping flexible and micro-volunteering roles that reflect local needs**. Joint storytelling and promotion have further **strengthened visibility of volunteering impact from the project**, with organisations working together to share case studies and heritage stories, increasing public awareness of activity across the area.

1.5.3.2.2 Resourcing and skills

Initiative investment has supported the **appointment of 20.5 fixed term employees** across surveyed grantees (n=16). **Two permanent employees have been appointed**. Volunteering has also strengthened. **Five projects (31 per cent) have recruited new volunteers**. In total, **473 volunteers were recruited**. The majority of these (450) have been recruited via the Pathways to the Past project, demonstrating the reach of sector wide coordination of volunteering activity. This exceeded the project's target for volunteer recruitment, achieving 30 per cent more volunteers than targeted. The remaining three projects that reported volunteer recruitment, recruited an average of 7.5 core volunteers.

One in five surveyed projects supported the creation of traineeships. In total, **16 traineeships have been created as a result of Heritage Places projects**, with 10 of these coming from one project. No apprenticeships have been created or are planned within the current portfolio.

Projects were asked to report on the amount of training which has been completed as a result of their Heritage Places project. Across 42 beneficiary organisations, **over 1000 hours of training have been provided**, to staff, volunteers and trustees.

1.5.3.2.3 Sector capability to drive placemaking

Surveyed grantees were asked to rate to what extent their project contributed to a stronger heritage sector that is more capable of driving local placemaking, the results of which can be seen in

1.5.3.3 Heritage is included and protected more in local policymaking and practice

Surveyed grantees were also asked whether, and how, their projects have resulted in a new or strengthened policy framework for heritage locally. **Three quarters of grantees (n=12) indicated that their projects had resulted in a stronger policy framework.** Two respondents reported the creation of a new heritage strategy for their place (13 per cent). A further 10 grantees indicated that this outcome had been achieved through other means such as adding or strengthening heritage within wider policies and strategies, or updating an existing heritage strategy.

1.5.3.4 Heritage organisations are ready and capable to work at scale

1.5.3.4.1 Community Grants

Five surveyed grantees (31 per cent) used some of their Heritage Places project funding to administer a community grant scheme (n=16), however 1 project provided no further details on these community grants. Across all these projects, **105 community grants have been distributed** by these 4 projects, representing **an investment of £321,167 in community-led projects**.

Community grants ranged in average size across the Places operating these schemes. The range in average grant size was £8,655, with the largest average size at £9,641 and the lowest at £986. The average size across all the Places was £5,296. This diversity demonstrates varying approaches to community grantmaking across the Places, with some projects opting to distribute more, smaller grants, while others distributed fewer, larger grants. This reflects the maturity of community grantmaking in the Places as well as the scale of intervention, with North East Lincolnshire (a former Area of Focus) and Glasgow City (with a much narrower geographical footprint) making larger awards.

These community grant schemes are increasing community organisations' readiness for larger applications, by enabling early-stage activities that typically precede larger bids, such as feasibility work, gathering evidence of need, testing ideas with communities, and strengthening organisational processes. Community grantees reported they feel better equipped to plan future heritage activity following successful delivery of their grant-funded projects. Grants have also expanded their networks and partnerships, which supports work at greater scale. In some cases, community grants helped groups demonstrate demand and audience interest, producing evidence they intended to use in subsequent funding proposals. Others

Figure 1.5.1 (overleaf).

Projects contributed **strongly** towards:

- Heritage organisations becoming better networked and more collaborative
- Heritage organisations developing a better understanding of both “their heritage assets, and the potential of these assets to engage audiences”
- Heritage organisations developing a better understanding “of local audiences, their needs, interests and motivations”

1.5.3.5 Heritage is included and protected more in local policymaking and practice

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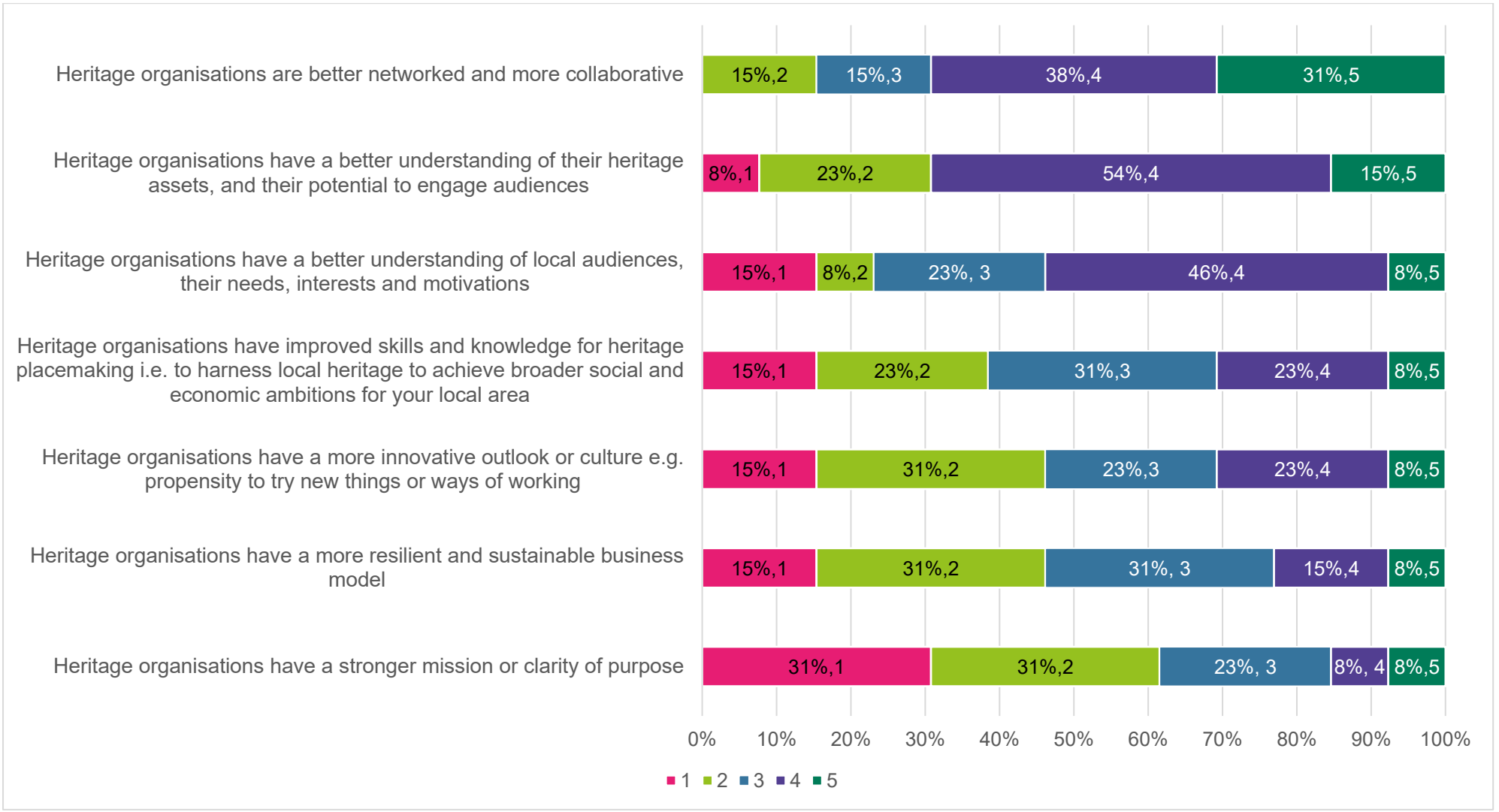
Figure 1.5.1: Extent to which projects have contributed to strengthened heritage organisations (n=13) (where 1 means "Not at all" and 5 means "To a great extent)



described how the experience increased volunteer capacity. All of these improvements contribute to readiness for more complex, multi-year applications.

In a small number of Places, **community grants are already building a pipeline into Heritage Fund grants**. Collectively, Medway and North East Lincolnshire, highlight that the Initiative has resulted in **six direct and successful bids to the Heritage Fund.**

‘Hidden Histories’ Community Grants in North East Lincolnshire: From Confidence Building to Scaling Ambition

Community grants, trialled under Areas of Focus, have continued and evolved under the Initiative with the name, **‘Hidden Histories’**. Initially designed to build capacity and confidence to bid for funding and deliver projects, the grant scheme is now more heavily geared towards **seed corn funding for larger ambitions**, reflecting successes in raising confidence in the sector and the elevated ambitions signalled by Heritage Places designation. **Six grants have been awarded to date.**

“At first, it was a bit of a ‘suck it and see’ approach … access heritage funding for the first time type projects. But now we're emphasising delivery, in terms of funding acting as a springboard. There's an expectation that organisations do not look at this as a standalone project, but something that can take things forward and lever in investment.”

(Local authority officer)

Projects include **a feasibility study into the redevelopment of a historic building** in Grimsby into a multi-functional arts and culture centre, and **educational workshops about North East Lincolnshire’s chalk streams** - rare habitats described as, ‘England’s rainforests’, which are under threat from climate change.

Local arts and heritage organisations report that the refreshed approach to community grantmaking has **enabled testing, learning and proof-of-concept work, unlocking new partnerships and stronger, collaborative bids for more ambitious, longer-term projects**. They see this as improving outcomes for heritage and local audiences over the long-term.

“We've started working with new partners, which came out of commissions funded through Create NE Lincolnshire. They've purposely encouraged partnerships to improve collaboration in North East Lincs. There’s a lot more partnership working now.”

“We can really think about our project, give ourselves time, and let it build and have a conclusion at the end that has a positive outcome. That can then go into another application with proven evidence.”

“I think that's a great model of doing research and development and then going into something longer-term. So you don't feel like you're just going from project to project chasing funding, you're actually building the heritage offer and understanding, and getting collaborators on board in a timely manner without rushing it, which is good.”

(Local partner organisations)

One organisation has used its community grant to research and convene communities around **Grimsby’s historic print industry**, laying the groundwork for a successful Heritage Places bid to develop skills and employment for creative artists inspired by Grimsby’s print heritage.

Another Heritage Places project is focused on the **Sir Moses Montefiore Memorial Synagogue in Grimsby**. Project officers describe how the combination of an initial community grant and subsequent Heritage Places award has built connections between Jewish residents and the wider community; growing confidence, neighbourliness and belonging, and building cohesion. Closer connections have resulted in twelve new volunteers exploring ways to support the building and congregation, ahead of a planned next Heritage Places bid to restore the synagogue. The grants have increased organisational capacity and boosted a dwindling synagogue community.

"It's confidence building - going from a really small congregation and building capacity. They thought not many people would be interested, but through activities and events we've proven that lots of people are interested and want to help … We've even had support from the church opposite, so they've now got a really good interfaith relationship, supporting each other for different things. So, I'd say that's been a big change."

(Local partner organisation)

The partnership outcomes of the small grants scheme are illustrated by an **emerging partnership of five organisations, each with museum ambitions**. With funding from the Initiative, the local authority lead has commissioned **Museums Development North** to provide bespoke business support and guidance to this emerging museum consortia.

"Now they're wanting to work together, and that isn't something that we said, there's those organic conversations. And through Heritage Place, we've been able to support them financially, and you can now potentially see a cohort of five organisations that will work together."

(Local authority officer)

North East Lincolnshire's experience shows how, over time, community grants – alongside regular heritage community networking - can evolve from confidence-**building mechanisms into an engine for sector ambition**, deepening collaboration, strengthening organisational capacity, and generating pathways into larger Heritage Places projects.

97 per cent (n=29) of community grantees had never received National Lottery Heritage Fund support previously, demonstrating that community grants are helping to reach organisations that can benefit from early-stage support to scale their ideas. **62 per cent (n=26) of grantees are now more likely to make an application to the Heritage Fund over the next year.**

The evidence gathered highlights that community grants function as R&D for increasing local ambition, and lay essential groundwork for future bids by building capability, clarity of purpose, stronger partnerships, and project concepts with more solid evidence behind them. As a result, **community grants are helping create a stronger pipeline of organisations that are better positioned to progress toward larger Heritage Fund applications, and work at scale.**

1.5.3.7 More, and more sustainable, investment in heritage is emerging

Many of the match funding sources detailed by surveyed projects (n=12) were internal lead organisation resources, both in-kind resources and cash, highlighting that **more sustainable sources of investment are not yet widespread among the current grantees**. However, Arts Council England and The Postcode Lottery were among the external sources of match funding, demonstrating capability among some organisations to attract more sustainable investment.

In total, **£466,229 was secured from 19 sources**, with an average of £24,538 per project. Of those projects which reported a target for match funding (n=6), all of these projects have achieved their match funding target, with one project securing higher than their match funding target, leading to a **success rate against target of 111%**.

1.5.3.8 There are fewer and lower risks to heritage

Six grantees (37.5 per cent) stated that their project included activities which aim to reduce the risks to local heritage, with a further four (25 per cent) stating that they plan to do this as part of the remainder of their project (n=16).

1.5.3.8.1 Reduced physical risks to heritage

One project stated that heritage had been removed from an at risk register or had its risk assessment changed as a result of the project.

- **Humber Estuary SSSI, SPA and SAC**, North East Lincolnshire, reduced risk profile
- **Cleethorpes Nature Reserve**, North East Lincolnshire, reduced risk profile

One project reported reduced physical risks to heritage collections through risk reduction measures:

- **Torquay Museum**, Torbay, upgraded heating system to safeguard collections
- **Torquay Museum**, Torbay, new environmental controls to safeguard collections

A further three projects stated that urgent works and repairs had been carried out, without providing additional details. Another three had carried out **heritage digitisation activities** to reduce risks.

1.5.3.8.2 Reduction in broader risks, which help to safeguard heritage

Of these projects, all reported **broader outcomes which reduce risks to heritage** (n=6).

Strong, risk-reducing outcomes from year two projects:

- Increased community engagement
- Increased awareness and appreciation of heritage
- Improved identification and interpretation of heritage

Weaker and/or less prevalent risk-reducing outcomes from year two projects:

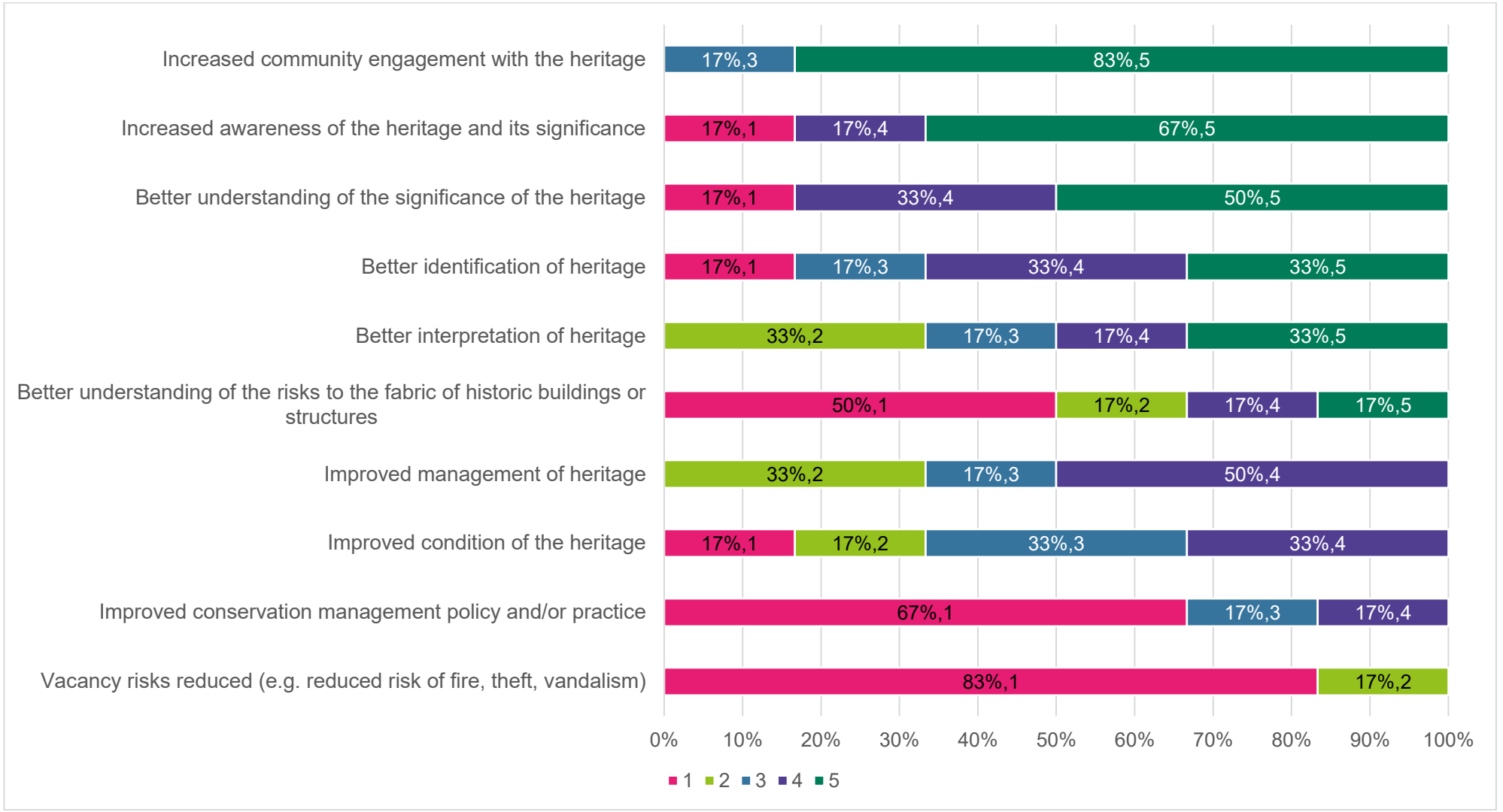
- Better understanding of the risks to the fabric of the building
- Improved management of heritage
- Improved condition of heritage
- Improved conservation management policy and/or practice
- Vacancy risks reduced

1.5.3.9 Communities trust those who look after 'civic' heritage

Evidence from lead organisations and Area and Nation teams indicates that **trust between lead organisations, the wider heritage sector and local communities has generally increased by the end of Year Two**, where this was a key dependency for collaborative, people-centred heritage placemaking. Where perceptions of local authorities previously acted as barriers to collaborative working, teams emphasise that relationship-building efforts have enabled more meaningful collaboration to begin.

- In **Glasgow City (SSCHD)**, lead organisation teams highlight that their next, proof-of-concept phase is grounded in public consultations, "They're not just things that have been grabbed from a list… People will see things recognisable in the programme, which is really important if we're going to maintain that trust."

Figure 1.5.2: Extent to which projects have contributed towards heritage risk outcomes (n=6), (where 1 means "Not at all" and 5 means "To a great extent)



- In **County Durham (Shildon and Newton Aycliffe)**, deep listening is rebuilding trust in areas where communities felt "let down" by past consultations.
- In **ABC Borough Council Area**, early trust-building has developed into the creation of the borough's first heritage network, and officers underscore a commitment to sustaining relationships, ensuring follow-through, and avoiding the perception that consultation leads only to "a strategy on a shelf."

Overall, the delivery evidence shows a **clear positive trajectory: trust is increasing, communities are beginning to feel heard and represented, and partnerships are strengthening**, while recognising that sustained effort, clearer communication and continued relational working are essential to deepen and maintain this progress into later phases of the Initiative.

1.5.4 Encouraging a people-centred approach, enabling everyone's heritage to be recognised

At a glance...

88% of projects worked with local communities and/or VCSE organisations	**87% of projects which work with communities report community-centred policy change**	**100% of projects which work with communities report community-centred practice change**	**One heritage asset has come under community ownership or management**

1.5.4.1 Summary of the findings

By the end of Year Two, the Initiative has begun to make **meaningful progress toward enabling everyone's heritage to be recognised, particularly through changes in organisational practice, strengthened skills and capacity, and deeper community participation.** Impacts are early and uneven, as expected at this stage, but the foundations for more inclusive heritage practice are increasingly visible across the Places.

Heritage organisations have strengthened their ways of working with communities. Surveyed grantees reported widespread changes to policy and practice arising directly from their experience of community-led delivery through their Heritage Places projects. Many organisations have improved existing policies or developed new ones to ensure their work better reflects local needs and voices. Practice has also shifted. Organisations are engaging communities earlier, working with a more diverse range of VCSE partners, and adopting broader and more inclusive engagement methods. These changes signal **a move away from traditional, institution-centred models toward more participatory and people-centred approaches.**

Skills, capacity and confidence to work inclusively have grown. Community engagement has helped strengthen staff, volunteer and organisational capability. Training, diversification of staff teams and exposure to new methods have increased confidence in working with a wider range of communities. Organisations also report being better networked with local community infrastructure, better informed about community needs, and more capable of facilitating inclusive heritage activity.

Heritage is increasingly community-led. The vast majority of grantees worked with community and voluntary groups to design and deliver project activities. Evidence shows that co-created outputs with local communities, such as new stories, interpretations and community-centred projects, have raised awareness of lesser-known heritage, broadened audiences, and diversified who participates in heritage. Collaboration

with VCSE partners has also helped to recruit volunteers, design activities, reach new audiences and establish community steering groups.

Some Places are beginning to see shifts toward community ownership or management of heritage assets. While still limited at this early stage, a small number of projects have supported moves toward community-led management, with more anticipating such outcomes as projects progress.

Overall, **the Initiative has successfully begun to reshape how heritage is understood, governed and delivered, embedding more inclusive practices and expanding who is represented in heritage activity.** Although work remains to sustain and scale these practices, Year Two outcomes show a clear trajectory toward a more people-centred heritage system.

1.5.4.2 Heritage organisations have improved ways of working with communities.

1.5.4.2.1 Policy and practice change for work with communities

The theory of change identified that for long-term improvement in the inclusivity of heritage to materialise, this would require improvements in the ways that organisations work with communities, which become embedded in policy and practice.

Surveyed grantees were therefore asked whether their project experience working with communities and VCSE organisations had influenced policies and practice within their organisation, or among any of the organisations their activity has supported e.g. community grantees.

Practice change

There has been **widespread and meaningful development in organisational practice**, with every project reporting positive shifts, represented in Figure 1.4.3, in terms of:

- Earlier timing of community engagement
- Involvement of new and diverse VCSE organisations
- New and diverse methods of community engagement

The **influence of communities on project decisions** shows potential to develop further over the course of the Initiative, but from strong start in these early years.

Policy change

There has also been **widespread development in people-centred organisational policy,** with 87 per cent reporting positive changes (n=15):

- Existing policies have been improved (nine grantee organisations)
- New policies have been developed (eight grantee organisations)

1.5.4.2.2 Skills, Capacity, and Confidence Working with Communities

Surveyed projects (n=16) were asked about changes to skills, capacity and confidence to work with communities, arising from their activities. Of those projects that employ staff, **the majority of projects (88 per cent) reported improvements in staff skills, capacity and confidence to work with communities**. These improvements are attributed to staff taking part in relevant training (50 per cent of the projects), as well diversification of the staff team (44 per cent of projects).

For projects which have volunteers, a **similar proportion reported improvements in volunteer skills, capacity and confidence to work with communities**. Nearly a third of projects reported that volunteers had undertaken relevant training, and a quarter that the volunteer team had become more diverse.

Fewer projects improved skills, capacity and confidence of boards of trustees reflecting differences in the organisational type of supported organisations, and the breadth and scope of activities which engaged the VCSE. One project involved trustees receiving training that improved capabilities to work with communities, while two projects reported that boards of trustees had become more diverse.

The **Pathways to the Past (PTTP) programme in Neath Port Talbot** reports that **trustee skills, capacity, and confidence to work effectively with communities have been strengthened** by providing practical insight into community-led delivery and partnership working.

*Exposure to real examples of community participation has **deepened their understanding of barriers to engagement and the importance of inclusive, accessible approaches**. Observing the outcomes of collaboration with local organisations, voluntary groups, and heritage partners has also **strengthened trustees' confidence in community-centred approaches.***

*Seeing how partnerships increase participation, diversify audiences, and improve accessibility has **reinforced their ability to advocate for these approaches within governance discussions and strategic planning.** In addition, trustees have developed **greater confidence in their oversight role.** Reviewing progress updates and evaluation insights has **strengthened their capacity to provide constructive challenge**, ask informed questions, and ensure that delivery remains aligned with organisational values and community priorities. This has **supported more effective governance and improved decision-making.***

*Overall, their involvement has **increased their confidence to champion community voice, strengthened their skills in understanding impact, and enhanced their capacity to guide future initiatives that prioritise co-creation, inclusion, and meaningful partnership with communities**."*

At the **whole organisation level**:

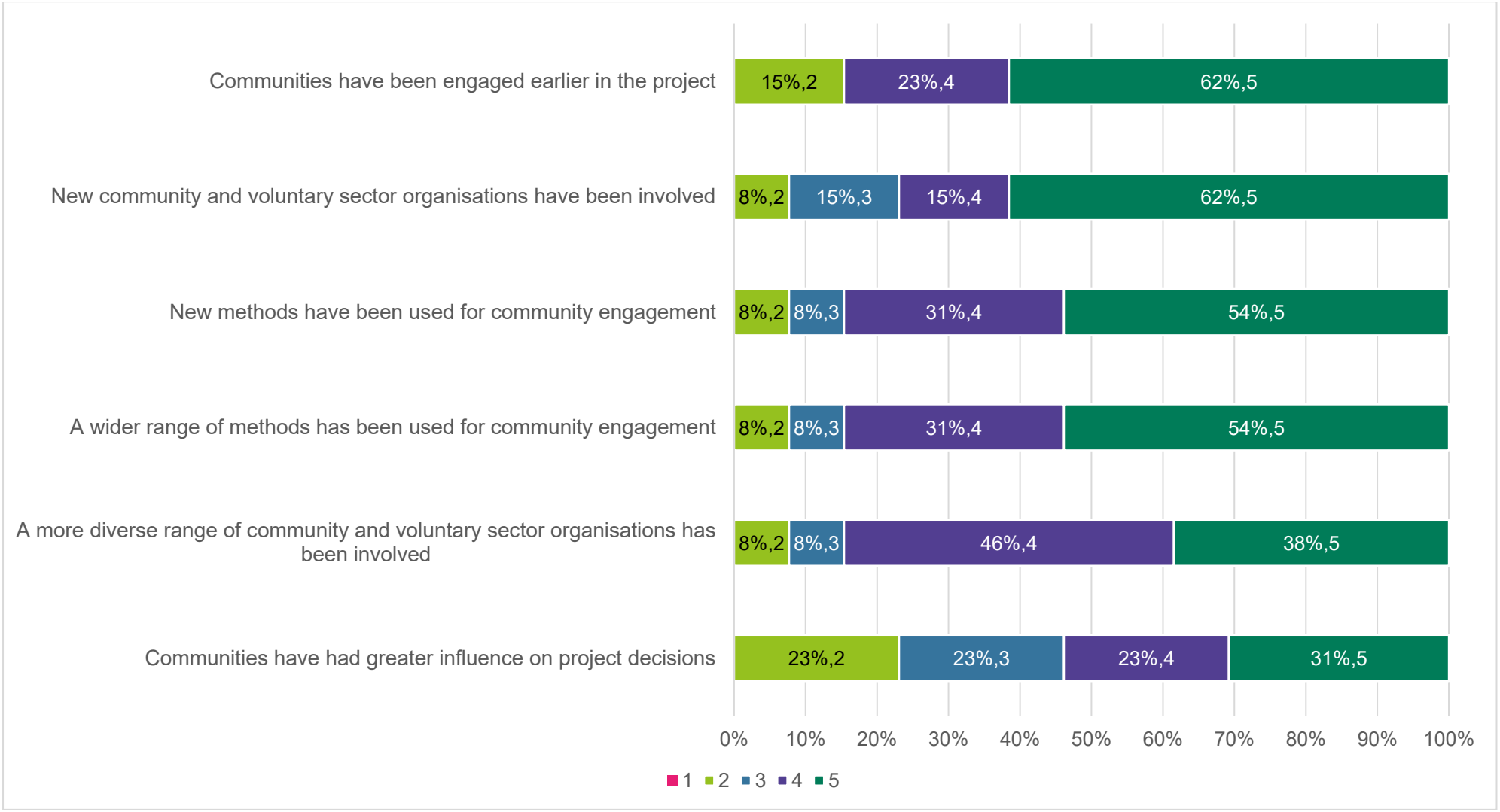
- Eleven projects agreed that supported organisations are better networked with community infrastructure
- Seven projects agreed that supported organisations have improved organisational confidence and capacity to work with diverse communities,
- Nine projects agreed that supported organisations have a better understanding of local community infrastructure (56 per cent)

Electric Medway CIC has strengthened its organisational skills and confidence in community-centred heritage practice through a series of approaches developed specifically for its Heritage Places project. One of the most significant shifts has been the adoption of **youth-led methods**, with trained Digital Archivists taking ownership of research and digital organisation. Working with minimal support from the project manager, these young participants demonstrated high levels of capability and initiative, giving the organisation greater confidence in embedding youth-driven approaches in future work.

The organisation has also gained experience in **community decision-making**, involving the Intra Community Trust directly in assessing and scoring artist commission proposals. This process generated genuine community buy-in and led to collaborative decisions about mural locations, strengthening connections between the heritage programme and local residents.

In addition, Electric Medway has shifted its commissioning practice by embracing **open-source principles**. Moving to Creative Commons licensing required a rapid learning curve but has already influenced how the

Figure 1.5.3: The extent to which work with communities and VCSE organisations has impacted organisational practice (n=13), on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 means not at all and 5 means a lot).



organisation works with artists and how it intends to structure future commissions. This approach is viewed as a valuable step toward more transparent, shareable and community-accessible digital heritage.

Together, these patterns suggest that **staff, volunteer and whole-organisation capability to work with communities is strengthening** across many projects. Projects which involved boards of trustees were less widespread and there is **scope in later years of the Initiative to further develop trustee and leadership capability** within this overall picture of improvement, through training and recruitment practices – either via targeted cross-organisational programmes or explicit encouragement to individual projects to embed this work.

1.5.4.3 Heritage is community-led

Grantees surveyed for the year two evaluation reported **widespread collaboration with communities and VCSE organisations,** which supports the Initiative's aims to ensure that everyone's heritage is included. 88 per cent worked with local communities and/or community and voluntary sector organisations in a variety of ways to share management, design and delivery of projects activities (n=16).

1.5.4.3.1 Heritage is co-created

Survey respondents (n=11) who reported on the outcomes of co-creation, highlight that **co-creation drives a range of inclusive outcomes**, presented in Figure 1.4.4. The **strongest outcomes** were:

- Raising awareness and appreciation of local heritage that was not widely known about before
- Increasing the audience for the heritage involved in our project

1.5.4.3.2 Heritage is owned and managed by the community

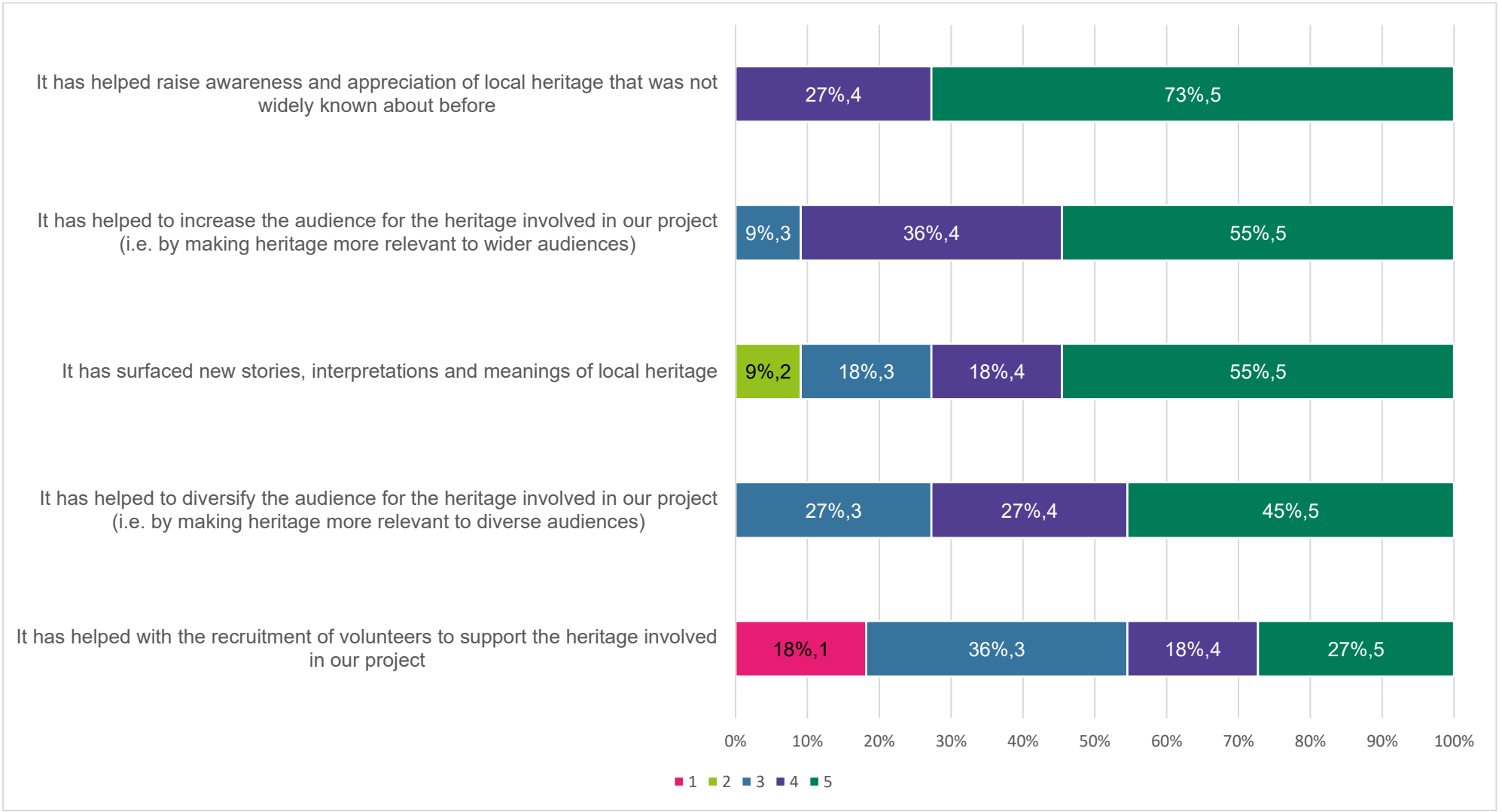
One grantee survey respondent reported that local heritage has come under community ownership or management during the first two years of the Initiative. A further six respondents indicated that a change to community management or ownership was expected to take place over the full course of their projects. The Create Place project in Stoke-on-Trent (open to heritage and cultural leaders across North Staffordshire) demonstrates how leadership programmes can indirectly support this outcome.

Create Place Heritage & Digital, Staffordshire University: A Placemaking and Co-Creation Programme for Heritage and Cultural Professionals in North Staffordshire

The Create Place leadership programme, delivered by Staffordshire University, is **helping to strengthen local capacity in Stoke-on-Trent for community ownership and management of heritage by equipping leaders with the skills, confidence and relationships needed to steward heritage assets over the long term**. While the programme does not directly manage transfer processes, it provides structured support to organisations that are planning, or already undertaking, community-led ownership and management.

Across its first two cohorts, the programme has **supported a range of leaders in Stoke-on-Trent that manage or own community assets, or which are in the process of exploring these options**. These include the leadership team at The Teapot Factory CIC, which aims to restore and repurpose abandoned buildings around Oliver's Mill in Middleport; trustees of the Spode Museum Trust, based on the Spode site, which is in current development for cultural and economic use; and fellows from the Portland Inn Project, a community led regeneration project with a physical asset of the Portland Inn. Other fellows come from sector-development organisations supporting communities to better use and care for their heritage assets.

Figure 1.5.4: Impact of co-creation on a range of outcomes (n=11), on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 means not at all and 5 means a lot).



Collectively, **the programme is nurturing a cohort of community-based heritage leaders whose work is contributing to more locally anchored, community-owned models of heritage stewardship** across Stoke-on-Trent and the wider North Staffordshire area.

1.5.5 Creating integrated and holistic schemes across the breadth of heritage, including, anchor institutions, cultural heritage, and the natural environment

1.5.5.1 Summary of Findings

Evidence from interviews with lead organisations and Area and Nation teams indicates that **the Initiative is making meaningful early progress toward more integrated and holistic heritage schemes**, though this is still emerging and varies across Places.

Several Places are already demonstrating **cross-cutting integration** of heritage into wider local authority departments. Across the portfolio, **work spans the breadth of all heritage types**. Examples include natural-heritage scoping in North East Lincolnshire; culture and memories in Glasgow City (SSCHD) and Leicester; industrial and transport in County Durham; and heritage-led community planning in ABC Borough Council Area. These demonstrate a holistic, and growing, appreciation locally of heritage as encompassing physical assets, landscape, stories, identities, and lived experience. New **governance structures and networks are also helping align multiple sectors and heritage domains** within shared strategic frameworks.

Analysis of **Heritage Places awards by heritage type** at Appendix 3, shows that **"Historic Areas, Buildings and Monuments" currently dominates the Tranche One portfolio** at 43 per cent of all awards, with "Cultures and Memories" and "Industrial, Maritime and Transport" each at 21 per cent, and other categories less represented. Overall, Year 2 Tranche One investment indicates both continuity from historical patterns, as well as early shifts, with **greater emphasis on "Historic Areas, Buildings and Monuments" compared to the long-term average.**

Overall, the evidence suggests **a clear direction of travel: the Initiative is beginning to create integrated, holistic schemes** that span multiple heritage types and policy domains, but the maturity and visibility of these approaches will grow as Places move further into delivery.

1.5.6 Increasing pride in place and connecting communities and visitors with heritage

At a glance…

51,805 participants engaged	**8,173 visitors attracted**	**Five historic assets that matter to local communities are restored or in the process of restoration**	**Five projects have contributed towards heritage receiving or retaining national or international recognition and/or protections**

1.5.6.1 Summary of the Findings

By the end of Year Two, **the Initiative has begun to generate early signs of increased pride in place and strengthened connection to heritage**. This is consistent with the wider delivery context, where most Places remain focused on foundational activity - scoping, building relationships, and establishing strategic direction - rather than delivering the major public-facing or capital projects likely to produce large-scale changes in pride and belonging at this stage.

Participation levels in Heritage Places project activities demonstrate the scale of emerging engagement, and the connections being established between heritage and local people. Across 11 surveyed projects, **51,805 participants have taken part to date**, with some Places engaging several thousand each through workshops, consultations and public-realm activation.

Although widespread physical transformation of Places is still to get going, completed and imminent **restorations of historic places and spaces are able to evidence that these assets matter to local people,** which lays the foundations for stronger pride in place outcomes later in the Initiative. Five sites are either restored or in the process of restoration, each identified as a local priority through consultation, community crowdfunding, or inclusion in neighbourhood plans. Public support shows people value these places, and indicates that completed restorations will have a positive effect on pride and belonging.

The Initiative is also helping Places achieve and safeguard **national and international recognition, which can play an important symbolic role in strengthening civic pride**. Surveyed grantees reported contributions to listings, citations in national publications, and safeguarding of international designations. Examples include support to retain Torbay's UNESCO English Riviera Global Geopark status and to achieve Stoke-on-Trent's World Craft City designation, where Heritage Places activity helped strengthen the strategic case for recognition.

Evidence from case studies, evaluation reports and project updates shows that **early engagement and community-led creative activity are already fostering positive shifts in pride and belonging**. In Glasgow (SSCHD), participants reported feeling more positive about the future of Sauchiehall Street, stronger belonging, and increased pride in living, working or studying in the area. In Neath Port Talbot, volunteers described renewed pride linked to rediscovering historic places and contributing to local activity. Medway's scoping work was seen by elected members as raising community pride in local places.

Other Places show **emerging recognition of heritage's contribution to identity and cohesion**. In North East Lincolnshire, heritage is becoming more visible across wider large-scale, public-facing cultural initiatives, signalling growing appreciation for the contribution that heritage makes to local pride and belonging. ABC Borough Council Area reports that the Initiative is helping dispersed communities develop a shared sense of borough-wide identity rooted in heritage.

Overall, evidence of **pride-related outcomes remains early and localised, however the Initiative is already demonstrating potential by creating the conditions in which pride can grow**: deeper community engagement, more inclusive participation, visible heritage activity in public spaces, and renewed recognition of local stories and assets. These foundations are expected to support more substantial and widespread impacts on pride and belonging as delivery accelerates in later years.

1.5.6.2 More and a wider range of people enjoy, visit and take part in heritage

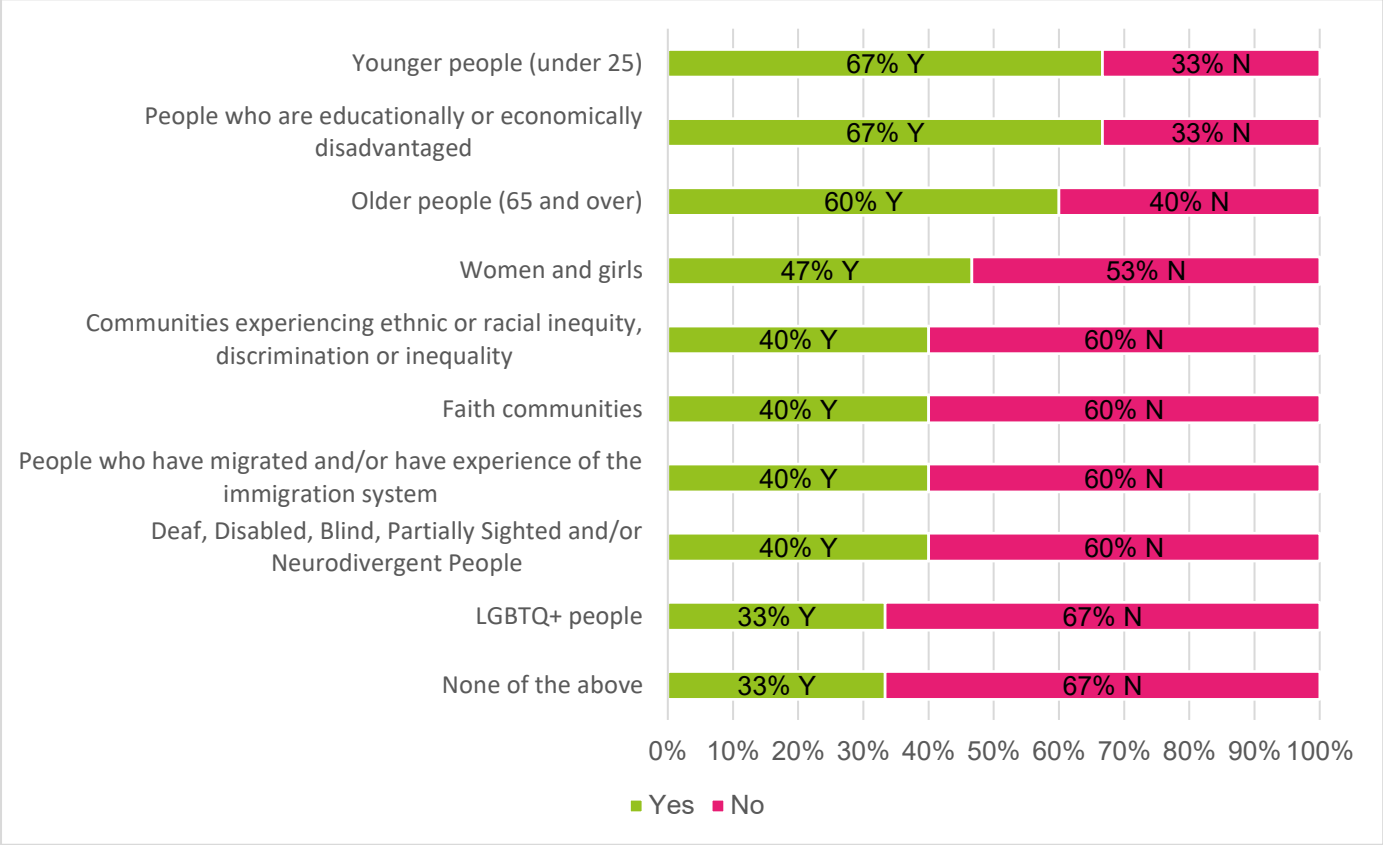
1.5.6.2.1 Numbers of participants

Across the 11 surveyed projects which reported participant figures, **51,805 participants have been engaged** so far. In total, 94 per cent of projects (n=15) aimed to engage more, or a wider range of, participants in local heritage, highlighting that there is widespread ambition in the early years of the Initiative to engage communities into local activities.

In terms of deliberative targeting of groups in the community, Figure 1.5.5 demonstrates that there was particularly **strong targeting in the current portfolio of Heritage Places projects towards younger people (under 25), people who are educationally or economically disadvantaged, and older people**[18].

[18] Surveyed projects were also asked whether they targeted any specific groups in the local community, to understand the extent to which activities were designed to engage groups with protected characteristics and/or are groups marginalised from heritage. Of those grantees that responded to

Figure 1.5.5: Overview of target participant groups for projects (n=14).



Comparisons between projects' intentions, and the actual communities served by the project demonstrates that: Projects were **most successful at engaging their target groups** (80 per cent or above success rate) from the following demographics:

- People who have migrated and/or have experience of the immigration system
- Faith communities
- Younger people
- LGBTQ+ people

Projects were **least successful at engaging their target groups** (60 per cent or below success rate) from the following demographics:

- Communities experiencing ethnic or racial inequity, discrimination or inequality
- Deaf, Disabled, Blind, Partially Sighted and/or Neurodivergent People
- People who are educationally or economically disadvantaged

However, lower engagement rates for "Communities experiencing ethnic or racial inequity, discrimination or inequality" and "Deaf, Disabled, Blind, Partially Sighted and/or Neurodivergent People" will be skewed by the low number of projects targeting these communities.

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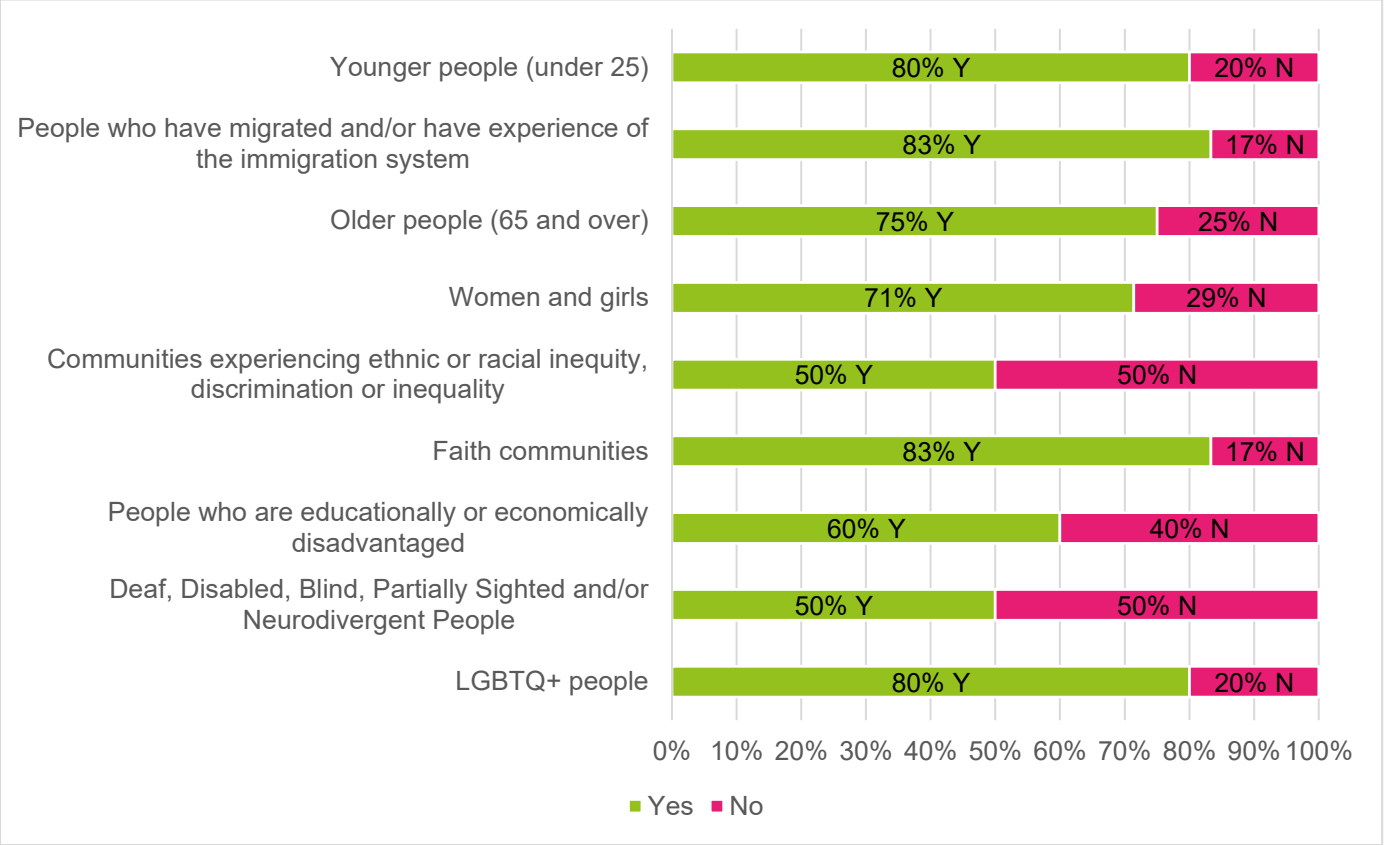
this question, five out of 14 did not aim through their activities to target any groups in particular i.e. activities were not designed to specifically increase engagement and participation among these groups, even if projects did not intend to exclude these groups.

The results for across both datasets per group underscore the importance of effective outreach to groups who are less frequently targeted, if less frequent targeting is then compounded by lower success rates. Communities experiencing ethnic or racial inequity, discrimination or inequality and Deaf, Disabled, Blind, Partially Sighted and/or Neurodivergent People are the two groups where future engagement efforts emerge as being of highest priority across the portfolio.

Figure 1.5.6: Overview of successful engagement of target participant groups for projects (n=14).



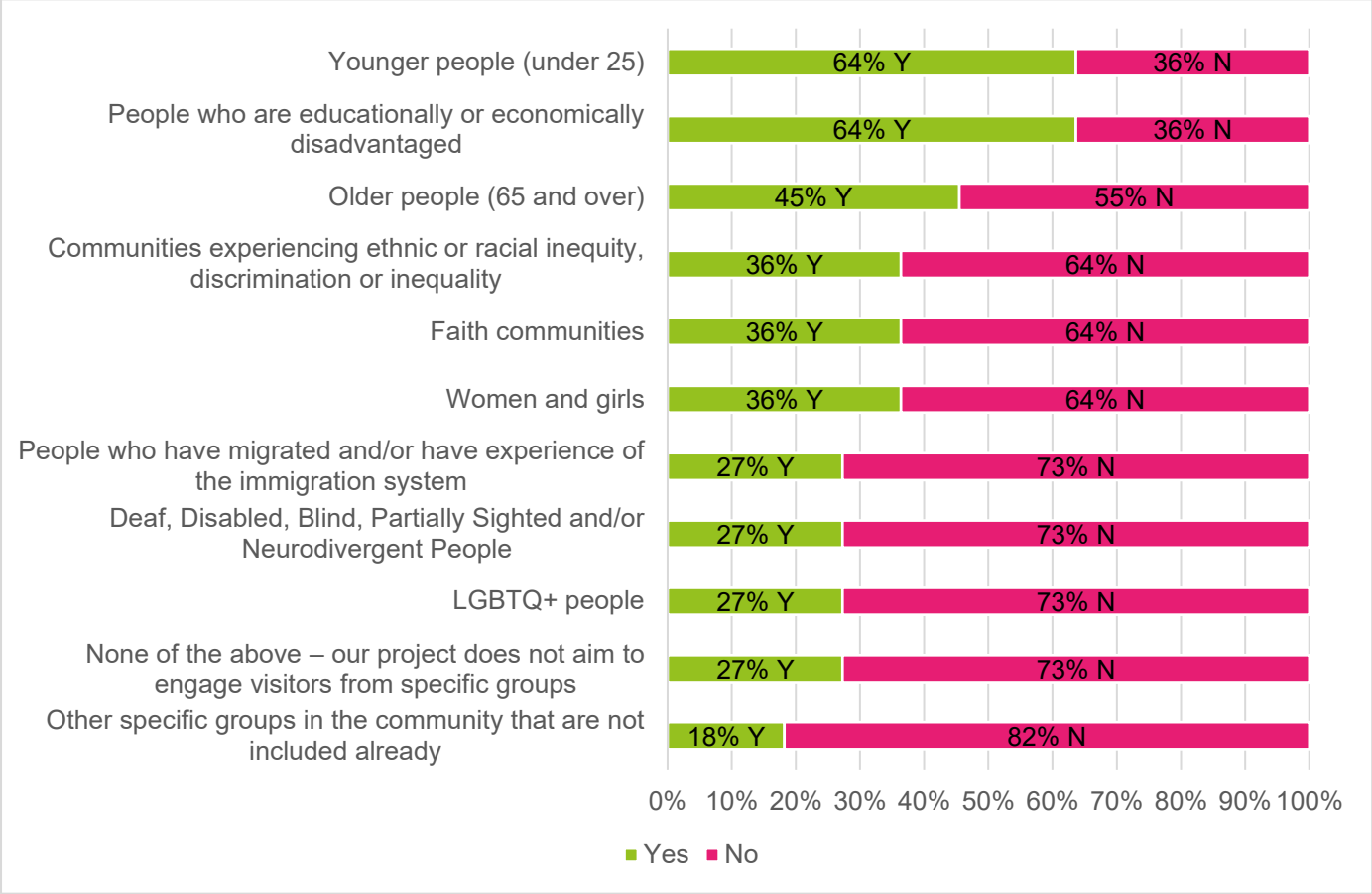
1.5.6.2.2 Numbers of Visitors

Across the 14 surveyed projects which reported visitor figures, **8,173 visitors have been attracted** so far. In total, 88 per cent of projects (n=16) aimed to attract more, or a wider range of, visitors to local heritage, highlighting that there is also widespread ambition in the early years of the Initiative to influence visitor numbers and diversity.

In terms of deliberative targeting of groups in the community, Figure 1.5.7 demonstrates that there was particularly **strong targeting in the current portfolio of Heritage Places project towards younger people (under 25), and people who are educationally or economically disadvantaged**[19].

[19] Surveyed projects were also asked whether they targeted any specific groups in the local community, to understand the extent to which activities were designed to engage groups with protected characteristics and/or are groups marginalised from heritage. Of those grantees that responded to this question, four out of 14 did not aim through their activities to target any groups in particular i.e. activities were not designed to specifically increase visitors among these groups, even if projects did not intend to exclude these groups.

Figure 1.5.7: Overview of target visitor groups for projects (n=14).



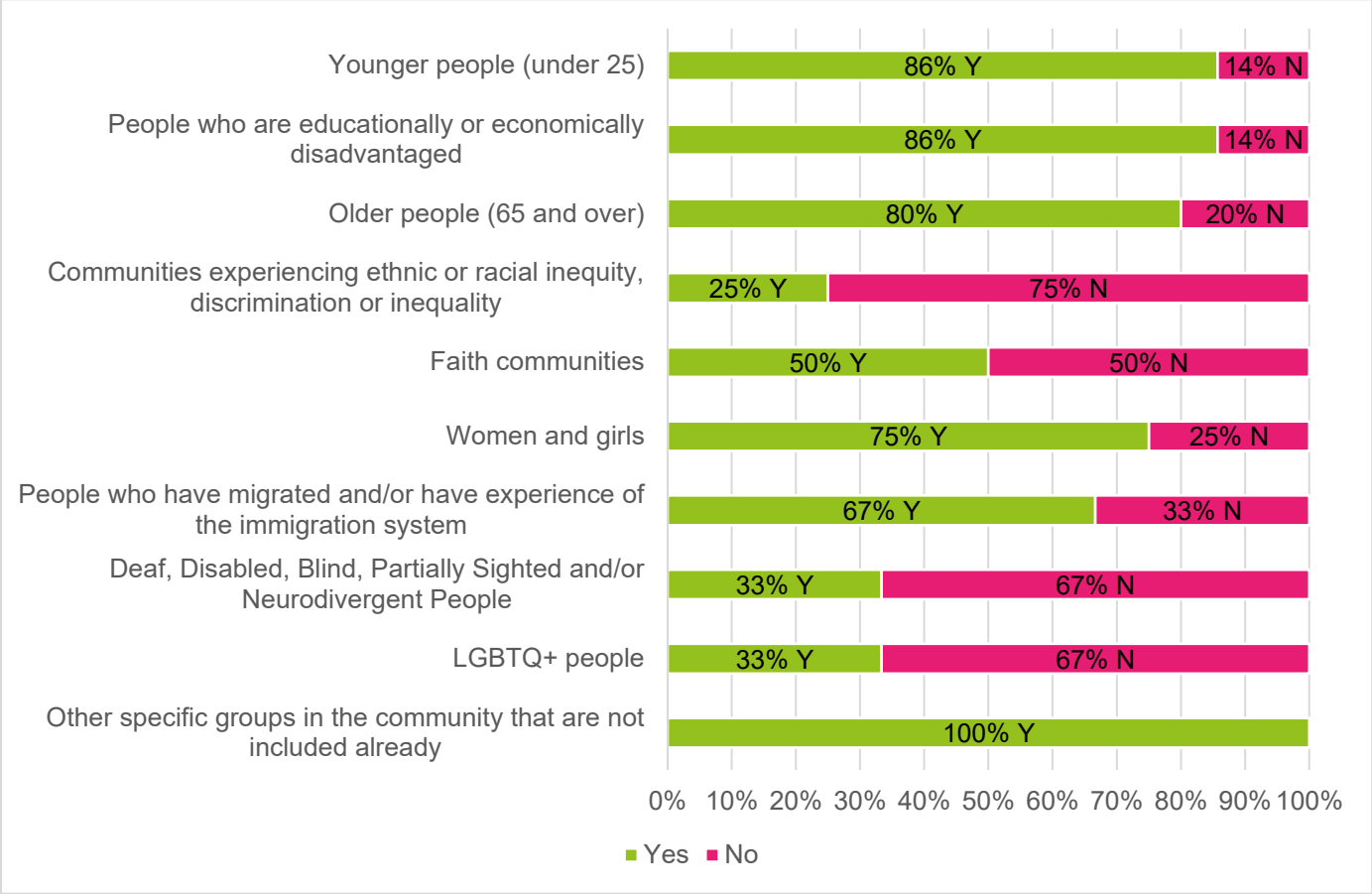
Comparisons between projects' intentions, and the actual visitor groups served by the project demonstrates that: Projects were **most successful at attracting their target visitor groups** (80 per cent or above success rate) from the following demographics:

- Other specific groups not identified in the categories
- Younger people
- People who are educationally or economically disadvantaged
- Older people

Projects were **least successful at engaging their target groups** (60 per cent or below success rate) from the following demographics:

- Communities experiencing ethnic or racial inequity, discrimination or inequality
- Deaf, Disabled, Blind, Partially Sighted and/or Neurodivergent People
- LGBTQ+ people
- Faith communities

Figure 1.5.8: Overview of successful engagement of target participant groups for projects (n=14).



1.5.6.2.3 Enjoyment

Across **the six case study Places**, lead organisations and local partners shared evidence that **early Heritage Places project activities have been enjoyable for community participants**. Enjoyment is indicated through sustained participation, enthusiastic feedback, repeat engagement, and the willingness of participants to contribute creatively or socially to activities.

Spotlight on Glasgow City (SSCHD): Participants in the artist residency project stayed for unusually long periods (three to four hours), reflecting the success of the engagement strand in making people feel welcome (83 per cent of participants felt welcome across all engagement activities). Artists described long dwell times as highly unusual for free city-centre activity, an indicator of enjoyment, comfort and absorption. Activities were described as *"accessible," "gentle,"* and offering space to *"be very vocal or be quiet or just listen."* Workshop participants enjoyed the creative angle of the activities, as well as the opportunity to talk to new people and forge stronger intergenerational bonds in a low-pressure, safe and welcoming environment.

1.5.6.3 Heritage audiences enjoy, learn about and value community and cultural heritage.

Across the six case studies, there is evidence that **participants have learned about local community and cultural heritage, and valued the opportunity to contribute to community-centred cultural activity**.

- In **Glasgow** (SSCHD), audiences engaged enthusiastically with creative workshops that allowed them to explore the street's social history. The co-created exhibition of memories "from the 1940s to today" further demonstrated how participants valued the chance to contribute personal heritage

to a collective artwork. In total, 85 per cent of respondents agreed that they had learned something valuable to them about the heritage of SSCHD as a result of the activity.

- In **North East Lincolnshire**, the recruitment of new volunteers at the Grimsby synagogue from outside the Jewish faith community highlights how the project has contributed to deeper appreciation of community and cultural heritage different to one's own.
- In **ABC Borough Council Area**, consultation on the draft Heritage Strategy has raised awareness and appreciation of intangible heritage and natural heritage, broadening narratives of 'what heritage is' locally. Participatory budgeting processes and heritage networking also demonstrate early promise in encouraging community groups to see heritage as 'for them' and to value community heritage in other places in the borough beyond their 'own patch'.
- In **Medway**, small-grant projects enabled residents, particularly young people and marginalised groups, to connect with overlooked community and cultural heritage stories. Participants were inspired by encountering archival materials, showing enjoyment, emotional resonance and a sense of value in seeing their histories recognised.
- In **County Durham**, engagement surfaced deep curiosity in local industrial and wartime histories, particularly among young people who were eager to learn more. This reflects a strengthened valuing placed on industrial and military heritage that has continued resonance in place identity today.

1.5.6.4 More and a wider range of people feel represented in 'civic' heritage

Evidence from the six case studies shows that early **Heritage Places project activity is beginning to broaden who sees themselves reflected in civic heritage**, with more communities feeling their stories, identities and experiences are recognised, valued and part of 'civic' heritage narratives.

Glasgow City (**SSCHD**) provides strong indications that diverse groups now feel represented in civic heritage initiatives. Artist workshops enabled participation from older Glaswegians, teenagers, newcomers, women's craft groups and refugees. Artists reflected that the co-created soft-sculpture exhibition provided "something for everybody to connect to". Overall, 51% of participants across the scoping activity programme felt their contribution mattered although this varied, increasing to over 70% for some of the activities. This demonstrates confidence among participants that their contributions would impact the emerging plans for SSCHD. Lead organisation consultees summed up, *'The next phase feels founded on conversations that we've had with people, and with their research. They're not just things that have been grabbed from a list that existed beforehand. People who come back in the next phase to speak to us ... will see things recognisable in the programme, which is really important if we're going to maintain that trust."*

In **North East Lincolnshire**, community grants are driving stronger representation of diverse groups in civic heritage initiatives via investment in projects that surfaced under-represented stories, including Grimsby's Jewish heritage. There are challenges emerging however from a maturing heritage ecosystem, to ensure that the spirit of collective endeavour is maintained as ambitions among North East Lincolnshire's community of cultural and heritage organisations continue to grow. Joint working across the Initiative and Grimsby's Pride in Place programme is exploring how the VCSE sector can continue to feel sufficiently represented and resourced as more resources flow into the local area.

ABC's borough-wide strategy process prompted high engagement as a result of deliberate and concerted efforts to ensure that the whole borough feels represented in the Initiative, *"We were adamant we weren't just going to do workshops. We were going to get to people where they are, these hard to reach groups."* This approach is also broadening ownership of local heritage ambitions to include the grassroots heritage sector, with lead consultees noting, *"I've been surprised by the positivity … I think the message is getting across that ownership and the shaping of Heritage Places is beginning to filter up their ideas through the strategy."*

In **Medway**, grassroots, small-grant projects revealed stories often excluded from civic heritage, such as migrant heritage, youth-led Black history, and skateboarding culture. Medway's scoping phase evaluation report highlights that people *"felt like their voice was being heard"* and, that there was *"real sense of validation from participants knowing that their stories would 'go into the archives'"*. This highlights how inclusion of Heritage Places project outputs within official public heritage archives and collections sends a strong signal to community participants that their histories are valid and represented.

In **County Durham**, evaluation consultees highlighted that deep, place listening is rebuilding trust in the two Heritage Places towns (**Shildon and Newton Aycliffe**), and that community voices are being heard, and will be acted upon. Lead organisation teams describe how local communities have felt 'let down' in the past by consultation exercises that produced little tangible change, but that deeper participatory models for community engagement are helping to draw communities back into conversations about revitalising their towns.

1.5.6.5 There are more heritage citizens

473 volunteers have been recruited during the first two years of the Initiative, and there is some limited qualitative evidence that the volunteer base is beginning to diversify in some of the Places where volunteers have been recruited.

Torbay Museums Trust has broadened and diversified its volunteer base across collections and behind-the-scenes roles. The project has attracted a substantial cohort of younger volunteers (under 35), who now participate in equal numbers to older volunteers, a positive shift the Trust intends to build on. It has also engaged a greater number of volunteers who self-identify as having additional needs compared with pre-project levels, reflecting a more inclusive and representative volunteer offer.

1.5.6.6 Historic buildings and spaces that matter to people are restored, occupied and support community wellbeing and wealth-building

Studies of pride in place show that the deterioration of historic buildings and spaces that matter to communities dents local pride, while the revitalisation of places that hold important collective memories and meanings - like department stores, places of worship and celebration, pubs, and parks - can be catalytic in restoring a sense of pride and belonging[20].

Despite the early stage of the Initiative, surveyed grantees report that **five historic spaces and places are either in the process of being restored, or are fully restored**. Three surveyed projects indicated they were contributing to this outcome, and two of these projects were able to provide further details of these historic spaces and places. An overview of these restorations can be seen in Table 1.5.1 and Table 1.5.2.

Table 1.5.1: Overview of complete restorations.

Name of place or space:	Type of heritage (e.g. building, park, landscape etc):	Listings and/or designations (if any):	Scale of restoration to date (m^2, if applicable):
Motor Tug, Medway	Boat (maritime)	None	Approx. 50m long boat

[20] See Year One Heritage Places Report for citations and discussion, Heritage Places Strategic Initiative: Interim Evaluation Report Year One

Table 1.5.2: Overview of restorations in process, but not yet complete

Name of place or space:	Type of heritage (e.g. building, park, landscape etc):	Listings and/or designations (if any):	Scale of restoration to date (m², if applicable):
St Margaret's Church Rainham, Medway	Place of Worship (Church of England)	Grade 1	0 (funding applied for to deliver)
Dickens Writing Chalet, Medway	Historic Building	Listed	0 (funding applied for to deliver)
Riverside Country Park, Medway	Natural heritage (green and blue space)	Green Flag	Approx. 50m

The current uses of these restored places/spaces compared to the new or planned uses after restoration can be found in Table 1.5.3, demonstrating changes in uses which support community connections to heritage.

Table 1.5.3: Overview of changes to planned uses following restoration of places/spaces

Name of place or space:	Previous or original use before restoration:	New or planned use after restoration:
Motor Tug, Medway	Volunteer run heritage asset	New open days and hands on heritage experiences
St Margaret's Church, Medway	Church, occasional community venue	Community venue, local heritage centre, cultural venue
Dickens Writing Chalet, Medway	Vacant	Space for volunteer projects, writer in residence, focus for community heritage projects
Riverside Country Park	Eroding riverside/flood risk	New community ecological monitoring station

There is **strong evidence that these places and spaces 'matter' to local communities** and have been identified as a priority through a range of mechanisms:

- Two (50 per cent) have been identified as a priority in local consultation
- Two (50 per cent) have been crowdfunded by the community
- One (25 per cent) has been named in a neighbourhood, town, or place plan
- One (25 per cent) is owned or managed by a local VCSE organisation

Many scoping projects have involved mapping and auditing physical heritage. Some scoping phases and community grantmaking schemes have also encompassed feasibility studies and business planning for local assets which are yet to convert into heritage funding applications. Together these lay the foundations for future progress towards this outcome.

For example:

- Grant to Royal Highland Fusiliers Museum (Glasgow City, SSCHD) to reimagine its existing heritage building.

- Grant to Garnethill Multicultural Centre (Glasgow City, SSCHD) to update project costs and planning fees for accessible and sustainable space.
- Grant for feasibility study into the development of No.2, Alexandra Road, Grimsby into a multi-functional Arts and Culture Centre (North East Lincolnshire)
- Grant for conservation and community research and consultation on Grimsby Minster (North East Lincolnshire)
- Scoping activity included feasibility studies and business planning for premises for Shildon Railway Institute and Newton Aycliffe Bus Preservation Society (County Durham).

1.5.6.7 National and International Recognition and Protections

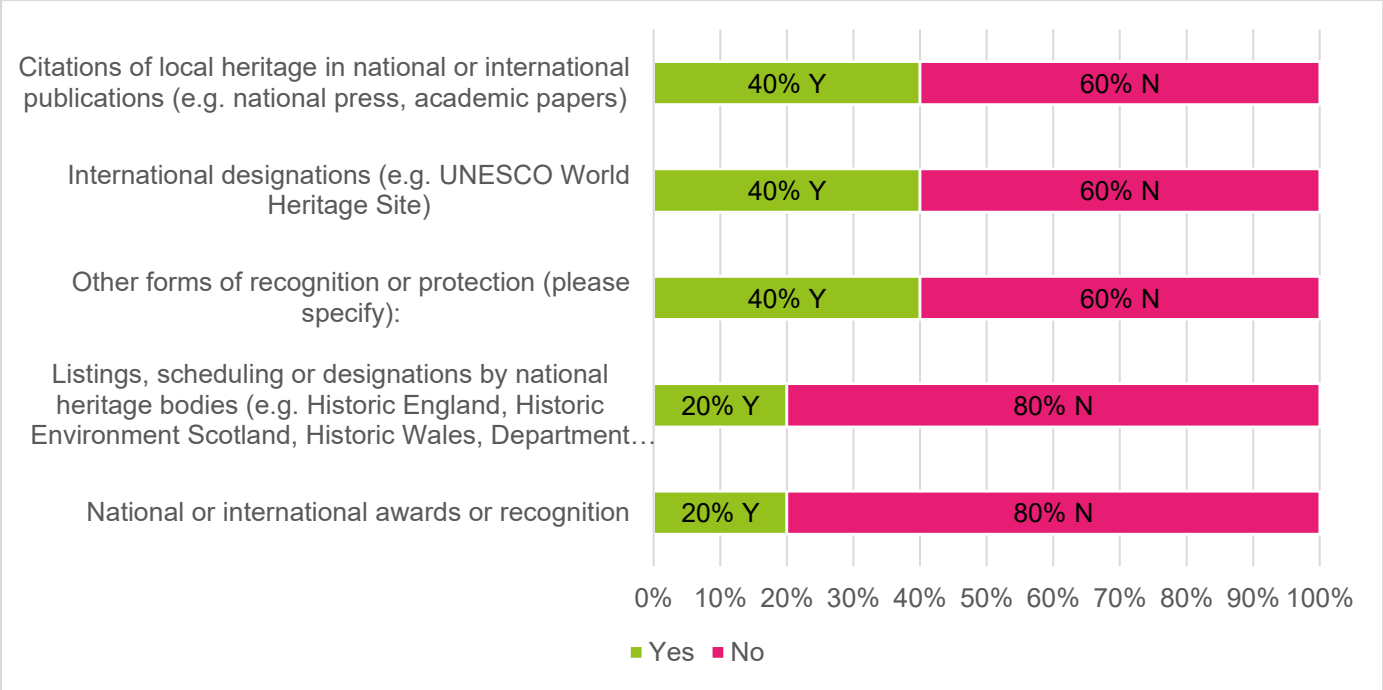
When local heritage is recognised, and protected, within and beyond local geographies this can boost pride in place. This outcome is expected to emerge more strongly in later years of the Initiative as work to advocate and communicate local heritage to wider audiences gathers paces. Nevertheless, **five surveyed projects (31 per cent) highlighted that work in the first two years of the Initiative was contributing towards local heritage receiving national or international recognition and/or protections**[21] (n=16).

As can be seen in Figure 1.5.9: Percentage of national or international recognitions or protections that supported heritage has received/contributed towards, the most common forms were citations of local heritage in national or international publications (e.g. national press, academic papers) and activities which have helped to safeguard international designations:

- Two projects describe activities to help retain Torbay's **UNESCO English Riviera Global Geopark** designation.
- Another project describes supporting **Stoke-on-Trent's 2024 World Craft Council's City of Crafts designation.** The project, CREATE PLACE, was included in the jury's deliberations which explored the educational pipeline of training crafts leaders in the city. The project is now supporting work to build momentum towards a **UNESCO City of Crafts designation.**

[21] Examples provided in this survey question included listings or designations, awards, citations in national media or academic publications, or international recognitions such as UNESCO status.

Figure 1.5.9: Percentage of national or international recognitions or protections that supported heritage has received/contributed towards (n=16)



1.5.6.8 Heritage makes places more attractive.

This emerges from year two research as a longer-term outcome which will develop further in later years of the Initiative, as restoration work improves the appearance of the public realm.

1.5.6.9 Visitors dwell longer and 'take in' more heritage

This also emerges as a longer-term outcome which will develop further in later years of the Initiative, as delivery of capital-schemes and large-scale, heritage-led animation of public spaces begins to drive these outcomes.

1.5.6.10 Heritage is a greater source of pride in place and belonging

Direct measures of the Initiative's contribution to strengthened pride in place and belonging is limited at the end of Year Two, reflecting activity across the portfolio which remains focused on establishing the foundations for longer-term impact as opposed to widespread community-facing activity and physical transformation of Places.

Nevertheless, there is some evidence from the Places that activities with local communities have boosted participants' sense of belonging and pride in place, particularly where community-led creative engagement, visible public-realm activity and inclusive outreach have taken place. The evidence suggests promising foundations for deeper, broader impacts in later years.

Direct measures of pride in place, reported in project evaluations:

- In **Glasgow City (SSCHD)**, participants in activities reported that they felt more positive about the future of Sauchiehall Street (83 per cent), that they felt a stronger sense of belonging to Sauchiehall Street (79 per cent, which rose to 95 per cent for participants that lived in the neighbourhood), and that they felt more proud to live, work, study or visit the area (89 per cent for people who live, work and study in the area). Cultural leaders also describe a shifting narrative

about the street, from being “written off”, to now commanding renewed optimism and confidence among communities, cultural partners and private investors.

“People said [co-created exhibition on SSCHD] had them in tears because the stories were so personal and so place-specific. There was something for everybody to connect to.”
(Artist Practitioner)

Indirect measures of pride in place:

- In **Neath Port Talbot**, the Pathways to the Past Project, feedback from project staff demonstrates how volunteering is driving pride in place, detailing volunteers’ sense of pride promoting heritage to wider groups and new audiences, and how volunteers’ growing affinity with the project has also improved their sense of pride in place.
- In **Medway**, elected members observe a contribution from Medway’s scoping project towards local pride in place, *“To me what is most important and notable is the chord it has struck in local communities, raising their pride in place.”*
- **North East Lincolnshire** describes how designation as a Heritage Place has strengthened the connections locally between arts and heritage, and cites how local heritage features prominently in the Paint the Town Proud initiative funded by the Cultural Development Fund, which partners regard as an indication that heritage’s contribution to sense of place and belonging is increasingly recognised outside the heritage sector. Increased visibility of heritage in large-scale art installations also serves to instil pride in the area’s heritage among local communities.
- **ABC Borough Council Area** describe how the Initiative is starting to connect oftentimes disparate and dispersed communities around a borough-wide sense of belonging and identity, shaped by shared heritage, while at the same time recognising and validating distinctive localised place identities.

Image 8: The Scottish Ensemble stepping out on route to their new base in Sauchiehall Street. Glasgow. Part of a £7m investment to transform Scottish Town and City Centres from The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

1.6 Conclusions and Recommendations

1.6.1 Conclusions

1.6.1.1 The Context for Delivery

Delivery of the Initiative in Year Two has taken place within **a complex, evolving and often challenging operating context, shaped by local political developments, shifting policy environments, organisational capacities, and wider place-shaping events**. While many of the contextual factors identified in Year One continue to exert a strong influence on progress, Year Two has seen intensification in some areas, new pressures emerging, and clearer evidence of how Heritage Places is itself shaping the local context in which it operates.

- **Year Two delivery continued to reflect the wide variation in local starting points identified in Year One.** Differences in heritage condition, prior investment and the maturity of local partnerships shaped the pace and character of progress, with Places benefiting from established strategies or legacy capacity moving more quickly, and those with more fragmented heritage ecosystems or dispersed geographies requiring longer periods of trust-building and alignment.

- **Local authority capacity remained a decisive influence.** Financial pressures, recruitment challenges, competing programme demands and slow internal approvals within lead organisations continued to constrain teams, particularly in Places working at full local authority scale.

- **The operating context in Year Two also intensified.** Proposed Local Government Reorganisation and changes in local government and mayoral leadership created uncertainty for several Places, accelerating decision-making while generating apprehension among officers navigating potential restructures. Capacity pressures deepened in some authorities, amplified by the introduction of new place-based Government programmes such as Pride in Place, which stretched officer time and competed for internal attention.

- Despite these constraints, **there was clearer evidence in Year Two of the Initiative positively shaping its delivery context.** Scoping work contributed to strengthened policy environments, with updated corporate strategies in several Places now giving greater prominence to heritage as an asset for regeneration and wellbeing. Heritage ecosystems also broadened, with grassroots, creative and community-based organisations playing more visible roles in shaping local agendas.

- **Wider place-shaping events further influenced expectations and visibility.** Centenary celebrations, bicentenaries and national media attention heightened public interest in heritage and created opportunities for alignment, while also placing pressures on timeframes and testing the Initiative's commitment to slow, deliberative groundwork.

Overall, **the context for delivery in Year Two was characterised by persistent structural challenges alongside growing strategic alignment, widening participation, and increasing recognition of heritage's role within broader local agendas.**

1.6.1.2 Heritage Fund Delivery of the Initiative

Delivery in Year Two reflects a **more confident, coordinated approach from Area and Nation teams, who now have greater familiarity with the Initiative's flexibility and long-term horizon**. Teams are increasingly aligning investments across a 10-year pathway, collaborating more effectively with partners, and drawing on strengthened learning mechanisms to share insight and refine practice.

- Area and Nation teams are **planning more intentionally across whole Places**, using early awards to build momentum and position the Initiative as part of a coherent place approach. They also report stronger, more strategic engagement with external agencies, with Tranche Two selection processes deepening cross-sector understanding and improving alignment across place-based work.

- **Teams are exercising flexibility creatively,** using fast-track routes and responsive grantmaking to blend early activity with longer-term scoping, enabling visible progress where conditions allow. Heritage Places designation is also being leveraged to draw in wider Heritage Fund investments, helping build traction in Places with limited recent heritage funding.

- A **relationship-led delivery model** is central, with teams balancing hands-on support with space for leads to shape local approaches. Despite resource pressures, this presence on the ground is viewed as essential. Pace continues to vary across Places, reflecting differences in capacity, partnership maturity and local complexity.

- **Structured learning activities** (briefings, peer-to-peer sessions, and bilateral visits) are helping teams **consolidate experience and adopt a more joined-up organisational approach** to place-based delivery.

1.6.1.3 Lead Organisation Delivery of the Initiative

Lead organisation delivery has continued to mature in Year Two, with most Places using the early years to lay the long-term foundations needed for a 10-year programme of activity. Delivery is increasingly sequenced and strategic, with teams building organisational structures, governance processes and evidence bases to underpin later phases.

- **Across Places, delivery models are becoming more relational and community-embedded**, reflecting a shared emphasis on co-design, inclusive engagement and trust-building. Lead organisations are working iteratively, blending strategic planning with test-and-learn activity to refine priorities before moving into full delivery.

- **Internal capacity is being reshaped as teams recruit new roles, strengthen cross-departmental structures and form partnerships** that integrate heritage into broader systems such as regeneration, planning, community safety and youth services. This whole-place orientation is becoming more prominent as departments align around shared heritage-led priorities.

- **Despite variation in starting points, a consistent delivery pattern is emerging**: approaches are long-term rather than transactional, iterative rather than linear, and increasingly co-owned by communities and partners. Collectively, these shifts signal the emergence of a family of place-responsive delivery models capable of supporting transformational heritage-led change over the decade ahead.

1.6.1.4 Increasing the capacity of local heritage to maximise its contribution to places and communities and enhance the wide-ranging benefits it can bring

By the end of Year Two, the Initiative has made **clear progress in laying the foundations for long-term impact.** Scoping, engagement and early capacity building have strengthened Places' understanding of local heritage systems, enabling more coherent, inclusive and evidence based approaches than in Year One. Engagement has broadened, community led activity is building capability, and heritage is becoming more visible and relevant across local systems.

Places are also beginning to form shared visions for heritage (where these were not in place), and the contribution of the Initiative to these visions, supported by strategy development and emerging

cross-council alignment. While progress varies according to starting points and local context, early foundations are notably stronger than at the outset. These gains are expected to consolidate further in Year Three.

1.6.1.5 Encouraging a people-centred approach, enabling everyone's heritage to be recognised

By the end of Year Two, the Initiative is showing early but meaningful progress toward enabling everyone's heritage to be recognised. While impacts remain uneven, there is clear evidence that the foundations for more inclusive heritage practice are strengthening across the Places.

- Heritage organisations report **notable shifts in policy and practice working with communities**, moving from institution-centred models to more participatory, community-responsive approaches. Many have adopted earlier and more inclusive engagement, strengthened relationships with VCSE partners, and updated internal policies to better reflect local needs.

- **Skills and confidence to work inclusively have grown among staff and volunteers**, supported by training, more diverse teams, and exposure to new engagement methods. Organisations describe being better connected to local community infrastructure and more capable of facilitating inclusive activity.

- **Heritage activity is becoming increasingly community-led**, with most projects involving communities directly in design and delivery. Co-creation is helping surface lesser-known stories, broaden audiences, and diversify participation.

- Early steps toward **community ownership or management of heritage assets** are emerging, signalling the longer-term potential of the Initiative's people-centred approach.

Overall, the **Initiative is reshaping how heritage is understood and delivered, widening representation and embedding more inclusive practice**. While further work is needed to sustain and scale these changes, Year Two demonstrates a clear trajectory toward a more community-centred heritage system

1.6.1.6 Creating integrated and holistic schemes across the breadth of heritage, including, anchor institutions, cultural heritage, and the natural environment

Early evidence shows the Initiative is beginning to create **integrated, holistic heritage schemes**, though progress varies across Places. Several areas are already embedding heritage across wider systems such as planning, regeneration, tourism, public health and youth services. Work is also spanning the full breadth of heritage types, from natural heritage scoping in North East Lincolnshire to cultural memory work in Glasgow City (SSCHD) and Leicester, industrial heritage in County Durham and community led planning in ABC Borough Council Area.

The Initiative's **flexibility is helping Places combine scoping, engagement, testing and early delivery, supported by new governance structures and networks that align different sectors.** However, integration remains uneven: some Places are still focused on foundational work or navigating fragmented systems and capacity constraints.

Overall, the direction of travel is positive. **The Initiative is beginning to support more integrated, whole-place approaches, with maturity expected to increase as delivery progresses.**

1.6.1.7 Increasing pride in place and connecting communities and visitors with heritage

By the end of Year Two, there are **early but meaningful indications** of strengthened pride in place and deeper connection to heritage, though outcomes remain **localised and emergent**, reflecting the wider

focus on foundational work rather than major public facing delivery.

Participation levels point to growing engagement and attachment: **over 51,000 participants** have taken part across 11 surveyed projects, with some Places engaging several thousand through workshops, consultations and public realm activities. Early **restorations and planned restorations** of five historic sites, each identified as community priorities, show that investments in physical heritage matter locally, laying groundwork for future pride related impacts.

The Initiative is also contributing to **external recognition of heritage in the Places**, helping to safeguard national and international designations, including Torbay's UNESCO English Riviera Global Geopark status and strengthening the case for Stoke-on-Trent's World Craft City designation.

Case studies show early positive shifts: participants in **Glasgow (SSCHD)** reported greater optimism, belonging and pride; volunteers in **Neath Port Talbot** described renewed pride through rediscovering local heritage; and elected members in **Medway** observed how the Initiative is anchoring local pride, linked to inclusive scoping activity.

Overall, while impacts remain **early and uneven**, the Initiative is clearly **creating the preconditions** for pride to grow, through deeper engagement, inclusive participation, visible heritage activity, and renewed recognition of local stories. As delivery accelerates, these foundations are expected to underpin increased pride and belonging among more local people.

1.6.2 Recommendations

1.6.2.1 The Heritage Fund is recommended to continue:

- **Resourcing additional capacity for Area and Nation team** to maintain effective engagement and developmental/relational approaches in the Places, especially as the context for delivery is likely to become more complex in several places over the next couple of years owing to political changes, and local government reorganisation.

- **Exercising the Initiative's full flexibility across all the Places**, to respond to localised needs and opportunities, and support responsive, iterative development of the Initiative in each Place. In year two, the "fast track" route and investments which surge lead organisation capacity are emerging as critical levers to accelerate progress.

- **Using the Initiative as a platform for wider partnership building work with other ALBs, and funding bodies in the local area**. Tranche One lead organisations see this as added value from the Heritage Fund's approach, while they are focused more on internal stakeholder alignment. Area and Nation teams observe how their long-term commitment to Places is translating into new discussions and opportunities to work collaboratively across these partners, and address challenges for the cultural sector together.

- **Maintaining its commitment to long-term transformation** and celebrating the foundations put in place during these early years, which produce valuable outcomes in the short-term as well as unlocking greater benefits for places over the longer-term. The Heritage Fund is recommended to spotlight the findings from this year two report on the foundations for change, and sector development, in order to recognise and celebrate the successes of this strategic work and show leadership and pride in these important early outcomes of place-based investment.

- **Recognising that the Places each represent a unique constellation of needs, opportunities and potential** as surfaced by the selection process. This translates into different speeds and routes to impact, but Area and Nation teams and lead organisations are confident that, over the full

period of the Initiative, each Place will have transformational schemes completed or underway.

- **Encouraging community grantmaking and network-building activity** in both early applications, and as key pillars of continuous activity up to 2033. These activities strengthen trust, collaboration and capacity across the heritage and cultural sector, and help to keep local partners engaged in Heritage Places while enabling their organisations to grow as ambitions rise in the Places.

- **Tracking the investment of staff time in the Initiative**, to provide a clear picture of the level of resource required to launch place-based initiatives so that this can feed into resourcing decisions for the Heritage Places Strategic Initiative as well as the design of future initiatives.

1.6.2.2 The Heritage Fund is recommended to consider:

1.6.2.2.1 Implementation of the Heritage Places Strategic Initiative

- **Encouraging Area and Nation engagement and investment team representation in Initiative governance mechanisms in each Place**, to establish clarity on Place pipeline management. There is a need for greater clarity on responsibilities between the lead organisations – and forthcoming lead partnerships – and the Area and Nation teams in terms of who steers and manages the pipeline of applications into the Heritage Fund, and how the responsibilities of each party work in practice. Where Area and Nation teams are embedded in current governance mechanisms, this is regarded as shaping a more 'co-created' approach between leads and the Heritage Fund. It will be increasingly important to clarify responsibilities and ways of working in the coming years, as the vision and long-term approach for the Initiative in each Place is firmed up, and more local partners look to collaborate on delivery.

- **Providing further clarification on what the Initiative timeframe means for delivery in the Places.** Area and Nation teams and lead organisations continue to question if 2033 is a "hard stop" and that Heritage Places projects should be concluded during this time and impacts achieved. Or, whether the Initiative's end in 2033 indicates that transformational schemes should be underway, but can be completed in the years thereafter.

- **Exploring all opportunities to deliver the Initiative as flexibly as possible**, including reviewing requirements for repeated case-making by lead organisations in early scoping applications. Lead organisations highlight that the selection process has established the rationale for investing in the place and its heritage, yet grantmaking processes require this case to be restated, in-depth, each time a scoping application is submitted.

- **Developing further guidance for Area and Nation teams on expectations at different phases of the Initiative**, and how these are interpreted in different local contexts. This guidance should consider the following findings from year one and two evaluation:

    - Scoping phases have taken longer than was anticipated (ongoing in many Places into year three) in the initial delivery profile outlined in the Initiative business case, even in those places where strategies are in place to steer investment, and/or there were potentially "transformational" schemes already in the pipeline.
    - Working across a local authority-wide footprint, particularly in places with high heritage need and complex geographies, often involves more time and resources to reach consensus on priorities and the final programme for the Initiative.
    - Investment in staff posts which is responsive to local conditions and evolving contexts can help to overcome leadership capacity challenges. Some Places may need more investment upfront in order to produce a more even profile of progress and delivery across the portfolio.
    - Engagement activity by Area and Nation teams is an important 'value added' component in the early phase of the Initiative, and the scope of this activity will vary according to the local

context, and the scale at which the Initiative is operating in each Place. Some Area and Nation teams may need more investment in resources to reach milestones at the same time as colleagues working in less challenging or geographically large contexts.

- **Preparing a communications pack for lead organisations to use internally within their organisations to support lead team clarity on process, and efforts to communicate the Initiative to wider colleagues**. Similar packs have been prepared for the Heritage Fund's Register of Specialist Services (RoSS) consultants. This pack should clarify:
    - The role of the lead organisations in relation to managing the Place-level pipeline of Heritage Places projects, including how lead organisation endorsement works in practice.
    - The distinction between Heritage Places projects, and wider Heritage Grants.
    - Grantmaking processes, and how these differ from other place-based funding that some lead organisations (i.e. local authorities) administer. With a stronger grasp of this in decision-making groups within lead organisations, these groups can consider whether, when and how to attune decision-making about the Initiative to these processes.
- **Establishing more regular knowledge-sharing opportunities between Area and Nation teams**, to tighten and speed up learning cycles which are helping to spread good practice and collective problem-solving.
- **Strengthening the feedback loops between mechanisms which convene lead organisations, Area and Nation teams and the core project team**. Meeting cycles should be aligned to enable insights from each group to feed through swiftly into practical action at various levels - the Place, the Initiative and the Heritage Fund.
- **Doubling down on PR and communications activity in the Places during these 'quieter stages'** to maintain enthusiasm, buy-in and confidence in the Initiative after the initial excitement of designation has dissipated

1.6.2.2.2 Considerations for the design of place-based initiatives

- **The Initiative's operating model differs from other place-based programmes that local authorities administer.** A bespoke grantmaking vehicle for Heritage Fund place-based initiatives which devolves a place-level funding allocation to local partnerships to distribute would help make processes more legible to local partners, and smooth local decision-making. Partnerships would then report to the Heritage Fund against a pre-agreed vision, plan and set of outcomes. In places where there is no strategy or pipeline to confidently guide local delivery, staging investment over two key phases would balance risk management at the Heritage Fund with expediting progress towards a final programme of transformational investment:
    - **Phase One: a revenue-led, combined scoping and proof-of-concept phase (1-3 years)** which provides lead organisations with adequate resources to take a test-and-learn approach to programme development, and which supports robust, locally-owned and shared conclusions about the priority schemes and projects over the long-term.
    - **Phase Two: a mixed revenue/capital delivery phase (7-9 years)** which provides the resources to a lead organisation or partnership to manage a portfolio of projects according to local priorities.
- **Place identities operate at multiple levels, and heritage activates place identities in different ways.** Evidence from the Initiative shows how natural heritage can provide connective tissue for shared place identity, across towns and villages with their own distinctive place-rooted identities. It also demonstrates how a neighbourhood-level scheme can renew and reshape place identities within the immediate locality, while also speaking to wider narratives of pride in place across a

whole city. Forthcoming local government reorganisations highlight the mutability of administrative place boundaries, whereas place-based working at a scale which aligns with local communities' "authentic" place identities can help mobilise more durable connections to these places and their heritage.

- **A 10-year timeframe to deliver capital-led heritage placemaking is not long, even when there are schemes ready in the pipeline.** If place-based initiatives are to produce impact in this timeframe, this may exclude working at bigger geographic scale, in areas which are more complex geographically and politically, and in areas with the most acute and widespread risks to physical heritage. Selection processes ought to be refined to take account of this in future initiatives over a similar timeframe, or initiatives are recommended to consider a longer timeframe if they are to remain open to implementation in these contexts.

- **A genuinely open, responsive and devolved place-led model of investment is unlikely to produce uniform progress across diverse local places.** If a more uniform rate of progress is expected from place-based initiatives, then initiative design will need to specify these milestones at the outset, and selection processes and resourcing allocations will need to account for different needs across selected places to achieve comparable rates of progress.

- **Local authority leadership of heritage placemaking brings benefits and challenges.** Future initiative design ought to consider how leadership could be distributed between local partners from the outset. For example, models which harness the strengths of local authorities in shaping local policy and building alignment across internal departments, while leveraging the community connections, engagement skills and trusted reputations of local VCSE organisations to gather intelligence on community needs and feed this into emerging strategies and plans.

Image 9: Ford Capri, Valence House Museum, Barking and Dagenham

1.7 Appendices

1.7.1 Appendix 1: The Theory of Change for the Heritage Places Strategic Initiative

1.7.1.1 The creation of the theory of change

The creation of the Theory of Change (ToC) was an iterative, multi-stage process combining strategic insight from the Heritage Fund with grounded experience from partners across the nine Tranche One Heritage Places. It began with an extensive review of Initiative documents and existing data to surface rationale, assumptions, and early change narratives. This informed a UK-wide co-creation workshop with senior Heritage Fund representatives, shaping an initial high-level Theory of Change. This version was then taken into place-specific workshops in autumn 2024, where local partners explored long-term visions, enablers, barriers, and change pathways. Findings were coded and synthesised, and elements shared by at least two Places were included in the final Initiative-level Theory of Change.

1.7.1.2 Vision, rationale, assumptions

The long-term vision reflects the lasting changes in people and places that the Initiative aims to contribute towards. The Initiative rationale provides the underpinning causal logic of the Initiative design and delivery approach, in relation to its intended aims, while the Initiative assumptions are the key assumptions that must hold true for this logic to unfold as expected and the aims to be realised.

1.7.1.3 Timeframes for change

Place-based approaches usually require long timeframes for change to manifest, and previous programmes show that placemaking impacts often appear only after several years. Local Place partners were not able to forecast detailed timelines for outcomes to emerge during the ToC workshops, and so the ToC does not prescribe exact timeframes for activity and outcomes, allowing them instead to emerge through evaluation.

1.7.1.4 Foundation stage

This phase reflects the early exploratory work undertaken to build local readiness for implementation, including identifying issues, building relationships, and developing plans. It recognises however that exploratory and implementation phases are permeable and can overlap in practice.

1.7.1.5 Strategies for action

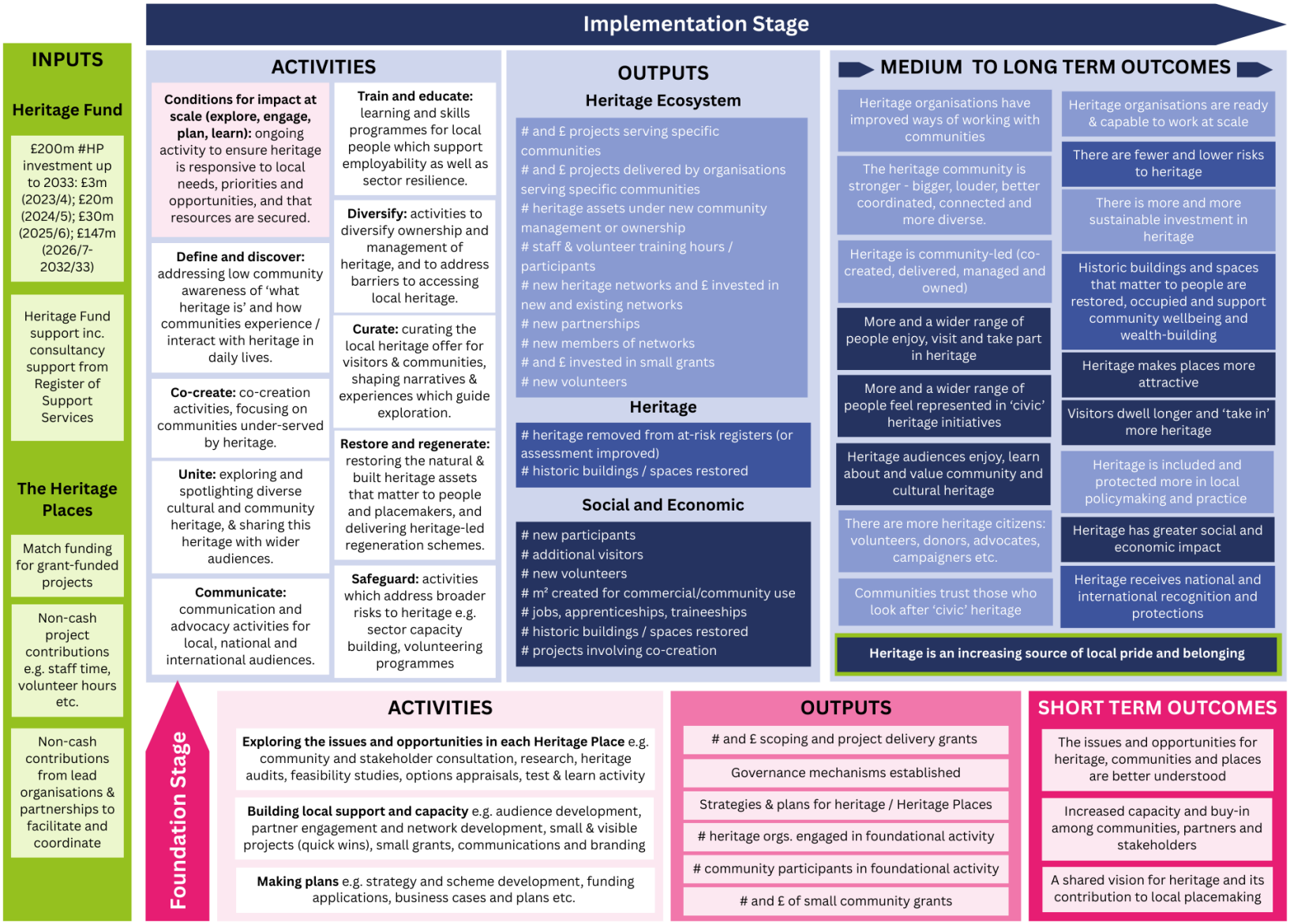
Rather than specify detailed activities across all of the Heritage Places, the ToC groups anticipated activity into flexible strategies that capture the common functions of activity across the Places while allowing for local variation.

1.7.1.6 Outcomes

Outcomes represent the high-level changes expected across multiple Places, positioned on the timeline based on when they are likely to first emerge. Variation in sequencing and timing was expected across the Places, so evidence will be gathered from the outset against all outcomes to ensure that the impacts from the Initiative are captured in full, and to support learning about when and where outcomes first emerge.

Vision	Rationale	Assumptions
Heritage is at the centre of local placemaking approaches. Long standing heritage issues are addressed at scale, and heritage is making a greater contribution to the issues that matter most to local people, boosting pride in place and connection to heritage.	The Heritage Places Strategic Initiative provides flexible, long-term investment to Places that demonstrate the need, potential and opportunity to implement a place-based approach to transforming heritage and boosting pride in place. By making a long-term commitment to these Places, partners in each place will be better able to work collaboratively to define local needs and opportunities, and identify strategic, heritage-led solutions. This will result in better designed, more ambitious and sustainable heritage strategies and schemes that have more widespread appeal, support and buy-in from communities, heritage organisations as well as wider public, private and third sector stakeholders and placemakers. These schemes will provide the roadmap for more ambitious, responsive, and collaborative project proposals that are more capable of attracting investment and creating impact. Delivery of the Heritage Places project portfolio in each Place will therefore result in the resolution of longstanding heritage issues at scale, while also making a greater contribution towards social and economic wellbeing. Over time, the investment from Heritage Places and its benefits will stimulate wider system change, with local policy and placemakers more motivated to include and centre heritage in their policies, plans and practice. This increases the opportunities for local heritage to contribute to placemaking and engender more widespread change in attitudes and connections to heritage.	Selection and onboarding processes reduce the risks and barriers to success (A1) The scale and longevity of funding is sufficient to incentivise a more collaborative, inclusive and ambitious approach among local partners and stakeholders (A2) Flexible, long-term funding enables more locally responsive projects that make a bigger contribution to local priorities (A3) There is a lead organisation in each place which has the requisite capacity and capability to coordinate and facilitate the Heritage Place (A4) Local Heritage Place partnerships receive the training, support and data/insights needed to fulfil their remit (A5) Heritage Place leads and partners communicate effectively at multiple levels to engage communities, stakeholders and placemakers (A6) Increased engagement and involvement of local authorities results in heritage being pushed up the agenda in local government decision making (A7) Intensified engagement with the voluntary, community, and social enterprise sector (VCSE) results in a more inclusive range of heritage projects (A8) Co-production with local people increases the likelihood they will sustain and deepen their connection to heritage over the longer-term (A9) Wider local strategies and plans that incorporate Heritage Place investment and activity are implemented as intended (A10) Local implementation is responsive to cultural shifts and changing context over time (A11)

Figure 10: Theory of Change for the Heritage Places Strategic Initiative



1.7.1.6.1 Contextual Influences

Type	Description
Heritage context	Heritage context encompasses local attitudes toward heritage, the condition and characteristics of heritage assets, and the strength and diversity of the local heritage ecosystem. These factors shape how heritage is valued, accessed, and how it can be an asset for change.
Place context	Place context refers to wider social, economic, cultural, and environmental conditions such as social cohesion, cultural infrastructure, economic profile, geography, and climate vulnerability. These contextual conditions influence both the feasibility and the impact of place-based heritage activity.
Population context	Population context relates to demographic characteristics, patterns of migration, civic engagement, and residents' attitudes and behaviours towards their place. These factors shape community participation, perceived relevance of heritage, and patterns of heritage engagement.
Partnership working context	This context concerns the breadth, quality, and history of partnership working across heritage, adjacent, and non-heritage sectors. The strength of local relationships and collaborative cultures affects the ease with which Places can coordinate activity and deliver shared ambitions.
Partner organisation context	Partner organisation context captures the culture, structure, resources, and readiness of lead and partner organisations to deliver heritage-led placemaking. Variations in organisational capacity and expertise influence the pace and effectiveness of implementation.
Wider initiatives	This factor covers other heritage, cultural, and non-heritage programmes operating locally, including regeneration programmes, festivals, creative strategies, skills programmes, and major capital projects. These initiatives can either amplify or compete with Heritage Places' efforts, shaping opportunities for alignment and added value.

1.7.1.6.2 Theory of Change Limitations and Constraints

In place-based working it takes time before objectives, impacts and ways of working are agreed across local stakeholders, and these may change over time as place-based approaches adapt to changes in the context, new opportunities, and learning. Added to this, the Tranche Two Places were not confirmed at the time the Theory of Change was created, and were not therefore included in this process. The Theory of Change and resulting evaluation framework are therefore provisional and will evolve as all the Places refine their approaches and new evidence emerges.

1.7.2 Appendix 2: Year Two Methods and Data Sources

Primary qualitative research:

- Semi-structured interviews with lead contacts in each of the Tranche One lead organisations (12 local authority officers and one CIC lead officer, responsible for delivery of the Initiative) in January and February 2026.
- Focus groups with staff from the Heritage Fund in February 2026 (three focus groups with Heads of Engagement and Investment, and Senior Investment and Engagement Managers from the area and country teams, and members of the Core Project Team), totalling 25 members of staff.
- Case study focus groups and interviews between December 2026 and February 2026, involving lead organisation representatives and local partner organisations, totalling 37 interviewees.
- Focus group with Tranche Two lead contacts in each of the six lead organisations (5 local authority officers and two CIC officers), totalling 7 interviewees.
- Grantee survey of organisations that have received Heritage Places awards, and which are at least six months into project delivery. 16 responses were received of a possible 18. It is

important to note that survey data was captured mainly from grantees that had not yet completed their projects. Only one project (Glasgow City's scoping project) was completed, with activities still underway in the remaining 17 projects[22].

Secondary evidence, review and analysis:

- Documentation and data provided by the Heritage Fund, including but not limited to: internal resources which guide the delivery approach; committee and board reports on Tranche Two selection, and successful funding applications from year two of the Initiative.
- Review and synthesis of project monitoring returns and evaluation reports up to January 2026 (20 monitoring returns from 12 projects, and 6 evaluation reports from 5 projects).
- Information management system (IMS) data pertaining to Heritage Fund grantmaking covering the period from January 2025 to January 2026.

In October 2025, six new Tranche Two Heritage Places were announced. Primary research for this report was undertaken between October 2025 and February 2026. As such, **evidence from the Tranche Two Heritage Places is limited to their experience of designation and early onboarding as a Heritage Place**, reflecting the early stage of their development at the time of reporting, and prioritisation of their capacity on preparing initial scoping applications to the Heritage Fund.

1.7.3 Appendix 3: Example Tranche Two Indicators for Selection

Local leadership	**Ynys Môn** cites favourable local authority leadership, which brings extensive cultural and community experience and networks. **Tameside**, cites wider governance by the Greater Manchester Mayoral Combined Authority, and its status as an Arts Council England Levelling Up for Culture Place.
Infrastructure and partnerships	**Barking and Dagenham**, cites strong cross-sector interest and alignment with arms-length bodies including ACE, Historic England and London Sport. **Dudley**, cites proven delivery partnerships and partners e.g. Heritage Action Zone, Townscape Heritage grants, Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust, West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust, Dudley VCSE, and Creative Black Country.
Heritage and heritage-adjacent ecosystem	**Belfast Historic Waterfront** cites the hyper-local ecosystem forming around the Maritime Mile on the waterfront, partners that are engaged in the waterfront scheme, and its density of heritage (maritime, industrial, social, built, and natural heritage). **Orkney Islands** cites the presence of multiple natural heritage partners on the islands including Nature Scot and the RSPB, who own and operate a number of nature reserves. Historic Environment Scotland has a significant presence including managing and operating the World Heritage site.
Measurable, visible difference	**Barking and Dagenham**, cites opportunities to develop approaches around the planned regeneration of Barking Riverside. Belfast Waterfront, cites a defined geography with a coherent narrative, and alignment with major funded assets.

[22] Analysis of the delivery timeframes at the point of survey data capture shows that, across all survey respondents, project delivery was 65 per cent complete. Outputs and outcomes reported are therefore indicative of this profile.