

The Heritage Places Strategic Initiative: Case Study Annex

March 2026

Case study: Sauchiehall Street Culture and Heritage District (SSCHD) Heritage Place, Glasgow City

The Place-Based Approach in SSCHD

Neighbourhood-level scale, 'right here on your street, in your hood.'

Sauchiehall Street combines a strong cultural identity with a practical role in the city's daily life. Within a short walk it hosts Scotland's highest density of cultural institutions and has a long history of cultural and community activity through its venues, museums, shops and cafés. Focusing Heritage Places work on a single recognisable street has created clear "common ground" for collaboration and provided a manageable scale where sustained engagement can build trust locally, and attract wider interest in city-centre renewal.

"You're genuinely sharing something with a group of people ... when you're trying to have engagement around something, you think about common ground. If you've got a defined place to build an approach, then you've got common ground ... that helps us reach audiences and collaborators that we wouldn't otherwise ... and opens up new conversations because of the defined nature of what we're doing."

(Glasgow City Council Officer)

The street's concentration of cultural assets and its reputation as a long-standing cultural hub make the rationale for SSCHD immediately intelligible to stakeholders. Its location within the 'Golden Z' retail spine also connects the work directly to wider efforts to revitalise the city centre. These factors underpin why Glasgow's Heritage Place is centred on a single, highly legible street - as a practical geographical unit for action with a strong identity that stakeholders and communities can rally around.

A shop front for Heritage Places

A staffed project space in a vacant shop has become the everyday touch point for SSCHD. It provides a shop-front for the Heritage Place where residents, workers and visitors can come and go freely, take part in small activities and exchange their views about the past, present and future of SSCHD. The space has lowered barriers to engagement, created faster feedback loops, and rooted the early programme of activity in the flow of daily life.

"Physically being there in the middle of the street ... you are with your audience ... and it gets you over a whole bunch of mistakes in engagement strategies. You're not going through thematic groups all the time ... it's who's here, who's enjoying, who's got memories. In a placemaking project, why wouldn't you do that?"

(Glasgow City Council Officer)

Creative practice to connect the past with the future

Glasgow Life commissioned a range of artistic interventions to uncover the street's social history and animate the public realm. This included a six month artist residency combining archive research, oral histories, hands-on textile workshops, and a final exhibition. Activities ran both in the project space and in trusted venues, including a refugee support group. The creative, gentle format encouraged people to join informally, stay for extended periods and contribute at their own pace.

"By attaching the heritage and the conversation to an activity, it made it really accessible. It was not a head on engagement. You could be very vocal or be quiet or just listen."

(Artist Practitioner)

"Without that focus on arts and artistic residencies, that connection might not have happened. The power of the arts in any consultation is something I've picked up from this project."

(Glasgow City Council Officer)

Artists underscored that archival research at the outset was crucial to the quality of the public engagement. It uncovered a vivid history of community activity on the street which participants in the workshops drew from, alongside their own memories and experiences of Sauchiehall Street, to imagine future possibilities for SSCHD.

“There were tea rooms, department stores where you could sit for as long as you want, bands playing on stages, beautiful extravagant spaces that were accessible to people on a much lower income than nowadays. To have that broad perspective, the past and the future all in one thing ... we could create something with our needs now, and with what we know from the past, and imagine something for the future.”

(Artist Practitioner)

A place-specific, coherent delivery logic

SSCHD’s delivery model is structured around three strands: Uncover (research into buildings and social history), Animate (visible activity that brings life back into the street and resets narratives), and Renew (preparation for physical change to the street). This simple framework helps partners see how engagement, evidence and fabric work connect, rather than operating as siloed streams. Officers emphasise that starting hyper-locally has also produced a distinctive, community-responsive approach which is key to its early success.

“What was missing [in previous efforts to draw cultural partners together around a common agenda] was the place approach ... by really working with what’s there, we are starting to actually make an impact on the area ... what’s different this time is working with the community and making things happen straight away.”

(Glasgow City Council Officer)

“The outputs and ways of working wouldn’t make sense if you picked them up and transplanted them somewhere else, even somewhere just around the corner ... because it is so responsive to the community needs.”

(Glasgow Life Officer)

An equitable, developmental relationship with the Heritage Fund

The Heritage Fund’s flexible approach has influenced both the pace and style of local delivery. Approval of a Proof of Concept phase between scoping and full delivery has allowed Glasgow Life to maintain visibility, test ideas and accelerate decision-making. The relationship with the Scotland team is regarded as open and co-productive, enabling expectations to adapt while maintaining shared aims. These features have supported a cadence for Heritage Places delivery that matches the street’s live conditions.

“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.”

(Glasgow Life Officer)

Outcomes from the Approach

Rebuilding Pride and Repositioning Sauchiehall Street

Consultees described a marked shift in sentiment about Sauchiehall Street, noting the project has “changed the narrative and the dynamic,” with growing private-sector interest, “The private sector are

investing in Sauchiehall Street... looking at projects to purchase assets and acquire opportunities.” Another local authority officer echoed this shift: “It is unbelievable, the change in sentiment in this period.” These reflections illustrate how the programme’s visible presence, continuous activity and clear story for SSCHD have begun to reshape how the street is regarded by public and private placemakers

“Sauchiehall Street had been written off and this project has changed that. The idea that Sauchiehall Street is a lost cause ... has been fundamentally changed by this project. There’s now a positive agenda, and air of confidence, and a credible project that is changing things up in Sauchiehall Street for the better.”

(Glasgow Life Officer)

Inclusive Creative Engagement Reaches New and Diverse Audiences

Engagement during the scoping phase was much broader and deeper than officers recollect from previous, regeneration initiatives. The artist residency reached older lifelong Glaswegians, teenagers, newer arrivals, a women’s craft group and a refugee support group. Many people stayed for several hours, which is unusual for free city-centre activity, indicating demand for welcoming, low-pressure spaces to meet, talk and make. This demonstrates that people unlikely to join formal heritage activity will participate when opportunities are creative, relaxed and rooted in place.

“We could really see in both the workshops and the exhibition that the work had a real impact, and that doesn’t always happen. People really connected both with making and viewing it ... I’ve learned that it’s not hard to include everybody ... it might take a bit longer but with the right support around you, including everybody isn’t complicated.”

(Artist Practitioner)

Co-Created Heritage Reveals Lived Experience and Strengthens Social History

The work has strengthened interpretation of SSCHD’s social history, and participants have enjoyed contributing to this work. Its final exhibition - a co-created soft sculpture covered with handwritten memories and hopes from the 1940s to today - will be archived locally as part of the next phase. Artists reported strong emotional responses to the workshops and the exhibitions among participants, which helped to uncover the felt and lived dimensions of place, ‘*We got everything from funny, to sad, to scared*’. This was supported by the artists’ feminist thinking approach, which sought explicitly to understand how groups, which are often marginalised in traditional city planning processes, feel and inhabit the street.

“People said it had them in tears because the stories were so personal and so place-specific. There was something for everybody to connect to.”

(Artist Practitioner)

A Trusted, Coherent Model Shaping the Next Phase of Delivery

Trust and momentum built over the last two years have influenced decisions by key cultural organisations. One local museum has chosen to remain in SSCHD rather than relocate, and another major cultural institution is considering moving in to the district.

“Because of the trust’s that been built, because they can see the momentum, because of the genuine intent of this project, because it’s focused on a specific place, they’re now going to stay on the street.”

(Glasgow Life Officer)

The Uncover–Animate–Renew model has generated a ground-up programme for the next phase, including shop-front renewal, interpretation schemes and regular public-realm activation. The Proof of Concept phase maintains visibility, and sustains the rhythm of engagement from the scoping phase. It will also

provide a clear line of accountability from scoping work into this next phase, while helping to rapidly convert learning into delivery, rather than allowing gains to slip through gaps between phases..

“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.”

(Glasgow Life Officer)

Consultees emphasise that the Initiative’s flexibility enables this responsiveness:

“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.”

(Glasgow Life Officer)

Challenges

Co-investment in capital work

The cost of repairing and reusing older buildings remains a significant barrier, often exceeding what owners can recover through rent or sale. Although the ten-year timeframe supports stronger business cases, consultees noted that major projects continue to be difficult to finance fully in current market conditions.

Shared ownership, and voice

A second challenge is securing deeper involvement from larger private owners and major cultural institutions. While public engagement has been strong, these actors are not consistently present and engaged. Governance is being widened through a Strategic Partnership Board and short-life working groups to bring in additional expertise and share responsibility for decision-making.

Process fit

Consultees welcomed the flexible, collaborative way of working with the Heritage Fund team but emphasised that adaptive practice does not always align easily with standard grant processes, RIBA stages, or annual budgeting cycles. Officers described *“a little shoeorning on all sides”*. They recognise that this a new way of working which has had to live inside existing systems, and that any potential changes to Heritage Fund processes for place-based investment will take time.

Conclusions and lessons learned from the approach

The SSCHD experience shows how a clearly defined place, consistent presence and creative engagement can shift narratives, draw in new partners and surface local heritage. Looking ahead, the Proof of Concept phase provides space to test first delivery, strengthen governance and maintain momentum.

- **Focus and common ground:** A single named place provides a legible rationale, shared ownership and visible action.
- **Meet people in the place:** A staffed project space lowers barriers to engagement and provides continuity.
- **Use creative practice to listen:** Making-led sessions draw in wider audiences and surface lived experience.

- **Hold momentum between stages:** A proof-of-concept phase protects gains in the scoping phase, and supports a robust transition in to delivery.
- **Widen ownership at the right moment:** A broader partnership board and short-life working groups will bring in business, universities, community voices and young people once credibility has been established.
- **Align flexible practice with systems:** Identify where processes and funding cycles constrain progress and adapt these where possible.

Case Study: North East Lincolnshire Heritage Place

The Place-Based Approach

Continuity, not reset

Heritage Places in North East Lincolnshire (NEL) builds on five years of groundwork as an Area of Focus and delivery through the Grimsby Historic Action Zone, Cleethorpes Townscape Heritage and the Cultural Development Fund. Partners describe the current approach as a natural evolution of this long-term activity. Established trust, confidence and ways of working provide a platform to use Heritage Places strategically: to consolidate the local heritage network; connect built and natural heritage opportunities with community and cultural activity; and use community grants to develop partner propositions capable of stepping up into larger bids.

"It's around having the capacity, capability, confidence to build those trusted relationships, which enables things to happen ... it's taken two to three, maybe even five years to get to where we are now."

(North East Lincolnshire Council Officer)

Joining the dots: strategic alignment and brokerage

Heritage Places gives officers the mandate, means and timeframe to connect major investments, regeneration programmes and community ambitions. The approach is helping to find the join-ups between Heritage Places and Levelling Up investments, and between capital and nature projects. Officers gave practical examples: using Heritage Places capacity to forward-plan beyond Townscape Heritage; linking the capital-led Levelling Up Pier Gardens scheme with community engagement in the DUNE project and saltmarsh protection; and reconvening stakeholders approached in Cleethorpes Townscapes Heritage to consider new uses for a listed local theatre, with a community interest company in the frame if the freeholder steps back. In each case, consultees said Heritage Places flexibility and timeframe allowed them to explore the "art of the possible" without prematurely raising expectations.

"It means that we could start to forward think about what's beyond Townscape Heritage for Cleethorpes... how the heritage can complement that additional funding."

"With Pier Gardens, it's trying to balance ... a desire to get spades in the grounds, with that community engagement which is vital for the long-term success of projects."

(North East Lincolnshire Council Officers)

Create NEL as the convenor, the 'glue'

Create North East Lincolnshire, located within the council, sits at the centre of local delivery for heritage. Partner consultees consistently described the team as the convenor and "glue." The team sustains the heritage network (which continues to expand to include arts and community organisations) with its delivery partner Heritage Lincolnshire, brokers on behalf of local partners with owners of listed assets such as Network Rail, and convenes arm's length bodies at regional level to align cultural investments. Partners

emphasised the culture of no gatekeeping and “we work with each other,” crediting Create NEL with enabling routine conversations that allow local collaboration to emerge.

“I think a lot of the things we’ve done collectively are around giving people the opportunity to talk to each other ... now you can see organically lots of conversations taking place.”

(North East Lincolnshire Council Officer)

“They bring us together a lot ... we collaborate, we work with each other, and we find each other.”

(Local Heritage Organisation Representative)

Community grants as R&D for scaled ambition

Community grants, tested under Areas of Focus, continue and evolve under Heritage Places under the banner of ‘Hidden Histories’. Initially designed to build capacity and confidence to bid for funding and deliver projects, the programme is now more heavily geared towards creating a pipeline for larger project bids to external funders including the Heritage Fund, reflecting successes in raising confidence in the sector and the elevated ambitions inspired by Heritage Places designation. Six grants have been awarded to date, including feasibility work, education projects, and community heritage activities.

“At first it was a bit of a ‘suck it and see’ approach... but now we’re emphasising... funding acting as a springboard.”

(North East Lincolnshire Council Officers)

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 ultimately as improving outcomes for heritage and local audiences.

“It gives us the ability to go back for a longer-term project with a bigger bid... with proven evidence.”

(Local Heritage Organisation Representative)

Arts and Heritage Integration

Create NEL’s long track record of encouraging synergies between arts, culture and heritage remains key to building an engaging and accessible offer under Heritage Places. Community grant-holders describe being supported in blended delivery and funding models - ‘*actively arts and heritage*’ - that connects the public through creative interpretation and participation.

“We found the Council and that team really supportive, creative, and embracing of the overlap between heritage, arts, and culture. They’re open to so many ideas, willing to help, share information, offer letters of support, make connections.”

“There’s more cross-marriage of the arts and heritage. To me, that means we’ve found fun and accessible ways of exploring heritage, whereas previously heritage existed in its own sphere ... That connection between arts and heritage has been a strong theme in NE Lincolnshire from the very beginning.”

(Local Heritage Organisation Representatives)

Outcomes of the Approach

A more mature, connected network

Heritage Places has strengthened and broadened NEL's heritage network, building on foundations laid under Areas of Focus. Partners describe a shift from isolated projects toward a more confident, collaborative ecosystem in which organisations support each other, share ideas and recognise their collective potential. Regular network meetings have helped to nurture an open, partnership-focused culture across the sector. This has created space for new collaborations to form organically, with groups increasingly seeing themselves as part of a shared endeavour. The cumulative effect is a network with stronger peer support, improved information flow and a sense of momentum that encourages ambition and participation.

"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 Heritage Organisation Representative)

Small grants producing pipelines

The evolution of the Hidden Histories programme into a source of early-stage R&D has begun to produce a steady pipeline of stronger, partnership-ready proposals. Two projects illustrate this shift: research into the historic print industry laid the foundation for a skills-focused creative industries project funded by Heritage Places, while the Grimsby Synagogue project deepened community connection, increased volunteer numbers and strengthened inter-faith ties in preparation for a successful development stage bid to Heritage Places. A future restoration bid to Heritage Places is expected next.

These developments demonstrate that small grants, when targeted at feasibility, collaboration-building and testing ideas, can unlock organisational confidence and capability. They also show how the programme's design encourages groups to think beyond standalone activities toward long-term, scalable propositions that align with Heritage Places priorities.

Growing policy traction and cross-council recognition

Heritage has become increasingly embedded in NEL's strategic landscape. Officers and partners report that heritage is now "integral" to the new council plan published in January 2025, signalling recognition of its contribution to wider priorities such as community cohesion, children's services, public health and environmental agendas. This represents a step change from earlier years, when cultural and heritage agendas were not consistently championed. Heritage Places has acted as a catalyst for this shift by providing a long-term framing and commitment of funds, and visible activity. The result is broader engagement across service areas and an emerging understanding of heritage as a cross-cutting asset that can help deliver multiple policy outcomes.

"There's been a critically important shift in terms of people celebrating and sharing those heritage stories and those heritage projects... that's been a real shift in that placemaking model locally."

(North East Lincolnshire Council Officer)

Growing visibility of heritage in public space and everyday life

Heritage is becoming more visible across North East Lincolnshire's public realm, supported by the stronger ties between arts and heritage practitioners which has been facilitated by Heritage Places-funded networks and community-building. The Paint the Town Proud initiative has taken its inspiration from local heritage, and uses mural commissions and creative interpretation to tell local heritage stories in accessible, engaging ways. This has helped bring heritage into streets, neighbourhoods and community spaces where people encounter it informally. It indicates an increased appreciation of heritage locally, while also strengthening local pride and belonging. Partners emphasise that this integration of arts and heritage is now a distinctive feature of NEL's approach, reinforcing both sectors and helping reach audiences who may not engage with heritage through traditional routes.

“The murals... have been heavily focused on heritage... people are seeing it around them in places and spaces that they wouldn't have ordinarily seen.”

(North East Lincolnshire Council Officer)

Strengthened collaboration and ambition among local organisations

Heritage Places has nurtured a more ambitious and outward-looking sector. As confidence has grown, new partnership models have emerged, the most prominent being a five-organisation museum consortium now receiving bespoke business support funded by Heritage Places. Officers observe that ambition is no longer concentrated in a *handful* of organisations; rather, it is becoming distributed across a widening group of partners who feel supported to explore possibilities and take on more complex projects. This is a marked change from earlier years, when financial pressures, sector fragmentation and low confidence limited collective aspiration. Heritage Places has shifted this dynamic, encouraging organisations to consider longer-term opportunities and work collaboratively to achieve them.

Challenges

Sustaining capacity for convening and development

Progress in NEL remains heavily dependent on a small number of local authority officers whose roles are currently tied to short-term project funding which is drawing to a close. These posts hold the relationships, institutional memory and networks that underpin the area's momentum. As a small local authority with competing pressures on statutory services, the risk of losing this capacity and the trust built over several years is a live concern for the lead organisation team.

Embedding practice across the council

Although heritage is now referenced in key strategies and more cross-departmental conversations are occurring, this shift is not yet consistently reflected in day-to-day practice. Some teams still view heritage as separate from core service delivery, and commissioning processes do not always recognise its contribution to wider agendas. Embedding heritage more systematically across departmental programmes and practice, is regarded as essential to fully realise its potential as a cross-cutting asset.

A perceived 'ceiling' on ambition

Some local partners feel that local ambition has outpaced the level of confidence shown in investment decisions by the Heritage Fund. While capability and partnership maturity have grown, organisations report a hesitation around approving larger or more complex bids. This perceived “ceiling” creates uncertainty among these local partners and is felt to slow the pace of ambition at a point when capacity is deemed strongest.

Funding flexibility and process constraints

The flexible ethos of Heritage Places is not felt to be consistently matched by grantmaking processes. Officers experience the approach as largely unchanged from standard Heritage Grant processes, with procurement thresholds, eligibility rules and mechanisms for funding lead organisation staff posts tied to project funding which work to limit their capacity to both develop and deliver projects in parallel. In this context, the lead team valued its long-established and trusted relationship with the North team, which they regard as helping to ease these challenges as much as possible within the constraints of the funding mechanism. However they encourage greater flexibility in process as well as personnel, so that the Heritage Fund can test more adaptive models suited to place-based work, and ensure consistent flexibility across all the Places.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

NEL's experience highlights the cumulative value of long-term trust-building, strong convening, and inclusive networks. Heritage Places has enabled stronger alignment across the breadth of heritage and cultural investment, generated credible pipelines, and broadened participation through creative, people-centred approaches. Key lessons include:

- **Trust and relationships take time**, and underpin effective place-based work.
- **Convening power is critical**, Create NEL acts as the connective tissue enabling collaboration.
- **Small grants used as R&D** generate stronger, evidence-based bids.
- Arts-heritage integration broadens engagement and embeds heritage in daily life.
- **Capacity and flexibility matter**, sustaining developmental roles is essential for momentum.
- **Ambition in the heritage community needs careful stewarding**, as capacity evolves, regular conversations between local partners and the Heritage Fund will help ensure that ambitions, readiness, and investment decisions continue to feel aligned among all parties.

Case Study: Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (ABC) Borough Council Area Heritage Place

The Place-Based Approach

Anchoring the approach in a borough-wide Heritage Strategy

ABC Borough Council Area has centred its early Heritage Places activity around the development of a borough-wide Heritage Strategy, described by officers as the “anchor” that has provided direction and coherence in a large and complex geography. The strategy process has offered a clear mechanism to engage multiple communities, frame priorities, and draw together the social, environmental and cultural dimensions of heritage in a way that aligns with the borough's long-term Community Plan. Officers emphasised that heritage is already embedded as a standalone priority in ABC Borough Council's Community Plan, which considers heritage as a lens through which social, economic and environmental wellbeing can be understood and strengthened.

“The great anchor within our area has been the strategy process.”

“We started from a low base in ABC. We've had heritage projects, but they've been very task and finish. There was no continuity and grand vision, and plan.”

(ABC Borough Council Officer)

Creative, people-centred engagement to reflect the diversity of the borough

Engagement with grassroots community groups and organisations has been a defining feature of ABC Borough Council area's approach. The lead organisation team in the local authority adopted outreach approaches designed to reach people “where they are,” recognising the borough's many distinct places and identities. Officers ran pop-up engagement at a farmers' mart, delivered cycling tours of Craigavon, collaborated with Love Parks Week, and structured engagement around existing community planning mechanisms. These varied approaches helped reach groups who do not typically participate in heritage consultations and supported a more inclusive understanding of heritage across the borough.

“Heritage Places is an example of a more inclusive approach to delivery, which is bottom-up and co-designed.”

"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."

(ABC Borough Council Officer)

Cross-departmental collaboration reaching broader audiences and reframing heritage

Multiple council departments have been involved in efforts to reach new audiences and reposition heritage as an asset for improving quality of life for local residents. This included community planning, Climate Sustainability & Parks, and Tourism, Arts & Culture which have worked together to deliver new, and leverage existing, engagement opportunities. Officers described how this has broadened perspectives on what heritage is and helped embed natural, cultural and built heritage within strategic thinking. Engagement teams collaborated across existing council processes (e.g., Place Plans, Love Parks Week) and created new outreach opportunities to widen public involvement. This has been supported by the broad definition of heritage foregrounded in Heritage Places, and the flexibility of the Initiative to explore what this means in the local context.

"It's given us the flexibility and the drive to look beyond our own department and our own areas of expertise."

"Heritage... is an all-encompassing thing... it's allowed us to look at different elements, natural heritage outside the built heritage."

"It's fabulous to have a delivery mechanism for heritage when it is so important and always comes through in community planning, but also that the ways of working and the approach are very aligned to community planning."

(ABC Borough Council Officer)

Participatory budgeting as a route to awareness, engagement and capacity building

Heritage Places funding also contributed to a wider participatory budgeting (PB) exercise linked to the Five Steps to Wellbeing. This enabled heritage groups to reach large new audiences - up to 4,000 people at PB events - and connected heritage directly to community wellbeing outcomes. Officers reflected that being part of a larger PB process brought both challenges and opportunities.

It increased visibility and volunteer recruitment for some local groups, and offered an accessible entry point for organisations considering future Heritage Places bids. However, officers also noted that being part of a much larger PB exercise meant that the *heritage-specific* elements could be harder to distinguish, with some groups not recognising the connection to Heritage Places or finding that heritage priorities were less visible within a wider wellbeing-focused process.

"Participatory budgeting makes it very real... beyond normal consultation processes."

(ABC Borough Council Officer)

Outcomes of the Approach

Growing confidence and ownership among communities and partners

The Heritage Strategy engagement generated unexpectedly high levels of participation, with hundreds of responses, far exceeding typical engagement for corporate consultations. Officers reported a strong sense of positivity and emerging ownership among community group representatives, who described the strategy as reflecting their needs and aspirations. This emerging sense of shared ownership now extends into

schools, newer communities and voluntary organisations, who see their stories and concerns reflected in the draft strategy.

"I think the crux of what we're proposing ... is largely accepted, as yes, this is what we want or need. Everybody seemed to be on board."

"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."

(ABC Borough Council Officer)

Heritage reframed as broad, inclusive and relevant across the borough

Through engagement on the strategy, officers noted a shift in how heritage is understood by both communities and the council. Natural heritage, parks and green spaces, social history, cultural identity and newer stories - such as those of Craigavon as a "new town" - are increasingly recognised as part of ABC Borough Council Area's heritage. This broader perspective has widened participation and encouraged groups who previously felt heritage "wasn't for them" to engage or begin forming new organisations. Schools engagement and intergenerational activity during the strategy process also strengthened cross-community connections.

"People are starting to realise that heritage doesn't have to be 400 or 500 years old ... recognising that heritage is more than just old buildings... the social side, even the environmental side."

"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."

(ABC Borough Council Officer)

Strengthened foundations for sector capacity and future project pipelines

Engagement through the Heritage Strategy and PB processes helped groups build volunteer numbers, test small ideas and identify support needs ahead of potential funding applications. Officers have facilitated an emerging network among community groups across different parts of the borough, building connections, reducing isolation, and encouraging groups to look beyond their "own patch" and appreciate the heritage that's elsewhere in the borough.

"It's a slow burner... but you can see things starting to shift and potential starting to be realised."

(ABC Borough Council Officer)

This has strengthened future project pipelines, providing a clearer base for community-led applications, feasibility work and emerging cross-borough collaborations, as well as cross-border collaborations with the Republic of Ireland.

Greater internal alignment and visibility of heritage within the council

Cross-departmental involvement has increased awareness of heritage's relevance to wider priorities such as biodiversity, climate sustainability, placemaking and public health. Heritage is increasingly used as a way to connect agendas, and provide a unifying story across departments. This cross-departmental working deepened over the scoping phase, with teams reporting that heritage now appears more regularly in planning, climate, health and community-safety discussions, creating a stronger internal policy environment for long-term delivery

"It's played a role in opening up doors to cross-departmental collaboration... everybody sees the benefits."
(ABC Borough Council Officer)

Increasing recognition from external stakeholders and funders

Officers reported growing interest from regional partners and external funders, such as Arts Council NI, who are beginning to see ABC Borough Council Area differently as momentum builds. Heritage Places has contributed to a heightened profile for the borough and strengthened its credibility within Northern Ireland's cultural and heritage landscape. Officers report it is now seen as a borough developing stronger heritage leadership and strategic coherence.

Challenges

A borough-wide geography requiring balanced attention

Working across the entire borough, comprising multiple towns, rural communities and places with distinct identities, presents challenges ensuring equitable engagement and representation. This requires ongoing sensitivity to place identity and widespread engagement to avoid perceptions of imbalance. Heritage Places funding was used to appoint a dedicated Engagement Officer which has been vital to overcoming these challenges by enabling such broad, deep and creative consultation activity.

Maintaining momentum and demonstrating visible progress

While early engagement has been strong, communities now want to see evidence of delivery following the publication of the Heritage Strategy. Officers emphasised the importance of sustaining relationships, ensuring follow-through, and avoiding the perception that consultation leads only to "a strategy on a shelf." The challenge next is to balance long-term foundations with visible early wins.

Ensuring sustained communication across stakeholders

The breadth of the programme requires ongoing, clear and accessible communication, with internal Council teams, community groups, the wider public and the Heritage Fund. Officers recognised a need to maintain clarity about how communities can access support directly from Heritage Places and the Heritage Fund, feed into the delivery of the strategy, and navigate the path from project ideas to funded activity.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

ABC Borough Council's early work shows how a borough-wide strategy can anchor a Heritage Place with diverse identities, engage dispersed communities, and build shared understanding of heritage as a broad-based asset for improved community wellbeing and quality of life. Cross-departmental working has strengthened internal buy-in and widened participation in early engagement activities, while participatory budgeting and creative outreach have introduced new audiences to heritage. The case study highlights the value of a long-term investment, the need for steady confidence-building, and the potential for heritage to act as a connective thread across a complex geography. Key lessons include:

- **Build foundations slowly:** trust, shared understanding and local confidence require time to form. Place-based approaches to heritage need "time and space to breath" and the Heritage Fund should continue its commitment to deep and deliberative processes that form the foundations of a transformative long-term programme.
- **Use heritage as a connector:** the broad definition of heritage at the Heritage Fund, which is given prominence in Heritage Places, facilitates alignment across social, environmental and cultural agendas.

- **Embed cross-departmental working early:** collaborative delivery strengthens internal ownership across departments, and widens reach into communities.
- **Prioritise ongoing communication:** relationships and communications must be maintained before, during and after strategy development.
- **Balance strategy with visibility:** while communities need to be part of long-term planning process, they also want to see early signs of progress, in order for Heritage Places to maintain momentum and credibility.

Case Study: Medway Heritage Place

The Place-Based Approach in Medway

Building foundations for a dispersed, multi-centre heritage landscape

Medway's approach to the Heritage Places Initiative has centred on building the foundations for a long term, sector led heritage system in a complex, dispersed landscape. Unlike places whose identity coalesces around a single neighbourhood or district, Medway's heritage is polycentric: stretching across five towns, estuary landscapes, naval and industrial histories, and communities with roots from many different countries. The early phase of the programme therefore focused on creating coherence in this diverse ecosystem, building trust between groups that had historically worked in isolation, and establishing the strategic and relational infrastructure needed to support meaningful change. In the words of one officer, the early phase was about "putting down roots" after years of fragmented delivery and limited strategic visibility for heritage.

A dual-layer model: systemic transformation and grassroots activation

Two connected layers have shaped Medway's place based model: systemic transformation and grassroots activation. At the system level, the Council has used Heritage Places to rewire how heritage features across planning, regeneration, the visitor economy, community engagement, and cross departmental policy. At the grassroots level, small grants, mentoring and development support have enabled new groups to explore local histories, tell overlooked stories, experiment with digital and creative forms of interpretation, and gain the confidence to lead their own projects. These two layers have begun to reinforce one another. Grassroots insights from early projects are directly informing the new 10 year heritage strategy, while systemic changes are creating pathways for community organisations to participate with influence and decision making power in Medway's heritage future.

The importance of time: a long-term framework for change

The long-term, ten-year framework has been fundamental to this approach. Stakeholders repeatedly described it as "the most significant and impactful aspect" of the initiative, offering the freedom to work relationally and inclusively rather than rushing to deliver short-term outputs. This extended timeframe has allowed Medway to reach communities and voluntary groups who would otherwise be excluded by the administrative pace of traditional funding cycles. It has also supported a phased, reflective approach to strategy development, enabling Medway to begin co-producing its first heritage strategy with the sector, grounded in a detailed audit of more than 200 assets and shaped by sustained engagement with local people.

"Real change takes years, not months; the ten-year commitment makes it possible to do this properly."
(Medway Council Officer)

Evolving future governance: building a sector-led heritage body

A defining feature of Medway's approach is the creation of a new sector led heritage body that will eventually co-lead the initiative and act as a unified voice for heritage. This governance shift reflects both

the area's long-standing need for sector cohesion and the practical realities of forthcoming Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), which will see Medway Council absorbed into a wider North Kent authority. Being designated as a Heritage Place has created a shared underpinning framework that allows these varied histories, organisations and communities to connect and collaborate. By investing early in strengthening sector governance, Medway is positioning the heritage ecosystem to outlast administrative change:

"We're building a system that will outlive the Council as it is today"
(Medway Council Officer)

A connecting framework for a dispersed landscape

Taken together, these elements form a place-based logic rooted in Medway's realities. Instead of defining the "place" around a single street or district, Medway's Heritage Place functions as a connecting framework; a shared platform for collaboration, strategy, inclusion and long-term stewardship across a dispersed and diverse heritage landscape.

Outcomes from the Approach

Heritage gaining visibility and influence in strategic decision-making

Two years into the initiative, Medway is beginning to see tangible changes across its heritage ecosystem. At the strategic level, heritage is now more visible, influential and integrated within Council governance than at any previous point. Heritage informs the Local Plan, shapes the new river strategy, and plays a stronger role in regeneration priorities, supported by newly established officer groups that embed heritage within planning, town centres, public health and green spaces. Officers describe this shift as moving heritage from being "present but peripheral" to a recognised driver of place-shaping.

Strengthening national partnerships and strategic confidence

The process of developing a first-ever heritage strategy has been central to this transformation. Informed by the heritage audit, community engagement, sector consultations and national expertise from Historic England's Historic Places Panel, the emerging strategy provides a long-term, evidence-based foundation for investment and decision-making. This strategy development work has also helped strengthen relationships with national agencies. Both Historic England and Natural England have deepened their presence in Medway, offering advisory visits, policy guidance, and strategic alignment. Their engagement is widely seen as a direct outcome of Heritage Places' visibility and credibility.

Widening local participation and reactivating overlooked stories

At the grassroots level, the small grants programme has been a catalyst for widening participation, unlocking overlooked stories and growing organisational confidence. Twenty three early stage projects have explored diverse facets of Medway's heritage, from migrant storytelling and youth led Black history resources to aviation heritage rediscovery and skateboarding subculture documentation. These projects have demonstrated how heritage can become more inclusive, accessible and relevant, bringing to light histories that were previously marginalised or unknown. Participants described moments of rediscovery, for example a project team member stated that a participant "instantly lit up, [and] all these memories came back", when referring to a former skater who, during the Gillingham Skatepark heritage project, unexpectedly encountered archival photographs from the late 1970s and began recalling friendships and stories she had not revisited in decades. This illustrated how heritage activity reactivated both personal and collective connections to place.

"People realised their stories mattered, that's what changed everything."
(Local heritage Organisation Representative, and community grantee)

Growing organisational capacity and sector confidence

This community activity has also begun to reshape the heritage sector itself. Several new organisations have formally constituted themselves as Community Interest Companies (CICs) during the programme, including House of Stars CIC, Short Brothers Aviation CIC, and the Herbert Baker Heritage Trust. These groups attribute their emergence and early success to the supportive, trust based approach of the Heritage Place team. “I had the confidence to set up the CIC thanks to seeing others do it, and the advice from Heritage Place grant sessions,” one grantee observed. The growth of new organisations and leaders signals an expanding ecosystem with greater capacity for future delivery, partnership and investment readiness.

Community insight shaping systemic priorities

Insights emerging from grassroots projects are also shaping systemic priorities. Practical challenges encountered by grantees, including barriers accessing community venues, navigating signage approval processes, or finding pathways into heritage craft careers, have directly influenced strategy development, skills and volunteering programmes, and Council process improvements. This demonstrates a developing feedback loop in which community experience actively informs policy and future investment, creating a more responsive and equitable heritage system.

A more integrated and representative heritage ecosystem

Taken together, these outcomes reflect a heritage ecosystem that is becoming more integrated, confident and representative of Medway’s cultural breadth. Heritage is increasingly seen not just as an asset, but as a living force in civic identity, community wellbeing and place-shaping. These developments echo comments from community groups and Council officers who noted that “a much wider range of people now feel part of the sector” and that new voices and networks have begun to emerge across Medway’s heritage landscape.

Challenges

Short-term cycles within a long-term initiative

While the trajectory of change is positive, several challenges have shaped Medway’s experience of the early phase. The most significant is the tension between the long-term ambitions of Heritage Places and the short-term nature of some funding mechanisms. Year 2 delivery involved managing multiple under £250k grants with short reporting cycles, creating a continuous sense of urgency that stood in contrast to the relational, community-led work the programme aims to support. Officers described this as “a constant rush” that limited flexibility and capacity, despite the initiative’s ten year horizon.

Fragility and uneven capacity across the voluntary heritage sector

Capacity constraints across the voluntary heritage sector also remain a structural challenge. Many grassroots organisations require extensive officer support to develop even small bids, reflecting both the fragility and the richness of Medway’s grassroots heritage landscape. While the programme is intentionally developmental, sustained investment in sector capacity will be essential to ensure long-term resilience.

Navigating uncertainty during Local Government Reorganisation

Finally, the context of Local Government Reorganisation has introduced uncertainty around governance, continuity and political geography. Although Heritage Places funding is secure, the wider environment is shifting, necessitating careful stewardship of relationships, strategy and leadership as Medway transitions toward a North Kent authority. The development of a sector led heritage body is a proactive response, but the transition still poses risks and practical complexities.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

Medway's first two years as a Heritage Place demonstrate how systemic transformation and grassroots activation can work together to strengthen a heritage ecosystem. The initiative has supported Medway to develop the strategic infrastructure, relationships and community confidence necessary to tell a fuller, more inclusive story of its heritage and to use that story as a driver of place-shaping. The emerging outcomes, such as a more integrated governance system, new organisations, renewed narratives of identity and belonging, and stronger national partnerships, reflect an ecosystem beginning to mature. Several lessons stand out from Medway's experience:

- **Invest in foundations:** The deliberate focus on listening, mapping, engagement and trust-building has created a durable base for strategy and collaboration.
- **Align whole-place ambitions with whole-system working:** The integration of heritage into planning, regeneration and tourism has been transformational, showing the importance of cross council governance and leadership.
- **Use small grants as catalysts:** They have widened who takes part, unlocked hidden stories, and generated organisational growth.
- **Prioritise governance and stability:** Particularly in contexts of administrative change, the sector-led body provides a pathway to long-term continuity.
- **Make inclusion intentional:** Outreach to communities historically distant from heritage has strengthened both relevance and the quality of insight.
- Medway's Heritage Place journey is still in its early stages, but the foundations laid so far reveal **the potential of a dual-layer model** that connects people, strategy and system change.

As one community-led heritage organisation expressed it:

"We're part of something bigger now - this is Medway's heritage, in all its forms, finally being recognised."

Case Study: County Durham Heritage Place

The Place-Based Approach in County Durham

Beginning with People, Building from the Ground Up

When County Durham was designated a Heritage Place in late 2024, it represented a shift in how the National Lottery Heritage Fund engaged with this part of the North East. While heritage investment in the county has historically been shaped by the prominence of nationally significant assets such as Durham Cathedral, located in the city of Durham, this pattern has meant that other parts of the county have received more limited and fragmented support over time. As a result, many towns and communities across County Durham have remained comparatively under-invested, despite facing persistent social and economic challenges and possessing rich but less visible heritage.

Against this backdrop, the designation created space to begin a different kind of heritage conversation in towns such as Shildon and Newton Aycliffe, where heritage has historically played a less prominent role in funding and regeneration narratives. Grounded in local identity and community priorities, it offered an opportunity to rethink what heritage could mean for two towns with rich but contrasting histories. The designation also opened up the possibility of shaping a place-based approach from a relatively low baseline, and of exploring how a long-term programme might enable change that genuinely starts within communities themselves and grows over time.

Two towns, two distinct stories, and a shared beginning

Shildon and Newton Aycliffe sit close together geographically but carry very different narratives. Shildon's industrial and railway heritage stretches back two centuries, rooted in the Waggon Works, mining and the generations who built and sustained them. Heritage here is deeply entwined with identity. Newton Aycliffe, by contrast, is a young town shaped by wartime labour, early engineering industries and the optimism of the post-war New Town movement. Its heritage is still within living memory but under-recognised and rarely interpreted publicly.

Residents in both towns expressed pride in their histories, alongside a sense that these stories had not always been visible or valued in ways that resonated with people today. Young people showed particular curiosity about mining, engineering and the Aycliffe Angels, signalling both interest and the risk of important knowledge fading without dedicated investment.

Starting differently: trust first, projects later

Because Durham began without a pre-existing project pipeline, the Council and partners embraced the ten-year timeframe as a chance to start differently. Rather than drafting plans in advance, they centred the first year on listening, building trust and mapping the landscape of assets, memories and skills across the two towns.

This decision was shaped by local experience: both towns have weathered decades of consultation without visible change. Communities were tired of being asked for views without meaningful follow-through. The Heritage Places team wanted to break that pattern. Engagement was designed to meet people where they already gather - leisure centres, wellbeing walks, football clubs, community hubs, youth groups and churches.

A tactile map-based exercise invited people of all ages to share what they were proud of, curious about, or worried might disappear. Across 398 interactions and 220 survey responses, this work produced the first significant step in Durham's placemaking journey: a shared, community-generated evidence base that will guide decisions in the years ahead.

Children and young people at the centre of future heritage

A strong early theme was the importance of involving children and young people. PLACE Lab Shildon, delivered by Northern Heartlands, created opportunities for young people to explore heritage through creativity, storytelling, digital tools and play. Activities such as the "Time Train" model encouraged them to imagine themselves within Shildon's industrial past and possible futures, connecting local history with contemporary identity, skills and aspiration.

Partners emphasised that young people bring both curiosity and long-term investment in the area's future. Their involvement is not symbolic, it is foundational to building confidence, skills and civic ownership over the decade ahead.

Outcomes from the Approach

Early project activities revealing potential and building confidence

Although the early phase focused on foundations rather than delivery, several strands of their initial scoping project provided insight into future opportunity.

Shildon Railway Institute underwent a feasibility study exploring how its Grade II listed building could evolve as a contemporary community asset. The Aycliffe & District Bus Preservation Society completed an independent review, clarifying organisational capacity and future direction. Locomotion deepened its role as

a community hub, developing intergenerational partnerships with Age UK and offering volunteering routes for asylum seekers and refugees.

These early activities underscored two things: the richness of heritage embedded in everyday life across both towns, and the need for a long-term, strategic approach to deciding which assets, stories and skills will drive sustainable, community-led change.

Reactivating pride, belonging and under-recognised stories

The evaluation established a quantitative baseline for residents' sense of belonging (0.82), pride (0.81), drawn from a structured survey of 219 respondents. On a 0–1 scale, these scores indicate strong feelings of connection to place and pride in the local area, providing a reference point for tracking change over time. It also captured baseline patterns of engagement with local heritage through analysis of visit frequency to sites such as Locomotion, Aycliffe Bus Museum and other heritage sites. This showed uneven levels of visitation, with Locomotion being the most regularly visited site, while engagement with the Aycliffe Bus Museum and other local heritage places remained comparatively low.

Alongside this data, participatory mapping and survey responses identified key themes that residents most wanted to explore further, such as mining, the Waggon Works, the Aycliffe Angels and Newton Aycliffe's medieval history. Together, these themes speak directly to local identity and intergenerational memory. They also highlight a risk: without investment, significant knowledge and skills could disappear within a generation.

Young people's responses reinforced this point - many were unaware of local histories but keen to know more, suggesting strong potential for future volunteer, skills and engagement pathways.

A shared vision for heritage emerging from community priorities

As the foundational work concluded, a three-part vision began to take shape:

PRIDE: for Shildon's deep engineering and industrial identity

STORIES: for Newton Aycliffe's human-centred, lived histories

TOGETHER: for the shared journey both towns are now beginning

This vision underpins a developing Theory of Change, ensuring that future investment remains aligned to community priorities and the themes that resonate most strongly with local people.

Strategic change within the Council

Alongside the community engagement, Durham County Council has begun aligning its internal structures with the ambitions of the Heritage Place. Work with regeneration and economic development teams has already influenced how heritage will feature in wider strategy and planning. A cross-departmental steering group which brings together heritage, regeneration, culture and economic development signals a shift towards understanding heritage not as an isolated cultural activity but as a lever for regeneration, identity, economic opportunity and wellbeing.

Challenges

Beginning from scratch without an existing pipeline

Durham entered the programme without the established networks, projects or funding pathways found in some other Heritage Places. While this created space for authentic community-defined priorities, it also meant that early work required building relationships, evidence, insight and trust from the ground up.

Legacy effects of consultation fatigue

Communities in Shildon and Newton Aycliffe were candid about fatigue caused by decades of consultation without delivery. This history made trust-building more delicate and placed emphasis on demonstrating that Heritage Places is genuinely different: long-term, community-led and grounded in visible follow-through.

Knowledge and skills at risk of being lost

Engagement revealed widespread concern that vital intergenerational knowledge, particularly around engineering, mining and wartime contributions, may disappear without dedicated action. Balancing this urgency with the slower, trust-based nature of the programme presents an ongoing challenge.

Developing organisational capacity

While early feasibility and development work has shown promise, many local heritage organisations are still in early stages of consolidation. Their ability to participate in larger funding opportunities will depend on continued support, mentoring and opportunities to build confidence over time.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

Durham's first year as a Heritage Place demonstrates how a bottom-up, community-defined approach can begin to reframe local heritage in meaningful ways. By slowing down and investing in trust, the programme has built the foundations for a place-based model that is rooted in what matters to people in Shildon and Newton Aycliffe. The emerging outcomes reflect a heritage ecosystem beginning to take shape, with the development of a shared evidence base, renewed narratives of belonging, and early shifts in Council structures. Several lessons stand out from Durham's experience:

- **Beginning with listening builds credibility:** The decision to start with open, place-based listening - in everyday settings rather than formal consultations - helped rebuild trust in towns with a long history of engagement fatigue. This approach signalled that Heritage Places is different: long-term, responsive, and genuinely shaped by community voice.
- **Young people must be central, not peripheral, to long-term placemaking:** Early engagement showed that children and young people bring curiosity, creativity and a long-term stake in the future of both towns. Their involvement through PLACE Lab Shildon demonstrated not only enthusiasm but the importance of youth ownership in building future skills, confidence and civic identity.
- **Heritage gains power when integrated into wider strategic agendas:** The formation of a cross-departmental steering group - and growing alignment with regeneration and economic development - shows that heritage becomes more impactful when treated as a lever for planning, wellbeing and identity, rather than a standalone cultural activity.
- **Communities hold deep knowledge that requires time, curiosity and relational engagement to uncover:** Baseline engagement surfaced rich intergenerational stories - from engineering and mining heritage to the Aycliffe Angels - which might otherwise be lost. Uncovering these stories demands time, trust and relational methods, underscoring the value of the early slow-build approach.

Durham enters the next phase not with a predefined list of projects, but with something more valuable: a shared evidence base, a clear vision and a renewed sense of possibility. As one resident expressed through early engagement, heritage in Durham is "who we are, and who we choose to become." The decade ahead will build on this foundation, supporting communities to shape, lead and sustain a heritage future that reflects both the pride and the potential of Shildon and Newton Aycliffe.