LOCALIS

What's Past is Prologue

UNLOCKING THE VALUE OF HERITAGE FOR LOCAL ECONOMIES

By Sandy Forsyth & Callin McLinden

About Localis

Who we are

We are a leading, independent think tank that was established in 2001. Our work promotes neo-localist ideas through research, events and commentary, covering a range of local and national domestic policy issues.

Neo-localism

Our research and policy programme is guided by the concept of neo-localism. Neo-localism is about giving places and people more control over the effects of globalisation. It is positive about promoting economic prosperity, but also enhancing other aspects of people's lives such as family and culture. It is not anti-globalisation, but wants to bend the mainstream of social and economic policy so that place is put at the centre of political thinking.

In particular our work is focused on four areas:

- **Decentralising political economy.** Developing and differentiating regional economies and an accompanying devolution of democratic leadership.
- **Empowering local leadership.** Elevating the role and responsibilities of local leaders in shaping and directing their place.
- **Extending local civil capacity.** The mission of the strategic authority as a convener of civil society; from private to charity sector, household to community.
- **Reforming public services.** Ideas to help save the public services and institutions upon which many in society depend.

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Any opinions expressed in the report remain our own, as do any errors or omissions.

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A foreword from Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

'What's Past is Prologue' invites us to imagine a future in which heritage is valued as more than the preservation of buildings and the curation of stories.

This thoughtful exploration encourages us to see heritage as both a strategic asset and a form of enabling infrastructure: one that can drive economic growth while also strengthening wellbeing, social prosperity and a shared pride in place.

This is heritage in action in its truest sense, weaving together past, present and future in ways which bring real opportunity for people and communities.

Seen in this way, the report makes a powerful argument for change in the policy and funding landscape for heritage. It calls for longer-term investment in stewardship, skills and regeneration, with heritage made visible within growth plans, local plans and cultural strategies from the outset.

Using Stratford-upon-Avon as a case study, the report positions heritage as part of a wider 'civic infrastructure', and, crucially, one which enables communities to shape their own narratives.

The value of real, embedded community participation is something those of us working in heritage have known and felt for a long time, but it is important to see it set out as a necessary imperative, rather than a tokenistic nice-to-have.

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust is the home of Shakespeare for the world, a charity established by Act of Parliament with a national custodial role for the built heritage and collections that situate William Shakepeare's work, life and legacies in Stratford-upon-Avon. Our global significance is intrinsically linked to a local, place-based story.

It is at this meeting point of people and place that heritage can operate so powerfully, but this is not passive transfer of value. Heritage must be actively and thoughtfully stewarded and interpreted, made real and accessible for everyone in dynamic ways, and this requires leadership.

If we are to make the case – as we must – for investment, we must rigorously and credibly evidence the holistic value of heritage as a central part of a growth and wellbeing strategy.

The real task is one of alignment; working in partnership nationally, regionally and locally to organise, retain and grow the value of our heritage assets. That way we will ensure what's past really is prologue to an ambitious, shared future.

Rachael North, CEO,
The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

A foreword from Stratford-on-Avon District Council

Stratford-upon-Avon is blessed with a rich heritage. As the birthplace of William Shakespeare, Stratford has an international reputation and attracts significant visitor numbers every year. Stratford's resident population is relatively small, but, by opening its arms to the annual flow of visitors, Stratford can sustain a vibrant town centre, blue and green open spaces and a cultural and heritage offer more often associated with much larger towns.

Year on year, visitors are becoming more demanding and better informed, and the cultural tourism sector is increasingly crowded as destinations compete for visitor attention. Set against these factors, it is vital that Stratford keeps up with expectations to ensure that it maintains its prominent position within the heritage economy.

A well-presented, coherent heritage offer has enormous potential to achieve good things. It can enhance the health and wellbeing of those who immerse themselves within it, provide fulfilment and employment, create a sense of 'pride in place' among residents, and underpin a strong local economy.

At their best, heritage assets are accessible and inclusive, allowing all sectors of society to engage with them at a level at which they are comfortable. Whilst there will inevitably be competition between heritage assets, from a place perspective, they should seek to complement each other, combining to give the consumer the best possible experience. This will make visitors more receptive to the offer, more relaxed and more open to a longer stay in the setting.

As Stratford embarks on the next stage of its heritage journey, this independent research has been commissioned to provide a framework around which great ideas can be developed. It provides a baseline that can be used to underpin evidence-based decisions that will ensure a progressive Stratford thrives for current and future generations.

Tony Perks,
Deputy Chief Executive, Stratford-on-Avon District Council

Executive summary

This report seeks to reframe heritage in policy as a strategic mechanism for inclusive and sustainable placemaking – a form of strategic infrastructure that connects the past, present, and future. Heritage is not merely a backdrop to growth but is a powerful asset for productivity, wellbeing, and social prosperity. Using the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (the Trust) in Stratford-upon-Avon as a primary case study, this report will make clear that the management of both tangible properties and intangible legacies is a process that shapes local identity and that actively contributes to an inclusive, sustainable environment for growth. However, contemporary pressures such as post-pandemic visitor declines, inflation, and the cost-of-living crisis mean that heritage-led development must rise to the challenge of creating a more coherent place offer. The Trust, alongside the town of Stratford-upon-Avon, is currently undergoing a process of transition that could demonstrate how heritage investment can strengthen long-term economic resilience while fostering collaboration between councils, partners, and communities. In a national policy environment that increasingly values holistic approaches to place, there has never been a better time to cement heritage as an integral part of the conversation surrounding strategic planning and place-based growth.

Defining heritage as civic infrastructure

Heritage should not be considered as a static, retrospective relic of the past: it is a dynamic, present-day process that shapes place identity and influences future investment. Nor is it a single, bounded industry; rather, it is itself a place-based economic system. It encompasses both tangible assets (historic buildings, landscapes, and archives) and intangible practices (skills, stories, and traditions) to form connective tissue that links communities together. Increasingly, heritage has been integrated into the national policy agenda as part of the social, economic, and civic infrastructure of place rather than merely as a set of visitor attractions or matters of cultural stewardship. While its economic benefits are clear, heritage also sits within a national policy shift towards preventative and place-based intervention. There has therefore perhaps never been a clearer case for investment in heritage. Interventions such as the Treasury Green Book's emphasis on non-market benefits such as wellbeing and pride-in-place have necessitated better measurement of heritage's holistic value and DCMS's Culture and Heritage Capital Framework further exemplifies a policy shift towards new, more holistic approaches to heritage.

In this context, situating heritage as an archetypal representation of social and cultural infrastructure is key to elevating its role within national and place-based policy. Heritage organisations function as anchor organisations within place, supporting local economies through employment and procurement while providing spaces that foster social connection and collective identity. Treating heritage as infrastructure allows heritage-led programmes to be framed through a long-term perspective that is attractive to investors and pertinent to the unique needs of heritage organisations, addressing both upfront capital costs and the ongoing revenue needs of maintenance and programming. It also provides a foundation through which the complex and multi-layered governance processes associated with heritage, from national bodies to local asset custodians, can establish best practice.

Local authorities, acting as a linchpin of place, hold the mandate to integrate heritage into planning and regeneration strategies, and representing heritage as infrastructure within place planning cements the role of such assets and organisations within a wider strategic whole. Furthermore, in the context of devolution reforms, primarily in the form of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026, regional mayors and strategic authorities can be empowered to utilise heritage as a driver for growth.

However, the sector faces significant hurdles:

- **Capacity:** Local authorities, following years of austerity, have seen a substantial real-terms fall in culture spending and associated losses of specialist roles such as conservation officers.
- **Funding imbalances:** National funding is fragmented and competitive, often favouring organisations with better capacity for bid-writing.

Unlocking the value of heritage will depend on institutional capability. The strongest outcomes occur when councils, communities, and heritage anchors align their efforts to treat heritage as a critical infrastructure asset for inclusive growth and resilience.

A framework for heritage within local economies

Nationally, heritage is a significant economic driver with a high multiplier effect: for every £1 of direct GVA generated by the heritage sector, an additional £1.93 is supported in the wider UK economy through supply chains and employee spending. However, heritage exists within a place-based economic system that comprises organisations, assets, and supply chains concerned with stewardship, conservation, interpretation, and productive use and reuse. The true measure of its economic impact therefore lies in the ability of heritage assets and organisations to retain value locally rather than allowing it to leak out to external markets.

A framework to track how heritage value moves through a local economy can be summarised as follows:

- **Demand and generation:** Heritage assets create appeal, which is converted into economic activity through admissions, trading, programming, conservation work, and wider place spend.
- **Capture and circulation:** Local firms and workers secure a share of this activity, which then circulates through wages and local procurement.
- **Retention:** Value is retained when it builds local skills and supplier networks; on the other hand, leakages result when ownership, labour, or materials sit outside the local geography.

In this report, Stratford-upon-Avon serves as a practical test of this framework. While Shakespeare's legacy generates global demand, the local benefit depends on converting footfall into visitor value. For local stakeholders, this involves increasing dwell time and encouraging overnight stays, as staying visitors spend significantly more across a wider range of local businesses than day trippers. Institutions such as the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust are vital economic anchors that support local jobs and skills.

Value from heritage is rooted in physical assets that themselves require constant maintenance, making that work difficult to offshore. Consequently, with a substantial commitment to supporting productive capacity and skills at place level, the route to value retention becomes apparent. This commitment might take the form of promoting accessible procurement, designing contracts so local SMEs and specialist craftspeople can compete, and building local skills pipelines, using heritage estates to support apprenticeships and training, particularly for high-demand areas like historic building retrofit, which also contributes to the decarbonisation of the historic built environment.

A place-strengthening model is needed in which heritage acts as economic infrastructure, connecting demand to local firms and workers to retain value and build long-term community resilience.

The wider impacts of heritage

The public value of heritage is multifaceted: its impact extends far beyond traditional economic metrics and lies in its ability to foster wellbeing, social connection, and a sense of identity. However, these benefits depend heavily on access, representation, and participation: who defines heritage and who has the power to shape how heritage is used. For policymakers, inclusivity must therefore be a fundamental condition of heritage impact, rather than an additional discretionary concern.

Wellbeing and pride in place

Research indicates a strong link between heritage engagement and improved mental health, reduced loneliness, and increased life satisfaction. For instance, the wellbeing value for individuals living near heritage sites in the UK is estimated by DCMS at £29 billion annually. While the process of measuring these often-subjective benefits is complex, recent studies have identified tangible gains in adult health and productivity. Consequently, modern policy frameworks now encourage the use of mixed-indicator approaches to evidence non-monetisable outcomes such as pride in place and community attachment.

Traditional skills and education

The heritage sector faces significant challenges, including a critical shortage of traditional skills like stonemasonry, thatching, and timber framing due to funding cuts and rising costs. These skills are essential for maintaining the UK's built environment and play a vital role in green adaptation through sustainable retrofitting. Furthermore, a reciprocal relationship exists between heritage and education: heritage sites serve as trustworthy educational spaces that can mitigate misinformation, while education and training are necessary to sustain heritage for future generations.

Inclusion and heritage literacy

The benefits of heritage are not automatic but can be undermined by social and demographic stratification in participation. To address this, organisations must move beyond tokenistic processes of engagement towards genuine heritage literacy, a process that empowers diverse audiences to interpret and shape their own narratives. This includes engaging with difficult topics to ensure that heritage reflects the full diversity of past and present communities; diversifying leadership to bring lived experience into boardrooms to better reflect local communities and dismantle systemic barriers; and recognising the non-use value of heritage assets, valuing them for their existence and their importance to future generations, even for those who do not visit them directly. Effective heritage stewardship thus requires a shift from top-down imperatives to inclusive practices that recognise the holistic value of tangible and intangible assets and cultural traditions.

Heritage-led growth

Heritage is a powerful catalyst for future growth, contributing significantly to the economic and social life of communities through job creation, tourism, and the revitalisation of the historic built environment. To maximise this value, policy must move heritage from the margins into the mainstream of place policy and leadership, ensuring it is embedded in economic, cultural, and spatial strategies rather than treated as a standalone conservation activity.

Strategic integration is essential, particularly in devolved settings where local and strategic authorities are increasingly expected to evidence outcomes like resilience, growth, and pride in place. Institutional tools such as place-based partnerships, heritage strategies, supplementary planning documents, and masterplans can help translate heritage values into the investment logic and planning rules that shape how a place is developed.

A key practical driver of renewal is adaptive reuse, which repurposes vacant historic buildings into functional spaces for housing, workspaces, and community infrastructure. Beyond influencing the character of a place, adaptive reuse supports modern environmental goals by preserving the embodied carbon of historic buildings. However, these projects often face a conservation deficit, where repair costs exceed market value, which can necessitate public or philanthropic support to ensure long-term viability and prevent these assets from becoming local 'white elephants'.

Meaningful regeneration also depends on community empowerment. Effective governance uses co-creation, where residents have genuine agency over what is protected and prioritised. By utilising asset-based community development, places can use heritage to foster social cohesion and support self-reliant communities. Pride in place is most effectively built when residents see their own histories reflected in local change and are given legal routes to own or shape their place's cultural infrastructure.

The primary role of local government in heritage-led growth is one of orchestration: convening diverse partners and aligning heritage activity with planning, skills and investment decision-making. Despite the importance of this role, there is a widening gap between policy demands and professional capacity due to staffing reductions and funding landscapes that prioritise one-off capital projects over long-term revenue. In the end, durable stewardship requires building robust, synergistic place systems that treat heritage as a living resource for contemporary life.

Summary of recommendations

Tier of governance	Recommendations
Central government	Make tangible and intangible heritage visible across national place policy
	Publish heritage-specific appraisal guidance for place-based investment
	Put heritage funding on a more sustainable footing
	Rebuild specialist heritage capacity across local government
Regional government and strategic authorities	Make heritage a defined part of Local Growth Plans and investment evidence bases
	Build heritage skills into regional labour market and green skills planning
	Use destination management to measure heritage value, not just visitor numbers
	Actively shape regional heritage and retrofit supply chains
Local councils	Move from Local Plan recognition towards delivery-focused heritage planning
	Use council-owned heritage assets to support long-term stewardship
	Apply procurement reforms to heritage-led regeneration projects
	Strengthen community stewardship, inclusion and heritage literacy through holistic project governance

Introduction

Heritage is one of the ways places connect past, present and future. The historic fabric of neighbourhoods, towns and landscapes, together with the memories, practices and stories attached to them, helps shape local identity, belonging and a sense of place. This is not a marginal contribution. In annual direct GVA, England's heritage sector is estimated at £15.32bn, slightly exceeding the domestic sports sector at £15.3bn[1]. Public polling has repeatedly shown that residents value heritage sites, access to them, and the historic character of urban and rural places[2,3]. Heritage also provides a means of engaging with contested histories that continue to shape contemporary England[4]. In this sense, heritage is connective, contested and actively produced through present-day values, social relations and placemaking policy[5,6].

In contemporary placemaking debates, 'culture' and 'heritage' are often treated as interchangeable. That slippage obscures heritage's distinctive role: it is not simply a backdrop to growth, but a strategic place-based asset with economic, social and civic value. This report begins by contextualising heritage as a matter of policy, situated within complex local, regional and national systems before examining how heritage contributes to employment, productivity, supply chains, visitor expenditure and local economic retention. It also considers heritage's wider public value: its role in wellbeing, learning, creativity, community identity, pride in place and social prosperity. Finally, it assesses how heritage can support development and regeneration, as well as attract investment, when embedded in local strategies, policymaking and practice. The central question is therefore not only what heritage is worth, but how its value can be strategised for, distributed and retained in ways that strengthen places and the communities connected to them.

1 CEBR (2024) – The heritage sector in England and its impact on the economy
2 DCMS (2017) – Taking part focus on: Heritage
3 Ipsos (2000) – What does 'heritage' mean to you?
4 Audience Answers (2024) – Attitudes to heritage
5 Massey (1991) – A Global Sense of Place
6 Smith (2006) – Uses of Heritage

This report is intended to reframe heritage within policy, to situate it as a strategic asset that not only provides a profound connection between the present and the past, but also has a place in the future of local growth when it is made central to concerns of inclusive and sustainable placemaking. As such, this report is for policymakers within central government, to encourage a shift that connects the strong work of DCMS in valuing heritage as a place-based asset to the need for cross-departmental work that strengthens support for place-makers and those organisations that can catalyse heritage, both tangible and intangible, as a mechanism for mitigating deprivation. It makes the case for situating heritage, nationally, as infrastructure to ensure that policy interventions make room for the long-term judgement necessary for heritage assets to create local economic security as anchor institutions. This report is also for those working in strategic authorities, to evidence the cross-boundary and cross-silo working necessary to reap the benefits of heritage for the value of regional economies. This report is for local authorities, to evidence both their position within heritage ecosystems, highlighting their vital role as place conveners, and the power of heritage within place economies, provided that local authorities undertake work to support local value retention. And finally, this report is for local heritage organisations, to ensure that they leverage their place as anchors within local economies to support sustainable supply chains, inclusive growth, and empowered communities.

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

Stratford-upon-Avon is the anchor of a South Warwickshire visitor economy worth over £860 million in 2024[7]. The last clearly published town-specific economic impact estimate put Stratford-upon-Avon town's visitor economy at £239.7 million and 4,429 jobs in 2019[8]. More recently, the most robust post-pandemic figure is for Stratford-on-Avon District in 2021, when tourism was valued at £320.2 million and supported 6,628 jobs[9].

Stratford-upon-Avon's heritage economy is shaped by an unusually direct relationship between a globally recognised cultural figure and a specific local place. Shakespeare's legacy operates as intangible cultural heritage, but in Stratford it is anchored through tangible assets: historic houses, archives, collections, theatres, streets, public spaces and visitor routes. Shakespeare's legacy has shaped Stratford's economy since at least the eighteenth-century Shakespeare Jubilee. Stratford is one of the UK's most-visited

7 Shakespeare's England (2024) – Tourism delivers £860m to South Warwickshire as visitor numbers rise
8 Stratford-on-Avon District Council (2021) – Authority Monitoring Report 2020-2021
9 Stratford-on-Avon District Council (2025) – Authority Monitoring Report 2023-24

towns, ranking in the top 20 British towns for day-trippers and overnight visitors in 2024[10]. This place significance is also recognised strategically, with 'Shakespeare's England' – a not-for-profit membership organisation and public-private sector partnership recognised as the official tourism body for South Warwickshire (incl. Stratford-upon-Avon) – identified as central to the West Midlands visitor economy[11].

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust is a statutory charity with a national custodial role, responsible for preserving the Shakespeare properties and maintaining collections connected to Shakespeare's life, works and times[12]. Its collections, recognised by UNESCO's Memory of the World programme, locate Shakespeare's global significance within the place context of Stratford-upon-Avon[13]. This makes the Trust both a heritage custodian and a local anchor institution: it preserves assets of national and international importance while shaping Stratford's cultural, educational and visitor economy offer.

The Trust's mission — to nurture a growing global community inspired by Shakespeare, rooted in Stratford-upon-Avon — reflects this position at the intersection of people, place and heritage. Its work spans conservation, collections care, education, research, public programming and visitor experience[14]. Alongside other cultural anchors, including the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Trust helps make Shakespeare a fundamental part of Stratford's placemaking.

The Trust is currently going through a time of transition and expansion. In the post-pandemic years, the sites' reliance on the tourist economy has come into stark relief against a long-term dampened trend in visitor numbers, which have failed to return to pre-pandemic levels. Meanwhile, the Trust's operations have felt the impacts of inflation on costs while the cost-of-living crisis has reduced consumer demand for even domestic travel. Likewise, local authorities and other heritage sector anchor institutions are increasingly constrained themselves. Overall, the picture suggests that change is needed to keep abreast of the challenges.

10 Visit Britain (2024) – Inbound visits and spend: trends by UK town
11 HM Government (2019) – West Midlands Local Industrial Strategy
12 UK Parliament – Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Acts 1891 and 1961
13 UNESCO (2017) – The 'Shakespeare Documents', a documentary trail of the life of William Shakespeare
14 Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (2026) – What We Do

The Trust is also operating at a strategic inflection point. Post-pandemic visitor patterns, inflation, cost-of-living pressures and constraints on local authorities and cultural anchor institutions have exposed the fragility of heritage operating models reliant on tourism income. At the same time, significant transformation is being considered across Stratford-upon-Avon's built environment. The proposed World Shakespeare Museum and the wider Stratford-upon-Avon Gateway Masterplan create a test of how heritage-led development can organise dispersed assets into a more coherent place offer[15]. The ambition is not simply to add a new museum, but to provide a more joined-up, coherent visitor offer in collaboration with Stratford-upon-Avon's other visitor and heritage organisations across the town centre and wider public realm. In policy terms, the proposal raises the central questions explored throughout this report: how heritage investment can strengthen visitor experience, local identity, inclusive access, institutional collaboration and long-term economic resilience.

The Trust is therefore used throughout this report as a practical case study for three interlinked questions:

- how tangible and intangible heritage can be integrated into a coherent place offer;
- how heritage organisations can work with councils, strategic authorities, partners and communities to connect dispersed assets and visitor experiences;
- how heritage institutions can respond to financial and operating pressures while retaining, sharing and reinvesting the value they conserve and produce.

15 Stratford-on-Avon District Council (2024) – Stratford-upon-Avon Gateway Masterplan Framework SPD

CHAPTER ONE

Contextualising heritage as policy

This section sets out the policy foundations for the report. It begins by defining heritage broadly, covering both tangible assets and intangible practices, and explaining why heritage should be understood as active, contested and place-shaping rather than merely retrospective. It then situates heritage within the current policy context, including economic evidence, public value appraisal, planning, regeneration funding and devolution. The section goes on to map the governance and institutional landscape through which heritage value is delivered, with particular attention to the role of local authorities, strategic authorities, national bodies, destination organisations and local anchor institutions. Finally, it considers how heritage operates in place: as part of local economies, as a contributor to inclusive growth, and as a practical asset through which communities, councils and heritage organisations can strengthen distinctiveness, resilience and shared prosperity.

Key points

- Place leaders and heritage stakeholders require institutional capacity to unlock the value of heritage for local economies; to evidence value credibly, effectively align heritage with wider development priorities, develop investable propositions, and manage competing interests to turn heritage assets into economic drivers.
- Policy and practice must treat heritage as critical infrastructure for heritage assets to function as economic anchors, supporting local resilience and community empowerment.
- Effective heritage governance requires local authorities to act as a linchpin for place, and within place systems heritage organisations must function as anchor institutions, using their employment, procurement, and asset-stewardship roles to retain value locally and support inclusive growth.
- England's heritage funding landscape is fragmented and competitive, often leading to a disconnect between capital investment and revenue sustainability. Only when all layers of governance, from the national to individual asset custodians, align around shared outcomes will heritage be able to provide long-term, inclusive public value.

1.1 What this report means by 'heritage'

Heritage, conceptually, is best understood as the present-day relationship with the past. It is not simply what survives, but what communities, institutions and public bodies recognise as significant, ascribe and produce meaning, and seek to sustain for the future[16]. This makes heritage both connective and contested. It can support memory, attachment and continuity, but it can also prompt challenge, reinterpretation and debate. In policy terms, this matters because heritage is not only retrospective: it shapes how places understand themselves, make decisions about change, and organise future investment[17].

Heritage overlaps with culture and the arts, but it is not interchangeable with them. Its distinctive role lies in the relationship between stewardship, inherited assets, public

16 Smith (2022) – Heritage, the power of the past, and the politics of (mis)recognition
17 Harrison et al. (2020) – Heritage Futures: Comparative approaches to natural and cultural heritage practices

memory, place identity and intergenerational responsibility. Heritage can support individual and collective wellbeing not only by providing amenities and leisure, but by creating forms of attachment, recognition and social connection[18]. These benefits form part of the wider conditions that make places attractive, liveable and participatory.

This report therefore uses a broad definition of heritage. It includes tangible assets such as historic buildings, gardens, designed landscapes, land, archaeology, archives and collections, alongside intangible heritage such as customs, skills, stories, performance, language, memory and traditions[19]. This includes non-built heritage: the gardens, grounds, landscapes and wider landholdings through which heritage is experienced, interpreted and sustained. These categories are not separate in practice. Physical places often derive significance from intangible meanings, while intangible heritage often depends on places, objects, institutions and communities for its transmission. This is particularly important for place-based policy: heritage value is shaped not only by assets themselves, but by the meanings, uses and attachments that communities and visitors ascribe to them.

The challenge for policy is that heritage does not always fit neatly into the categories through which public systems operate. Different forms of heritage face different kinds of policy friction. Intangible, movable and environmental heritage can be harder to define, evidence and measure within systems that often rely on fixed assets, designations and institutional ownership[20]. At the same time, listed buildings, historic sites and significant landscapes can face high barriers of their own, including conservation duties, maintenance liabilities, capital costs, planning constraint and limited flexibility over use[21]. The issue, therefore, is not that one form of heritage is always easier to protect or fund than another, but that public systems can recognise, support and constrain different forms of heritage in uneven ways. This matters because institutional definitions shape what is recognised as valuable, what receives investment, and whose histories, practices and places are included and accounted for in local strategies. Such definitions must therefore treat heritage as plural and diverse, not reducible to a single asset type or homogeneity.

18 See Sofaer et al. (2021) – Heritage sites, value and wellbeing: learning from the COVID-19 pandemic in England and Gallou (2022) – Heritage and pathways to wellbeing: From personal to social benefits, between experience identity and capability shaping

19 UNESCO – Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

20 Djabarouti (2024) – Intangible cultural heritage and UK built heritage practice: Opportunities and future directions

21 Munjeri (2004) – Tangible and intangible heritage: from difference to convergence

For the purposes of this report, heritage is therefore defined as the tangible and intangible inheritance of places that communities, institutions and public bodies recognise, interpret, steward and adapt over time. It is infrastructural, in that it represents assets and practices that are integral to the functioning of communities and their wellbeing[22]. It is also, primarily, rooted in the past, but active in the production of place identity, public value and local futures.

1.2 Policy context

Heritage occupies an increasingly important place in England's policy agenda. It is no longer treated only as conservation, visitor attraction or cultural stewardship, but increasingly as part of the social, economic and civic infrastructure of places: buildings, stories, institutions, skills, public spaces and associations through which local areas strengthen identity, support renewal, attract visitors and improve quality of life. This shift is visible across economic evidence, public appraisal, planning, funding, devolution and local governance.

Historic England's evidence base demonstrates that heritage is embedded in local property markets, supply chains and employment structures, with England's heritage sector estimated to have generated £15.3bn in direct GVA in 2022 and a wider direct, indirect and induced economic footprint of £44.9bn[23]. Heritage tourism is also crucial to many local economies, with 2023 estimates pointing to 211 million domestic day visits, 14.9 million domestic overnight trips and 17.6 million international heritage-related visits in England[24]. Recent research also links cultural heritage abundance with higher local innovation and GDP growth, suggesting that heritage preservation and reuse can support entrepreneurship and creative industries[25]. The policy implication is that heritage should be treated not as a passive inheritance, but as part of local economic capability.

22 Miller (2021) – Infrastructure: How to define it and why the definition matters
23 Historic England (2024) – The Economic Value of the Heritage Sector
24 Ibid.
25 Cerisola (2024) – Multidimensional creativity as a mediator between cultural heritage and regional economic development in England

1.2.1 Place-based reform

Recent developments in appraisal strengthen this argument. The Green Book endorses and reinforces a shift towards a welfare-based approach in which all relevant benefits and costs should be considered, including environmental, health, wellbeing and distributional effects[26]. It emphasises that value for money should not be reduced to monetisable benefits and costs, and that place-based business cases need stronger treatment of transformational change, distributional effects and unquantifiable public value[27]. DCMS's Culture and Heritage Capital (CHC) work extends this logic by developing methods for valuing non-market benefits, including use and non-use values, so that heritage benefits are not implicitly treated as zero where they do not generate direct market transactions[28]. Under the CHC framework, heritage assets are treated as stocks of capital that produce flows of services and benefits over time, including education, recreation, identity, belonging and wellbeing[29,30]. This shift forgoes the old requirement that heritage-adjacent projects and investment must be justified solely through financial returns and instead allows for public investment cases to explicitly cite evidence of wellbeing, social and place-based public value – provided such claims are still nevertheless grounded in evidence rather than rhetorical assertion.

This reframing is also visible in planning and regeneration policy. The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 and the National Planning Policy Framework strengthen the expectation that heritage assets should be conserved as irreplaceable resources and understood in relation to sustainable communities and economic vitality[31,32]. In effect, heritage has been reframed in national policy as a form of both 'soft infrastructure' and capital that underpins pride-in-place and wellbeing alongside economic growth and prosperity. This is particularly useful for local government because it provides a language for connecting conservation, access, interpretation and public value within business cases.

26 See Historic England (2023) – Techniques for Valuing Heritage in Economic Terms, Frontier Economics (2024) – Culture and heritage capital: Monetising the impact of culture and heritage on health and wellbeing and HM Treasury (2026) – The Green Book: UK government guidance on appraisal

27 HM Treasury (2026) – The Green Book: UK government guidance on appraisal

28 DCMS (2025) – Culture and Heritage Capital portal

29 Sagger et al. (2021) – Valuing Culture and Heritage Capital: A framework towards informing decision making

30 Historic England (2025) – Culture and Heritage Capital

31 Legislation.gov.uk (2023) – Levelling-up and regeneration Act 2023

32 MHCLG (2024) – National Planning Policy Framework

1.2.2 Supporting heritage

National funding and programmes also reflect this broader conception of heritage value and its connection to local economic growth. The government's Pride in Place agenda places heritage at its core, emphasising 'unique heritage' and community pride as drivers of renewal and regeneration[33]. The National Lottery Heritage 2033 strategy is explicitly place-based and places greater emphasis on organisational sustainability, inclusion, environmental resilience and the contribution heritage can make to local economies, with over £1bn planned for investment during the 2023-26 delivery period and £3.6bn over the wider ten-year strategy[34]. Moreover, the Heritage Revival Fund and Heritage at Risk Capital Fund enable community organisations and social enterprises to rescue neglected historic buildings and sites in struggling areas, while the Museum Renewal Fund supports local museums to improve access and educational programmes. Similarly, Historic England's Heritage Action Zone programmes for high streets and places have demonstrated how public investment in heritage assets can create thousands of square metres of commercial and cultural space, directly "boost[ing] local economies" and training local people in construction and heritage-adjacent skills[35]. These funds and programmes all point to a wider policy direction: heritage is increasingly being understood and supported as a lever for renewal, community pride, access, local economic development and environmental sustainability.

The fiscal environment for heritage conservation, however, remains uneven. Tax relief such as Gift Aid supports charitable giving, while some heritage owners can access specific incentives linked to inheritance, ownership transfer or capital works[36]. Recent temporary VAT relief for family-focused summer tourism may support some visitor attractions by reducing the cost of admissions and encouraging footfall[37]. Its effect is likely to be uneven across the sector. Many charitable heritage bodies already benefit from VAT exemptions on admissions and therefore cannot easily pass on equivalent reductions to visitors[38]. At the same time, VAT on repair and maintenance, rising operating costs and the capital cost of caring for listed buildings, landscapes and

33 MHCLG (2025) – Pride in Place Strategy
34 National Lottery Heritage Fund (2023) – Heritage 2033: Our 10-year strategy
35 See Historic England – Heritage Action Zones and MHCLG (2025) – Pride in Place Strategy
36 Natural England (2008) – Conditional exemption and Heritage Management Plans: An introduction for owners and their advisers
37 HMRC (2026) – Temporary reduced rate of VAT for children's meals, tickets and family attractions
38 HMRC (2026) – Admission charges to cultural events (VAT Notice 701/47)

sites continue to create pressure[39]. The closure of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme has been followed by the introduction of the Places of Worship Renewal Fund, but this is a targeted and competitive programme rather than a general solution to the long-term fiscal pressures facing historic places of worship and other heritage assets[40].

Alongside these policy, strategic and financial measures, governance reforms have also reflected an intent to devolve heritage-adjacent policy and decision-making. Notably, the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026, for the first time, recognises ‘culture’ (explicitly including arts, heritage and creative industries) as a core competence for which strategic authorities and mayors are to be held accountable[41]. As the Museums Association notes, this change moves culture “from being a downstream beneficiary of other policy areas to becoming a driver of how devolution delivers for communities”[42]. In other words, mayors, constituent authorities and local partners will be expected to champion heritage-led regeneration as part of regional growth plans, aligning it with skills, tourism and health agendas while ensuring heritage policy serves matters of local identity and civic life too. This national commitment to an asset-based devolution builds on some earlier trends. Many areas already use Heritage Partnership Agreements, which effectively act as standardised building consent for listed buildings; Local Plan heritage policies, with the NPPF providing guidance on sensitivity regarding heritage assets; and their own cultural strategies to leverage heritage effectively while still protecting its historic significance and character — often to great effect[43,44,45]. For both local government and heritage organisations, this creates a stronger basis for aligning heritage with regional growth, visitor economies, skills, health, transport, regeneration and civic identity. But it also raises the bar for evidence, coordination and delivery capacity.

Moreover, this more favourable policy environment does not in itself unlock value. England’s heritage funding landscape remains fragmented, competitive and capacity-sensitive. National departments, arms-length bodies, regional authorities, local authorities, charitable funders, cultural organisations, civic groups and private owners all shape outcomes, but they do not always operate through aligned incentives

39 Historic Houses (2025) – Exemptions needed for heritage in new mansion tax system
40 DCMS (2026) – The Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme (LPWGS) is closed
41 UK Parliament (2026) – English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026
42 Museums Association (2026) – ‘Major policy breakthrough’ as culture is included in England’s devolution bill
43 Charles Russell Speechlys (2025) – Heritage Partnership Agreements: the future of historic buildings?
44 Historic England (2015) – The historic environment in Local Plans
45 Local Government Association (2020) – Cultural strategy in a box

or shared local strategies. Stakeholder evidence gathered for this research points to a persistent imbalance between places and organisations with the capacity to prepare strong bids and those with greater underlying need but weaker institutional resources[46]. The recurring tension between capital and revenue has also been consistently highlighted. Capital investment can stabilise buildings, restore high streets and bring assets back into use, but revenue funding is needed for maintenance, staffing, programming, interpretation, access and community use. Without this dependent capacity uplift, heritage assets may be preserved physically but nevertheless remain underutilised economically, socially inaccessible or operationally fragile. Strategic Authority Integrated Settlements, while representing a significant evolution for regionally led growth, have so far failed to provide a unique space for cultural policy, meaning that heritage-led inclusive growth still greatly depends on aligning stakeholders at all levels.

The key policy challenge contextualising this report, therefore, is whether England's local, regional and national authorities and institutions can strategise for, organise and deliver heritage value coherently and inclusively in a way that connects conservation with regeneration, capital investment with revenue sustainability, local pride with inclusive access, and economic appraisal with the less visible, less tangible public value that makes heritage places distinctive, liveable and resilient.

1.3 Governance and institutional landscape

Unlocking the value of heritage for local economies depends not only on heritage assets themselves, but on the institutional conditions around them: who owns and maintains them, who regulates change, who convenes partners, who funds repair and reuse, who manages visitor pressure, and who communities trust to shape what changes and what endures. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's assets, for example, sit within streets, neighbourhoods, planning policies, visitor routes and public spaces governed by other institutions. Its role is therefore both custodial and civic: the Trust preserves nationally and internationally significant heritage, but its value is realised through a wider system of planning, transport, culture, tourism, community involvement and investment.

This reflects the wider landscape of heritage governance in England. Accountability is rarely contained within one clean institutional pipeline[47]. Instead, it is distributed across local and regional authorities, arms-length bodies, charitable institutions,

46 CLOA (2024) – Place-led Working for Culture: a moment for change

47 Sokka et al. (2021) – Governance of cultural heritage: towards participatory approaches

private owners, national funders, community groups and residents. The Trust therefore operates as one actor within a wider place-governance system, rather than as a standalone heritage body. Its ability to generate local value depends not only on the quality of its assets and organisational capabilities, but on how effectively those assets are connected to Stratford-upon-Avon's streets, public realm, transport infrastructure, cultural programming, visitor economy, planning framework and civic identity.

This creates a further governance challenge. Heritage is a long-term commitment operating within short-term political, financial and policy cycles. Conservation, repair, landscape stewardship and adaptive reuse often require patient investment, staged delivery and benefits that accrue over decades, while local authorities and elected members must respond to annual budgets, electoral cycles, service pressures and public demand for visible improvements. Managing this tension requires heritage to be treated as part of long-term place stewardship. This means embedding heritage priorities in local plans, conservation management plans, strategies, visitor economy plans and capital programmes, so that decisions about repair, access, interpretation and use are less dependent on one political moment or funding round. It also means making the value of heritage legible in practical terms. Long-term protection is more likely to hold when communities can see what heritage does for a place now, while institutions retain a clear framework for what must be protected in the future.

Local government remains central to this system. Councils are not simply consultees or delivery partners; they are often owners, stewards, planning authorities, enforcement bodies, cultural convenors and place leaders at the same time. Historic England's guidance is clear that most decisions about the historic environment are made by local authorities, in consultation with local stakeholders, communities and residents, with Historic England supporting, advising and intervening where nationally significant assets or statutory processes require it[48]. Local authorities also own and manage a wide range of heritage assets, including town halls, parks, civic buildings, museums, archives and buildings of local and historic significance.

To such ends, the local value of heritage is often mediated through ordinary council functionality. Stratford-upon-Avon's Neighbourhood Development Plan frames how the town's historic and contemporary assets will contribute to future growth, while town-level bodies and partnerships shape priorities around public realm, local character,

48 Historic England – Local Management

community wellbeing and resident experience[49]. Stratford-on-Avon District Council's local planning policies shape how the historic environment is conserved, adapted and integrated within statutory development considerations, including biodiversity, affordable housing, infrastructure funding and neighbourhood planning. Warwickshire County Council adds another operational layer through education, libraries, roads and other place-shaping functions that affect how the Trust and its peers operate.

This institutional interweaving is visible in Stratford's cultural and regeneration planning. The Stratford-upon-Avon Arts and Culture Strategy was led through a cross-organisational group including the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-upon-Avon BID, Stratford Town Trust, district, town and county councils, and local library partners[50]. The Stratford-upon-Avon Gateway proposals similarly show that the Trust's World Shakespeare Centre ambitions depend not only on heritage vision but also on site allocation, planning guidance, housing investment, public realm, access, commercial viability and local consent across multiple tiers of governance.

Planning policy determines how heritage assets are protected, adapted and incorporated into development frameworks. Asset management shapes whether council-owned buildings are maintained, transferred, reused or allowed to decline. Cultural strategies determine whether heritage is part of a wider civic offer or confined narrowly to conservation. Economic development teams decide whether historic assets are built into town-centre renewal, visitor economy plans, meanwhile-use strategies, skills programmes and high street propositions. Where these functions are joined up, heritage can operate as civic infrastructure: a practical asset around which places organise identity, investment and activity. Where they are split across under-resourced departments, heritage can become everyone's concern in principle but no one's priority in practice. As an interviewee for this report noted, local authorities are often the 'linchpin of place'; even where they do not own the relevant heritage assets, they hold the mandate, convening power and planning responsibility needed to integrate heritage into wider strategies.

49 Stratford-upon-Avon Town Council (2017) – Stratford-upon-Avon Neighbourhood Development Plan 2011-2031

50 Stratford-upon-Avon (2026) – Stratford-upon-Avon Arts & Culture Strategy 2026-2036

1.3.1 Devolution and heritage governance

The rise of mayoral and strategic authorities adds another layer to the governance landscape, without replacing the role of constituent councils. In Stratford, the West Midlands Combined Authority's role in the Stratford-upon-Avon Gateway scheme is not chiefly as a funder, but as a strategic partner helping to align housing, regeneration and wider economic growth. Its value lies in coordination, political backing and the ability to connect heritage-led development to housing, transport, skills and inward investment. The test is whether this strategic alignment is pursued with local communities and residents, rather than over them.

Capacity for strategic heritage governance is nevertheless a significant overarching challenge. Councils remain the largest public funders of culture in England, spending over £1bn annually on services including libraries, museums, galleries, theatres, heritage sites and archives[51]. Yet cultural and heritage services are often discretionary, multi-functional and difficult to defend through narrow budget metrics. The LGA identifies a real-terms annual fall of £2.3bn in culture and leisure spending between 2010/11 and 2023/24, alongside rising demand for statutory services such as adult social care[52]. Recent government-commissioned research on small and medium-sized heritage organisations similarly points to declining capacity for local authority-led heritage strategies, including the loss of specialist roles such as conservation officers and heritage planners, and weaker local strategic leadership more generally[53].

> *"It takes a lot of resource to create bespoke interventions targeted to local communities. We fund that because we know that's what it needs in order to be delivered successfully... It's that consistent engagement over a long period of time that will really bring benefits – and that goes back to social prescribing because that is a long-term investment that takes a lot of capacity from heritage organisations, some of which haven't got it."*
>
> – RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

51 LGA – Cultural funding: challenges and opportunities
52 Ibid.
53 DCMS (2025) – Impacts of changes to local authority funding on small to medium heritage organisations

1.3.2 Building heritage partnerships

The visitor economy introduces another set of institutions. VisitEngland's guidance on destination management planning emphasises that the visitor economy is delivered through a range of public, private and voluntary organisations, requiring coordination across governance, access, infrastructure, visitor services, business support, transport, culture and the arts. Destination bodies, local businesses, accommodation providers, transport partners, cultural organisations and councils therefore all shape how heritage becomes economic activity[54]. For the Trust, this is especially important because its contribution is not reducible to ticket sales or footfall at individual properties. Shakespeare's local presence helps define the wider Stratford and Warwickshire offer that all sits around a heritage core. The Trust acts as an anchor within this system. VisitEngland's Local Visitor Economy Partnership programme is also relevant because it provides a bridge between asset stewardship and destination development, connecting heritage organisations with accommodation providers, transport partners, town-centre businesses, local authorities, and regional growth bodies[55].

National and sub-national bodies are wider enablers of heritage governance. Historic England provides statutory advice, maintains the National Heritage List for England and runs the Heritage at Risk programme, helping define significance, risk and conservation responsibilities. The National Lottery Heritage Fund shapes the funding landscape through Heritage 2033, including more than £1bn planned for 2023–2026, while its Heritage Places initiative supports whole-place approaches rather than isolated projects[56,57]. For the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, these bodies frame the standards, advice, recognition and investment routes through which local heritage ambitions become deliverable programmes.

The governance of heritage in place can therefore be understood through five overlapping layers. These layers are not hierarchical in a simple sense: national bodies may provide standards and funding, but local authorities mediate delivery; visitor economy bodies shape routes to market; strategic authorities connect heritage to regional growth; and asset custodians hold the knowledge, legitimacy and stewardship responsibilities through which heritage value is made public. The task for place leaders is to align these layers around shared outcomes, rather than allowing heritage to sit separately within planning, culture, tourism or asset management.

54 VisitEngland (2023) – A Guide to Destination Management Planning
55 VisitEngland – Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) Programme
56 National Lottery Heritage Fund (2023) – Heritage 2033: Our 10-year strategy
57 National Lottery Heritage Fund (2025) – Heritage Places

Central government and national bodies

Provide standards, funding, evidence and statutory expertise

Strategic and regional authorities

Align heritage with regional growth and investment

Local authorities

Convene, regulate and integrate heritage into placemaking strategy

Visitor economy bodies

Connect heritage assets to destination development

Asset custodians

Steward, interpret and activate heritage assets

Thus, heritage governance in England is increasingly place-based, but unevenly so. This landscape suggests a pragmatic conclusion. Unlocking the value of heritage for local economies is not simply a matter of better advocacy. Rather, it is a matter of institutional capability. Places need the capacity to evidence value credibly, convene partners, develop investable propositions, manage competing interests, and align heritage with wider development priorities[58]. In this sense, the key barriers are often not conceptual (though such matters nevertheless play a key part) but primarily operational. The strongest places tend to have a recognisable compact: councils that can lead and convene, communities that are enabled to shape priorities, heritage organisations with the confidence to act as local anchors, strategic authorities that can connect heritage to growth, skills, transport and regeneration, and national bodies that provide expertise, funding and standards[59,60]. The weakest places are not necessarily those with less heritage, but those where this responsibility is fragmented, capacity is low, evidence is poor and heritage is trapped inside a narrow planning or asset management silo.

1.4 Heritage in place

Heritage should be understood as an enabling asset for local economies: not only something to preserve or monetise, but something through which places organise investment, renew public realm, deepen local identity and strengthen economic resilience. It should not be treated as a niche cultural concern or shorthand for tourism alone. Rather, heritage functions as a place-based system of value, shaping employment, visitor spend, regeneration, wellbeing, civic identity, skills, local attractiveness and investability. However, these benefits are often distributed unequally. Positive outcomes depend on governance, participation, delivery capacity and place-specific conditions.

The first question is how heritage contributes to local economies; the second is how heritage organisations can deliberately shape that contribution. Heritage does not generate inclusive local value by default. That value must be organised through governance, access, participation, procurement, stewardship and long-term capacity.

58 DCMS (2025) – Impacts of changes to local authority funding on small to medium heritage organisations
59 Sokka et al. (2021) – Governance of cultural heritage: towards participatory approaches
60 Culture Commons (2024) – The Future of Cultural Devolution in the UK

1.4.1 Heritage as infrastructure

A policy-relevant definition of infrastructure is often hard to pin down, not because infrastructure is a necessarily challenging concept — defined as the physical systems and structures that support a society and its economy, often including sewage and water supply, energy, warehousing and transportation, and telecommunications systems while sometimes extending to physical assets such as housing, hospitals, and schools — but because, as this report's exploration of heritage reveals, capital-intensive programmes for the good of society often have outcomes that are not necessarily measurable using purely economic terms[61]. The UK Infrastructure 10-year strategy claims that it takes a new approach to infrastructure that, alongside ensuring a long-term and joined-up strategy, will for the first time prioritise social infrastructure alongside the economic[62]. In doing so, it suggests that the government is prepared to consider the holistic nature of infrastructure, but the strategy fails to commit to defining what it means for social infrastructure to be 'social'. The British Academy has provided a more useful paradigm in a recent but substantial body of work that considers both the policy functions of social and cultural infrastructure, and how social and cultural infrastructure might be measured[63]. This work defines social and cultural infrastructure as "the spaces, services and structures that bring people together, and that can strengthen the social and cultural fabric of our communities".

Heritage is, therefore, almost an archetypal representation of social and cultural infrastructure. Heritage assets function as anchor institutions; as organisations that shape local economies through procurement, employment and asset ownership. For heritage organisations, the anchor role is not only economic; it also concerns stewardship, interpretation, civic trust and the social use of assets[64], illustrating their part in the social conditions and infrastructure of a place.

Heritage institutions often display these anchor characteristics. Churches, museums, historic estates and cultural trusts can all perform anchor functions where they provide space, employ local people, commission local services, support volunteering, sustain community activity and make procurement decisions that retain value locally[65,66].

61 House of Commons Library (2025) – Infrastructure in the UK
62 HM Treasury (2025) – UK Infrastructure: A 10 Year Strategy
63 The British Academy (2025) – Measuring social and cultural infrastructure
64 Centre for Local Economic Strategies & Preston City Council (2019) – How we built community wealth in Preston
65 University of Birmingham (2023) – Anchoring their communities: how church buildings are bringing people together
66 Antink et al. (2020) – Heritage for inclusive growth

As anchor institutions, heritage organisations are uniquely placed to support bottom-up and inclusive approaches to economic growth. Heritage activity can strengthen participation, volunteering, partnership working, shared memory, and intergenerational connection[67]. Heritage organisations do not work in isolation; at their best, they provide platforms through which local stakeholders can convene and generate social value. A strong community-led or participatory heritage offer allows regeneration and development to respond more directly to community needs. It is, however, important to address the fact that heritage organisations in their role as stewards and convenors must be cognisant of their impact on local populations. While local communities might be grateful for the spaces and opportunities offered by heritage, volunteer fatigue, conflicts of interest, or even a reliance on negative narratives surrounding heritage endangerment in an effort to bolster participation by heritage organisations can all affect the emotional connection between populations and their heritage[68]. These effects may be more concentrated where heritage organisations are situated in smaller locales. As such, policies that recognise that heritage institutions act as local economic and social linchpins need also to recognise the very human limitations to participatory objectives.

Neither do heritage anchors shape place alone. Rather, they work as part of a broader civic leadership with ownership, stewardship, and interpretations distributed across several organisations. Collaboration with councils, other asset owners, education providers, businesses and communities is therefore not optional; it is the condition through which heritage becomes place-based value. As anchor institutions, heritage organisations need to act as strategic partners, using their employment, skills, education, procurement and asset-stewardship roles alongside other local employers, decision-makers and educators.

The difficulty is that anchor work takes place in a competitive and fragmented funding environment. Many heritage organisations rely heavily on commercial income, while public funding pressures have contributed to site closures, reduced opening hours

67 See Perkin (2010) – Beyond the rhetoric: negotiating the politics and realising the potential of community-driven heritage engagement, McDermott et al. (2016) – Public space, collective memory and intercultural dialogue in a (UK) city of culture and Wang et al. (2025) – Participation intention in cultural heritage conservation across generations: the influence of differential heritage value perception and place attachment

68 May (2019) – Heritage, endangerment and participation: alternative futures in the Lake District, Abdurahiman (2025) – Urban Heritage Sociocultural Impact Assessment (UHSCIA): scale development and psychometric validation, Gallou (2019) – Exploring impacts of participation in heritage management: reciprocal links between communities and heritage institutions in the case of Orkney islands

and curtailed programming. Reduced access has disproportionate effects in more deprived areas, exacerbating inequalities in who benefits from heritage[69]. At the same time, shifting debates about national identity can make inclusive interpretation and advocacy more politically contested[70]. This makes institutional resilience essential to undertaking the role of a local heritage anchor organisation. Without stable capacity, heritage organisations may struggle to sustain participation, build and strengthen partnerships and deliver inclusive growth.

Situating heritage as social infrastructure is therefore a necessary step in ensuring that heritage organisations can reach their full potential. Infrastructure requires financing for upfront costs as well as long-term funding in terms of both revenue and capital for maintenance and ongoing operations; heritage has the same needs, with arguably even more necessity placed on those strategic operational considerations as heritage assets are often immensely valuable for their events and programming offer, requiring significant revenue and human resourcing. Therefore, defining heritage as infrastructure opens up a conversation around treating it as an asset with long-term outcomes, (often) high upfront and capital costs, ongoing operational and revenue requirements, associated risks, and clear demand, adding to the narrative of heritage as an investible proposition and, in many cases, overcoming political short-termism in local spaces. Furthermore, and as will be explored later in this report, the role of heritage in building green and sustainable spaces seamlessly integrates with a wider national policy environment in favour of green infrastructure, lending credence to the conceptualisation of heritage as integral to national and regional infrastructure strategies, which in turn may support resourcing for heritage as a mechanism for achieving a sustainable future.

The solution to ensuring that local areas have the social and cultural infrastructure that communities need both to feel resilient and to be economically secure is to ensure that policy actually treats it as critical infrastructure and not just an optional nice-to-have[71]. Solutions that work for infrastructure may well work for heritage, too. Similarly, it is necessary to distinguish between economic and social infrastructure. Heritage should be valued as social infrastructure in its own right: as an anchor institution, a convenor, a source of collective identity, a space for communities and a contributor to local economic growth[72].

69 DCMS (2025) – Impacts of changes to local authority funding on small to medium heritage organisations
70 Denham & McKay (2023) – The Politics of England: National identities and political Englishness
71 The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2026) – Why social infrastructure matters for economic security
72 McMorran (2008) – Understanding the 'Heritage' in heritage tourism: Ideological tool or economic tool for a Japanese hot springs resort?

CHAPTER TWO

Economic impacts: Retaining heritage value locally

For place leaders, the economic question is not simply whether heritage has value, but where this value is generated, how far it travels, who captures it and how much remains retained in place. Heritage value moves through jobs, supply chains, visitor spend, investment, conservation, public realm improvements and wider place effects. But its scale, distribution and durability vary significantly according to local market structure, institutional capacity, ownership, procurement routes and the strength of links between heritage assets and the surrounding economy. Economically, heritage should therefore be understood not as a single bounded industry or set of isolated assets, but as a place-based economic system: a set of organisations, occupations, assets, supply chains and practices concerned with stewardship, conservation, interpretation and productive use and reuse. This section presents a simple but effective economic framework to such ends.

Key points

- Heritage should be assessed as a local value-retention system, with attention paid to where visitor spend, procurement, labour, skills and profits are captured.
- Visitor numbers are an incomplete measure of economic success. Stronger tests include dwell time, overnight stays, spend-per-head, local business capture, seasonal spread and links between attractions and the wider visitor economy.
- Supply chains and skills determine whether heritage investment builds local productive capability or leaks out through distant contractors, inaccessible tenders and thin local labour markets.
- Procurement is one of the main policy levers for increasing local retention, because contract design shapes whether SMEs, specialist trades, social enterprises and local suppliers can access heritage and heritage-adjacent work.

Thus, heritage generates demand; local institutions, firms and workers capture some of that demand; value circulates through wages, procurement, visitor spending and reinvestment; and leakage occurs where ownership, labour, contracts, materials or profits sit outside the local economy. The relevant test for policy is therefore not only how much value heritage quantifiably creates, but whether it strengthens the local economic relationships around it.

Stratford-upon-Avon provides a clear, demonstrative example here. Shakespeare's legacy creates international demand, but the local economic value of such demand depends on how it is converted into admissions income, trading activity, hospitality spend, conservation work, employment, supplier opportunities and, ultimately, reinvestment in place. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust is therefore not only a steward of historic assets, but a local economic anchor whose role is shaped by visitor experience, estate management, conservation needs, commercial activity and relationships, both tacit and explicit, with the wider Stratford economy.

This section therefore examines heritage's economic impact through this 'retention-and-leakage' lens, focusing on visitor value, employment and skills, supply chains and local economic resilience. It uses national evidence where necessary to establish scale, but its main concern is practical and place-based: how heritage economies generate value, where that value goes, and what determines whether it strengthens the places from which it is drawn.

2.1 A local economic framework

National measures demonstrate that heritage is economically material, with total aggregate GVA impact estimated at approximately £44.9bn, equivalent to around 2.5 percent of total GVA[73]. However, heritage does not sit comfortably within a single industrial classification: reliance on SIC 91.03, covering the operation of historical sites and buildings, risks capturing only the most visible visitor activity, whilst broader SIC-SOC mapping shows that heritage value also appears across construction, professional services, conservation, repair, maintenance, visitor experience and expenditure[74,75].

This wider lens is important because heritage is not only a visitor economy. In 2022, heritage construction was estimated to be the largest constituent sub-sector of the heritage economy, generating £7.4bn in GVA, compared with £3.3bn from archives, libraries and museums; architectural and engineering services contributed around £1.8bn, while ancillary visitor spend linked to heritage trips was estimated at approximately £28bn[76]. The implication is that heritage is also a source of skilled work, technical knowledge, capital investment and demand for goods and services.

In further accordance with these national measures, heritage's economic contribution can then be understood through four related layers. Direct impacts are generated by the organisations and assets whose primary purpose is heritage management, conservation, interpretation or stewardship; in 2022, England's heritage sector was estimated to generate £15.3bn in direct GVA[77]. Indirect impacts arise through supply chain spending, while induced impacts are created when employees and suppliers spend their earnings in the wider economy[78]. Together, these effects explain heritage's multiplier value: it is estimated that for every £1 of direct GVA generated by England's heritage sector, a further £1.93 is supported across the wider UK economy, through indirect supply-chain impacts and induced spending effects[79]. Catalytic impacts are broader and longer-term, including additional tourism, regeneration, business activity and reputational effects, but are harder to attribute because heritage rarely acts alone.

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73 CEBR (2024) – The heritage sector in England and its impact on the economy
74 DCMS (2024) – A feasibility study and preliminary framework for an alternative Heritage Sector statistics methodology
75 CEBR (2024) – The heritage sector in England and its impact on the economy
76 Ibid.
77 Historic England (2024) – The economic value of the heritage sector
78 CEBR (2024) – The heritage sector in England and its impact on the economy
79 Ibid.

However, aggregate impact does not guarantee local retention. Heritage spending can leak out where ownership, labour, procurement or supply chains are located elsewhere, reinforcing uneven local outcomes. The relevant policy test is therefore the local multiplier: how far each pound circulates locally before leaving the area[80]. Visitor numbers, admissions income, restored buildings and capital investment are useful indicators, but they alone are not sufficient measures of local economic value. The more demanding test is whether heritage activity supports local businesses, creates routes into work, strengthens supply chains and helps economic value remain in place rather than leak out.

This section therefore puts forward a simple retention-and-leakage framework. Heritage assets and institutions generate **demand** through visitor appeal, conservation need, public realm, cultural and place identities, programming and investment. This demand is then **captured** when local organisations, firms and workers provide the goods, services, labour and experiences through which heritage value is realised. It **circulates** when wages, procurement, visitor spending and reinvestment pass through local businesses, households and supply chains[81]. It is **retained** where such interactions and relationships build durable local capacity, including skills, supplier networks, visitor economy businesses and institutional partnerships. It **leaks** where capture is ineffective and therefore ownership, contracts, labour, materials, profits or visitor spending ends up sitting outside the local economic geography.

80 New Economics Foundation (2002) – Plugging the Leaks: Making the most of every pound that enters your local economy

81 Ibid.

Demand

Heritage assets, institutions and place identity create appeal, drawing visitors, investment, public interest and civic attention.

Generation

Demand becomes economic activity through visits, admissions, trading, programming, conservation work and wider place spend.

Capture

Local businesses, workers, suppliers and institutions secure a share of this activity before it passes into external markets.

Circulation

Captured value moves through the local economy via wages, procurement, business-to-business spend, skills and reinvestment.

Retention

Heritage activity strengthens local firms, employment, skills, stewardship capacity and wider economic resilience.

Leakages

Value exits through external ownership, distant contractors, weak supplier links, short dwell times, low local skills capacity, fragile operating models and a lack of coherent economic strategy.

This creates a distinction between extractive and place-strengthening heritage economies. Extractive models use heritage primarily to attract visitors, investment or consumption while value is captured elsewhere, thus never reaching the latter stages of the above model. On the other hand, place-strengthening models connect heritage demand to local firms, workers, skills, suppliers and institutions as if it were a form of economic infrastructure. The key risk then is that heritage-led development uses historic identity to attract visitors and investment without sufficiently strategising for and strengthening local ownership, employment, supplier capacity or affordability[82].

The causal drivers of local economic success are therefore not simply footfall or asset quality. They include the strength of local business links, the accessibility of procurement routes, the depth of local and regional supplier markets, the availability of heritage and conservation skills, the quality of visitor experience, the ability to increase dwell time and spend-per-head, and the financial resilience of anchor institutions and public sector stewards. Where these conditions are present, heritage demand is more likely to become local economic resilience. Where they are weaker, heritage may still attract activity, but more of the value is likely to leak elsewhere.

Stratford-upon-Avon provides a clear test of this framework because Shakespeare's heritage creates internationally recognised demand, but the local economic value of this demand depends on the extent to which it is converted into local employment, visitor spend, supplier opportunities, conservation skills and reinvestment. The following sections therefore apply this framework to the Stratford case, as well as employment and skills, heritage-led tourism, visitor experience, supply chains and strategies for local economic retention more broadly.

2.2 Stratford as a heritage economy

Stratford-upon-Avon is not just a historic destination; it is a heritage economy as described above. Shakespeare's legacy generates international recognition and visitor demand, but this demand becomes local economic value through the institutions, businesses, workers, suppliers and public spaces that organise it. Destination management planning for the Shakespeare's England region identifies the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and the Royal Shakespeare Company as internationally significant anchors within the local and regional visitor economy[83]. This is the point at which

82 Gill (2024) – Heritage and entrepreneurial urbanism: unequal economies, social exclusion, and conservative cultures

83 Shakespeare's England (2018) – A destination management plan for Shakespeare's England region 2015-2025

Stratford becomes more than just a cluster of attractions, as its economic value depends on the interaction between major cultural institutions, accommodation, food and drink, retail, the local public realm, transport, conservation and local business capacity.

The scale of this system is significant. Stratford-on-Avon District's tourism sector has been estimated at around £385 million a year and approximately 7,400 workers, with Shakespeare's heritage forming a central part of the town's visitor appeal[84]. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust plays a particularly important role within this local economy. In 2024, the Trust reported an average of 164 employees across its historic houses, trading activities, cultural engagement and participation, and management and support functions[85]. Visitor footfall statistics evidence that relative increases in pedestrian traffic across Stratford's town centre from 2025-26 were concentrated in a significant boost in footfall around the Trust's central base of operations on Henley Street[86]. Its stewardship of Shakespeare's family homes, archives, books and museum collections requires skills in collections care, interpretation, education, site management, research and organisational leadership. The Trust should therefore be understood as both a custodian of historic assets and a local economic anchor whose activities support employment, skills, visitor demand and place identity.

The Stratford case shows that heritage value depends on generation through to retention, not just inherent demand. Shakespeare does indeed provide a globally recognised cultural identity, but local economic value is generated when this recognition is converted into recognisable, attractive visitor experience, with admissions income, trading activity, overnight stays, local business spend, conservation work and reinvestment all working to capture such value. The clearest example here is Shakespeare's New Place. Following a £6m transformation and new permanent exhibition in 2016-17, visitor numbers rose from 44,979 in 2015 to 126,603 in 2016, while an economic assessment cited in a relevant REP impact case study estimated that the project created 31 full-time equivalent jobs and increased regional GVA by £1.3 million[87]. The significance of this example is that capital investment did indeed increase demand and footfall, but it was the process of strategising interpretation, exhibition and visitor experience that helped convert the inherited cultural significance of Shakespeare into further contemporary economic activity.

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84 Stratford-on-Avon District Council (2018) – The Place for Business at the Heart of England: Local industrial and economic development strategy for Stratford-on-Avon District 2018-2031

85 Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (2024) – Trustees' report and consolidated financial statements

86 Analysis based on internal Shakespeare Birthplace Trust figures shared with Localis for the purpose of this research

87 Staffordshire University (2021) – SEARCHING FOR SHAKESPEARE – impact of archaeology on local, regional and global communities

2.2.1 Shakespeare Birthplace Trust: Modelling retention

The Trust's current overarching operating model further reinforces the distinction between visitor volume and visitor value, contributing significantly to all tiers of the aforementioned local economic framework. In 2024, the Shakespeare family homes received 443,643 visits, a five percent increase on 2023, admissions income rose to £4.5 million, whilst the Trust's trading subsidiary generated £1.7 million[88]. These figures matter because they show that the economic value of heritage is not simply about the number of visits, but the ability to generate economic activity off the back of the inherent demand for heritage assets and visitor experience and capture it through wider local spend. A high-profile heritage asset may bring people into a place, but local benefit depends on what happens after arrival by way of capture, circulation and retention: whether visitors stay longer, move between attractions and local businesses, use local accommodation, spend with independent firms, return in different seasons and encounter a place offer that feels specific rather than generic.

This makes Stratford a useful test of the retention-and-leakage framework because the town's visitor economy is highly visible, but somewhat uneven in how value is captured. In 2018, Stratford Town recorded around 290,000 staying trips compared with over 2.4 million day trips, with direct trip expenditure of £75.6 million from staying visitors and £115.5 million from day visitors[89]. The distinction matters because the spend profiles are structurally different. Staying visitors generated accommodation spend alongside food, drink, shopping, attractions and travel, while day visitor expenditure was concentrated heavily in shopping, food and drink, with no accommodation spend. The economic question for Stratford on this front, then, is not simply how many people are attracted by Shakespeare – or indeed the Trust and RSC specifically – but the extent to which this demand is generated, captured, circulated and retained through higher-value dwell time, overnight stays, linked town centre spending, repeat visits and supply chain activity. This aligns with the stated ambition of Shakespeare's England to attract visitors who stay longer, explore further and spend more, while working with local businesses, attractions and public bodies to develop the visitor economy[90]. In retention terms, Stratford's challenge is to strategise further in turning the demand of Shakespeare's global cultural recognition

88 Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (2024) – Trustees' report and consolidated financial statements
89 The Research Solution (2018) – Economic Impact of Tourism: Stratford Town – 2018
90 Shakespeare's England (2015) – A destination management plan for the Shakespeare's England Region 2015 – 2025

into retained heritage value that actively works to strengthen the local economy: one where visitors move between heritage sites and independent businesses, where visitor spend supports hospitality and retail beyond the attraction gate, and where conservation and estate management expenditure sustains local and regional suppliers rather than leaking into distant markets unnecessarily.

This also changes how success should be measured. Footfall remains important, but it is a weak proxy for local economic retention. More useful indicators include the share of visitors staying overnight, average dwell time, spend per head, repeat visits, the proportion of spend captured by independent local businesses, local supplier use by anchor institutions, and the balance between direct visitor expenditure and indirect or induced local turnover. Stratford's visitor economy already shows this wider multiplier logic: the 2018 town-level assessment estimated total local business turnover supported by tourism activity at £233.5 million, of which £187 million was direct turnover and £46.6m was indirect[91]. The point is not to replace heritage value with narrow tourism accounting, but to ask a more practical economic question: which forms of heritage activity deepen the local economy, and which merely pass through it?

The more recent experiences of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust also show the vulnerability of heritage-led economies if not supported and accounted for by government. The Trust's 2025 staffing redundancies underline the fragility of heritage employment where operating models remain overexposed to visitor and admissions income, rising costs and the fixed costs of conserving historic assets[92]. This does not weaken the economic case for heritage; it clarifies it further. The organisations that generate visitor demand often carry long-term responsibilities for conservation, collections care, staffing, compliance and estate management. In retention terms, such anchor institutions need sufficient financial resilience if they are to keep supporting employment, skills, suppliers, visitor experience and reinvestment in place – otherwise there is a risk that cheaper options further afield or drastic measures have to be taken, thus resulting in significant leakages and an increased chance of failing to capture generated heritage value.

91 The Research Solution (2018) – Economic Impact of Tourism: Stratford Town – 2018

92 Leamington Observer (2025) – 29 redundancies confirmed at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

2.3 Visitor value

Visitor value is the point at which heritage demand becomes local economic benefit. Footfall is of course important, but it is only the first stage. The local value of a heritage visit depends on how long visitors stay, where they spend, whether they move between attractions and local businesses, and whether that spending supports local employment, suppliers and reinvestment. Heritage-led tourism therefore matters when heritage assets act as catalysts for wider place spending, rather than operating as self-contained attractions[93]. The economic issue is not simply how many visitors arrive, but whether their spending reaches local cafés, pubs, hotels, shops, transport providers, guides, creative businesses, maintenance firms and supply chains.

National visitor data shows the scale of the opportunity. Domestic overnight heritage-related trip spending reached £4.8bn in 2022, while domestic heritage day visits were valued at £11.6bn in 2023 across around 211 million visits[94,95]. International tourism is also strongly heritage-led: VisitBritain evidence found that 57 percent of surveyed international travellers ranked exploring history and heritage first as a motivation to visit the UK, with international heritage-related trips estimated to generate £12.5bn in 2023[96]. However, this spending is geographically uneven, with London dominant for overseas heritage visitors and regions such as the North East capturing far fewer heritage-related overnight trips[97]. Heritage visitor demand therefore needs active destination management if it is to increase local spend, support local firms and reduce leakage.

Further available evidence suggests that much heritage-related expenditure occurs beyond the attraction itself. Older sector evidence estimated that around two-thirds of spend associated with a heritage visit went to local businesses, while Historic Houses members reported £1.3bn generated for the UK economy in 2022, around two-thirds of which was spent locally[98,99]. These ratios should be treated as indicative rather than universal, but they support the central point: the local value of heritage tourism depends on how visitor demand connects to the surrounding economy. Retention depends on dwell time, spend-per-head, local business capacity, ownership structures, the strength of local supply chains and the quality of links between attractions and the wider town or city centre.

93 Historic England (2024) – The contribution of the heritage sector to the visitor economy
94 CEBR (2024) – The heritage sector in England and its impact on the economy
95 Ibid.
96 Hickey et al. (2022) – MIDAS: A Global Report
97 CEBR (2024) – The heritage sector in England and its impact on the economy
98 Heritage Lottery Fund (2010) – Investing in success: Heritage and the UK tourism economy
99 Historic Houses (2023) – Changing Times, Valuing History: Historic houses for the twenty-first century

This shifts the economic test from visitor growth to visitor-economy integration. Within visitor economy literature, tourism is only one part of a wider place system in which visitor value is generated[100]. The question is therefore not only whether heritage attracts visitors, but whether it creates linkages across this wider economy. Tourism leakage literature frames the issue as a movement from 'leakages to linkages' as value is lost where visitor activity depends on external ownership, non-local labour, imported goods, weak supplier relationships or isolated consumption circuits, and retained where tourism demand is connected to local firms, workers, producers and services[101]. Destination management should therefore be understood less as promotion and more as economic coordination, where the active shaping of routes, itineraries, partnerships, visitor flows, product development and business participation increases linkage density and sees heritage demand generate visitor spend that circulates through the wider place economy[102] . On such a reading, the strongest indicators are not simply footfall or headline spend, but the density of linkages, typically through overnight conversion, dwell time, spend-per-head, multi-site itineraries, independent business spend, local sourcing, repeat visits, seasonal spread and the share of visitor expenditure captured by local labour and suppliers.

The same logic also explains why visitor growth can become self-defeating. Heritage tourism can generate recurrent revenue for conservation and local business activity, but excessive or poorly managed flows can impose costs on the very assets and communities that create the appeal of the destination. Heritage-led tourism is therefore not automatically place-strengthening. Cerisola and Panzera's work on Italian provincial data suggests that heritage tourism supports local economies only up to a point: excessive visitor flows can produce diminishing returns through conservation costs, service pressure, environmental damage, crime and loss of local attractiveness[103]. Moreover, Zhu et al. find that perceived authenticity strengthens visitor experience across entertainment, aesthetics, education and escapism, increasing satisfaction[104]. For local heritage economies, authenticity should therefore be treated not as static preservation or generic nostalgia, but as an economic asset produced through conservation, interpretation, programming, sensory engagement and opportunities to encounter tangible and intangible heritage in meaningful ways.

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100 Hristov (2015) – Tourism versus the visitor economy and the shifting landscape of destination management

101 Chaitanya & Swain (2025) – A comprehensive literature review of theoretical and empirical aspects of economic linkages in tourism destinations

102 VisitEngland (2012) – Principles for developing destination management plans

103 Cerisola & Panzera (2025) – Heritage tourism and local prosperity: An empirical investigation of their controversial relationship

104 Zhu et al. (2025) – Experience economy and authenticity in the heritage tourism sector: A multiple-dimensional approach

2.4 Supply chains and skills

Beyond visitor value, heritage value also depends on local productive capabilities. Therefore, supply chains and skills also matter a great deal in capturing, circulating and retaining heritage value locally and regionally. Conservation, repair, maintenance, retrofit, interpretation and estate management all require a working ecology of firms, materials, trades, professional judgement, training routes and informed clients[105]. In regional-development terms, this is a question of absorptive capacity – whether a place has the labour, institutions and business base needed to turn heritage demand into local economic activity[106]. This also explains why heritage skills should be treated as a labour market system, rather than a narrow conservation concern. Work on 'skills basins' is also illustrative here, suggesting that growth depends partly on locally embedded capabilities and related labour pools, where workers circulate between firms and diffuse knowledge across connected sectors[107]. Heritage economies therefore depend on this kind of related capability. Various occupations and relevant skills may do different jobs, but their combined knowledge determines whether places can care well enough for historic assets, continue to generate more value from them and, ultimately, retain this value in place.

Empirically, Historic England and CEBR estimate that, in 2022, England's heritage sector directly employed around 201,000 workers and supported an aggregate employment footprint of 523,000 jobs across the UK economy once supply chain and induced spending effects are included[108]. These figures indicate the scale of the employment reach associated with heritage activity, but they should not be read on their own as proof that all heritage expenditure is equally productive or locally retained. Local retention depends on people with specific, place-sensitive skills working in local contexts.

The strongest evidence for this labour intensity comes from repair, maintenance and retrofit. Work on historic buildings often requires specialist judgement, traditional materials and craft skills, including stonemasonry, carpentry, joinery, lime plastering, roofing, glazing and sensitive retrofit. Historic England's 2024 skills need analysis estimates that work on pre-1919 buildings in England generated demand of over £28bn in 2024, around 39 percent of total construction repair and

105 Ost & Saleh (2022) – The contribution of economics to the value chain of urban conservation
106 The Royal Society (2022) – Regional adsorptive capacity: The skills dimension
107 O'Clery & Kinsella (2019) – Modular structure in labour networks reveals skill basins
108 CEBR (2024) – The heritage sector in England and its impact on the economy

maintenance output. Meeting this demand required a core workforce of 180,000 people, including approximately 101,000 workers with specific traditional building skills[109]. The implication is not simply that heritage conservation creates jobs, but that it supports forms of employment which are materially rooted in place and difficult to offshore.

These figures should be read as evidence of the scale and labour intensity of heritage-related demand, rather than as a simple measure of net economic benefit. In some cases, high project costs may reflect the scarcity of skilled labour, suitable traditional materials, specialist professional advice, compliance requirements and the risk premium attached to work on listed or significant historic assets. This does not weaken the case for heritage investment, but it changes the policy implication. The aim should not simply be to celebrate high levels of expenditure, but to convert recurring conservation, repair and retrofit demand into lasting productive capacity, i.e. more trained workers, stronger local and regional firms, better client capability, more proportionate procurement and clearer routes into heritage trades.

Thus, supply chains are central to local retention. It is estimated that, for every £1 of GVA directly generated by England's heritage sector in 2022, a further £0.96 was supported through supply-chain impacts and £0.97 through wider employee spending effects[110]. Construction accounts for 38.5 percent of domestic supply-chain expenditure associated with England's heritage sector, followed by manufacturing at 16.6 percent and professional, scientific and technical activities at 11.5 percent[111]. Heritage should therefore be understood as a source of recurring demand for goods, works and services, linked to construction, manufacturing, professional services, retail, administration, conservation and specialist consultancy.

Stratford provides a practical example of this mechanism. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's estate creates recurring demand for conservation and maintenance, including specialist work undertaken by Stratford-based Hawkscroft Ltd across the Trust's properties[112]. Recent work at Hall's Croft also shows the nature of that demand, including structural stabilisation, traditional materials, specialist timber repair and environmental improvements. The wider significance lies less in any single contract than in the pattern of demand created by heritage assets over

109 Historic England (2024) – Skills needs analysis: For the repair, maintenance and retrofit of traditional (pre-1919) buildings in England

110 CEBR (2024) – The heritage sector in England and its impact on the economy

111 Ibid.

112 Hawkscroft – Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust

time: routine maintenance, repair, conservation, interpretation and adaptation can sustain specialist firms and skills if procurement routes allow them to participate. For the Trust, this points to a potential role beyond commissioning conservation work: using its estate, projects and institutional partnerships to support skills training, apprenticeships and practical routes into heritage conservation where local or regional capacity is scarce.

2.4.1 Building local, heritage-led supply chains

Heritage projects thus also often depend on smaller firms, microbusinesses and self-employed specialists whose value lies in technical knowledge, craft skill and experience working with older buildings. However, heritage procurement does not automatically work in favour of such firms. Research on SME access to UK heritage procurement shows that specialist contractors may hold the technical knowledge required for heritage work while still facing barriers linked to tender complexity, project uncertainty, lead-professional gatekeeping and subcontracting structures[113]. Local economic value therefore depends not only on the existence of specialist firms, but on whether procurement routes are visible, proportionate and accessible to them.

Procurement design determines who can participate in the economic life of heritage investment. Contract size, lotting, tender visibility, payment terms, insurance requirements, evaluation criteria, preliminary market engagement and subcontracting routes all shape whether local firms, specialist trades, conservation professionals, social enterprises and community heritage organisations can compete. Sector practice already points in this direction. The National Lottery Heritage Fund's procurement guidance requires grantees to consider its investment principles when procuring goods, works or services, including supply-chain diversity, local economic contribution and environmental protection[114]. English Heritage's Supplier Charter similarly commits the organisation and its suppliers to fair and prompt payment, whole-life value, sustainability, SME-friendly procurement, retention of specialist skills and opportunities for smaller local businesses[115].

113 Loader & Norton (2015) – SME access to public procurement: An analysis of the experiences of SMEs supplying the publicly funded UK heritage sector

114 Heritage Fund (2024) – Procurement good practice guidance

115 English Heritage – Supplier Charter

Manufacturing is also underplayed. Its 16.6 percent share of heritage supply-chain expenditure points to the importance of high-quality, low-volume production associated with restoration, interpretation and visitor experience[116]. This includes conservation-sensitive products such as heritage glazing, traditional timber work, bespoke interpretive objects and historically informed finishes. These are not incidental inputs. They are part of the productive economy of heritage, helping to preserve specialist craft capacity, local production networks and the material knowledge needed to maintain historic places.

Retrofit makes the supply-chain question more urgent. Historic England's local data tool frames demand for historic building retrofit as both a decarbonisation requirement and a local economic opportunity, estimating a need for an average additional workforce of around 86,500 workers per year to 2050 and around £12bn of direct economic output[117]. This becomes particularly important in the context of the need for absolute emissions reduction. Other analysis estimates that scaling up construction capacity for historic building retrofit could generate around £35bn of additional annual output and support around 290,000 jobs[118]. However, the relationship between retrofit and traditional building skills is not automatic. Recent work suggests that historic retrofit and traditional building craft practices remain relatively separate workstreams, despite clear opportunities for greater synergy[119]. Recent research also identifies supply-chain development, specialist expertise, stakeholder collaboration, incentives and trusted retrofit information as recurring barriers, with local authorities positioned as important intermediaries but requiring national support[120,121].

116 CEBR (2024) – The heritage sector in England and its impact on the economy

117 Historic England (2025) – Delivering Net Zero for England's Historic Buildings: Local Data on the Demand for Retrofitting Skills and Economic Growth

118 O'Connell (2025) – Heritage and Carbon: Addressing the skills gap

119 Evans et al. (2025) – An investigation in synergy: The intersection of historic building retrofit and the heritage of traditional building craft practices in the United Kingdom

120 Panakaduwa et al. (2024) – Identifying sustainable retrofit challenges of historical buildings: A systematic review

121 Wise et al. (2025) – Retrofit information challenges and potential solutions: Perspectives of households, retrofit professionals and local policy makers in the United Kingdom

The point is not that all heritage value can or should remain within a single town, district or neighbourhood. Some specialist supply chains will necessarily operate at regional or national scale. The point is that the geography of value is shaped by institutional choices. Heritage procurement can therefore act as a form of local industrial policy. Predictable demand for repair, conservation, retrofit, maintenance, interpretation, landscaping, visitor management and cultural programming can support local and regional skills pipelines. The policy implication is that heritage supply chains should be treated as part of local economic development, not as a technical by-product of conservation. The evidence gap is practical as much as analytical: local areas need better understanding of how far heritage spend reaches local firms, tier-two and tier-three suppliers, workers and training routes, and whether capital projects build lasting productive capacity rather than one-off activity.

CHAPTER THREE

Wider, often overlooked impacts

The economic impacts of heritage are often visible through jobs, investment, visitor spend and supply chains. Yet much of heritage's public value is not captured directly through market transactions. It lies in wellbeing, learning, social connection, identity and the ability of people to relate their own histories to the places in which they live. It also lies in contestation: heritage links the historic and the contemporary, making it a site where cultural debates are often fought.

Key points

- Place-based growth strategy and preventive policy should centre the ability of heritage to generate significant social value by enhancing individual wellbeing, reducing loneliness, improving health, and fostering a sense of belonging and pride in place.
- Local policymakers must prioritise the preservation of traditional heritage crafts and skills not only as a rewarding goal in and of itself but also as essential for local economic resilience and the long-term sustainability of the historic built environment.
- Heritage custodians should formally recognise that inclusive participation and the honest representation of diverse, often contested, histories are fundamental to ensuring that the benefits of heritage are accessible to all members of society.
- All organisations that act as heritage stewards – whether public or private – have a role to play in supporting heritage education and the development of 'heritage literacy', which empowers individuals to interpret and engage with their own histories, creating a positive feedback loop that supports both personal growth and heritage preservation.

These wider impacts are strongest when people can recognise, question or reinterpret their own relationship to place through heritage. Tangible and intangible heritage can support social cohesion, community wellbeing and holistic placemaking, but these benefits are not automatic. They depend on access, representation and participation: who defines heritage, whose histories are included, and who has the power to shape how heritage is used. For policymakers, inclusivity must therefore be a fundamental condition of heritage impact, rather than an additional, discretionary concern.

This section asks what heritage enables, not only what it earns: improved wellbeing, belonging, education, traditional skills, cohesion and social prosperity. This enabling role is often overlooked because heritage sits between economic development, cultural policy, planning and public service outcomes, and can therefore fall between institutional remits and departmental siloes[122]. However, evidence from heritage

122 See Belfiore (2022) – Is it really about the evidence? Argument, persuasion, and the power of ideas in cultural policy and Gómez-Zapata & del Barrio-Tellado (2023) – Social impact and return on investment from cultural heritage institutions: An application to public libraries in Colombia

practitioners and organisations suggests that local heritage can help create the social, spatial and institutional conditions within which inclusive growth and stronger connections to place become possible.

3.1 Wellbeing, belonging and pride in place

A growing base of evidence links engagement with heritage to wellbeing, belonging and social connection. As a policy outcome, wellbeing spans health, productivity, social relationships and education[123]. Pandemic-era restrictions also clarified the use-value of heritage sites for social connection, trust and shared experience[124]. Historic England points to heritage sites for social prescribing, mental health support, social connectedness, loneliness reduction and supportive provision for the elderly, including those with dementia or sight loss[125]. DCMS's Cultural Heritage Capital programme estimates that the wellbeing value for those living close to heritage amounts to £29bn per year[126].

Measurement remains difficult because wellbeing is largely subjective. Heritage studies thus often distinguish between subjective wellbeing, including life satisfaction and pleasure, and eudaimonic wellbeing, associated with meaning and self-realisation[127]. These outcomes are still nevertheless shaped by many factors, making attribution difficult, but recent valuation work has been able to identify measurable health, productivity and public service benefits. A 2024 Frontier Economics and DCMS study estimated, among a long list of monetised wellbeing benefits, that general engagement in culture and heritage could generate individual and productivity benefits for adults aged 30-49 worth £992 per person per year in relation to general health[128].

Because many wellbeing benefits depend on connectedness and enjoyment, access and narrative control matter. Heritage is ultimately bound up with culture, identity and storytelling. It is this process of 'heritage making' that serves to frame the narratives that rationalise the recognition of heritage assets. Heritage making has a significant role in collective identity formation, whether that be global, national, or

123 Layard (2021) – Wellbeing as the goal of policy
124 Sofaer et al. (2021) – Heritage sites, value and wellbeing: learning from COVID-19 pandemic in England
125 Historic England (2025) – Wellbeing and Heritage
126 Ibid.
127 Gallou (2022) – Heritage and pathways to wellbeing: From personal to social benefits, between experience identity and capability shaping
128 Frontier Economics & DCMS (2024) – Culture and heritage capital: Monetising the impact of culture and heritage on health and wellbeing

local identity, as it represents the very process of defining what significance lies in tangible and intangible heritage, and for whom and why that significance occurs[129]. Where these narratives are shaped primarily through top-down imperatives, heritage can reproduce existing inequalities and intolerances rather than reduce them. Even community engagement projects can become exclusionary if they fail to account for the full diversity of past, present and future communities and residents[130].

Stratford illustrates this tension. Shakespeare gives the town a nationally and internationally recognisable identity, but institutions such as the Trust and other local heritage stakeholders shape how this identity is interpreted, negotiated, taught and opened up to different audiences through education, performance and outreach[131]. For placemaking, the task is to connect and relate historic and contemporary discourse and identities, rather than treating heritage and place identity as immutable and unwavering[132].

This matters for place-based policy. The Green Book's stronger emphasis on place-based business case objectives and non-monetisable benefit creates a clearer route for heritage organisations to evidence wellbeing, prevention and other local identity and pride in place outcomes. Recent research on public library activities in South East England, for example, estimated annual social benefits of between £1.75 and £1.88 million[133]. However, the key policy challenge for place leaders is to avoid replacing narrow economic metrics with purely narrative-based claims – a delicate, strategic balance is to be struck. Arts, culture and heritage should be included within place-based policy metrics in ways that recognise wellbeing and belonging while still nonetheless requiring transparent, detailed evidence.

129 Smith (2022) – Heritage, the power of the past, and the politics of (mis)recognition

130 Perkin (2010) – Beyond the rhetoric: negotiating the politics and realizing the potential of community-driven heritage engagement

131 Tenzer (2023) – Social Landscape Characterisation: a people-centred, place-based approach to inclusive and transparent heritage and landscape management

132 García-Esparza (2024) – Cultural heritage as an inspiration for placemaking in the historic city: A transversal approach

133 Libraries Connected (2025) – The power of prevention: the economic and wellbeing impact of library activities for mental health and older adults

> *"These benefits often take a number of years to be fully realised, and with a longer period there is a difficulty in attributing those benefits to your intervention… long-term impact measurement can actually try and capture that broader range of measurements. We don't have [much] longitudinal data in the heritage sector, but there is a wonderful opportunity to collect that, especially now, as methodologies and proxies are being better established. … But, if you don't perceive value, you won't receive value."*
>
> – RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Recent practice points towards a mixed-indicator approach rather than a single, holistic measure of heritage value. Historic England's 2025 social impact work provides a practical starting point, grouping heritage outcomes around participation, identity, feelings about place, community, knowledge and skills, and health[134]. Its 'feelings about place' indicators are particularly relevant for place-based heritage organisations because they include attachment, satisfaction, pride, perceived safety and the quality of the physical environment, including green spaces, built heritage and archaeology. This matters for organisations such as SBT, whose value sits not only in buildings and collections, but also in gardens, land, townscape, education and civic identity.

There are informative examples of such a rounded approach being applied in practice. Historic England's Kirkham Heritage, Health and Wellbeing Programme used measures including attendance, direct engagement, wellbeing, physical and mental health, confidence, skills, life satisfaction, community wellbeing, knowledge of local history and connection with the town[135]. The National Lottery Heritage Fund's Heritage Places evaluation similarly uses baseline data, local theory of change and long-term tracking to 2033, including indicators such as satisfaction with the local

134 Historic England (2025) – Research Evidence for the Social Impact of Heritage
135 Historic England (2026) – Wellbeing Case Study: Kirkham Heritage Health and Wellbeing Programme

area, sense of belonging and pride in place[136]. The Audience Agency's Heritage Places methodology, the Great Place Programme evaluation, DCMS's Culture and Heritage Capital work and the emerging Cultural Indicator Suite all demonstrate that heritage value should be evidenced using a basket of indicators covering access and participation, social connection and wellbeing, pride and place attachment, heritage condition, environmental quality, local supplier spend, skills progression and community influence over stewardship[137]. Beyond England, comparable holistic heritage assessment approaches can also be found in SoPHIA's multidimensional heritage impact framework, HACHI's indicator-based assessment method, recent sociocultural heritage impact scales, and work on environmental and land-based heritage such as the Welsh Government/NRW woodland asset transfer review[138]. These frameworks further reinforce the case for combining social, cultural, economic, environmental and participatory indicators rather than relying on any one singular measure of heritage value.

3.2 Traditional crafts and education

Traditional heritage skills sit within a constrained funding environment. The austerity period reduced government support for heritage, culture and the arts, particularly revenue funding for organisations[139]. Although government has since committed a five percent uplift in arts funding, including £230 million for heritage and £75 million for repairs to at-risk heritage, wider fiscal pressures remain[140]. VAT on historic building maintenance, the end of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, maintenance backlogs, rising costs and escalating, climate-induced insurance premiums all constrain the skills capacity needed for conservation[141,142].

136 Heritage Fund (2025) – Heritage Places Strategic Initiative: Interim Evaluation Report Year One

137 See The Audience Agency – Data for Heritage Places research methodology, Arts Council England & Heritage Fund (2022) – Great Place Programme Evaluation (England) Final Report, DCMS (2026) – Culture and Heritage Capital: research and outputs and Centre for Cultural Value & The Audience Agency (2025) – Developing a Cultural Indicator Suite respectively

138 See SoPHIA – Holistic Heritage Impact Assessment Model, Coscia & Aterelli (2024) – The "Holistic Approach to the Cultural Heritage Impact Method" (HACHI Method) as a Method for Indicator-Based Impact Analysis, Abdurahiman (2025) – Urban Heritage Sociocultural Impact Assessment (UHSCIA): scale development and psychometric validation and Welsh Government (2023) – Understanding social value in woodland asset transfer to third parties: a review of the benefits, costs, and risks (summary) respectively

139 Campaign for the Arts (2025) – UK Government commits new funding for arts and culture

140 The Heritage Alliance (2025) – Backing the Bedrock 2025: Heritage fiscal & funding priorities

141 House of Commons Library (2026) – VAT and Churches

142 The Heritage Alliance (2024) – On the brink: Heritage in the cost of living crisis

Heritage skills themselves are also under significant strain. Heritage Crafts' 2025 Red List includes critically endangered crafts such as vernacular thatching and basketwork furniture-making, while lime plastering, tile-making and timber framing remain monitored[143]. Stonemasonry and carpentry face shortages, alongside wider gaps in fundraising and digital literacy[144]. The drivers of this strain are familiar: rising operating costs, weak training routes, insecure work, visa and salary constraints, fragile specialist supply chains, and the risk that the loss of one craft can accelerate the loss of others[145].

These pressures strengthen the case for local heritage skills pathways. Traditional skills such as timber window-making and thatching are crucial to the sustainability of the UK's built environment, around 20 percent of which pre-dates 1900[146]. Traditional crafts can also adapt to new uses and markets, support local supply chains and contribute to national skills policy. Although it can be challenging in terms of labour market mapping to estimate the total impact of the crafts sector to the UK economy, DCMS statistics have estimated that crafts contributed £400m in GVA to the UK's economy in 2023, while taking a wider definition of crafts meant that the Crafts Council estimated £3.4bn added to UK GVA in 2012[147]. A very broad definition that includes both those employed in craft occupations even in non-creative industries suggested that almost 150,000 people were employed in craft industries in 2012[148].

The UK's ratification of the 2003 UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage may strengthen the protection of such culturally significant crafts and skills by giving longstanding traditions clearer legal and policy recognition. With intangible heritage now a formal part of the regulatory environment supporting heritage conservation and other work in the UK, the cultural significance of longstanding tradition finally has legal merit. But recognition alone is not enough. As discussed earlier in the report, investment in heritage skills can strengthen local economic resilience by diversifying local skills bases and retaining more heritage-related value in local communities and businesses[149]. It also connects people

143 Heritage Crafts (2025) – Red list of endangered crafts 2025
144 The Heritage Alliance (2024) – Written Evidence: Skills for the future – apprenticeships and training
145 Heritage Crafts (2025) – Red list of endangered crafts 2025
146 Lybeck (2025) – Addressing the UK's heritage skills crisis: why we must act now
147 House of Lords Library (2025) – UK craft sector: Economic contribution, financial support and challenges
148 Ibid.
149 Neil Mendoza (2017) – The Mendoza Review: an independent review of museums in England

with traditions that have shaped local labour, production and identity historically, supporting creative expression, cultural connection, emotional value and knowledge transfer through targeted craft and skills education[150].

Heritage crafts also have a role in green adaptation. Local material production, traditional construction knowledge and conservation-sensitive retrofit can support both ecological sustainability and local supply chains. Recent innovations include hemp fibre insulation and vacuum-insulated glazing for historic buildings, although wider adoption remains constrained by cost[151]. Regional skills policy should therefore recognise traditional skills as part of local labour-market innovation, especially where craft diversity, place identity and distinctive visitor experience reinforce one another[152]. In the modern context of widespread commodification of craft products and homogenisation across global supply chains, renewed support for local and traditional crafts can return an element of local distinctiveness to places, thus tapping into and solidifying the very authenticity that can enhance the visitor experience and attract more spending and investment.

Heritage organisations can also help build and contribute to local skills frameworks. Best practice points to partnership with education providers, community colleges and local institutions. The Herbert Baker Heritage Trust in Kent offers a useful example[153]. Supported by the Rochester Bridge Trust, it brings together heritage organisations and local education providers to deliver heritage craft training for young people, combining practical experience with routes into the historic built environment and conservation. Such programmes make heritage part of the local talent ecosystem. Evidence from Sweden suggests that historic built environments and cultural assets can also attract skilled human capital, reinforcing the case for heritage investment as part of local competitiveness and resilience[154].

There is thus a reciprocity of heritage and education: on the one hand, heritage itself provides an educational benefit. Museums are regarded as trustworthy educational institutions that can provide a space for the representation of contested histories, provide authoritative information on matters of national debate, and offer an alternative source of information alongside mainstream news sources and social

150 Li et al. (2025) – The innovation of traditional handicrafts and cultural identity: A multidimensional value analysis using the DEMATEL-ISM method

151 Historic England (2024) – Heritage and a low carbon economy

152 Corradini, Morris & Vanino (2022) – Towards a regional approach for skills policy

153 The Rochester Bridge Trust (2026) – Rochester Bridge Trust grant will support heritage craft skills

154 Backman & Nilsson (2016) – The role of heritage in attracting skilled individuals

media, potentially having a mitigating impact on the spread of misinformation[155]. Heritage also sits at a vital place in young people's educations, with local heritage education enhancing children's attachment to place, visiting heritage associated with increased self-esteem amongst girls aged 10 to 15, and natural heritage offering motivation for young people to visit outdoor spaces and partake in conservation, among other heritage-led activities[156]. On the other hand, heritage education and training support the preservation of cultural heritage[157]. The feedback loop is therefore clear: heritage creates learning opportunities, and learning sustains heritage.

3.3 Inclusion and participation: whose heritage counts?

It can be easy to frame the wider benefits of heritage as automatic spillovers from investment in tangible assets and intangible heritage activities. However, these benefits can be undermined where participation is tokenistic or dominant narratives exclude certain groups and experiences. Research suggests that access to culture is the second most important determinant of psychological wellbeing after physical health status[158]. Questions of recognition, legitimacy and who gets to define heritage must therefore sit at the centre of efforts to widen access. Without this, inclusion risks becoming surface-level, and heritage's wider benefits may not transfer to the communities most excluded from them.

Cultural participation, including heritage participation, remains demographically and socially stratified in the UK. White people remain proportionally more likely to visit heritage sites than people from other ethnic groups, although the gap has narrowed in recent years[159,160]. Engagement also varies by deprivation and disability, even where participation among underrepresented groups has improved over time[161]. Efforts to broaden participation must therefore address the historical reasons for these imbalances, including perceptions of heritage as "inaccessible, elitist, and unrepresentative"[162].

155 National Museum Directors' Council (2022) – NMDC response to the DCMS Committee's inquiry on misinformation and trusted voices September 2022

156 The Heritage Alliance (2023) – Response to LUHC Inquiry into 'Children, young people and the built environment'

157 Achille & Fiorillo (2022) – Teaching and learning of cultural heritage: Engaging education, professional training, and experimental activities

158 University of Birmingham (2025) – Heritage sites as spaces for promoting mental health

159 Gov.uk (2021) – Ethnicity facts and figures: Visits to heritage sites

160 Gov.uk (2024) – Ethnicity facts and figures: Participation in the arts, culture and heritage

161 Historic England (2025) – Participation, visits and membership

162 Historic England (2024) – How might perceptions of heritage be a barrier to engagement?

Practical responses include paid involvement of people with lived experience of exclusion, targeted training and resources, demographic-specific programming, and digital tools to reduce access barriers[163]. Honest engagement with the complex, uncomfortable history of much of this country's heritage is also key. One such attempt at challenging traditional approaches to historical narratives through a place lens is that of Aberdeen City Council's Commemorative Plaques scheme. The scheme, for example, includes a University of Aberdeen plaque at Powis Gateway recognising the connection between slavery compensation and the wealth that shaped the city's built environment[164].

> *"The desire for social connection, particularly in disadvantaged communities, is extraordinary. And people, they absolutely see the events that bring them together as being part of that solution. Heritage is the hook that allows them to have those events to create social connectedness."*
>
> – RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

However, heritage organisations must be prepared to manage audience expectations. Making heritage relevant to wider publics by engaging difficult histories can alienate audiences who prefer fewer challenging narratives. Debates over decolonising heritage, inclusive interpretation and culturally ingrained prejudice have produced public backlash[165]. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's own support for academic engagement with the colonial context of Shakespeare's historic milieu was met with backlash on the national stage[166]. But despite the risk of alienating certain audiences, interrogating heritage's role in place, history and collective identity is central to inclusive growth and to reducing social inequalities[167].

163 The National Lottery Heritage Fund (2024) – Inclusion, access and participation: eight ways to improve your project's reach and impact

164 University of Aberdeen (2022) – Plaque installed to mark the legacy of slavery at the Powis Gateway

165 See Maidment-Blundell (2025) – Support or opposition? How do volunteers feel about decolonization?, University of Leicester (2025) – Unpacking the backlash: Full report 3 and van Huis (2019) – Contesting cultural heritage: Decolonising the Tropenmuseum as an intervention in the Dutch/European memory complex

166 West (2025) – The audacity of 'decolonising' Shakespeare

167 Dorpalen & Gallou (2026) – How does heritage contribute to inclusive growth?

The need for positive, intellectually stimulating heritage engagement is reinforced by the fact that heritage benefits are mediated by perception. When residents do not recognise an asset as meaningful, accessible or relevant, its potential value may remain latent. When people perceive heritage as valuable, they are more likely to develop a stronger connection to place and to engage responsibly with heritage assets[168]. Perceived value encourages use, engagement and place attachment, although more research is needed on its relationship to wider heritage benefits, including economic impact[169].

This also matters for non-use value: the value people place on heritage even when they do not directly use it. DCMS distinguishes existence value, altruistic value and bequest value: the value of an asset existing, others benefiting from it now, and future generations benefiting from it later[170]. These values can function as metrics when they are translated into evidence on stated preferences, usually through contingent valuation, willingness-to-pay questions or choice-modelling surveys[171]. In practice, this means asking residents, visitors or wider populations how much they value the preservation, improvement or continued availability of a heritage asset, including where they may never directly use it themselves. Comparable approaches have been used in DCMS Culture and Heritage Capital research on museum non-use value, in Nesta and Simetrica's valuation of historic cities and cathedrals, and in wider heritage valuation studies[172]. Stratford-upon-Avon demonstrates how nationally significant heritage can contribute to local identity, civic pride and external reputation, even for residents whose everyday engagement with the asset is indirect. These values are usually assessed through contingent valuation or choice-modelling methods, but the wider policy point is simpler: heritage value depends not only on direct engagement, but also on proximity, identity and place connection[173].

168 Zhang et al. (2025) – Research on the influence mechanism of heritage value perception and place identity on heritage responsibility behaviour – A case study of the Shaanxi section of Baocheng railway industrial heritage

169 Wang et al. (2025) – Participation intention in cultural heritage conservation across generations: The influence of differential heritage value perception and place attachment

170 DCMS (2026) – Applications of non-use values in the context of culture and heritage report

171 Historic England (2023) – Techniques for Valuing Heritage in Economic Terms

172 See DCMS (2026) – Applications of non-use values in the context of culture and heritage – executive summary and Nesta & Simetrica (2018) – The Economic Value of Heritage: A Benefit Transfer Study

173 DCMS (2023) – Choice modelling and methodology development: Marginal willingness to pay for museum improvements

3.3.1 The importance of heritage literacy and value-setting

Heritage literacy is the practice among heritage organisations of allowing audiences to understand how heritage meanings are constructed, to participate in the interpretation of heritage meanings, and to take charge of their own engagement with and responses to heritage[174]. Heritage literacy is thus a process of empowerment that supports positive engagement with heritage. It is therefore imperative that the principles of heritage literacy find their place equally in heritage institution and public sector strategy and policymaking. Heritage literacy should sit alongside policy interventions in favour of genuine, not tokenistic inclusion, following best practice in terms of tackling racism and other forms of discrimination based on religion, gender, or disability[175]. Research shows that interventions such as actively diversifying volunteer training in heritage organisations, including museums, are a simple, if not easy, way to improve wellbeing, widen access, and promote social inclusion[176].

Heritage organisations can also take a value-setting approach, beginning with diversifying their boardrooms, in order that the diverse lived experience of board members can both more accurately reflect their local communities, and bring a mix of practical, financial, and grassroots skills to their organisations. Financial, commercial, and other specialist expertise are in demand among heritage organisations[177]. Systemic barriers to diversity in the workforce need also to be tackled, with good practice including the provision of childcare or ensuring clear diversity and inclusion organisational policies.

The current policy approach often struggles to protect intangible heritage because this kind of heritage can lack the buildings or objects that conventional heritage systems are designed to preserve. More attention is therefore needed for cultural practices and community narratives not tied directly to physical sites. This is difficult work, particularly where heritage becomes entangled in cultural conflict, as the response to the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's engagement with decolonial narratives illustrates. But participation requires more than access to existing heritage; it requires heritage literacy, organisational leadership, honest engagement with contested histories, active work with different communities, and recognition of non-use value.

174 Babić & Stublić (2026) – Heritage literacy: A different understanding of heritage management

175 Europa Nostra (2023) – Masterclass report: Diversity & inclusion in the heritage sector

176 Thomson, Elsden & Chatterjee (2023) – Volunteering for wellbeing: Improving access and social inclusion by increasing the diversity of museum volunteer training for public-facing roles

177 The Heritage Alliance (2024) – On the brink: Heritage in the cost of living crisis

CHAPTER FOUR

Leveraging heritage for the development and regeneration of place

As covered, heritage already contributes to the economic, social and civic life of places through employment, visitor activity, supply chains, public realm improvements, local identity and the reuse of historic assets. The question for policy is therefore not whether heritage has value, but how that value is organised, retained and reinvested. Recent programme evidence makes this point clearly: the High Streets Heritage Action Zones programme generated benefits valued at over £245 million from £103 million of investment, revitalising 67 high streets through the repair of historic buildings, reinstatement of shopfronts, job creation, public realm investment and community activity[178]. As Historic England describes it, heritage is "a powerful catalyst for future growth"[179].

178 AMION Consulting & Historic England (2025) – High Street Heritage Action Zones Programme Evaluation
179 Historic England (2025) – The Value of High Street Heritage Action Zones

Key points

- Place policy must integrate heritage within even broader economic and spatial strategies to ensure that heritage can move beyond being just a mechanism to help places articulate their own distinctiveness and function as a primary driver of local growth.
- Efforts to actively engage and empower communities by local heritage and public organisations, alongside policies that champion inclusive growth, are crucial in ensuring that heritage-led regeneration is socially durable and economically resilient, centring resident voices and retaining investment value within the local economy.
- It is the responsibility of government at all levels to ensure that local organisations, including local authorities, have the absolutely critical institutional capacity that heritage-led development requires: local authorities must have the ability to act as central convenors to orchestrate partnerships and align complex funding and planning systems to sustain long-term development; preventive interventions rely on capacity for long-term thinking; and local heritage stewards need capacity to drive genuine engagement with communities.

This section thus examines how heritage can be leveraged for place development and regeneration. It considers the importance of strategic alignment, adaptive reuse, community empowerment, and inclusive growth, arguing that heritage-led regeneration is most effective when it strengthens the wider place rather than operating as a standalone cultural or conservation activity. This is especially timely as local and strategic authorities are increasingly expected to evidence outcomes across growth, resilience, pride in place and public value. The task is therefore to move heritage from the margins of cultural and conservation policy into the mainstream machinery of place leadership, investment and long-term stewardship. Ultimately, this task relies significantly on local government and local institutional capacity, without which community engagement remains superficial, urban environment interventions remain reactive rather than preventive, and place ecosystems remain fragmented, unaligned with either regional or national policy agendas.

4.1 Strategic integration and policy alignment

Heritage is most effective as a driver of local development when embedded in economic, cultural and spatial strategy. Its value lies not only in preserving individual assets or attracting visitors, but in the capacity of historic buildings, public spaces, cultural narratives and local identity to organise wider place improvement. Treated as part of a place's development logic, heritage can support town-centre renewal, public realm investment, tourism management, skills development, civic participation and business confidence.

The core policy task is alignment. Heritage can help places articulate distinctiveness, but conversion into practical outcomes and credible investment propositions depends on its integration with the formal machinery of place policy: local plans, town-centre strategies, strategic economic plans, cultural strategies, visitor economy plans and, where relevant, supplementary planning documents and heritage strategies. In mature devolution settings, this also means alignment with the functions of strategic authorities, including economic development, regeneration, transport, skills, spatial planning and investment coordination.

This matters in the current policy context. Local government and strategic authorities are increasingly expected to demonstrate how investment contributes to growth, pride in place, skills, regeneration and long-term resilience. Integrated Settlements make this more explicit for established mayoral strategic authorities, with funding tied to outcomes frameworks that extend beyond departmental siloes and sharpen the need for places within deeper devolution arrangements to demonstrate how local assets and interventions contribute to agreed outcomes, linking local economic priorities with national missions[180]. Comparators from the devolved nations make a similar point. In Wales, the Well-being of Future Generations framework places culture within a statutory account of long-term wellbeing, requiring public bodies to work towards economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing, including the goal of "a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language"[181]. The lesson for places is that heritage must be visible within place strategy from the outset, rather than appearing after core economic priorities have been set.

> *"What we're not trying to do is to create an idealised community… There's a fine line we have to march to ensure that we bring prosperity and not at the cost of the people who are already there."*
>
> – RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

180 MHCLG (2026) – Integrated Settlements Outcomes Frameworks for 2026/27 to 2028/29

181 Stokes & Smyth (2024) – Hope-Bearing Legislation? The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

"From our perspective, the projects that are really successful and have the most impact are those that begin even before they apply [for funding] to consult their local community, and that are genuinely co-curated with that community."

– RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Institutional mechanisms turn alignment into practice. Cultural Compacts, place-based partnerships and coordinated engagement between national arm's-length bodies can help embed heritage and culture within wider local development, regeneration and investment decisions, rather than leaving them confined to conservation or cultural portfolios[182,183]. Locally, heritage strategies, masterplans and supplementary planning documents can translate historic character and distinctiveness into planning guidance, town-centre management and regeneration decision-making. Strategic integration becomes meaningful when heritage values shape the rules, priorities and investment tests through which places are developed. Strategic added value is relevant where heritage investment strengthens leadership, innovation, and coordination across a place[184]; conservation investment also has a role in prevention, creating new activity and sustaining local confidence, asset conditions, civic memory, and related economic activities.

The task for local government, strategic authorities and heritage organisations is to embed heritage in the evidence base, planning framework and investment logic of place before decline becomes expensive to reverse and reactive interventions become the default option. The challenge gains even more prominence in a funding landscape that awards dilapidation over potential.

182 Arts Council England (2020) – Review of the Cultural Compacts initiative
183 DCMS (2022) – Reimagining where we live: cultural placemaking and the levelling up agenda
184 AMION Consulting (2024) – Wider Methodological Approach

Adaptive reuse as a catalyst for renewal

Adaptive reuse is one of the clearest routes through which heritage can catalyse practical place improvement, repurposing vacant and deteriorating historic buildings into functional spaces for housing, workspaces, community infrastructure, and mixed-use development[185]. Renewal rarely starts from a blank slate; it often depends on making better use of the fabric that already gives a place its legibility, character and economic identity.

In high streets and town centres, which are natural focal points for heritage-led regeneration, adaptive reuse facilitates diversification beyond traditional retail. By transforming structures such as former banks, warehouses, and mills into anchors for new economic and civic activity, heritage assets can provide an early, visible point of confidence to attract wider investment. Such assets also have the potential to contribute significantly to housing supply, with one estimate placing the potential figure as high as 670,000 homes for England[186].

The environmental case gives adaptive reuse a further role in contemporary policy. The 'Retrofirst' argument holds that retaining existing structures should be a priority to preserve embodied carbon and reduce the substantial upfront carbon costs associated with new construction[187,188]. While not every building can, or should, be saved, the environmental value of reuse needs to be properly assessed, particularly where historic buildings can be adapted to meet modern standards without destroying the features that give them public value.

However, the primary challenge is viability, most notably in terms of the 'conservation deficit', where the cost of repair and conversion exceeds the market value of the completed asset[189]. Overcoming this often requires public or philanthropic funding to de-risk projects and address not just financial issues,

185 Lanz & Pendlebury (2022) – Adaptive reuse: a critical review

186 Milne & Leeson (2025) – New Homes from Vacant Historic Buildings

187 Mérai et al. (2022) – The Governance Context for Adaptive Heritage Reuse: A Review and Typology of Fifteen European Countries

188 Power (2008) – Does demolition or refurbishment of old and inefficient homes help to increase our environmental, social and economic viability?

189 AMION Consulting & Historic England (2025) – High Street Heritage Action Zones Programme Evaluation

but complexities in planning, heritage protection, building control, procurement, funding and ownership systems. To ensure long-term success and avoid creating 'white elephant' assets that are restored but lack sufficient revenue or institutional capacity, projects must connect physical restoration to a resilient operating model and a credible future function that meets local needs.

For SBT, this makes adaptive reuse a practical planning and advocacy issue as much as a conservation issue. Reimagining the role of heritage sites within Stratford-upon-Avon's high street, visitor economy and civic infrastructure will require early engagement between heritage custodians, local authority planners, conservation officers, economic development teams and Local Plan-making processes. Adaptive reuse is more likely to succeed where planning policy gives clear support to sensitive changes of use, mixed-use activity, improved access and viable long-term occupation, rather than treating each proposal as an isolated exception to be negotiated late in the process. Heritage organisations therefore have a role in making the case to planners that continued use, careful adaptation and public access are often central to conservation itself.

Ultimately, successful adaptive reuse treats heritage as a living resource capable of change and continued use[190]. By balancing the preservation of significance with the need for modern functionality, it turns heritage from a passive asset into a working setting for contemporary life. For high streets and historic town centres, this requires planning frameworks that can protect what matters while allowing uses to evolve, so that neighbourhoods can adapt without losing the buildings, landscapes and character that make them distinctive.

4.2 Community empowerment and pride in place

Heritage governance cannot be purely top-down, because local people help define what matters, what feels authentic and what kinds of change are acceptable. Nor can it be of a purely voluntary nature, because participation without institutional support risks overburdening residents and civic groups already short of time, money and technical expertise. For local government, strategic authorities and heritage organisations, the policy task is not simply to consult communities, but to create credible routes through which residents can shape what is protected, adapted, interpreted and prioritised.

190 BPF, Historic England & RICS (2017) – Heritage Works: A toolkit of best practice in heritage regeneration

This matters because historic places are part of the lived environment through which residents understand belonging, continuity and change. They are also part of the everyday geography through which communities judge whether regeneration is being done with them or to them. The legitimacy of heritage-led regeneration therefore depends on structured community influence over design, access, interpretation and long-term benefit. Community voice depends on institutions and relationships that people recognise as credible, but inclusive engagement is time-intensive, requiring not just consultation exercises and statutory notice, but presence in communities, relationship-building and attention to lived experience. In some cases, local authorities have funded trusted local organisations to work directly with residents because councils lacked the capacity, reach or trust required to engage effectively.

Asset-based community development offers one useful frame, shifting attention from local deficits to existing capacities, relationships and assets[191]. In a heritage context, cultural mapping can help residents identify the tangible and intangible features that matter to them: buildings, parks, monuments, gathering spaces, stories, traditions, memories and everyday practices[192]. The value of this approach is that it reveals forms of heritage overlooked by expert-led or designation-led systems, while helping communities understand their own assets as a basis for confidence, self-reliance and future action.

There are risks. Engagement can raise expectations that individual funding programmes cannot meet; multiple institutions can also consult the same communities without coordination, producing fatigue, duplication and distrust; consultation becomes tokenistic when communities may be heard but lack the power to ensure their views are acted upon[193]. Real, tangible community influence is especially important where heritage work involves marginalised histories, contested memories or communities with limited trust in public institutions. In such contexts, participation needs to move towards co-creation, with residents helping determine how local knowledge is gathered, held, interpreted and used[194].

This also matters for pride in place, which is most effective when residents see their own histories and aspirations reflected in local change. It requires moving beyond viewing heritage as a visitor-oriented asset to creating opportunities for civic participation through volunteering, apprenticeships, and oral history work. At Hall's Croft, urgent

191 Mathie & Cunningham (2003) – From clients to citizens: Asset-based Community Development as a strategy for community-driven development

192 Avrami (2019) – Spatializing Values in Heritage Conservation: The Potential of Cultural Mapping

193 Arnstein (1969) – A Ladder of Citizen Participation

194 Whitehead et al. (2021) – Plural Heritages and Community Co-production

conservation has been linked to resident engagement, volunteer training, traditional building methods, public access and environmental improvements[195,196]. Heritage projects generate deeper public value when capital investment is accompanied by opportunities for people to learn, contribute and feel ownership over change.

Policy surrounding pride in place is shifting from giving residents a 'voice' to granting them genuine agency through neighbourhood-level governance and long-term investment plans[197]. Legislation in the form of Community Right to Buy reforms and the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act provides legal routes for communities to protect, shape, or own historically important assets[198]. Sector bodies have argued that this logic should be taken further by explicitly recognising cultural infrastructure – including libraries, museums, historic buildings, cultural venues and creative workspaces – within community ownership frameworks[199]. This moves pride in place from a rhetorical concept to an institutionalised reality.

> *"Give [communities] the space, give them the agency, because then they feel more ownership over it. It's not enough for us to say complacently, "Here you go, it's yours." It's not enough until we actually give agency to other people and think about that in a systemic way."*
>
> – RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Thus, pride in place cannot be engineered by branding alone; it is built through repeated opportunities for residents to shape, use, and care for the heritage around them. Participatory governance is essential for making heritage-led regeneration socially durable. When residents are empowered to act as authors of change, heritage becomes a shared civic resource rather than something imposed upon them.

195 Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (2025) – Audiences Invited to Explore Conservation in Action as Work Begins at the Home of Shakespeare's Daughter

196 Shakespeare Birthplace Trust – Our £2.5 Million Conservation Target

197 MHCLG (2026) – Pride in Place Programme: prospectus

198 MHCLG & Fahnbulleh MP (2026) – English Devolution Bill receives Royal Assent

199 Culture Commons (2025) – Strengthening the English Devolution & Community Empowerment Bill

Place-based examples illustrate the broader point here:

- In Boston, Lincolnshire, pride in place work has sought to reconnect residents with a town whose international heritage, distinctive architecture and civic history had become underused sources of confidence[200];
- In Grimsby, regeneration has been framed around resident-led action and the town's maritime inheritance, with local resilience treated as part of the place narrative rather than a decorative theme[201];
- In Hartlepool, the use of a broad civil society board and targeted engagement with groups less likely to respond to conventional surveys has helped connect heritage and place investment to residents' concerns about safety, health and social cohesion; the finding that 38 per cent of households lack access to a car also underlines why participation cannot be designed around assumptions of easy mobility or universal access[202];
- Ramsgate's pride in place work, grounded in its Royal Harbour, conservation area and listed building stock, similarly shows how heritage can be used to strengthen local confidence when residents are involved in shaping what improvement should mean[203] .

4.3 Convening, stewardship and local government capacity

Heritage-led regeneration rarely sits within the boundary of a single institution. It cuts across planning, culture, economic development, tourism, skills, transport, property, community engagement and environmental adaptation. The central governance question is therefore not only who owns or manages a heritage asset, but who can hold the wider system together. In fragmented heritage landscapes, where ownership, funding, planning responsibilities and specialist expertise sit across multiple institutions, convening capacity becomes practical infrastructure: the means through which projects are aligned, partnerships formed, funding assembled and heritage connected to wider place strategy[204,205].

200 Boston Borough Council – Boston 10-Year Vision Document
201 North East Lincolnshire Council (2025) – Greater Grimsby Board Pride in Place Regeneration Plan & 10-Year Vision
202 LGA & Belong (2026) – Common ground: Building cohesive communities
203 Thanet District Council (2026) – We are Ramsgate: Pride in Place
204 Historic Environment Forum (2020) – Local Planning Authority Capacity
205 Heritage Fund (2021) – Assessment of local authority heritage priorities and support needs

Councils and strategic authorities cannot deliver heritage-led regeneration alone, nor should they be expected to. Their distinctive role is orchestration: aligning heritage activity with planning and investment decisions, managing risk, connecting capital works to skills and procurement opportunities, and coordinating public, private and civic partners around phased programmes of repair, reuse and interpretation.

Partnership governance is therefore not an optional supplement to heritage-led development. Research participants pointed to the Great Place Scheme as one example of successful collaborative funding practice: a joint programme through which the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Arts Council England and Historic England supported place-based heritage and cultural partnerships around shared local economic and community objectives[206]. The value of this kind of model lies in reduced fragmentation: clearer aims, more coherent reporting, and a stronger basis for connecting heritage activity to place outcomes, as well as the reconciliation of the different timescales involved in capital programmes. Local government translates the needs of physical asset management into fundable propositions that retain partner confidence over time. Where councils' convening role extends beyond individual administrative boundaries, through, for example, wider labour markets, visitor economies, supply chains, and transport connections, the important role of strategic authorities in connecting heritage-led regeneration to broader, regional frameworks becomes clear.

Durable delivery vehicles are also needed. Heritage development trusts, cultural compacts, community ownership vehicles, business improvement districts, property-owner networks and group stewardship arrangements can all help address fragmented ownership and weak coordination[207]. In some places, arm's-length delivery bodies, including Community Interest Companies, may provide the capability to oversee complex projects while preserving accountability to local government and local partners[208,209]. Heritage-led development requires institutional architecture capable of sustaining responsibility, coordination and momentum beyond a single capital project.

206 Arts Council England & Heritage Fund (2023) – Great Place Programme Evaluation (England): understanding the programme's legacy

207 See Architectural Heritage Fund – Heritage Development Trusts, Arts Council England (2020) – Review of the Cultural Compacts initiative and House of Lords (2024) – High Streets: Life beyond retail?

208 LGA (2019) – Culture-led regeneration: achieving inclusive and sustainable growth

209 Gov.uk (2025) – Community Interest Companies Guidance

Local government also has a market-shaping role, not only in the narrow terms of procurement administration but also in ensuring that projects connect to skills systems and skills gaps are addressed; that local programmes can access regional and national supply chains, including specialist conservation resources; and that repair, maintenance and adaptation contribute to the wider local economy[210,211]. The stewardship role of local and strategic authorities depends heavily on their professional capacity, but reductions in heritage staff among English local authorities, falling expenditure on services for the historic environment and reports of increased casework involving energy efficiency measures have all contributed to the weakening of local heritage management[212].

The gap between policy demand and professional capacity is widening. Councils are less able to mediate between conservation, development, community interest and commercial pressure, increasing the risk that decisions are shaped by the actors with the greatest resources rather than by long-term public value[213]. The funding environment compounds this pressure. Capital funding is often easier to secure than long-term revenue, but capital alone rarely resolves the operational challenges facing heritage organisations, councils or asset owners. Historic buildings need viable operating models, maintenance budgets, skilled management, programming, governance and organisational resilience. A restored building without revenue capacity can remain fragile; a reopened asset without maintenance planning can become a future liability. Roundtable participants therefore stressed the importance of accessible funding, early-stage development support, multi-year revenue, full cost recovery and better coordination between major funders.

Councils and strategic authorities are often best placed to convene partners, align funding, connect heritage to planning and skills systems, shape local markets, manage consent and risk, and ensure that benefits are considered across whole place systems. But they need capacity to be effective stewards. The future of heritage-led regeneration will depend on building place systems that are robust, synergistic, and conscious of the value of their heritage assets.

210 English Heritage (2025) – Written evidence submitted to the Industry and Regulators Committee inquiry on skills for the future

211 Historic Environment Skills Forum (2024) – Historic Environment Skills and Careers Action Plan for England

212 See Historic England (2024) – Report On Local Authority Historic Environment, Historic England (2025) – Employment, Volunteering, Education and Training, Historic England (2025) – Funding and Resources and Heritage Fund (2021) – Assessment of local authority heritage priorities and support needs

213 DCMS (2025) – Impacts of changes to local authority funding on small to medium heritage organisations

CHAPTER FIVE

Recommendations

Central government

- Make tangible and intangible heritage visible across national place policy
  - Government should ensure that both forms of heritage are reflected consistently across infrastructure, regeneration, community ownership, cultural and place-based policy frameworks.
  - This should build on the UK's ratification of the UNESCO 2003 Convention by ensuring that local traditions, cultural practices, historic buildings, landscapes, collections and traditional skills are considered together where national funding and appraisal frameworks assess place value.
- Publish heritage-specific appraisal guidance for place-based investment
  - HM Treasury, MHCLG and DCMS should develop heritage-specific appraisal guidance or supplementary metrics for place-based heritage investment. These should help business cases capture non-use value and more holistic valuations of heritage.
  - The purpose should be to make existing Green Book principles easier to apply to heritage-led regeneration, rather than to create a parallel appraisal system.
- Put heritage funding on a more sustainable footing
  - Central government and major funders should apply full cost recovery, early-stage development funding, multi-year revenue support and long-term maintenance planning more consistently across heritage, regeneration and 'pride in place' funding programmes.
  - Government should also review fiscal barriers to repair, maintenance and adaptive reuse, including the uneven treatment of VAT relief beyond listed places of worship.
- Rebuild specialist heritage capacity across local government
  - Government should establish dedicated support for local authority heritage capacity. This should help councils prepare fundable projects, assess adaptive reuse, manage risk, support community ownership and integrate heritage across asset management, culture, climate adaptation, economic development, planning and tourism.

Regional government and strategic authorities

- Make heritage a defined part of Local Growth Plans and investment evidence bases
    - Strategic authorities should include heritage explicitly in Local Growth Plans, spatial strategies, investment frameworks and Integrated Settlement outcomes.
    - Evidence bases should identify heritage clusters, historic high streets, visitor flows, conservation needs, retrofit demand, major heritage anchors, specialist suppliers, skills gaps and opportunities for local business growth.
- Build heritage skills into regional labour market and green skills planning
    - Strategic authorities should work with local skills bodies, colleges, employers and heritage organisations to identify demand for conservation, repair, retrofit, interpretation, visitor management and estate stewardship skills.
    - Local Skills Improvement Plans, adult skills funding and regional skills strategies should make traditional building skills and historic building retrofit visible within green growth and local labour market planning.
- Use destination management to measure heritage value, not just visitor numbers
    - Local Visitor Economy Partnerships and Destination Management Plans should measure the contribution of heritage to retained local value.
    - Indicators should include dwell time, overnight stays, seasonal spread, local spend, sustainable travel, accessibility, independent business participation, visitor dispersal and benefits for residents.
- Actively shape regional heritage and retrofit supply chains
    - Strategic authorities should build better intelligence on heritage and retrofit markets. This should include mapping supplier capacity, identifying gaps in specialist trades, supporting 'meet-the-buyer' activity, helping SMEs navigate procurement and coordinating visible pipelines of work across councils and public bodies.
    - The aim should be to increase local and regional supplier capture while recognising that some specialist heritage supply chains operate nationally.

Local councils

- Move from Local Plan recognition towards delivery-focused heritage planning
    - Councils should go beyond recognising heritage in Local Plans towards the practical development and use of local heritage evidence bases, site allocations, regeneration strategies and asset management plans to identify where historic buildings can support adaptive reuse, housing need, public realm improvements, biodiversity, community use and town centre renewal.
- Use council-owned heritage assets to support long-term stewardship
    - Councils should assess publicly owned heritage assets through a stewardship test before disposal.
    - This should consider whether assets should be maintained, reused, transferred, placed into community stewardship or supported through delivery vehicles such as Heritage Development Trusts, Community Interest Companies, cultural compacts or group stewardship arrangements.
- Apply procurement reforms to heritage-led regeneration projects
    - Councils should use relevant PPNs and strategic procurement principles to increase local value retention through heritage-led regeneration.
    - Contract size, lotting, tender visibility, payment terms, insurance requirements, evaluation criteria, preliminary market engagement and subcontracting routes should be considered and designed with specialist SMEs, conservation professionals, social enterprises and local suppliers in mind.
    - Councils should draw on National Lottery Heritage Fund and Historic England guidance on fair payment, whole-life value, SME access and the retention of specialist skills.
- Strengthen community stewardship, inclusion and heritage literacy through holistic project governance
    - Councils and heritage organisations should create practical routes for residents to shape what is protected, how it is interpreted and how benefits are shared equitably.
    - Heritage projects should include clear governance arrangements for community participation, affordable access, the representation of contested histories, workforce inclusivity and heritage literacy to give local people the confidence and knowledge to interpret, use and care for local heritage.

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