

## **Cabinet – 20 October 2021**

### **Walsall Heritage Strategy 2021-2026**

**Portfolio:** Councillor Adrian Andrew, Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration

**Related portfolios:**

**Service:** Programme Management

**Wards:** All

**Key decision:** Yes

**Forward plan:** Yes

#### **1. Aim**

1.1 Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Council has developed a new Heritage Strategy, for the period 2021-2026, to rebuild capacity and establish a vibrant heritage sector which is integrated into Walsall's overall vision and transformation. Setting direction to address identified sector needs over the next five years and beyond, heritage will be unlocked through co-creation with communities and the wider sector to play a greater role in the Council's work to tackle inequalities in health and wellbeing, improve environmental outputs and support economic growth.

#### **2. Summary**

2.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval for the adoption and implementation of Walsall's Heritage Strategy (2021 – 2026), which sets out the Borough's commitment to promoting and enhancing its rich heritage as an important driver for positive change. This constitutes a Key Decision, due to the borough-wide nature of the Strategy the decision has potential to impact multiple wards.

2.2 In 2015, Cabinet approved Walsall's previous Heritage Strategy, designed to provide a framework for how Council services would continue to preserve, manage, interpret, and promote Walsall's heritage assets in the 21st century. The Strategy sought to address the pressures confronting the Council as a whole and its heritage services.

2.3 This new Strategy delivers a broader, developed framework to be applied both within the Council and by external partners, including a substantive Action Plan, which establishes the basis of increased engagement and utilisation of heritage across the public, private and third sectors.

2.4 Walsall's Corporate Plan highlights the need for regeneration in the Borough to tackle the inequalities around health and economic outcomes and build resilient communities. Developing and delivering projects through active co-creation with

partners, to leverage external funding and strategic support, will help to tackle these inequalities. Through equitable and inclusive delivery, imbedding greater capacity within Walsall's private, public and third sectors, the Strategy will celebrate, unlock and leverage Walsall's unique heritage potential to help address economic, health and social challenges.

- 2.5 The commissioning of the Walsall Heritage Strategy (2021-2026) is a direct result of the receipt of £250k National Lottery Heritage Fund grant support, following allocation of priority local authority area status within the Fund's Strategic Funding Framework 2019–2024. Funding has enabled the appointment of a Heritage Programme Officer (fully funded for three years) to increase internal capacity and drive the delivery of the Strategy, produced by consultants Chris Blandford Associates.
- 2.6 This Strategy provides the framework for establishing the robust heritage sector necessary to deliver against the wide-ranging social, economic and wellbeing needs of communities across the borough. Significantly, it identifies priorities and themes setting the vision and enables the focussing of limited resources where there can be significant gains against key Council objectives, over the span of the Strategy setting a trend for planning beyond this five-year scope.
- 2.7 In the development of the new Strategy, extensive consultation has been undertaken with a wide range of stakeholders both within the Council and the wider sector. This has ranged from national bodies such as Historic England, regional such as the West Midlands Combined Authority, to local including One Walsall, Walsall Community Network and independent heritage organisations.
- 2.8 Evidence through this process contributed towards a comprehensive Baseline Report (Appendix C) and the Strategy design. This evidence base was to assess and understand Walsall, the current heritage offer, and to begin to draw out opportunities for intervention. The final Strategy and associated Action Plan reflect this evidence base in line with local context and current best practice across the sector.
- 2.9 The delivery of the Strategy is structured within the Action Plan. The evidence gathered from engagement with sector stakeholders and wider consultation, has resulted in a prioritised Action Plan which has been developed under strategic headings to be achieved over the next five years. Inclusive of a pipeline of projects to attract external funding, the Action Plan will be implemented and subsequently developed, on an annual basis. Project outcomes and the associated monitoring framework will be established following adoption to measure achievement.
- 2.10 In coherence with Council priorities, the Heritage Strategy and Action Plan will support and aid delivery of the vision within the Corporate Plan and integrate with the Walsall Proud Programme. Leveraging heritage's value against wider public benefits, looking forwards, unlocking the heritage potential will help to realise the Walsall Proud Programme vision to support Walsall's residents to live, work and play in the unique, local area.
- 2.11 To demonstrate to stakeholders and respective funders that Walsall's heritage sector has a framework through which to build capacity and increase the rate of

externally funded projects, in a unified and co-ordinated fashion, it is proposed that the Walsall Heritage Strategy (2021-2026) is formally adopted.

### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1 That the adoption and implementation of the Walsall Heritage Strategy (2021-2026) (**Appendix A**) be approved.
- 3.2 That the implementation of the associated Walsall Heritage Action Plan (2021-2026) (**Appendix B**) be approved.

### **4. Report detail - know**

#### ***Context***

- 4.1 Walsall's Heritage Strategy (2021-2026) represents the first such comprehensive strategy for Walsall. In 2019, The National Lottery Heritage Fund identified the Borough of Walsall as one of thirteen priority local authority areas within their Strategic Funding Framework 2019–2024, due to combined measures of the Fund's spend per capita and standard indices of deprivation. Committing their local teams to work strategically with stakeholders, from within heritage and beyond, to identify the best way to support organisations to meet local needs in these areas has engaged the Council in long-term discussions.
- 4.2 The importance of providing a strategic framework in the management of heritage and the delivery of services has been well recognised in national funding policy. The resourced response to supporting the sector during the Covid-19 pandemic, via extensive emergency funding delivered by central government through bodies such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic England and Arts Council England, evidences the importance of the sector to the overall economic recovery moving forward.
- 4.3 Outlined in detail within the Walsall Heritage Strategy Baseline Report, Walsall's need for a current Strategy is evidenced by nationally recognised metrics. For example, from an historic environment perspective, ten assets are on the Historic England Heritage at Risk Register including six conservation areas, one Grade II listed church, one Grade II\* listed church and one Registered Park and Garden.
- 4.4 Referenced within the Strategy and Baseline Report, heritage is better evidenced as a driver of economic growth as a result of recent sector research by bodies such as Historic England and the Heritage Alliance. Walsall's legacy as The Town of 100 Trades lends itself to its current diverse output across economic, environmental and community activity. Applying this best practice, activity across culture, the historic environment, and emerging industries can leverage broad-ranging finance models to grow resource and, in turn, deliver measurable economic outcomes benefitting Walsall as a whole.
- 4.5 The Borough of Walsall has a finite budget to deliver against heritage objectives and this is not forecast to significantly change. Capitalising on this recognised National Lottery Heritage Fund priority local authority area status, covering a significant proportion of the Strategy delivery period, will improve the potential for increased participation by private, public, community and voluntary sector partners

in our heritage, to deliver against Council objectives. It will ensure that the Borough is well-placed to capitalise on identified opportunities presented by new and emerging external funding streams and major forthcoming cultural events.

- 4.6 In September 2020, the Council was awarded National Lottery Heritage Fund grant funding to develop a new heritage action plan to proactively deliver economic and community improvements and reach new, more diverse audiences. The framework provided by the formalisation of a Heritage Strategy will enable the effective mechanisms and output measurement for future heritage projects as the Borough seeks to attract significant external investment and improve opportunities for communities and businesses to grow.
- 4.7 Developed cross-Council, with the focus on heritage as a valuable driver for outputs across service areas, a Working Group was established prior to the procurement of consultants with representation from Regeneration, Programme Management, Clean and Green, Public Health, Localities and Libraries, Walsall Leather Museum and New Art Gallery Walsall. This enabled oversight of the Strategy's alignment with wider Council strategies such as Walsall Town Centre Masterplan 2019, Walsall Green Space Strategy 2018-22, Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-21, Climate Change Emergency Action Plan, Local Development Plan, statutory regulations which govern local heritage assets, and initiatives including Towns Fund and Future High Streets Fund.
- 4.8 Internal workshops with senior Council officers and the portfolio holder for Regeneration provided early direction. Engagement has also taken place with more than 40 partners and stakeholders across the sector via digital group meetings, World Café workshops, and an online survey attracting 80 responses.
- 4.9 The Strategy sets out the following vision and objectives which sit beneath the Council's overarching priorities.

**Vision:**

*Unleash Walsall's creative spirit and industry to develop a resilient and distinctive heritage sector that drives a vibrant new future for the whole of our Borough and all of our communities.*

*Enable us all to celebrate our rich and diverse heritage by opening up access for everyone and bringing to life our shared and varied stories.*

*Make Walsall a place to be truly proud of and will create a positive and resilient legacy for the future.*

**Objectives:**

**Quality of life and wellbeing:**

*Maximise the contribution that our heritage makes to the quality of life and wellbeing of our communities.*

**Sense of place and celebration:**

*Enhance the contribution that the historic environment makes to the character and identity of the Borough and ensure it is accessible for all.*

**Climate change:**

*Unlock and enhance the role that Walsall's historic environment can play in mitigating and adapting to climate change.*

**Building resilience**

*Create and sustain a thriving and inclusive heritage sector founded on the principles of collaboration and partnership.*

- 4.10 The Heritage Strategy is supported by an ambitious Action Plan covering the five-year strategy period which aligns recommendations against objectives and timescales in addition to identifying viable external funding streams. The included Action Plan forms the first version, to be updated annually, and is structured as follows:
- Early Walsall Council Actions
    - The first, and the most detailed set of actions are designed to provide a firm foundation for future heritage projects. They are ordered by priority and would be delivered by the Council.
  - Catalyst Projects
    - So called as they will drive us forward and get the ball rolling on heritage activity in the Borough, providing an impetus to future heritage activity. They are organised under the primary objective they support, and will involve a broad range of partner organisations and communities.
  - Pipeline Projects
    - A set of high-level, aspirational projects that could be taken forward in the early stages of the Strategy and can be further developed as and when opportunities arise.
  - Ideas Board
    - Documentation of all project ideas that have risen out of consultation, to be used as inspiration, many of which have gone on to inform the following actions and projects.
- 4.11 Development of the Action Plan supports both internal processes, such as the Strategic Investment Board, and external partners, to develop an investment-ready pipeline of projects articulating the value of projects to funders, stakeholders and the wider public, across the holistic range of heritage sector themes covered within the Strategy.
- 4.12 Resource will be required to deliver such an ambitious strategy, which will be met by a combined approach of alignment with broader Council plans such as the Towns Fund, in addition to a principle of co-creation, supporting external partners to develop and deliver projects, in turn building capacity external to the Council through which scaled projects can sustainably be delivered. This co-creation, referring to the research, design and production of projects in collaboration with people, communities and consumers will work to address the currently recognised lower capacity within the Borough, with projects already pipelined through the first version of the Strategy's Action Plans.

- 4.13 The Action Plan outlines potential funding, partners and capacity; outlining where additional funding resource is required for projects beyond core service delivery. Funded to develop the Strategy by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, as a priority local authority area, provides status within the sector to attract such external funding. This is further enhanced by engaging wider sector funders such as Historic England and the Architectural Heritage Fund with development from the outset.
- 4.14 Project funding and capacity will be further resourced across both explicit heritage and broader-scoped projects; Towns Fund and Future High Streets Fund projects, or the Walsall Town Centre Action Plan, include heritage within respective proposals. This external capital investment provides significant momentum to capital elements of regeneration through heritage, such as the improvement of key historic buildings and areas. Continued engagement with the Strategic Investment Board, and other oversight bodies within the Council, will provide the foresight for a resourced Action Plan over the duration of the strategy. Walsall Heritage Strategy's approach across the holistic sector, from the built environment to social heritage will encourage aggregate activity and external funding from broad ranging sources, including broadening social investment models available to community partners, considered within the Strategy.
- 4.15 The Working Group will continue to meet collaboratively to develop and deliver the Action Plan, supported by the establishment of a local Heritage Forum facilitated by the Heritage Programme Officer. Members, partners and stakeholders will be invited to contribute their knowledge and expertise to develop a more collaborative and sustainable way of working. Annual reports will be provided to recognise and replicate success, address challenges and respond to changing sector and wider societal circumstances.

#### ***Council Corporate Plan priorities***

- 4.16 The Heritage Strategy forms part of a group of key documents that together will shape the Borough over the coming years. The Council's Corporate Plan 2021-2022 highlights regeneration as the key to future prosperity tackling inequalities and building resilient communities. The aims and values of the Corporate Plan are utilised as a 'golden thread' throughout the Strategy.
- 4.17 Well established sector research, referenced within the Strategy, articulates the value of heritage not simply as a preservation of the past but as a quantifiable driver of economic and social change. Walsall's Heritage Strategy addresses this potential across a broad range of themes, specifically inked with the Corporate Plan.
- 4.18 Aspects of the Strategy, including regeneration of the historic environment, widening of access to the natural environment and green spaces, job and volunteer opportunities, celebration of diverse cultural heritage and increasing access to collections, will support the refreshed Corporate Plan priority outcomes in the following ways:

- Economic growth for all people, communities and businesses.
- People have increased independences, improved health and can positively contribute to their communities.
- Communities are prospering and resilient with all housing needs met in safe and healthy places that build a strong sense of belonging and cohesion.

### ***Risk management***

#### **Risk 1 – Failure to obtain support for the Strategy.**

- 4.19 This is considered to be a low risk due to the support in its development via external funding, in conjunction with National Lottery Heritage Fund priority status as one of thirteen identified local authority areas. In addition, the draft Strategy and Action Plan were made available for consultation in conjunction with significant engagement of stakeholders and wider communities.
- 4.20 Strong sector support has been evidenced by broad engagement with the development process across major themes of heritage. Inclusion in the development process from an early stage has facilitated sector buy-in, which should form the foundations for strategic partnership delivery over the Strategy period.

#### **Risk 2 - Failure to attract sufficient external resources to fund the implementation of the Strategy.**

- 4.21 This risk is considered to be low. The aforementioned National Lottery Heritage Fund priority status affords an increased confidence in funding availability via the largest dedicated funder of heritage in the UK. The Strategy provides a stronger framework for the Council and external partners to access sector funding, this will be an acknowledged step-change in funding delivery within the borough.
- 4.22 Many of the Early Walsall Council Actions can be achieved through existing staff and financial resources primarily through the Heritage Programme Officer post funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- 4.23 Key external capacity for the delivery of strategic objectives will be the formation of a Heritage Forum, resourced through the Heritage Programme Officer, this will create a network of interested parties to increase peer-to-peer learning, partnerships and ideas sharing that will be imperative to the long-term resilience of the sector beyond the Council.

### ***Financial implications***

- 4.24 There are no financial implications in the approval of the Strategy document. A programme manager has been appointed to support the strategy for a period of 3 years which we have received an allocation of £250k from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- 4.25 Where appropriate, external grants will be applied for to deliver the Action Plan - across capital and revenue expenditure. Due to the broad range of projects associated with heritage, this will be forthcoming from a range of sector funders, such as the arts, heritage, public health or the natural environment.

### ***Legal implications***

- 4.26 There are no legal implications in the approval of the Strategy and Action Plan document.
- 4.27 There is a statutory obligation for Local Planning Authorities to consider the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas, listed buildings and designated heritage assets in determining development proposals. However, this is not a specifically built heritage strategy recommending certain interventions or approaches to the historic built environment.
- 4.28 The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) place further duties on local authorities with regards to management and maintenance of Sites of Special Scientific Interest and public rights of way.

### ***Procurement Implications/Social Value***

- 4.29 There are no procurement implications in the approval of the Strategy document.
- 4.30 Chris Blandford Associates were procured via competitive tender for the development of the Strategy funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- 4.31 Any additional procurement processes necessary for the delivery of the associated Action Plan will adhere to Council protocol.

### ***Property implications***

- 4.32 There are no property implications in the approval of the Strategy document.
- 4.33 There are a number of built properties under the ownership of the Council with statutory or local listing status. Whilst the Strategy will provide a framework for potential utilisation of property assets where currently redundant, there is no direct implication for assets of 'heritage' status as a result of the adoption of this Strategy.

### ***Health and wellbeing implications***

- 4.34 The health and wellbeing aspects of interaction with heritage assets and heritage related projects are referenced in the Heritage Strategy, including recent sector policy and research, with strategic implementation to be developed over the course of the Strategy cycle with updated Action Plans.
- 4.35 There are considerable health and wellbeing implications to improving heritage provision. From a natural environment perspective, quality accessible space provides physical health benefits, whilst museums and heritage sites can offer job and volunteering opportunities which reduce isolation and build confidence. The Heritage Strategy advises that accessible heritage is a necessity, not a luxury, which contributes to the unique character of Walsall Borough and the quality of residents' lives.

### ***Staffing implications***

- 4.36 There are no direct staffing implications in the approval of the Strategy document.
- 4.37 The associated posts: *Heritage Programme Officer* and *Conservation Officer*, are funded respectively at 100% and 25% rates, via the National Lottery Heritage Fund, until January 2024 when sustainability funding will be explored.
- 4.38 Where necessary for the delivery of projects developed in the delivery of the associated Action Plan external funding for the provision of additional project-specific staff will be sought.

### ***Reducing Inequalities***

- 4.39 Addressing inequalities is a core theme in the Heritage Strategy, running across all priorities.
- 4.40 In the development of the Strategy, meeting the legal requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010, the Council has carried out an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) (**Appendix D**) and will also produce an 'easy read' guide of key documents.
- 4.41 Heritage related aims of the Strategy include supporting the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sectors, supporting and empowering vulnerable children and young people to improve their physical and mental health, and supporting quality apprenticeships for all ages and improving conditions for the homeless.

### ***Climate Change***

- 4.42 In response to the Council's Climate Change Action Plan, in relation to key areas of energy, waste, transport, nature, resilience and adaptation, the Walsall Heritage Strategy (2021-2026) will seek to unlock and enhance the role that Walsall's historic environment can play in mitigating and adapting to climate change by:
- Improving knowledge and awareness of the inherent sustainability of historic buildings and assets and ensuring aspects such as embodied carbon are fully accounted for in assessing development opportunities.
  - Promoting the sustainable adaptation and maintenance of historic buildings to address climate change and mitigate against predicted impacts.
  - Improving the resilience of the Borough's green spaces and landscapes to the predicted impacts of climate change and supporting the Nature Recovery Network across the Black Country.
- 4.43 Key Walsall Council actions to support this objective include:
- Supporting the development of a guidance document on the adaptation and maintenance of historic buildings to inform commercial and residential property owners.
  - Undertaking a Green Space Climate Review to identify opportunities to both address climate change and ensure resilience.
- 4.44 An overview of the potential for heritage to positively contribute to the mitigation of Climate Change is included within the associated Baseline Report (**Appendix C**).

## Consultation

- 4.45 Consultation during the development of the Strategy has taken place with national, regional and local organisations via online platforms due to the Covid-19 pandemic restricting the opportunity for physical meetings.

Process:	Detail:
<p>First stage:</p> <p>Digital video call workshops, in-person engagement not possible due to Covid-19.</p>	<p>Gateway/representative organisations in addition to local organisations to provide formative direction for the Strategy. This included national, regional, local and community organisations.</p> <p>These were separated under sector themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Community</li> <li>- Arts, Culture and Tourism</li> <li>- Historic built environment</li> <li>- Natural environment and green spaces</li> </ul>
<p>Second stage:</p> <p>Digital video call workshops, in-person engagement not possible due to Covid-19.</p>	<p>Two World Café format workshops were held, inviting the original stakeholders in addition to a wider range of local organisations to provide broader representation to advise on the Strategy, identifying core issues and providing key insights/direction prior to the production of the full draft strategy.</p> <p>Attendees were consulted on a text-only draft of the Strategy and Action Plan.</p>
<p>Third Stage:</p> <p>Online public survey.</p> <p>Digital survey with option for postal submissions, in-person engagement not possible due to Covid-19.</p>	<p>A four-week public consultation, including public communications including press release, social media and referrals by engaged stakeholders. Functioning as the first public 'call to action' for the Strategy, consultation included both views and comments on the Strategy and Action Plan and wider perception of the Borough's heritage.</p> <p>The public was provided with the full draft Strategy and Action Plan, inclusive of earlier amendments, via the Walsall Council website.</p>

- 4.46 The draft Walsall Heritage Strategy (2021-2026) was circulated with Officers, Members, and externally with the wider public on 15th July 2021, 80 responses were received by 11th August 2021. These have been considered and minor amendments made to the document where appropriate. Overall, online consultation delivered a positive response rate, with over 90% in support for, and agreement with, the respective Vision and Objectives of the Strategy (**Appendix E**).

## 5. Decide

- 5.1 Cabinet is asked to approve the Walsall Heritage Strategy (2021-2026) and Action Plan.

## **6. Respond**

- 6.1 Following the adoption of the Strategy, and associated communications to update all stakeholders and the wider public, the Project Officer and Working Group will convene to instigate delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan.
- 6.2 Early Walsall Council Actions will be prioritised for delivery against the agreed schedule, with development work for Catalyst Projects progressed to engage partners with the delivery schedule from the outset.

## **7. Review**

- 7.1 Following adoption of the Walsall Heritage Strategy (2021-2026), the Action Plan will be reported against through an Annual Review publication with updated versions of the Action Plan published annually for the duration of the Strategy.
- 7.2 By Spring 2022, the associated Monitoring and Management Framework will be agreed, to be used by the Council, supported by the Heritage Forum, to ensure the continuation of successful and focused delivery of the Strategy. This will include periodic review of projects and engagement with communities to ensure relevancy and effectiveness of initiatives.
- 7.3 Key performance indicators to be incorporated within all strategy actions' delivery and evaluation, accounting for and addressing inequality across the borough e.g. health and wellbeing, in association with officers across the Council.

## **Appendices**

- Walsall Heritage Strategy (2021-2026) **Appendix A**
- Walsall Heritage Strategy Action Plan **Appendix B**
- Walsall Heritage Strategy Baseline Report **Appendix C**
- Walsall Heritage Strategy Equality Impact Assessment **Appendix D**
- Walsall Heritage Strategy Consultation Report **Appendix E**

## **Background papers**

None.

## **Author**

Benjamin Parker - Heritage Programme Officer  
Programme Management – Resources & Transformation

☎ 07876 468450

✉ [benjamin.parker@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:benjamin.parker@walsall.gov.uk)

Kaye Davies- External Funding and Business Development Manager  
Programme Management – Resources & Transformation

☎ 07908 161384

✉ [kaye.davies@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:kaye.davies@walsall.gov.uk)

Mark Lavender - Head of Programme Management  
Programme Management – Resources & Transformation  
☎ 07951 620333  
✉ [mark.lavender@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:mark.lavender@walsall.gov.uk)



Deborah Hindson  
Executive Director – Resources & Transformation /  
Section 151 Officer

20 October 2021



Councillor Adrian Andrew  
Portfolio Holder - Regeneration

20 October 2021