

16 January 2024

Heritage Strategy – Reference to Highgate Brewery

Ward(s): All

Portfolios:

Councillor Adrian Andrew - Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration
Councillor Gary Flint - Portfolio Holder for Wellbeing, Leisure and Public Spaces.

1. Aim

- 1.1 Walsall Council developed its Heritage Strategy (2021-2026), funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, to celebrate its past, and its vibrant and diverse communities and places, with the aim of creating opportunities for present and future generations. In line with the vision set out in our Corporate Plan 2021-2022, to ensure that 'Inequalities are reduced, and potential is maximised', this Heritage Strategy enables us to improve our heritage capacity and thereby our offer as a town and to stimulate heritage activity in its most diverse forms across the Borough. It helps us to reduce inequalities in health, wellbeing, the environment and the economy. Through our collective vision it contributes to making Walsall a better place to live, work and play.
- 1.2 This extends to addressing challenging heritage assets, which may have fallen into a state of disrepair or needing to identify new, viable uses to secure their future. Successes during the early stages of the delivery of the strategy have included the securing of funding towards a range of heritage assets within the borough - notably, assets remain requiring plans towards a sustainable future, including Highgate Brewery.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Scrutiny Committee members note the progress outlined in this report.
- 2.2 That Walsall Council officers continue to work towards the delivery of the Walsall Heritage Strategy (2021-2026) up to the end of its stated period, at which point future planning of iterative strategy will be considered by requisite senior officers and portfolio holders as appropriate to the evolved position.
- 2.3 As Walsall's period as a 2019-2024 Area of Focus for The National Lottery Heritage Fund concludes in April 2024, that Walsall Council continues to maintain this positive strategic relationship alongside the heritage workstream to carry forward programmes to deliver significant external funding to the Borough.
- 2.4 That Walsall Council officers continue to work constructively, across internal and external partners, to encourage the sustainable re-use of historic buildings where identified as at risk, in terms of sustainable economic use.

3. Report detail – know

- 3.1. Funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), Walsall Council 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 outcomes 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.
- 3.2. 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.
- 3.3. 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.
- 3.4. The commissioning of the Walsall Heritage Strategy (2021-2026) is a direct result of the receipt of £250k NLHF grant support obtained by the External Funding Team, 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, in conjunction with partial funding for a re-introduced Conservation Officer post.
- 3.5. Objectives were established as follows:
 - 3.5.1. Quality of life and wellbeing: Maximise the contribution that our heritage makes to the quality of life and wellbeing of our communities.
 - 3.5.2. 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.
 - 3.5.3. Climate change: Unlock and enhance the role that Walsall's historic environment can play in mitigating and adapting to climate change.
 - 3.5.4. Building resilience: Create and sustain a thriving and inclusive heritage sector founded on the principles of collaboration and partnership.
- 3.6. 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, and is structured as follows:

- 3.6.1. 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.
- 3.6.2. 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.
- 3.6.3. 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.
- 3.6.4. 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 project.
- 3.7 Significant progress has been made across a range of objectives and action Plan Categories, with some necessary adaptation of time frame. An amended action plan will be produced, considering timeframes, stakeholders etc. in due course.
- 3.8 Progress has been acknowledged by The National Lottery Heritage Fund: [How Walsall's heritage is thriving | The National Lottery Heritage Fund](#)
- 3.9 Significant external funding has been secured by Walsall Council in support of owned projects, including but not limited to:
 - 3.9.1 Notably the £3.7million towards its creative industries to enhance the Creative Industries Enterprise Centre project and deliver a capacity building Festival of Making programme. This complimented the allocated Towns Fund resource. In development of this, Walsall Council had secured funding allocated from an underspend on the Government's Cultural Development Fund (CDF) Round 2, administered by the WMCA.
 - 3.9.2 Non-capital funding has included £85,000 for the New Art Gallery Walsall, Changing Collections - Embedding Diversity Project developing the delivery of the successful LGBTQ+ Community Panel and HERE&QUEER programme to develop collections spaces to be equitable, and representative of local communities.
- 3.10 External organisations have been directly supported in securing funding, towards the delivery of the Strategy, including but not limited to:
 - 3.10.1 The National Lottery Heritage Fund's £249,708 grant towards Learning Through Landscape Trust's My School, My Planet project to build partnerships between schools and community groups to implement environmental improvements.

3.10.2 The Architectural Heritage Fund's £11,980 grant towards Kiondo CIC's Transforming Places Through Heritage Project Viability project for Brooks & Sons, 7-21 Leicester Street.

3.11 Funding distributed to the sector by Walsall Council has included:

3.11.1 Delivery of the £10,000 Walsall Community Heritage Fund via Crowdfund Walsall, across five community projects, contributing to projects including the £7,645 Walsall Memory Jar – Down the Arbo! By Bostin Creative and £15,938 We Are Bloxwich by One Love Community Music and Arts CIC.

3.11.2 UK Shared Prosperity Fund supported Heritage Spark Grants are supporting local organisations to explore new partnerships and project ideas. This includes:

3.11.2.1 Plasma of Hope and Rose Tinted Financial, awarded £3,370, will unite children and young adults for immersive arts and creativity workshops across multiple borough heritage sites, sharing local history. Plasma of Hope supports individuals living with Sickle Cell Disease or other related illness. Their collaborator, Rose Tinted Financial, a local community interest company, provides free professional advice, help and community support.

3.11.2.2 Lifegate Communities, working in partnership with The New Art Gallery Walsall, have been awarded £3,300. Collaboratively, groups will explore African links in Walsall's public collections, and share their knowledge and responses, reducing barriers to access.

3.11.2.3 Kiondo CIC awarded £3,950, with Boxout Community, will deliver community events blending music, education, and heritage to celebrate cultural diversity, fostering a sense of ownership and pride, revitalising the Grade II historic Hogs Head pub, in central Walsall.

3.12 The Council has always developed infrastructure with the sector, launching the new Heritage Forum, through a series of [Co-design Workshops in November 2022](#), attended by a broad range of local organisations, including individual artists and practitioners.

3.13 This structure enabled the delivery of UK Shared Prosperity Fund resource across both capacity training and funding direct to the local VCS sector. This included a new, online training programme, delivered as part of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and delivering a new Matchmaking and Funding Opportunities Guide. 10 Walsall organisations were represented across the programme. When surveyed to rate the training session attended in comparison to previous training events in the Borough of the Walsall-based participants 87.5% said 'good' or 'very good'.

3.14 In support of externally owned heritage assets, Walsall Council has worked across teams inclusive of Regeneration, Planning, External Funding amongst others, to work constructively to identify viable opportunities to move challenging sites forwards, Highgate Brewery being one of these being considered by teams in terms of supporting the owners to identify the optimum outcome. With Council

guidance, early stage funding has been secured to undertake feasibility work, such as grant finance via The National Lottery Heritage Fund for St. Matthew's Church. Where plans are developed, Council staff have successfully negotiated suitable schemes for prominent sites, including the planning permission secured for Darlaston Police Station. Where suitable, the Council has taken the leading role through acquisition, notably the Grade II* Guildhall as part of the Towns Fund and Cultural Development Fund backed Creative Industries Enterprise Centre, now with the approval of the Walsall Council Planning Committee.

- 3.14 From a strategic policy perspective, Walsall's heritage and culture offer has subsequently been given prominence within the Walsall 2040 Strategy and the Walsall Economic Strategy and Action Plan (ESAP), in addition to regeneration frameworks including the Willenhall Framework Plan (2022).

4. Financial information

- 4.1 Ongoing delivery of the Walsall Heritage Strategy (2021-2026) is due to be supported through the adoption of the Heritage Programme Officer as a permanent post within Walsall Council, following the full funding of the post since January 2021 via The National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- 4.2 Externally funded projects supporting delivery of the Heritage Strategy are developed by Walsall Council are, and will continue to be, considered on a case-by-case basis through established reporting structures, including Strategic Investment Board, thus mitigating risk of taking on financial liabilities where identified.
- 4.3 To mitigate financial pressures, where external schemes are identified with scope for external funding as the viable enabler of schemes addressing local need, Walsall Council officers will work to identify opportunities. Example successes include the Grade II Globe House, in Bradford Place, securing West Midlands Combined Authority support through the brownfield regeneration and housing delivery programme.

5. Reducing Inequalities

- 5.1 Addressing inequalities is a core theme in the Heritage Strategy, running across all priorities.
- 5.2 In the development of the Strategy, meeting the legal requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010, the Council carried out an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) and produced an 'easy read' guide of key documents.
- 5.3 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

6. Decide

6.1 The committee is asked to note the work being carried out in delivery of the Heritage Strategy including external funding secured.

7. Respond

7.1 The NLHF programme is scheduled for completion by the end of March 2023 following this a project evaluation will be produced. Commitments in respect to future heritage delivery is set out in the Council's heritage strategy 2021-2026.

8. Review

8.1 The heritage strategy is scheduled for review in 2025 prior to expiry in 2026.

Background papers

- Walsall Heritage Strategy (2021-2026)
- Associated Cabinet sign-off papers, including EqIA

To be attached as appendix:

- [Walsall Heritage Strategy 2021-2026](#)
- [Walsall Heritage Strategy 2021-2016 Action Plan](#)
- [CMIS > Meetings \(walsall.gov.uk\)](#)

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