

# Walsall Heritage Strategy

## 2021-2026



Walsall Council





Bill Fizer Collette Mumford Joan Nock Margaret Rawe Ruth Boden Pat Turner Yvonne Thomas Jean Ash Rose Broadhurst



Ann Hazzard Ann Howden Chris Murphy Sue Stokes Francesca Cox Deb Hennessey Glenis Williams Julie Jones



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This Strategy was funded by a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and should be read in conjunction with the **Walsall Heritage Strategy – Baseline Report 2021** and **Walsall Heritage Strategy 2021-2026 – Action Plan**.

All documents can be accessed via [go.walsall.gov.uk](https://go.walsall.gov.uk)



# Foreword

***As Walsall Council, we have the privilege of working with our communities and stakeholders across the Borough where heritage represents both our collective past and how we look forward into the future.***

It is an exciting time for the heritage sector in Walsall as, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, we develop a new approach to unlocking the economic, environmental, health and wellbeing, and community benefits of heritage.

The diversity of our stories, and unlocking the potential of our unique heritage, can create a Walsall of which we are increasingly proud. Our residents live amongst historic buildings, parks and spaces, cultural sites and with countless stories to share, whether that be of migration or evolving trades.

This is the start of a journey, and whilst the Council will play a key role in the delivery of the strategy, the diversity of the Borough is its strength. Its history of growth, development and creativity will provide the foundations, and set the tone for, its delivery.

We are fortunate to work with, and support, organisations delivering services across diverse communities and have developed this strategy through engagement with stakeholders to ensure that it is relevant and inclusive. Through fostering local identity and promoting social cohesion, we hope our approach with co-creation at its heart will engage all with this Strategy and its future projects.

But, we recognise the challenges, from securing investment to identifying viable new uses for historic buildings, we are embarking on this project focussed on working with partners of all scales to facilitate creative initiatives to both preserve and prosper. To achieve this, the strategy must make heritage accessible to all, from the creative arts to green spaces, regeneration schemes to education and employment.

We are delighted that the National Lottery Heritage Fund has enabled this work, helping Walsall to unlock the potential of heritage to reduce inequalities and ensure potential is maximised across the Borough. Building on the already great work of organisations and communities, we encourage our residents, businesses, local organisations and wider stakeholders to respond to the strategy and get involved with the project in the years to come.



***Councillor Adrian Andrew  
Deputy Leader and Portfolio  
Holder for Regeneration  
Walsall Council***

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adrian Andrew', written in a cursive style.





# PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE



# PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

## Introduction

Walsall has a rich heritage and a past we are all proud of. Historically, the Borough was home to industrial and farming communities, being known as the ‘*town of a hundred trades*’; the Borough’s creativity and industry continues to this day, being recognised, amongst other aspects, as a leather goods capital and as the home of an internationally significant art gallery.

Walsall Council has developed this Heritage Strategy to celebrate that past and our 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 will enable us to improve our heritage capacity and stimulate heritage activity in its most diverse forms across the Borough. It will help us to reduce inequalities in health, wellbeing, the environment and the economy. Through our collective vision it will help us make Walsall a better place to live, work and play.

Partnership and involvement are key threads running through this Strategy. We will listen to our communities and work *with* them through a process of ‘co-creation’<sup>1</sup> to ensure that people are actively invited to engage with, develop and deliver meaningful projects and programmes across the Borough. We will partner and facilitate others – with Walsall Council acting as a catalyst for change, supporting the aspirations and abilities of our many communities.

<sup>1</sup> Co-creation refers to the research, design and production of projects in collaboration with people, communities and consumers. The aim is to develop ongoing dialogue between organisations and the community to engage more people and to produce relevant and engaging projects together, that are for everyone, opposed to traditional organisation-led approaches.

Through this Strategy we will:

*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.*

*Ensure that we can all 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.*

Our Strategy sets out how heritage can be an important driver for change; how it can benefit the economy, health and wellbeing, and the environment; and how it can help to tackle inequalities. We set out where we are now, how we will get to where we want to be and the challenges we may face.

We have developed this Strategy with key stakeholders including local organisations and community groups; and national and regional bodies. We will work with these partners (as others) as well as the wider investment and private sector to deliver our ambitions for Walsall and its heritage.

Our shared vision, objectives and ‘Catalyst Projects’ will help make us all proud to be Walsall, now and into the future. A separate document **Walsall Heritage Strategy 2021-2026 Action Plan** outlines these projects and a set of initial actions.

# PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

## Defining Heritage

'Heritage' can mean many different things to many different people. It is often used to reference history, lineage and ancestry, property, livestock, plants, design and branding. It can reference the 'traditional', 'time-tested', 'vintage', 'classic' or can be emblematic of fine craftsmanship. In its broadest sense, 'heritage' refers to elements that somehow have a connection with the past and can represent something we have inherited from generations gone by that still holds historical importance.

In the context of our Heritage Strategy, we have taken a broad definition, encompassing our history, the natural environment, architecture, archaeology and built heritage, but most importantly, who we are and our place in the world; the context of our lives and where we come from; our future hopes and aspirations; and our pride in Walsall.

Heritage isn't solely defined by historic buildings, archaeology, museum collections or stories of past industry. People and communities also make up our heritage; our connections with the past and with each other, our shared interests and values, and our hopes for the future. This is what our Strategy is centred on.



# PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

## Heritage - A Driver for Change

Heritage forms a large part of the identity of any place. It adds distinctiveness and can be used as a catalyst for community engagement, helping us to share our stories and connect with one another. It can generate value by promoting economic growth, stimulating cultural activity and helping to create vibrant and exciting places for all. It can help us to be proud of our Borough, promote social cohesion and preserve our connection to the past. By understanding the contributions heritage can make to our long-term prosperity and wellbeing, we can explore ways in which to capitalise on these benefits.



***Heritage makes a direct and tangible contribution to our wellbeing and our communities, supporting both physical and mental health.***

The role of heritage as a catalyst for inclusive growth is an important part of the wellbeing economy. A growing body of evidence is demonstrating how heritage, and involvement with heritage, can benefit our wellbeing and build resilient communities. Heritage offers a sense of identity, belonging and an understanding of place. Heritage plays an essential role in society and can help to create social cohesion. Projects centred on inclusion, reducing inequalities and community engagement will stimulate regeneration, increase interest in heritage and in turn favour the sustainability of heritage assets.<sup>1</sup>

***Heritage creates civic pride.***

It has the potential to empower communities to engage in social issues. When people and communities are invested in heritage they feel a sense of pride, local identity and are more likely to engage in social issues and support local services.<sup>2</sup>



# PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE



## ***Heritage supports learning and education.***

A recent study revealed that young people who are involved in the arts, visit heritage sites or libraries are more likely to go on to further education.<sup>3</sup> The study also states that young people experience higher levels of happiness and self-esteem after engaging in arts activities.<sup>4</sup> Exposure to heritage and culture can open doors to careers in the cultural and creative sectors and elsewhere, as well as generally improving quality of life for all ages. Whilst many children and adults participate in heritage learning and activities, there are still many barriers for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

## ***Heritage draws people to places.***

Heritage forms an integral part of the economy with millions of tourists visiting England each year, some travelling primarily to visit heritage attractions. In the period 2000 to 2019 visits to heritage attractions in the West Midlands region nearly doubled<sup>5</sup> well above the English average of a c.66% increase. A total of £18.4bn was spent on heritage related visits and trips in 2019 and 7 of the top ten visited attractions in England in 2019 were heritage attractions. These visits support jobs, contributing to economic growth.<sup>6</sup>

## ***Heritage attracts new businesses.***

The density of historic buildings strongly relates to the overall movement of business to an area. One in four businesses in England, surveyed in a recent poll, stated that the historic environment was a factor in deciding where to locate their business.<sup>7</sup> Heritage also attracts the creative industries, an industry that performs better when located in areas of denser cultural and heritage assets. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic the creative industries were growing at more than four times the rate of the UK economy as a whole.<sup>8</sup>

## ***Heritage and the historic environment offers flexibility in space, adds to the identity, distinctiveness and sense of place.***

Urban areas all over the country have a rich architectural history and heritage assets that provide homes, community spaces, visitor attractions and workspaces. Heritage-led regeneration puts the historic environment at the centre of regeneration proposals. Re-use and development of historic places also provides significant economic benefits and direct and indirect jobs.<sup>9</sup> Our historic environment can help increase the sense of identity and belonging and can prevent decline.

# PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

## *Heritage is inherently sustainable and is an integral part of a low carbon economy.*

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Investing in the reuse of historic buildings to extend life and durability adds value to the buildings themselves, increases their value to society and reduces the overall carbon footprint with a retrofitted building often omitting less carbon by 2050 than a new building.<sup>10</sup> In addition, new uses in and around historic centres can contribute to carbon reduction through the reduced need for car-based travel to these centres compared with more dispersed and suburban development which may not be as easily accessible using public transport.

The natural environment can also support net zero aspirations by increasing planting on sites, especially woodlands, plus encouraging more sustainable forms of transport through the use of greenways, such as canal towpaths and disused railway lines, for walking and cycling.

## *Heritage contributes to our natural environment.*

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There are many green spaces, allotments, graveyards, historic parks, gardens and canals in the Borough that all form part of our history and are an essential part of our historic environment. Heritage in green spaces can be used as a tool to help increase knowledge on environmental issues. Green spaces are also an important part of our historic environment with some being heritage assets in themselves holding historical importance, such as Barr Beacon and Park Lime Pits Local Nature Reserves. Many of our green spaces are a representation of how human activity has shaped the landscape.

## *Heritage can help us recover from the impacts of Covid-19.*

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Heritage can play a vital role in the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic in supporting the economy, helping to create jobs and promote activities, as well as utilising the increased appreciation and use of green spaces to promote health and wellbeing outcomes.



# PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

## Where we are now

The next few years will see Walsall grow, using its heritage as a catalyst to unleash its creative spirit and industry. This will be driven by public sector funding, community effort and private sector investment. Walsall is well placed to develop heritage and its cultural impact to fulfil our ambitions of making the Borough a better place for all. We already hold many assets which set us in good stead for the future, such as our location, good quality transport links, history of creativity and innovation, existing cultural programmes, and varied and vibrant communities.

There are many challenges to overcome too; such as community cohesion, limited levels of accessibility and inclusivity; high levels of inequality; socioeconomic divides; and limited resources, capacity and funding. There is a need for regeneration across the Borough to help us tackle the inequalities around health and economic outcomes and build resilient communities.<sup>11</sup>

## How we will get there

This Strategy shows how important engagement with heritage is to our collective success and to our future. Whilst there are a number of challenges, by working in partnership, by co-creating projects with our communities, by leveraging private sector investment and activity, and by actively encouraging people to take part, we will develop a resilient and distinctive heritage sector that drives a vibrant new future for the whole of our Borough and all of our communities. We will facilitate others, aid delivery, and be responsive and flexible. Ongoing consultation, knowledge, skills sharing and support will remain at the heart of our Strategy.

Walsall Council will facilitate and support monitoring and reporting of progress as well as ensuring initiatives align with other responsibilities and policies. Walsall Council will work in partnership with external organisations to secure adequate and well managed capacity and resources.



# PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

## Walsall Past and Present

Walsall Borough has a rich heritage. Our past is something to be proud of. Formerly known as the 'Town of 100 Trades', Walsall was recognised internationally as the British leather goods capital.

But there is far more in our past than industry. Our history is made up of a strong creative spirit, resilience, and diverse communities.

Only a fraction of our stories are told, with many more to uncover. This Strategy aims to unlock and celebrate these shared and varied stories, opening up access for all of us to discover and celebrate our heritage together, driving a bright new future that everyone can be part of. Heritage can be used as a catalyst for discovery and celebration, making use of our tangible and intangible assets, enabling us to be **'Proud of our Past, our Present and for our Future.'**

Walsall is made up of many historic and established localities across the Borough, ranging from villages to small towns, all with their own identities and their own stories to tell. Our growth has attracted people from across the world and continues to do so. There are over 140 languages currently spoken across the Borough.

Today, Walsall Borough covers an area of 104 square kilometres, much of which grew out of its agricultural and industrial heritage. The Borough, as a whole, is densely populated with large areas of continued heavy industry contrasting with comparatively greener and more open areas to the north and east of the Borough.

It is one of seven Metropolitan Boroughs in the West Midlands and one of four Black Country Authorities. Its estimated population of 285,500 (as of 2019) has increased significantly over the last 15 years and is predicted to rise further. Walsall has one of the highest rates of ethnic diversity in England and Wales.



# PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

A critical aim of this Strategy is to reduce inequalities through heritage-related activity. To achieve this, activities need to be developed for all, accessible to all and created with all in mind. There are many programmes, services and projects across the Borough that have local communities at their heart and advocate this approach, such as **Walsall for All, One Walsall**, and **Walsall Community Network** among many others.



These programmes and services play a huge part in shaping Walsall, and working with this Strategy they will help tackle the deficit between areas and communities and their active engagement, invitation to, and benefits from community activity. There are always new opportunities to ensure that everyone in our communities have fair opportunities to get involved and benefit.

Whilst the diversity and vibrancy of our communities across the Borough are important intangible assets, there are also multiple tangible assets, such as visitor attractions; nature reserves; green spaces; museums, galleries, libraries; archaeological sites; conservation areas; and historic buildings and places (including places of worship). These help to shape Walsall and can all be used as platforms for heritage and community projects.

Walsall is on an upward trajectory, with regeneration and development being constant themes across the Borough. We are seeing continued investment in some of our urban centres, through the development of new homes and through improvements to transport links. Projects associated with the **Towns Fund** and **Future High Streets** are also helping to elevate the Borough and its offer to the commercial sector, local communities and visitors.

Walsall also forms part of the recently inscribed **Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark** in recognition of the area's international importance and how it played a major role in the creation of the modern world. This status helps highlight the geology under our feet with cultural and industrial heritage. Current Geopark sites in Walsall include the New Art Gallery Walsall, Walsall Arboretum, Brownhills Mining Heritage Monument, local nature reserves, and disused railway and quarry sites.



# PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

## Strengths, Opportunities and Challenges

The creative spirit and diversity of our Borough is one of our main strengths. We have been able to grow and thrive since the origins of the Borough as settlements in the Middle Ages. Walsall has the potential to continue adapting to the modern needs of the Borough and its people. There are a number of strengths we already possess, and many opportunities open to us. There are also many challenges to overcome to achieve our shared goals. By using heritage as a catalyst, we can deliver meaningful experiences and make our Borough a better place.

### People

We are proud of our diverse communities and the existing community organisations already engaged in projects both within the Borough and across the region more widely. Research and consultation have revealed that there is a significant deficit in community cohesion, inclusion and community engagement with heritage in particular. There is a tendency for localities to be insular with a preference to 'stay local'. There is also a strong socio-economic divide between the east and the west of the Borough amongst other inequalities.



# PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

Heritage-related projects can better connect with communities and individuals through new and existing partnerships. Existing community projects and programmes, such as Resilient Communities, Walsall for All and Creative Black Country have developed strong, direct relationships between organisations and multiple communities across the Borough. Projects such as these can be drawn upon to identify crossovers between community and heritage work to deliver our shared aims, such as enhancing quality of life, pride in where we live, and connecting with one another. This collaboration will reinforce the importance of both the community and the heritage sectors helping to secure the funding and resources to benefit both.

The existing volunteering community in Walsall is a hugely valuable asset in itself and demonstrates that there is a clear appetite for community involvement. There are opportunities to work with communities and co-create projects,

to develop and deliver meaningful and relevant experiences. Building on co-creation work such as The New Art Gallery's Critical Friends group,<sup>12</sup> all projects should have the community at their heart.

The social enterprise sector unlocks wider value among communities, such as Urban Hax CIC<sup>13</sup> which facilitates and creates a community of makers, innovators and hobbyists who come together and share skills, knowledge and crafts with the wider community. Local communities develop and deliver dynamic arts and heritage projects through Walsall Creative Factory CIC.

Funded programmes such as Creative Black Country<sup>14</sup> (through Arts Council England) co-create projects with community groups, arts organisations, artists and creatives. Co-creating and co-producing projects and programmes ensures that all work is relevant for all members of the community and there are many existing projects to inspire us.



## Places

Walsall possesses many tangible assets such as historic buildings and parks. A number of these can be utilised to help deliver heritage projects and bring new life into the currently underused assets and areas, as well as contributing to carbon reduction through the re-use of historic buildings. Although Walsall has a number of these tangible assets, the Strategy does not rely on this alone. The real value lies in the connections between these assets and the people of Walsall. There are increasing ways in which communities can become involved in unlocking these key assets, delivering broad ranging social outputs as a result of the re-animation of neglected historic buildings and spaces. Support organisations such as the Heritage Trust Network and Locality provide support and peer-to-peer learning whilst funders such as the Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF) support project development via grants, loans and community share offers. In addition, a current AHF Heritage Development

Trust programme, which brings together local communities, local governments, businesses, charities and funders to repurpose and reimagine their built heritage provides contemporary learning for place-based approaches.

As a site of internationally important geology, the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark status will help Walsall and the wider region become a tourist draw in its own right. There are opportunities to promote Walsall and its heritage alongside Geopark initiatives and in partnership with the Dudley, Sandwell and Wolverhampton Councils to reconnect local and regional communities with their natural landscapes through the study and conservation of the Geopark's landscapes. Projects could include public events including outreach, workshops, field trips, and guided walks and tours to develop strong ties with schools and community groups to develop a team of 'citizen scientists and historians'.





## Access

Generally speaking, intellectual access to heritage is currently limited to those already engaged with and interested in heritage. One of the main challenges when speaking about heritage in its broadest sense is what the term 'heritage' means to different people. This is reflected in the promotion and awareness of heritage-related activity. In other words, the term 'heritage' can represent an opportunity to one person, and a barrier to another, or simply indifference to the term. It can mean historic buildings to one person, and family lineage to another. The fact that heritage can be a misunderstood term or a 'not for me' term, represents the lack of awareness and/or the irrelevance of heritage activity outwards to audiences. This reinforces the need for future heritage activity to be designed with, and for, individuals and communities through co-creation.

Co-creating/co-producing projects and programmes ensures that all work is relevant and for all members of the community. It helps to strengthen a sense of belonging, improve cohesion and drive heritage projects in the direction which may be more sustainable in the long-term given that they are rooted in the community.

Some historic buildings and visitor attractions present physical challenges for those with mobility and sensory restrictions. Some will likely need to undergo significant audits and modifications before reuse. There are also connectivity challenges particularly in relation to public transport links and the cost of transport services.

There are also some challenging sites and assets that may not be easily included in development in the near future. These sites may be derelict or damaged beyond practical reuse or they may be difficult to access physically. Examples identified to date include the derelict Great Barr Hall and the unoccupied Highgate Brewery, amongst others. In these cases, we will investigate these sites further, broaden our understanding, and begin to identify appropriate options for development.

An engaging online presence is essential to remain relevant and visible in the digital age. It can directly involve more people with more projects, particularly those less able to engage physically. Recent 'hybrid' events, where people can attend either in person or online, have demonstrated that a larger audience can be reached when given the option to either attend physically or digitally, broadening the reach and relevancy of projects. This approach should be considered in both the developmental and the delivery stages of projects and programmes, not only as a final outcome. This approach has excelled in recent months due to the Covid-19 pandemic restricting physical visits. One success story is the Black Country Living Museum. They created relatable and relevant content about life in lockdown. It was named in TikTok's top 100 UK accounts for 2020 and now has 1 million followers worldwide. Broader digitisation approaches include organisations partnering with Google Arts and Culture to display their collection through online exhibitions and 'stories'. Examples of this approach within the West Midlands are The Herbert Art Gallery and Museum in Coventry<sup>15</sup> and The Space in Birmingham.<sup>16</sup>



# PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

## Capacity

Many projects require significant investments, both money and staffing, to support their delivery. There are, and have been for some time, significant capacity issues in the heritage sector and associated sectors in the Borough. Many of these issues stem from a sustained decline in public sector finances over the last c. 10-12 years, a prioritisation of funding for activities that are seen to have more direct impact on economic activity and community wellbeing, and a continued shift to project-based funding for organisations rather than providing long-term sustainable support. This is a common theme for many places, but one that has also arisen out of research and consultation with Walsall stakeholders. We aim to propose heritage-related projects that can take priority and receive the support they deserve.

In response, and with support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Walsall Council has appointed a Heritage Programme Officer (fully funded) to develop and deliver the Strategy, and appointed a Conservation Officer (part funded) to support the management, conservation and help to enhance the significance of the Borough's built heritage and its ability to accommodate people's engagement with it. Walsall Council's Public Health, Healthy Spaces Team, and Clean and Green Team have also been strengthened and are better placed to be able to support some initiatives under the aegis of the Strategy.

Externally, examples include the One Walsall initiative developing capacity in third sector organisations. West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust has received grant funding (via Historic England) which has enabled it to appoint core staff for the first time, creating capacity to potentially support built heritage projects in Walsall.

Further capacity and greater collaboration is likely to be required to drive the success of Heritage Strategy and meet the Council's Corporate Plan priorities. A flexible approach is required to have the best impact possible and to remain relevant and dynamic and to be manageable and adaptable.

Covid-19 had a huge impact on our lives, and on the heritage sector. It caused a sharp decline in revenues in digital, cultural, media and sports industries. The heritage sector is vulnerable to the pandemic and the future is unpredictable, so how it will unfold from now on remains uncertain. In the medium/long term, financial constraints are likely to limit conservation work, affecting the overall sustainability of heritage sites.<sup>17</sup>



# PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

## Funding

As well as issues relating to the capacity to deliver change, there are also potential and historic issues relating to capital and operational funding for projects. Many projects will require significant capital investments to support their delivery which is increasingly challenging in difficult economic circumstances as more organisations chase the same sources of finance to deliver their projects.

There are opportunities to work with organisations such as the Architectural Heritage Fund through their ‘Transforming Places Through Heritage’ programme for building specific funding<sup>18</sup> as well as with the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country and their “Nature Recovery Network” for broader partnership funding and activities. These and other initiatives provide opportunity to shape projects and deliver positive outcomes for the Borough’s heritage and communities.

Outside of ‘pure’ heritage funding, such as that provided by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and a vast array of other trusts and charities of varying sizes and scales, Walsall has also been successful in attracting, and is in the process of applying for, a range of national government funds including the Towns Fund, Future High Streets and the Levelling Up Fund. Many of the projects promoted through these funding routes have strong heritage, cultural, or urban regeneration elements and could support the delivery of the Strategy. The current ‘deprived’<sup>19</sup> status of the Borough and the government’s levelling-up agenda would also indicate that the Borough is in a strong position to attract further funding and it will be critical to ensure that this can support and drive keynote heritage projects in the Borough.

Private sector investment and activity also has a key role to play in the future of the Borough, through its economy and its heritage. A strong private sector focussed on sustainable and sensitive development can bring our heritage assets back to life and create viable and vibrant communities. Walsall Council will work closely with the private sector to leverage and unlock this investment in a manner that safeguards and celebrates our shared history. There are also opportunities for third sector involvement and community-led investment. Community ownership (e.g. via Social Enterprises) can unlock assets unviable for the commercial market through access to broad ranging funding targeting both the asset itself and projects’ wider social outputs. This can include social finance, grants, crowdfunding or community share offers amongst other funding opportunities. However big or small, specialist support and expertise is needed to bring forward and deliver successful projects in the context of this Strategy, and help us all deliver.

## Carbon Reduction

Walsall has a number of historic buildings that may be open to adaption and re-use where doing so may significantly reduce carbon emissions, a target of the Borough. The adaptive re-use of a historic building will emit less carbon by 2050 than a new building<sup>20</sup>. It reduces waste from demolition and conserves the building materials whilst creating more jobs during its conversion period. Additionally, a programme of renovation and refit will help create sustainable jobs, drive economic activity and develop skills and learning opportunities, these are all Walsall Council priorities.



# PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

## SWOT Summary

The following analysis was undertaken to identify and organise the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Such analysis is key to assess the current position and establish the new Heritage Strategy.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passionate and knowledgeable local stakeholders.</li> <li>• Many key cultural and natural assets e.g. the canal network, local nature reserves, historic buildings and public art.</li> <li>• Strong cultural collections across museum, gallery, library and archive sites.</li> <li>• ‘Town of a hundred trades’ narrative to be explored.</li> <li>• Diverse communities with rich heritage and stories waiting to be told.</li> <li>• A willing third sector supported by existing initiatives.</li> <li>• Appetite for heritage related projects across sectors, from regeneration to public health.</li> <li>• Wider regeneration projects already underway with existing and developing strategies and masterplans.</li> <li>• Walsall Council’s previous successes with heritage related projects.</li> <li>• Status within the wider Black Country and West Midlands.</li> <li>• General readiness for investment through the Towns Fund, Future High Streets and transport projects.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High levels of deprivation, disproportionate across the Borough, affecting equal opportunity, connectivity and cohesion.</li> <li>• Barriers to accessing heritage include physical, intellectual and cultural with the perception as exclusive or a barrier to progress.</li> <li>• Challenging sites and assets that may prove difficult to re-use.</li> <li>• Land and property values/development returns resulting in difficulty for developers to justify work to historic buildings and places that carry a conservation deficit.</li> <li>• Disproportionate physical heritage across areas of the Borough.</li> <li>• Insufficient capacity and resources to delivery heritage projects.</li> <li>• ‘Insular’ localities whether due to a historically recognised identity or a preference to ‘stay local’.</li> <li>• Lack of draw to Walsall town centre and other urban areas.</li> <li>• Sector weakened by Covid-19.</li> </ul>



# PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Lottery Heritage Fund Strategic Funding Framework 2019–2024 priority local authority area.</li> <li>• Partnerships with communities, groups and businesses to increase capacity, expand and support heritage initiatives.</li> <li>• Increase cross-sector heritage projects, including culture, sport, and healthcare.</li> <li>• Develop new developer partnerships to address challenging historic sites and areas.</li> <li>• Create new jobs and volunteering opportunities, using heritage to develop new skills.</li> <li>• Increase heritage engagement with children, young people and families.</li> <li>• Partnerships with schools, colleges and universities to engage young people and promote heritage.</li> <li>• Integrate Index of Multiple Deprivation measures, e.g. health, to evidence positive contribution of heritage.</li> <li>• Understand, recognise and promote heritage stories and assets to involve a wider range of people.</li> <li>• Utilise unoccupied built heritage assets for new use drawing upon the knowledge and resources of the Building Preservation Trust.</li> <li>• Work alongside community focused organisations such as Urban Hax, Kiondo, Creative Factory amongst other community associations.</li> <li>• Incorporate and promote carbon reduction in heritage initiatives.</li> <li>• Increase online presence/digital access to promote heritage and encourage participation.</li> <li>• Utilise location in wider Black Country and West Midlands to unlock collaboration in wider initiatives, plans and projects.</li> <li>• Leverage UNESCO Geopark status in initiatives for promotion and development of initiatives</li> <li>• Utilise heritage in the recovery from Covid-19 to create jobs and promote activities and green spaces to promote health and wellbeing</li> <li>• Project development around wider cultural events e.g. Commonwealth Games Birmingham 2022, British Art Show in Wolverhampton in 2022.</li> <li>• Project development aligned with external initiatives e.g. Big Local Palfrey and Mossley, Creative Black Country etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some built heritage in poor state which will continue to deteriorate if remaining unoccupied.</li> <li>• Lack of maintenance of historic buildings in private ownership.</li> <li>• Heritage can be seen as a barrier to regeneration and development.</li> <li>• Loss of appeal of some green spaces and urban areas for recreation and leisure.</li> <li>• Non-heritage projects can take precedence for investment, funding and resources.</li> <li>• Post Covid-19 uncertainty for the future of historic areas, e.g. high streets, and how people will want to engage with their environments.</li> <li>• Lack of clarity of the benefits of heritage projects, resulting in insufficient public support.</li> <li>• Current funding and resources are time limited.</li> <li>• Significant external funding and capacity requirements.</li> <li>• Potential loss of local heritage skills e.g. leather working.</li> <li>• Loss of social history record if projects not developed and funded.</li> </ul>



# PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

## Policy Context

The Heritage Strategy forms part of a group of policy and guidance documents that together will shape the Borough over the coming years. **Walsall Council's Corporate Plan 2021-2022** highlights regeneration as the key to future prosperity tackling inequalities and building resilient communities. The vision is to see that *'inequalities are reduced and potential is maximised'*. The aims and values of the Plan will be used as a 'golden thread' throughout further strategies and key documents. Current knowledge and further consultation with communities will help to shape how the Council meets their needs to reduce inequality and maximise their potential. The Heritage Strategy and Action Plan will support delivery of the vision within the Corporate Plan 2021-2022 and future visions and objectives.

Reducing inequalities is at the heart of the **Walsall Plan: Our Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2020** (and the **Walsall Plan Refresh 2019-21**). 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.

Since the declaration of the climate change emergency in 2019, Walsall Council have developed a **Climate Change Action Plan** to become greener and more energy efficient. A steering group has been formed and action plan developed to help Walsall become a net zero carbon authority by 2050.

**Walsall Town Centre Masterplan 2019**, supported by the **Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan 2019** provides a vision for investment and transformational change in the town centre over the next 15 to 20 years through the strengthening of the cultural offer, supporting businesses, increasing employment opportunities, conserving, enhancing and reusing heritage assets, and transforming the experience and perception of Walsall for all who live, work, shop, visit and invest in the town.

This extends across the Borough, with existing plans outlining the role of areas to meet current and future needs, such as the Site Allocation Document 2019. Visioning work for specific areas is currently underway, including the Love Willenhall Masterplan focussing on the future of the town aiming to become a more vibrant, healthy and prosperous community.

Heritage has the potential to make a significant and long-term contribution to the aims and objectives in these plans, among many others for the Borough and the wider region.



# PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

## Recent Research

***‘ The most important finding is that there is no dispute about the positive social impact of participation in culture and sport.’***

**Changing Lives: the social impact of participation in culture and sport. DCMS<sup>21</sup>**

An inquiry in May 2019 by the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee (DCMS) revealed and showcased evidence that the impact of culture and sport on positive outcomes in health, education, criminal justice and urban regeneration.



***‘ Cultural participation can help to deliver formal educational outcomes, including raised attainment and greater likelihood of going on to further and higher education... Engagement in the arts can also help children to develop ‘ soft skills’ including amongst children with special educational needs. On an individual level the impact can be transformative. Exposure to culture within the education system can also broaden children’s horizons and extend opportunities.’***

**Changing Lives: the social impact of participation in culture and sport. DCMS<sup>22</sup>**

The same study also highlighted the social, educational and developmental benefits that engagement with cultural and heritage activity can have on children and young people.

***‘ Art and culture contributes £10.6 billion to the UK economy...Arts and culture help tackle social injustice. Theatres, museums, galleries and libraries are the beating heart of our towns and cities. Not only do they bring prosperity, they bring communities together and make life worth living... Our creative industries are successful throughout the world.’***

**Why Art and Culture Matters. Arts Council England<sup>23</sup>**

Based on extensive research, Arts Council England pulled together this ‘elevator pitch’ to show the value of art and culture to individuals, communities and society as a whole, and for the economy, environment, health and wellbeing.

# PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

***‘ The UK technology and cultural sectors make the ultimate power couple...Culture and technology can work together to drive audience engagement, boost the capability of cultural organisations and unleash the creative potential of technology.’***

**Culture is Digital Executive Summary. DCMS<sup>24</sup>**

Born out of the Government’s Culture White Paper, Culture is Digital reviews the digitisation of our public collections and enhances the online cultural presence. It showcases innovative projects, highlighting the extraordinary collaborations between cultural and digital pioneers and makes a case for our future alongside technology.

***‘ Engaging with or living near heritage is associated with higher life satisfaction and quality of life. The research highlighted the therapeutic effects of historic landscapes and ‘ blue’ and ‘ green’ spaces (such as canals, rivers, and historic parks), and the importance of shared identity and connection’***

**Heritage, Health and Wellbeing. The Heritage Alliance<sup>25</sup>**

Published in September 2020, this report from the Heritage Alliance showcases over 30 case studies covering the breadth of the sector, from yoga to historic houses, to a group of disabled adults empowered to put on a club night at Alexandra Palace. Published during the Covid-19 pandemic, since which individuals have been more focused than ever on their health and wellbeing, the report came at a timely moment to demonstrate the possibilities for heritage organisations and projects to support wellbeing.

***‘ Access to parks and greenspaces enhance physical health, mental wellbeing and life satisfaction...Parks can create important opportunities for social integration, community engagement, highlight inequalities in society, enable people to connect with nature, which enhances their sense of wellbeing...Parks and greenspaces have economic benefits’***

**Space to Thrive Report, NLHF<sup>26</sup>**

Conducted in January 2020, the Space to Thrive report is a rapid evidence review of the benefits parks and green spaces have for people and communities. It outlines the key benefits our natural spaces have on our health and wellbeing, and recommends how they should be seen as part of the social infrastructure, and managed to enhance our connections with nature.

***‘ Human activity has shaped the landscape, forming the foundations of regional and local identity and helping to reflect the diversity that exists in shared culture and natural heritage.’***

**Heritage and the Environment, Historic England<sup>27</sup>**

Heritage and the Environment includes recent research findings and past pieces demonstrating the importance of our knowledge of England’s heritage and relationship with the natural and built environment as invaluable for future generations. It evidences how the reuse of historic buildings and re-establishment of historic landscapes can help mitigate climate change.





# PART TWO: DELIVERING THE CHANGE



# PART TWO: DELIVERING THE CHANGE

## Vision and Ethos

Like many places, Walsall needs assistance in unlocking its currently underutilised potential. Heritage is a proven driver for change (see Part One) and has intrinsic value for people and place. Increased engagement with heritage can better connect communities and stimulate social and economic regeneration. Increased engagement with intangible heritage can better connect communities and stimulate social and economic regeneration. There is a clear opportunity for Walsall's diverse communities to support its future. Furthermore, appreciation of heritage assets increases sense of place and its value, resulting in safeguarded, environmentally sustainable assets.

The Walsall Heritage Strategy provides a vision for the next 5 years and beyond. It sets out a framework that all of us can use to ensure that heritage plays an active role in the regeneration of the Borough and empowers communities.



# PART TWO: DELIVERING THE CHANGE

## VISION

This Strategy will:

***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.***

## ETHOS

In delivering this Vision and Strategy we will:

- 1. Work in partnership with communities, the third sector, and public and private sector partners within and outside of the Borough to deliver the Strategy by sharing knowledge, resources, skills and experience;***
- 2. Through a process of co-creation, pilot new ways of working with communities to identify, design and deliver projects and initiative that will contribute to a more sustainable future;***
- 3. Listen to and hear what our communities and places, across the Borough, want and aspire to;***
- 4. Actively invite and listen to people to encourage participation and spread the benefits of engagement with heritage, moving beyond traditional audiences;***
- 5. Facilitate others to develop and deliver their ideas and priorities; and***
- 6. Remain flexible and responsive to changing region, national and global agendas to ensure the Strategy remains relevant and realistic.***

# PART TWO: DELIVERING THE CHANGE

## OBJECTIVES

In achieving this vision, we will focus on four key objectives:

**1. Quality of life and wellbeing**

**2. Sense of place and celebration**

**3. Climate change**

**4. Building resilience**

These objectives and key supporting actions for Walsall Council are set out on the following pages:

### Objective 1: QUALITY OF LIFE AND WELLBEING

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

**a) Embedding health and wellbeing outcomes at the heart of all heritage and conservation projects and programmes.**

**b) Supporting and driving regeneration initiatives across the Borough to improve economic activity and outcomes.**

**c) Prioritising interventions in communities with the greatest needs.**

**d) Supporting in delivering skills, education and learning opportunities.**

**e) Enabling active and inclusive volunteering across the Borough.**

**Key Walsall Council actions to support this objective include:**

- Supporting the creation of a volunteer programme and cohort to support all aspects of the Borough's built, natural, archaeological and intangible cultural heritage.
- Prioritising the delivery of public, private and third sector heritage opportunities in key disadvantaged or marginalised communities enhancing diversity and inclusion (see Heritage Opportunity Register in Objective 2).
- Strengthening support for the delivery of the Strategy by developing existing and investigating further opportunities for formalised coordination of volunteer, health and wellbeing, skills and life-long learning activities through heritage themes, sites and collections.

# PART TWO: DELIVERING THE CHANGE

## Objective 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 by:

- a) Safeguarding and prioritising all aspects of Walsall's diverse natural, built and archaeological heritage.
- b) Focussing on overcoming cultural, social and physical barriers to celebrating and accessing heritage, in all its forms.
- c) Actively using Walsall's heritage when promoting and celebrating Walsall as a place to live work and invest.
- d) Embedding heritage into the heart of Walsall's and the wider Back Country's tourism and day visitor offer.
- e) Working with a broad range of partners to reveal, explore and celebrate the many histories of Walsall's diverse communities.
- f) Attracting and engaging with a diverse range of audiences from within and outside the Borough in a ways that reflect its creative spirit.

**Key Walsall Council actions to support this objective include:**

- Undertaking an Accessibility Review of Walsall Council's heritage assets and services to identify and address cultural, social and physical barriers.
- Updating and maintaining all Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans and update and promote the Local List.
- Creating a "Heritage Opportunity Register" identifying assets at risk and those with opportunities to be enhanced, addressing all aspects of the Borough's heritage.
- Investigating opportunities to explore new ways of promoting heritage and activities as part of the new Walsall Proud Transformation programme, in partnership with organisations and by utilising community content sharing i.e. social media campaigns.
- Investigating and identifying opportunities to create an annual events calendar including a heritage celebration day and/or series of events.



# PART TWO: DELIVERING THE CHANGE

## Objective 3: CLIMATE CHANGE

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

- a) **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.**
- b) **Promoting the sustainable adaptation and maintenance of historic buildings to address climate change and mitigate against predicted impacts.**
- c) **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.**

**Key Walsall Council actions to support this objective include:**

- Supporting the development of a guidance and support 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.



# PART TWO: DELIVERING THE CHANGE

## Objective 4: BUILDING RESILIENCE

Create and sustain a thriving and inclusive heritage sector founded on the principles of collaboration and partnership by:

- a) Providing the opportunity for all stakeholders to contribute to the future of the Borough's heritage including council services, commercial, third and private sectors.
- b) Publicising the value of heritage for people's health, wellbeing and economic future.
- c) Supporting heritage-focussed organisations, projects and initiatives.
- d) Promoting best practice and achievements in the heritage sector.

**Key Walsall Council actions to support this objective include:**

- Supporting the establishment and maintenance of a Heritage Forum bringing together a wide range of stakeholders and partners to support the delivery of the Strategy.
- Supporting, seeking funding and investigating possible resource in creating a 'Matchmaking and Funding Opportunities Guide' to provide connections between professionals and organisations that require support, conservation, funding, organisational and other technical support to communities and partners.
- Embedding the Heritage Strategy into future iterations of Walsall Council's Corporate Plan.
- Working with external partners such as the Association of Independent Museums, Historic England, Heritage Trust Network etc. to provide training, support and guidance to voluntary and charitable organisations supporting Walsall's heritage.
- Supporting local partners to develop projects, funding applications and capacity.



# PART TWO: DELIVERING THE CHANGE

## **Governance and Delivery**

Walsall Council has developed this Strategy through engagement with stakeholders and community representatives to ensure that it is as relevant and inclusive as possible. The Council will play a key role in supporting the delivery of many projects and support the day-to-day management and review of project progress. The Council will continue to work with communities, stakeholders and the private sector to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to share and take part in our heritage.

**This Strategy is the foundation from which future projects will develop.**

It does not seek to set out every project and programme that will be delivered over the coming years. It provides a framework for partners from the public, private, volunteer, charitable sectors, and of course, people and communities to work within and around. Future work to achieve our collective goals will be undertaken collaboratively with co-creation at its heart so we can all be involved in the identification, development, delivery and monitoring of the Strategy and future projects.

To ensure this happens, the appropriate infrastructure will be put in place, including:

### **Heritage Forum**

A Heritage Forum, made up of a wide range of stakeholders and partners, helping to steer and support the delivery of the Strategy. It will provide a network of support and enable members to discuss, share information and skills. It will promote, support, develop and represent the interest of the forum members and encourage contribution and co-operation and develop partnerships between forum members. It will promote access to heritage for everyone in the Borough and identify funding opportunities to benefit heritage projects, as well as be a key facilitator in co-designing projects with the people of Walsall.

### **Oversight and Management**

Walsall Council and the Heritage Forum will provide oversight and direction to projects and facilitate the widespread participation in the Strategy with the support of the Heritage Programmes Officer. The Heritage Forum will help to review progress on an annual basis and drive the overall momentum and direction of the Strategy. Skills and resources within the Heritage Forum, Walsall Council, external stakeholders, private sector and community members will be utilised in the delivery of the Strategy.





# PART TWO: DELIVERING THE CHANGE

## Capacity and Resourcing

Whilst Walsall has recently been seeing continued investment, we must continue to pool knowledge and resources in order to deliver the Strategy. This includes financial resources, staffing, volunteers and experience. Funding opportunities should continue to be sought and less experienced organisations should be supported by the more experienced. This will be facilitated by Walsall Council, supported by the Heritage Forum, and publicised through the Matchmaking and Funding Opportunities Guide.

There have been significant capacity issues right across the heritage sector including the reduction in core funding and limited dedicated roles to deliver heritage. In response to this, Walsall Council has appointed a Heritage Programme Officer to support in the delivery of heritage projects, and a Conservation Officer to support the management of our built heritage. Two years ago the Council created the Healthy Spaces team to combine Sports and Greenspaces development, leading to greater emphasis on the importance of Green spaces to the health agenda. This team continues to work closely with the voluntary sector to assist in the delivery of high quality green spaces whilst concentrating on improving physical activity and mental health. The Council's Programme Management service has been developed to provide expert external funding management, support and advice. Supported by Walsall Council, the One Walsall service is developing capacity across third sector organisations to support communities across the Borough.

Whilst not all initiatives will be strictly 'heritage', linking heritage projects to Walsall's economic, environmental and community projects will broaden the resources and will benefit multiple sectors, helping to deliver well rounded projects and a more sustainable future.

Private sector investment will be critical to Walsall's future and the future of its heritage. Current land values and returns from investment in development activity in the borough are not strong and consequently there is limited capacity to deliver sensitive, high-quality development for heritage assets. On the converse of this, it is recognised that a high-quality historic environment can drive up land values, rental levels and investment returns. To unlock this cycle, Walsall Council will work with public and private sector partners to leverage investment into the Borough, seeing opportunities to address the conservation deficit and ultimately deliver a high-quality environment that benefits all partners and communities.

We currently have an existing volunteer sector and a number of societies, interest groups and community groups working on many successful projects. Along with the benefits volunteering brings to the individuals themselves, this is a resource that can be expanded and drawn upon to share knowledge and experience and to help deliver future initiatives.

Further capacity and greater collaboration is required to drive the success of the Heritage Strategy and meet Walsall Council's Corporate Plan priorities. This reveals opportunities to work with local businesses, nature conservation organisations, community and arts organisations, and school and colleges, to increase our capacity whilst benefitting all involved.



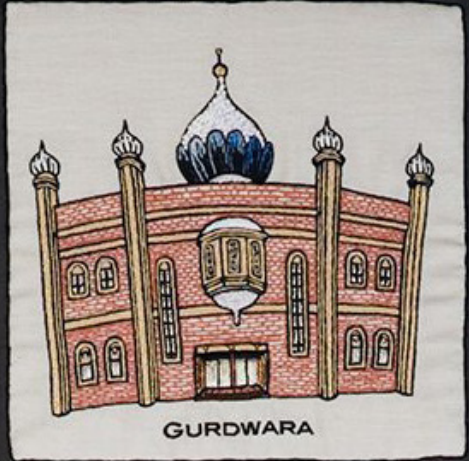
## PART TWO: DELIVERING THE CHANGE



### Measuring Success

Over the next 5 years, to ensure the aims of our Strategy are achieved, a key part of the delivery will be the monitoring and measuring of its achievements. As the Action Plan is implemented and subsequently developed, project outcomes and the associated monitoring framework will be established to measure achievement. Due to the breadth of project type, scale and delivery agency, data types will be incorporated as appropriate to respective projects' Key Performance Indicators. The overall monitoring will be administered by the Walsall Council Heritage Programme Officer and Working Group, supported by the Heritage Forum, with output made available in accessible ways.

A brief annual publication will be produced to report on the overall progress of the Strategy and its programmes and to propose any modifications or adjustments to the Strategy. This will enable all stakeholders and the public to see how the Strategy is taking effect, measures of success, and to raise awareness of the developing heritage sector in Walsall to encourage and open up opportunities for people to become involved in upcoming projects.



Beverley Cooke Jas Pahal Iris Richardson Bimla Kaur Dalbir Kaur



Wilenhall

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All documents can be accessed via [go.walsall.gov.uk](https://www.go.walsall.gov.uk)



**Walsall Council**



# Walsall Heritage Strategy

2021-2026



Walsall Council



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