

HERITAGE LED PLACE-SHAPING

1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared by the Historic Environment Stakeholder Group's Place-Shaping subgroup. The subgroup was formed as a 'task and finish group' last year and tasked with developing heritage led parameters for placemaking in NI. The following report was created as a result of regular meetings, input and sharing of resources within the Place-Shaping subgroup along with feedback received from the wider Historic Environment Stakeholder Group. The shared documents have been included in the resources at the end of the report.

A key focus of the group was the current work being undertaken in Downpatrick by DfC/SIB using the MAG Living High Streets Craft Kit. There is some excellent work happening and the placemaking subgroup looked to ways of enhancing the role of heritage rather than duplicating current models.

For more information including the subgroup's Terms of Reference please visit:

<https://niheritagedelivers.org/working-groups/placemaking/>

The Place Shaping Group members are:

- Kerrie Sweeney, Chair (Maritime Belfast)
- Leah O'Neill (Northern Ireland Environment Link)
- Roisin Wilmott (Royal Town Planning Institute)
- Helen Quigley (Inner City Trust and Heritage Trust Network)
- Brian Johnston (Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council)
- Paul Mullan (National Lottery Heritage Fund)
- Jim O'Hagan (Libraries NI)
- Liz Steele (Tourism NI)
- Sarah McNamee (Mid Ulster District Council, Institute of Historic Building Conservation)
- Shane Quinn (Belfast Buildings Trust and Heritage Trust Network)
- Neil Galway (Queen's University Belfast)
- Stephen Scarth (Public Records Office NI)
- Robert Lister (Alistair Coey and Royal Society of Ulster Architects)

2. BACKGROUND

Historic environments play an important role in giving local places their character and a sense of place identity, supporting our well-being, and promoting economic growth and community cohesion. As such, it is crucial that they are understood, valued, protected, and made accessible to current and future generations.

Since the pandemic, there has been a renewed interest in the practices of 'place shaping' particularly in relation to urban localities. This has been in response to decreasing footfall and increasing empty retail units across our high streets and town centres. However, it is also a response to the experience of people during pandemic lockdowns as local communities stayed close to home and so rediscovered and utilised their local 'places'. By adopting collaborative and integrated approaches, places can also reduce carbon footprint through transport, housing, recycling and greening strategies. **Local places include our - streets, villages, towns, and cities. These can be shaped by local people so that they are relevant, sustainable and thrive.**

Much has been written about place-shaping and the purpose of this paper is not to reinvent what is already out there. For further reading, we have listed several exemplars of best practice guides linked to several case studies (see reference section). Of relevance is the Living High Streets Craft Kit 2022, which is currently being piloted by the Department for Communities in Downpatrick. At the heart of this approach, is co-producing local places with local people, a concept that we fully endorse. Other key, common ingredients of good places include:

- Strong Vision
- Walkable/cyclable neighbourhoods
- Green/blue spaces
- Accessible local services
- Low carbon footprint
- Affordable housing
- Skilled jobs, including traditional 'craft' skills
- Public Transport
- Community engagement
- Cross sectoral and department working
- Events, festivals and cultural programming
- Branding
- Cultural spaces
- Play
- Meanwhile uses
- Sense of place/ understanding place

This paper has been produced to highlight how **best practice place-shaping models can be further strengthened by applying a heritage lens from start to finish**. By adopting this approach, we safeguard our heritage and strengthen local regeneration initiatives. **Heritage delivers and everyone wins.**

3. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY HERITAGE AND HERITAGE LED PLACE-SHAPING?

'Heritage' is that which has been inherited by us from past generations. Places are shaped by both tangible heritage - landscapes, archaeological sites and monuments, historic buildings, industrial sites, artefacts, historic gardens, and other elements of our historic environment; and 'intangible' heritage – the knowledge and traditions inherited from previous generations and passed on to our descendants, including oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge about nature and the universe and traditional crafts¹.

To maintain place-identities it is important that both **tangible and intangible heritage continue to play a future role in shaping and connecting people to place.**

Placemaking and place-shaping are participatory processes for ensuring that the future of our places harnesses the ideas and assets of the people who use them. It can involve public space, streets, neighbourhoods, villages, towns, and even whole cities.

We prefer place-shaping because it makes clear that most of our places already exist. We are not making something out of nothing but shaping what's there in ways that improve everyone's quality of life.

Heritage led place-shaping is about this process prioritising the things that already help to define our places. It promotes that place-shaping truly occurs when people understand and value the historic significance of their places. It happens when:

- we reuse existing buildings for modern uses,
- we meaningfully use our places' cultural and social stories, especially to guide future decisions and new developments,
- we do these things in a connected way to make regeneration relevant for people.

Doing this strengthens local relationships and our personal connection to a place. It stimulates pride and community cohesion. Embracing heritage-led place-shaping creates more attractive and sustainable places for the future.

¹ <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding/good-practice-guidance/intangible-cultural-heritage-guidance>

4. WHY SHOULD WE ADOPT A HERITAGE-LED APPROACH TO PLACE-SHAPING?

- ✓ **Sense of Place** – protecting and celebrating local heritage informs place identity, rooted in its past as it looks to the future. A good question to ask is ‘what time is this place?’.
- ✓ **Co-design and local buy-in** – heritage is strengthened if it is shared, it enables people from different backgrounds to come together. It allows conversations to take place e.g., telling stories and sharing memories.
- ✓ **Unlocking innovation and ideas** – tangible and intangible quality of the past inspires creativity and innovation, underpinning key strategies such as 10X². Heritage creates a place of substance, often attracting culture, arts, and creative industries. Using heritage we can reshape places and look forward.
- ✓ **Community building & wellbeing** – heritage stimulates local pride and community cohesion. Heritage connects local people to one another, physically through places and emotionally through stories.
- ✓ **Environmental Sustainability** – the use and reuse of heritage buildings contributes to carbon targets.
- ✓ **Economic** – places with a rich heritage attract more users, including visitors and residents unlocking private sector investment and job creation. (twice as much and twice as long)
- ✓ **Funding** – places with a strong heritage dimension can attract significant funding e.g., National Lottery Heritage Fund is one of the largest funders in Northern Ireland along with philanthropic funders and social loan capital. Whilst this should not replace the requirement on public sector agencies to fund heritage led place-shaping, these funds can create opportunities to lever additional support cross departmental working aligned to the Programme for Government.

5. WHO SHOULD ADOPT A HERITAGE-LED APPROACH TO PLACE-SHAPING?

Place-shaping takes place at many different levels, and no one size fits all. In most instances, local councils and government departments will be involved often from a funding and regeneration perspective. A key basis is a cross-sector approach. It is important that the case for a heritage-led approach is captured at strategic levels and subsequently cascades down as initiatives are delivered on the ground. Community plans and local regeneration strategies should at a minimum include ‘**Heritage Intent**’ statements to support policy and investment decisions. Equally many of the steps identified in this paper can be adopted by developers and local community groups – they can be scaled up or down depending on the size and complexity of the area.

6. HERITAGE-LED PLACE-SHAPING – KEY STEPS

The following diagram has been adapted from the Living High Streets Craft Kit 2022. By applying a heritage lens to each of the steps in the model, we can see how heritage supports and contributes significantly to the overall process and positive outcomes.

In summary,

- From the outset, heritage interests should be part of a locally representative ‘place’ team.
- Tangible and intangible heritage should be documented through audits and public engagement.
- Mapping places provides a way of identifying place identity and defining areas.
- Match and ignite local needs with heritage priorities e.g., reuse of vacant heritage buildings.
- Co-develop, activate and animate the ‘place’ story.
- Build capacity, heritage skills and knowledge.
- Monitor specific heritage indicators and celebrate success.

² 10x Economy: An Economic Vision was published by the Department for the Economy in May 2021. The Vision is guided by the 10x objectives, grouped into three pillars of activity: innovation, inclusive growth and sustainability. Place shaping is strongly referenced [Link](#)

PLACE

1. Walk the place – understand the local heritage and what is important to people – this is an opportunity to involve others e.g. schools
2. Build a picture of the area using historic and modern maps – see reference section
3. Conduct a local heritage audit – see reference section for toolkit
4. Use photos – old + new to understand past + present
5. Develop a place archive – books, photos, clippings physical + on-line. Note the online resource will be a useful tool now and in the future

PEOPLE

1. Involve heritage officers, HED from the outset
2. Engage local museums, libraries, schools
3. Reach out to people that have historical knowledge - historical groups and local historians
4. Identify support bodies e.g. BBPT, AHF, NLHF, NIEL- many can offer further guidance
5. Develop capacity and skills to better understand heritage e.g. where and how to access archives

OUTCOMES

1. Improved heritage
2. Sense of pride
3. Community cohesion
4. Wellbeing
5. Stronger sense of place
6. Attractive place to live, work and visit

IMAGINING

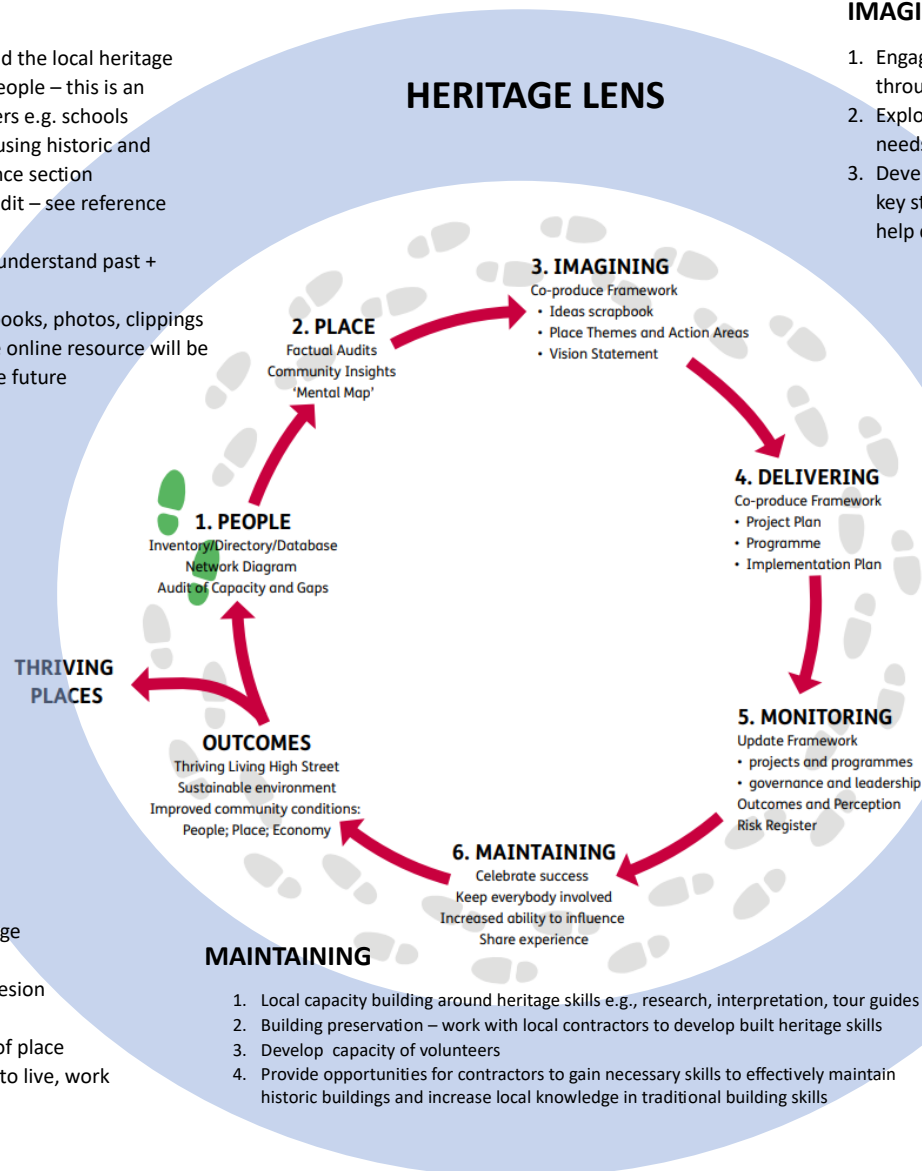
1. Engage the public to capture local stories e.g. through schools, care homes, local papers
2. Explore uses for heritage buildings aligned to needs of the community – match the needs
3. Develop a story plan for the place – identifying the key stories which can influence sense of place and help determine a strong brand

DELIVERING

1. Prioritise reuse of heritage buildings
2. Develop and deliver a vacant / meanwhile use strategy for heritage buildings
3. Protect + connect + interpret local heritage e.g. heritage trails / design guidelines / artwork
4. Develop heritage engagement programme – local talks, events
5. Establish/grow Volunteer programme.
6. Place-shaping plans should respond to area
7. Ensure new interventions respond to and be sympathetic to area's historic built environment – respecting scale, materials and sense of place

MONITORING

1. Reduce number of listed buildings 'At Risk'
2. Vacancy rates of heritage buildings
3. Floor space in use
4. Number of participants engaged in heritage activity / no. of visitors
5. Level of investment in heritage assets
6. Digital archive content and usage
7. Take a long-term view



7. Critical success factors /recommendations

Strategic Planning

It is important that the case for a heritage-led approach is captured at a strategic level within government and local councils.

Recommendation: Community plans and local regeneration strategies should, at a minimum, include 'Heritage Intent' statements to support policy and investment decisions. Local authority planning officers should approach proposed plans through a heritage lens and consider the local historic built environment and sense of place. The Heritage Intent statement would strengthen the role of heritage in planning and decision making.

Funding

In the current climate pressures on public funding are likely to continue for the foreseeable future. There is a need to work smarter. Place-based approaches allow local priorities to be identified across a range of areas and consolidated into a single plan for action. This provides an opportunity to align different pots of funding which in turn creates critical mass and leverage. There are also some key policy decisions required regarding VAT on repair costs of listed buildings along with information and advice on all schemes that could support heritage restoration such as Building Premises Renovation Allowance and Heritage Enterprise Fund (NLHF).

Recommendation: Councils/government should incentivise and stimulate heritage led approaches including provision of catalyst funding to support places to develop and deliver plans in order to unlock and align funding opportunities. A heritage-led approach should be part of the funding criteria (like Village Catalyst Programme). A repeal of VAT on repair and reuse of listed buildings is required.

Resources

Recommendation: All councils should employ a designated heritage officer – these officers can play a key role in fulfilling the potential of heritage across the council area and unlocking many of the benefits identified above. These posts should work across community development, regeneration, and planning teams.

Enhance and support the role of heritage sectoral bodies.

Data and Information

Recommendation: Sharing and capturing standardised knowledge and data should be encouraged across a network of place-shaping projects similar to Main Street America model or EU Hub-In.

8. General resources

Conservation Principles, Historic Environment Division, Department for Communities	https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/communities/dfc-conversation-principles-guidance-sustainable-management.pdf
Creating Places for People: the RIAI Town and Village Toolkit	https://www.riai.ie/whats-on/news/riai-launches-town-and-village-toolkit
Fit for the Future - an environmental sustainability network.	Fit for the Future
Heritage Enabled Regeneration in Towns, Architectural Heritage Fund and Department for Communities:	https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/heritage-enabled-regeneration-towns
Heritage-Led Tourism, Tourism NI	A Prospectus for Change. Heritage-Led Tourism in NI. Tourism NI.
Inspiring Creativity, Heritage & The Creative Industries. A Heritage Alliance Report	https://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/InspiringCreativity_THAreport.pdf
Investing in Creative Delivery – A report from the Culture, Arts and Heritage Taskforce	https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/investing-creative-delivery-report-culture-arts-heritage-strategy-taskforce
Living High Streets Craft Kit Department for Communities, Ministerial Advisory Group	https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/mag-living-high-streets-craft-kit
NI Heritage Delivers – Heritage news, events, publications and resources	https://niheritagedelivers.org
Open High Streets, Heritage Trust Network	Open High Streets: Transforming Places Through Heritage - Heritage Trust Network
Principles of Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment in the UK, IHBC	https://ihbc.org.uk/brighton2021/resources/Principles-of-CHIA-V2%5B4%5D.pdf
Quick guide to conservation, Institute of Historic Building Skills	https://selfstarter.ihbc.org.uk/index.html
Retrofit – mustn't ignore tragic health impact of damp and mould, Architects Journal	https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/opinion/retrofit-mustnt-ignore-the-tragic-health-impacts-of-damp-and-mould
The Heritage Alliance	https://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/blog/heritage-led-regeneration-and-cultural-placemaking/
The Value of Heritage, All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Value of Heritage, Places and People	The Value of Heritage: First Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Conservation, Places & People
Treasure the Past Enrich the Future, Historic Environment Division, Department for Communities	https://niheritagedelivers.org/publications/treasure-the-past-enrich-the-future/
Walkability, Accessibility and Health. Evidence supporting the benefits of walkable neighbourhoods. The Prince's Foundation	https://princes-foundation.org/walkability-accessibility-health-report

Heritage audit guidance and resources

Department for Communities NI Heritage Statistics document	https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/ni-heritage-statistics-recorded-31-march-2019
Historic England guidance on how to undertake Historic Area Assessments	https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/understanding-place-historic-area-assessments/heag146-understanding-place-haa/
Historic Environment Division – How to complete a Heritage Asset Audit	https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/communities/heritage-asset-report-how-to-complete-heritage-audit.PDF
Historic Environment Division DfC - Heritage Map viewer	https://dfcgis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=6887ca0873b446e39d2f82c80c8a9337
PRONI archives and research	https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/public-record-office-northern-ireland-proni
Public Records Office NI – historic map viewer	https://apps.spatialni.gov.uk/PRONIApplication/
Ulster Architectural Heritage - Hands on Heritage booklets on How to Read, Record and Research Heritage:	https://www.handsonheritage-ni.org.uk/heritage-how-to-guides/

Examples of plans including heritage

Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council: Armagh Place Plan	https://www.armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk/resident/armagh-place-plan/
Derry Heritage Plan	2022 - 2027

Examples of Heritage regeneration

Successful Heritage Regeneration Programme Has Revived Historic Towns Across England:	https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/heritage-regeneration-programme-revives-historic-towns/
TOP 5 URBAN REGENERATION HOTSPOTS IN THE UK 2023:	https://sevencapital.com/uk-property-investment/urban-regeneration-hotspots-uk/
Atlas of Heritage-led Regeneration - case studies showing how historic urban areas can be regenerated through entrepreneurship and innovation	Home - HUB-IN Atlas (hubin-project.eu)
Heritage-led regeneration in 5 Irish Towns	https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/Ballybrilliant.pdf

Potential sources of funding

Architectural Heritage Fund	https://ahfund.org.uk/grants/northern-ireland/
Historic environment Funding & Grants	https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/historic-environment/historic-environment-funding-grants
National Lottery Heritage Fund	https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/

Other resources

HED, DfC: Climate Change risk assessment for historic building owners	https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/climate-change-risk-assessment-historic-building-owners
HED, DfC: Conservation Principles	https://niheritagedelivers.org/publications/conservation-principles-guidance/
Historic England: Placemaking and regeneration	https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/planning/place-making-and-regeneration/
Historic England: Design in the Historic Environment	https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/planning/design-in-the-historic-environment-report/
Historic England: Places Strategy	https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/planning/he-places-strategy-2019/
Historic England: Understanding Places. Historic Area Assessments	https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/understanding-place-historic-area-assessments/
Historic England: Vacant Historic Buildings	https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/vacanthistoricbuildings/
All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Conservation, People and Places	https://conservationplacespeople.appg.info/resources/APPF-First-Report---The-Value-of-Heritage-011222.pdf
Heritage Trust Network: Open High Streets. Transforming Places through Heritage	https://www.heritagetrustnetwork.org.uk/launch-of-open-high-streets-transforming-places-through-heritage/
People make places. Place Commission, Glasgow City Council	https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=58490&p=0
Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) Plan the World we Need	https://www.rtpi.org.uk/new/our-campaigns/plan-the-world-we-need/plan-the-world-we-need-research-paper-2020-report/
Sustainable Investment Tool for the built environment. Developed through the Our Place in Time, Built Heritage Investment Group and supporting the strategy for Scotland's historic environment - Our Past, Our Future	Visualising the Potential for Scotland's Buildings and Heritage: https://www.sitool.co.uk/