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Whose High Streets? Exploring the impact of Heritage Action Zones on local voluntary sector organisations in terms of organisational goals, resilience, and environmental sustainability

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Introduction

This paper takes an ethnographic approach to understanding the impact of Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) investment programmes on local voluntary sector organisations who are involved in them, based on three case study places: Coventry; Ramsgate; and Tyldesley. I developed the research questions based on my experiences working with HAZ schemes and other similar schemes in the heritage sector such as Townscape Heritage Initiatives and Landscape Conservation Action Partnerships over the last decade. I was fortunate to be awarded a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) to pursue the project in 2023 through my participation in the Clore Cultural Leadership Fellowship and have enjoyed academic support and supervision in the project from Dr. John Wright of The Centre for Cultural Value (University of Leeds).

Heritage Action Zones were developed by Historic England from 2016 onward, with High Street Heritage Action Zones (HSHAZ) being introduced in 2018.¹ Historic England describes a Heritage Action Zone as:

“an initiative to create economic growth and improve quality of life in places. Working with local people and partners, including local authorities, Historic England is helping to breathe new life into old places that are rich in heritage and full of promise - unlocking their potential and making them more attractive to residents, businesses, tourists and investors. We are doing this through joint-working, grant funding and sharing our skills.”²

Between them HAZ and HSHAZ programmes represent over £100m of public investment in over 80 places around England.³ Having worked with a few of these schemes in and around London I knew that they often had a fascinating range of partners involved in them, including local voluntary sector organisations and volunteer-led societies. I have also learned from experience that time limited programmatic investments like these can often deliver extremely powerful and engaging work, but can struggle to establish a long term legacy of organisational change and knowledge in the groups that work on them and with them. Given that these voluntary sector groups are often hugely important to conserving and advocating for the heritage of our historic places, I set out to learn more about how being involved with HAZ and HSHAZ programmes is affecting these groups.

This paper owes its existence to a great many people, and I wanted to start by thanking them all. Firstly, I am extremely grateful to everyone who participated in my fieldwork and took the time to talk to me about their experience of the case study projects and the places they are passionate about. Thanks also to Rob Lloyd Sweet, Senior Policy Advisor for Places at Historic England, who guided me through the myriad HAZ and HSHAZ programmes to identify my case studies, focussing on these three case study areas where community organisations had played a significant role in shaping and delivering HAZ programmes, and has offered thoughtful reflections and insights at various points. John Wright at The Centre for Cultural Value has acted as academic supervisor for my research and has been a friendly and encouraging presence throughout, a sounding board, an insightful collaborator, and a patient and fastidious editor – thank you! Finally, I’d like to thank the team at Clore Leadership for all their support, and AHRC for funding the project.

¹ Historic England, [£40 Million Government Funding to improve historic high streets](#), October 2018 (Accessed Feb 2020)

² Historic England, [Frequently Asked Questions about High Street Heritage Action Zones](#) (Accessed February 2024)

³ Historic England, [Successful Heritage Regeneration Programme Has Revived Historic Towns Across England](#)

Framing the question – academic literatures on voluntary sector groups, heritage-led regeneration, and sustainability

In this section I'll frame the three key research questions that emerged from my experience of working with or alongside HAZ programmes and then go on to explore published literatures pertinent to them.

Firstly, I want to understand more about the relationship between voluntary sector organisational goals and ambitions for the places they operate in, and the relationship to goals articulated and achieved within HAZ programmes. I know from my own experience in places such as Walworth (London Borough of Southwark) that local amenity societies can be closely involved with bids. They supply knowledge and research that is essential to the sort of granular understandings of places or high streets that underpins HAZ work. What is less clear to me is the interplay between HAZ goals and the goals of these voluntary sector groups, especially given that in many cases local authorities often have a more official role in holding the vision for places, through mechanisms like local plans.⁴ I'm curious about how voluntary sector groups feel that HAZ goals align with and represent their own, both in terms of how projects are conceived and also in terms of what they have achieved.

My second question is around what I have termed the organisational development of these voluntary sector groups, in essence what changes for them organisationally through involvement in HAZ programmes. These groups appear to be an essential part of what Historic England describes, in relation to HAZ programmes, as “the right combination of people, place, and vision [...] to deliver transformational change for people and heritage” and thus understanding what happens to them as a consequence of being involved seems a useful question. They will, after all, still be active advocates for a place after the investment programme concludes.⁵

This second question is framed around three dimensions of civic society activity which were identified as part of a 2020 evidence submission to the DCMS Select Committee by Civic Voice (the national body for civic and amenity societies) on the impact of COVID-19 on civic societies:⁶

- The first dimension of organisational development is profile – how people in local places know what Civic Societies and voluntary sector groups involved in HAZ projects do and how they offer place-based leadership?
- The second dimension is resilience. These voluntary sector groups need resources, be they networks and memberships (to bring in active volunteers) or financial resources (often from membership subscriptions), and they need strategies and approaches to do this. Does involvement in HAZ programmes have an impact on these dimensions of voluntary sector sustainability?
- The third dimension is diversity. Civic Voice's submission cited numerous challenges related to a predominantly retired and aging membership base for civic societies. It seems reasonable to ask, given that HAZ investment comprises public money, if involvement in these programmes has any impact on who is involved in voluntary sector groups?

My third research question is about voluntary sector groups involved in HAZ programmes and their involvement in the growing conversation around environmental sustainability and historic buildings. Historic England's own *Climate Change Strategy* is a key policy document here, and I was curious to

⁴ Planning Inspectorate, [Local Plans: the examination process](#), 2012 (Updated Jan 2024, Accessed Feb 2024)

⁵ Historic England, [Heritage Action Zones: Breathing New Life into Old Places](#) (Accessed Feb 2024)

⁶ Civic Voice, [DCMS Select Committee Evidence Submission](#), 2020 (Accessed Feb 2024)

know how this is percolating into the experience of voluntary sector orgs.⁷ In this context it is important to note that the strategy was published in 2023, after the HAZ schemes in this paper had commenced.

Published literatures relevant to my research questions

This study looks to explore the impact of heritage-led regeneration investment on volunteer-led organisations with an interest in local history or heritage. There are several key strands of literature that can help to account for what is going on within individual case-study project or conversations.

Volunteering to lead: A study of leadership in small, volunteer-led groups undertaken by Nick Ockendon and Mark Hutin for the Institute of Volunteering Research explores a number of concepts which are useful to our question.⁸ Although limited in scope, as the synthesis of six case study investigations, this methodology is appropriate to questions around the functioning of these small groups grounded in specific activities and places.

Ockendon and Hutin highlight the common characteristics of such groups. These include a shared belief in the value of volunteering, specifically highlighting the voluntary nature of activity, as opposed to things groups members were obliged to do, as a driver of enthusiasm and continued commitment.⁹

The other characteristic of volunteer-led groups highlighted by Ockendon and Hutin that is relevant to this paper is their collective conviction of being rooted in the community and serving it in some way, which links directly to my question here about local voluntary sector goals and how they are reflected in HAZ programmes.¹⁰

Volunteering to lead also points to the importance of the specific characteristics and experiences of individuals involved in voluntary sector groups, in particular the consideration of previous professional experience in working with wider networks of stakeholders and organisations as they do in a context of HAZ programmes.¹¹ Whilst these specific experiences are powerful and important in achieving goals for voluntary sector organisations, such leaders are also almost always self-selecting and there is a challenge in supporting such groups to achieve makeup that is representative of their communities.¹²

The work of Fiona Cosson on Irthlingborough Local History Society in Northamptonshire is particularly useful, bringing local history archives and societies into the frame of local and personal politics.¹³ In Irthlingborough, Cosson finds the collection of local history archives and the impulse to collect local history materials in direct correlation to wider processes of change, specifically deindustrialisation, in the town with the collapse of the boot and shoe industry there from the 1970s onward.¹⁴ Similar conditions prevail across our case-study area: In the collapse of multiple

⁷ Historic England, [Our Climate Change Strategy](#), (Accessed Feb 2024)

⁸ Ockendon, Nick and Hutin, Mark. *Volunteering to lead: A study of leadership in small, volunteer-led groups*. The Institute for Volunteering Research, 2008. (Accessed Feb 2024)

⁹ Ibid. p.18

¹⁰ Ibid. p.20

¹¹ Ibid. p.29

¹² Ibid. p.39

¹³ Cosson, Fiona (2017) The small politics of everyday life: local history society archives and the production of public histories, *Archives and Records*, 38:1, 45-60, DOI: 10.1080/23257962.2016.1269646

¹⁴ Ibid. p.49

manufacturing industries in Coventry through the second half of the 20th century.¹⁵ In the decline of collieries around Tyldesley in the same period, and, as documented in a publication produced as part of the town's HAZ project.¹⁶ Similar change can also be traced in both the maritime industries and the North Kent collieries in 20th century Ramsgate.¹⁷

Literature that addresses heritage-led regeneration offer two things: Firstly, models of operation that can help us understand how Heritage Action Zones fit together as constellations of volunteers and professionals, or different types of organisation (volunteer, local government, and private business) working together. Much of this literature takes The United Nation's Education, Social, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)'s declaration on Historic Urban Landscape as its starting point, specifically its emphasis on built and archaeological heritage fostering "economic development and social cohesion in a changing global environment".¹⁸

There is also an emphasis in this strand of literature on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their relationship to heritage-led regeneration.¹⁹ In particular the potential for built heritage to contribute to Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), both of which have clear links to HAZ programmes and goals, is rated as 'Very High'.²⁰ Further, links between urban heritage and Goal 13 (Climate Action, rated 'High') make clear how historic urban centres contain climate adaptation strategies that we can learn from in the present. They also directly reduce emissions through the reuse of buildings rather than more carbon intensive new construction.²¹ These latter arguments are directly paralleled in Historic England's Climate Change Strategy.²²

A 2018 study taking a longitudinal approach to the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI), an antecedent of the Heritage Action Zone, highlights an absence of environmentally conscious approaches in the heritage-led regeneration paradigm at that point, just as HAZ and HSHAZ programmes are developing.²³ The authors further go on to propose a new approach that combines socio-economic and environmental sustainability through active community involvement in a model that addresses and capitalises on the power of strong local traditions and the strength of diverse participation.²⁴

¹⁵ Healey, Michael. "Industrial Decline, Industrial Structure and Large Companies: The Case of Coventry, 1974-1982." *Geography*, vol. 70, no. 4, 1985, pp. 328-38. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40571003>. Accessed 13 Nov. 2023.

¹⁶ Tyldesley Heritage Trail web page (<http://tyldesleyheritagetrail.weebly.com/history.html>) access 10/11/2023

¹⁷ Franklin, Geraint, with Nick Dermott and Allan Brodie. *Ramsgate, The town and its seaside heritage*. Historic England (Liverpool University Press), 2020. p.136

¹⁸ UNESCO, *Declaration on the conservation of historic urban landscapes*, 2005 (Accessed Feb 2024)

¹⁹ For the UN SDGs: *The 17 Goals*, 2015 (Accessed Feb 2024). For links between the 17 SDGs and Heritage Led Regeneration: Lerario, A. 'The Role of Built Heritage for Sustainable Development Goals: From Statement to Action'. *Heritage* 2022, 5, pp.2444-2463 <https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage5030127> (Accessed Feb 2024) pp.2446-2450.

²⁰ Lerario, A. 'The Role of Built Heritage for Sustainable Development Goals: From Statement to Action'. *Heritage* 2022, 5, pp.2444-2463 <https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage5030127> (Accessed Feb 2024) p.2450.

²¹ Ibid. p.2449

²² Historic England, *Our Climate Change Strategy*, (Accessed Feb 2024)

²³ Kalliopi Fouseki & Mariana Nicolau (2018) 'Urban Heritage Dynamics in 'Heritage-Led Regeneration': Towards a Sustainable Lifestyles Approach', *The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice*, 9:3-4, 229-248, DOI: 10.1080/17567505.2018.1539554, p.243.

²⁴ Ibid. p.244.

Methods and approaches

Inspirations

In approaching this research, I wanted to ensure as far as possible that my methods closely reflected the experiences of those involved. I was inspired by the ‘grounded research’ approach developed by Glaser and Strauss, and most recently popularised in the writing of US academic and storyteller Brené Brown, which centres the experience of the research participant.²⁵ My research participants have invested their time and energy in telling me about their places and their work and I want to do justice to that investment.

My questions about the role of voluntary and volunteer-led groups in Heritage Action Zones also chimed with the work of Robert Johnston and Kimberley Marwood on ‘Action Heritage’.²⁶ Heritage Action Zones are conceived to focus the agency and action of local stakeholders on local heritage and the impact it can have and my research questions around this are multivalent. Marwood and Johnston used semi-structured conversations to explore participant agency within three community heritage interventions in South Yorkshire, employing the method to draw out “strong multi-dimensional responses” that also reflected specific experience of place.²⁷

I was also reminded, when settling on these methods, of an important and ongoing conversation around the use of different research and evaluation methods around arts and cultural interventions. The Arts and Humanities Research Council’s 2016 *Understanding the value of Arts & Culture* report questioned the value of “hierarchies of evidence” established at ministerial level, in particular the technocratic way in which research or evaluation methods resemble scientific experiments or randomised control trials are deemed to give the most robust evidence. Given that truly replicating laboratory conditions in our sector is high impossible.²⁸ This has then developed in The Centre for Cultural Value’s 2021 evaluation principles into a commitment to proportionate, robust, and people-centred methods that I wanted to pursue in this research project.²⁹

Identifying Case Study Heritage Action Zones

With that proportionality strongly in mind, I had always envisioned taking a case study approach to understanding the relationships and impacts of HAZ investment at a local level. Indeed, Crossick and Kaszynska highlight the importance of this approach to research and evaluation when it comes to place-based work and understanding the impact of smaller scale cultural interventions within which we might understand HAZ programmes.³⁰

These case study areas were selected in collaboration with Historic England from the 80+ places around England where such zones have been or are being delivered. We focussed on HAZ and HSHAZ programme places where there was an interesting constellation of different voluntary sector groups

²⁵ Brown, Brené, [Trust in Emergence: Grounded Theory and my research process](#), 2012 (Accessed 01/02/2024)

²⁶ Robert Johnston & Kimberley Marwood (2017) *Action heritage: research, communities, social justice*, International Journal of Heritage Studies, 23:9, 816-831, DOI: 10.1080/13527258.2017.1339111

²⁷ Ibid p.819

²⁸ Geoffrey Crossick and Patrycja Kaszynska, [Understanding the value of arts & culture: The AHRC Cultural Value Project](#), Arts and Humanities Research Council, March 2016 (Accessed Jan 2024), p.122

²⁹ Beatriz Garcia and Oliver Mantell, [Evaluation Principles](#), Centre for Cultural Value (University of Leeds), 2021 (Accessed Feb 2022)

³⁰ Geoffrey Crossick and Patrycja Kaszynska, p.85

involved in the programme. It almost goes without saying that in an overall sample of over 80 places, this small study is limited, however, despite this it offers an important and timely opportunity to think about the relationship between this kind of scheme and local voluntary groups.

My previous experience had primarily been with HAZ programmes, and their Townscape Heritage Initiative antecedents, in and around London. I knew from this experience and my own practice that considerations for the research questions, such as voluntary sector engagement or diversity of participants, are quite different in a London context than in other parts of the country and opted to exclude any London places from the research.

The final selection of Coventry, Ramsgate, and Tyldesley allowed for a spread across different regions, covering the South East, Midlands, and the North West, as well as offering insight into coastal places through Ramsgate. The scale of these three different places also offered the potential to understand different local dynamics, covering three different classes in the House of Commons library's Town & City classification, with Tyldesley classed as a 'Small Town', Ramsgate as a 'Large Town' and Coventry in the (slightly unkind-seeming) category of 'Other City'.³¹

HAZ Documents and Evaluations

I've reviewed HAZ bid documents and other reports to nuance and widen the evidence gathered through fieldwork, exploring possible links to themes, specific elements of projects, or particular stakeholders, in a way that my fieldwork would not be able to cover.

Full external evaluation of the HAZ and HSHAZ programme is still live, so it hasn't yet been possible to put my observations in the full context of this wider programme of evaluation yet. Historic England have been able to share some early results based on a set of three surveys, aimed at audiences and those involved in delivering the HSHAZ Cultural Programme and I have linked these two elements of the thematic discussion where relevant.

Fieldwork participants

I approached fieldwork participants directly, having sought suggestions of key people to contact from Historic England. Using the 'snowball' sampling approach I then sought suggestions from these individuals of other people whom I might speak to who could speak to my research questions.³² The result of this approach is that my research participants were all directly involved in HAZ programme work, either as professionals involved in delivery, or in a non-executive capacity through steering groups or Trustee boards of organisations involved in delivery. It isn't possible here, then, to see how HAZ programmes or the questions I'm exploring have 'landed' with those outside of the existing network of individuals with an interest in local heritage.

Further, I noted at a few points during conversations that by virtue of being a researcher looking at the effectiveness of the programmes, and perhaps because of my own social and professional background, participants associated me very closely with Historic England. I am conscious that this may have resulted in a degree of 'putting on a good face for the funder', a pressure I have experienced myself on numerous occasions. In the conversations themselves I attempted to reassure participants of my independence, although there remained at least some concern as to how things would appear in this report.

³¹ Carl Baker, [City & Town Classification of Constituencies & Local Authorities](#), House of Commons Library Research Briefing, June 2018 (Accessed Feb 2024).

³² John Dudovskiy, [Snowball Sampling](#), Business Research Methodology, 2024 (Accessed Feb 2024).

Structured conversations and thematic analysis

In total, I undertook structured conversations with eight participants, some in pairs and some one-to-one. These were successful in unlocking personal experiences of HAZ programmes and how they did or didn't link to the themes in question. The broad structure of the conversations covered:

Theme 1 - Heritage Action Zone investment and local goals to serve and improve places:

- Where are local organisational missions/goals articulated?
- Did these ambitions pre-exist HAZ investment?
- Did new goals in relation to this emerge from the HAZ programme?
- Does it feel like HAZ has helped achieve these goals?

Theme 2 - Impact of HAZ investment on local voluntary sector organisations:

PROFILE

- Was the organisation branded/named in any HAZ events and or other materials/promotion?
- Has the HAZ resulted in more contacts and interest in the org? From whom?
- Has the HAZ prompted any changes to the brand or website?

SUSTAINABILITY/RESILIENCE

- Has HAZ involvement had an impact on membership?
- Has HAZ involvement had an impact on finances?
- Have new plans, strategies, or leadership structures emerged from HAZ involvement?

DIVERSITY

- Has being involved in HAZ changed who is involved with your group?
- Has being involved with HAZ encouraged new thinking/plans to boost diversity and involve different kinds of people?

Theme 3 – Environmental Thinking

- Was there much thinking about the relationship between historic building and environmental sustainability already going on?
- What level of awareness of Historic England's arguments about "the greenest building being one that is already built" etc?
- Have any further plans or campaigns in this area emerged through participating in HAZ?

Theme 4 – Challenges

- Have there been any challenges of working on or with HAZ scheme – (especially as a volunteer-led organisation?)

I covered all the themes in each structured conversation, however in some cases particular questions were less relevant: For example, there was no logical reason to ask about HAZ impact on finances for an un-constituted group without a bank account. My thematic analysis unpacks the learnings from these conversations, allowing for comparison between different HAZ programmes and contextualising responses with the academic literature.

The Case Study Heritage Action Zones

Coventry:

The Coventry Heritage Action Zone was awarded in 2016 and was delivered by a partnership of Historic England, Coventry City Council, The Historic Coventry Trust, Coventry Cathedral, Culture Coventry, The Coventry & Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership, Coventry City of Culture Trust, Coventry University, Coventry Society, Coventry Priory, Medieval Coventry, Coventry City College, Warwickshire College, Mapping Coventry, The Twentieth Century Society, The Prince's Foundation. A further High Street Heritage Action Zone was established in 2018.³³³⁴

Coventry HAZ's stated mission was:

We will boost Coventry's image and prosperity by celebrating our outstanding heritage whilst promoting new investment and development in support of sustainable growth. Using the historic environment as a catalyst, we will strengthen the city's economy and address the social needs of our community. We will transform Coventry through heritage.

In Coventry the HAZ comprised a series of planned projects programme managed by Historic England, with each project lead by one of the partner organisations. The programme was governed through partnership meetings four times a year.

Coventry was well known as a medieval centre before the Blitz of 1940 when much of the historic core was destroyed or seriously damaged. The city centre is based around a post-1945 civic and retail centre, the quality of which is only now beginning to be recognised. Surviving remnants of the medieval city are seen in a number of key designated heritage assets, all of which are on the Heritage at Risk Register such as Lady Herbert's Garden & The Burges conservation area, Cox Street Gate, Swanswell Gate and Whitefriars Gate. Later elements such as the London Road Cemetery Chapels fall within the HAZ area and would benefit from concentrated attention and financial support. Following the publication of [Coventry: Making of a Modern City](#) by Historic England in 2016, interest in the city's post-Blitz heritage has increased. Other than widespread affection for the new Cathedral, the richness of Coventry's historic environment is relatively unknown outside the city.

The city centre, which was the focus of the HAZ, falls within St Michael's Ward which is ranked – in terms of deprivation – 5918th out of 32,844 in England on Government's Index of Deprivation 2015. It falls within the bottom 20% for five out of the seven indices (which are: education, health, crime, barriers to housing and living environment). An example of the impact of the HAZ from the Delivery Plan would be tackling these issues by improving the environment in areas such The Burges, thereby providing employment opportunities within refurbished shops, bringing abandoned upper floors back into use as accommodation, diversifying the range of retail outlets, improving public realm and security to reduce anti-social behaviour and providing learning opportunities through traditional building and crafts apprenticeships.

HAZ project activity in Coventry included major building restorations, with Historic Coventry Trust as the lead partner, and wider programmes of activity to assess the value and condition of heritage in the city, reviewing the National Heritage List for England entries for the city, local conservation

³³ This description was compiled from documentation, primarily version 2 of the Coventry HAZ Delivery Plan (revised 2020), released to the author by Historic England under Freedom of Information Request (REF: 24/02939) in February 2022. Other sources are referenced in line.

³⁴ [Coventry High Street Heritage Action Zone](#), Historic England (Accessed Feb 2024)

areas, and heritage at risk.³⁵ Engagement programmes aimed at schools, tourists, and local residents were planned to interleave with Coventry City of Culture 2021, however many of these were compromised by COVID-19 and, according to a report produced by the Coventry Society, by the failure of Coventry City Council to appoint a Project Officer to support and coordinate HAZ work across the city.³⁶

In Coventry I consulted with two voluntary sector organisations who were involved in the HAZ programme:

1. **The Coventry Society:** I interviewed the Chair and the Secretary of the Coventry Society, which was represented on the Coventry HAZ Steering Group. The following description of the society is taken from their website:

The Coventry Society is Coventry's civic society, affiliated to Civic Voice and a Registered Charity. The Society is a membership organisation open to anyone who supports their objectives:

To promote the environmental, social, economic and cultural improvement of Coventry for the benefit of people living and working here.

To promote high standards of planning, urban design and architecture in or affecting Coventry.

To preserve, and to promote understanding and appreciation of, the built, landscape and environmental heritage and history of Coventry.

To promote high quality public amenities and services for the people of Coventry.

To promote harmonious relations among the community of all races, beliefs and cultures in Coventry. The Society was formed in 1970 and was revived in 2004.³⁷

2. **The Historic Coventry Trust:** I interviewed the Chair of the Board of Trustees, and the outgoing Assistant Director of the Historic Coventry Trust.

Historic Coventry Trust is an entrepreneurial heritage development trust which aims to bring new life to the city's heritage, finding innovative ways to sustain historic places and to inspire, involve and connect people with the city's history.

Founded in 2011 (and previously known as The Charterhouse Coventry Preservation Trust), our aim is to become the guardian of the city's heritage in perpetuity and a strategic partner to enable regeneration of Coventry's historic buildings and landscapes. The Trust is a social enterprise and aims to become self-sufficient, generating revenue from restored historic buildings and innovative development.³⁸

Ramsgate:

Ramsgate was designated as a Heritage Action Zone in April of 2017. The HAZ partnership team includes Historic England, Thanet District Council, Ramsgate Town Council, the Ramsgate Coastal

³⁵ Historic England's website provides further information on [The National Heritage List for England](#) and [Heritage At Risk](#).

³⁶ John Payne, [The Heritage Action Zone – A Review](#), Coventry Society 2022

³⁷ [The Coventry Society – About Us](#) (Accessed Feb 2024)

³⁸ [Historic Coventry Trust – About Us](#) (Accessed Feb 2024)

Community Team and the Ramsgate Society. A range of projects were delivered over 5 years to engage with the local community and organisations to understand what makes the heritage in Ramsgate really special, to share the findings and stories, and to protect and improve Ramsgate's heritage for the future. A further High Street Heritage Action Zone designation was made in 2022.³⁹⁴⁰

Ramsgate is a coastal town on the Isle of Thanet, a peninsula at the eastern edge of Kent. With a population of c.40,000 it is one of three resort towns that form the District of Thanet. Ramsgate's main attraction is its coastline, and its main industries are tourism and fishing. The town has one of the largest marinas on the English south coast, and the Port of Ramsgate provided cross-channel ferries for many years.

The planned outcomes for the Ramsgate HAZ included:

- Improved understanding and better explanation of Ramsgate's Historic Environment engaging residents and attracting visitors and investors
- Coordinated management of Ramsgate's Royal Harbour and immediate environs leading to improved public access and an increase in visitor numbers
- An increase in year-round use, addressing the seasonality of the visitor economy and increasing employment
- The conservation and enhancement of listed buildings and sites increasing demand for a skilled workforce and leading to a wider range of training opportunities and apprenticeships
- Creative solutions bringing neglected and undervalued heritage assets, including housing stock, back into use
- Coherent long-term plans for the maintenance and protection of historic environment and heritage assets

Ramsgate's conservation area covers the whole town and needed reviewing. The Heritage Action Zone funded an appraisal, community consultation, a guide with practical advice for residents and businesses, and advice on climate considerations.

Other Ramsgate Heritage Action Zone projects included:

- New research to better understand the history, heritage and changing face of this dynamic coastal town resulting in the listing of nine historic sites and a popular Historic England book *Ramsgate: The town and its seaside heritage*
- Public steps restored with Pugin-inspired tiles designed by local school children
- Repairs to the town's notable Pulhamite artificial rock and iconic Clock House
- A seaside memory project and podcast

In Ramsgate I interviewed the chair of The Ramsgate Society whose role and objectives as stated on their website are as follows:

The Society was formed in 1964 to save valued historic buildings from demolition and has continued to campaign for the town's architectural heritage. Today the Society works with schools, community groups and charities on activities that include tree planting, litter picking, landscaping, town planning and design, signage, transport, parking, wildlife,

³⁹ This description was compiled from documentation, primarily a preliminary version of the Ramsgate HAZ Delivery Plan (dated March 2017), supplied to the author by The Ramsgate Society. Other sources are referenced in line.

⁴⁰ [High Street Heritage Action Zones](#), Historic England (Accessed Feb 2024)

nature, sport and leisure, coastal issues and public talks. The Society is a partner in the Ramsgate Heritage Action Zone created by Historic England in 2017 using the town's heritage assets to support Ramsgate's economic and cultural regeneration.

THE SOCIETY AIMS TO BENEFIT THE CURRENT AND FUTURE CITIZENS OF RAMSGATE BY:

- 1) Protecting and improving their quality of life, including their economic and social well-being;*
- 2) Encouraging high standards of architecture and planning in Ramsgate*
- 3) Protecting and enhancing the quality of the built and natural environment, and the public realm;*
- 4) Promoting the history and heritage of the town; 3 Encouraging civic pride and active citizenship;*
- 5) Adopting and promoting best policy and principles to reduce the extent and impact of climate change and the degradation of the environment;*
- 6) And to pursue these objectives by means of campaigns, meetings, exhibitions, lectures, publications, other forms of instruction and publicity and the promotion of projects of a charitable nature.*

THE SOCIETY STIMULATES PUBLIC INTEREST IN, AND CARE FOR THE BEAUTY, HISTORY AND CHARACTER OF THE TOWN AND ITS SURROUNDINGS.⁴¹

Tyldesley:

The Tyldesley High Street Heritage Action Zone was awarded in 2020. It is located approximately ten miles south-east of Wigan and approximately 12 miles from Manchester making it ideally placed as a commuter town serving both areas. Situated almost at the boundary of the Borough, this area was mostly rural until the Nineteenth Century. Although the town is now in a relatively urban part of the Borough there are still several areas of greenbelt nearby earmarked for residential development. The Conservation Area is primarily commercial in nature, comprising mostly of shops, financial services and public buildings. Like many other townships in Wigan Borough, Tyldesley prospered and grew as a result of the Industrial Revolution.⁴²

Tyldesley is designated as a conservation area with 7 listed buildings. There is a single main route running through 1 area; Elliott Street. This road dictates the main pattern of development and is believed to follow the route of a previous Roman road. Running away from and parallel to Elliott Street are a series of linear and grid terraces which follow the natural topography of the area. In the centre of the conservation area is the traditional market square and Top Chapel; the towns' earliest place of worship. Due to their central location these two features have become a natural focal point within the townscape.

⁴¹ [About Us](#), The Ramsgate Society (Accessed Feb 2024)

⁴² This description was compiled from documentation, primarily version 2 of the Tyldesley HAZ Delivery Plan (revised 2020), released to the author by Historic England under Freedom of Information Request (REF: 24/02939) in February 2022. Other sources are referenced in line.

The town centre is located close to areas of deprivation at Shakerley and Hag Fold, which both fall within the 10% of most deprived super output areas. The town centre and immediately adjoining areas falls within the most deprived 20% of areas within the UK and the town centre has close links to other deprived parts of Wigan Borough, itself one of the most deprived Boroughs in the UK.

Like many other smaller town centres within the North-west region, Tyldesley has suffered from changing shopping patterns as customers move to larger centres and other forms of retailing. Many of the premises contain businesses who operate with marginal profitability. In this context, these businesses are unable to invest in the fabric of their buildings without financial assistance. This has been demonstrated in similar smaller town centres, and also local major centres with vacancy rates in both Wigan and Bolton exceeding 25% resulting in both figuring within the worst ten performing town centres in the UK.

Tyldesley HAZ was designed to carefully target and restore some of the numerous privately owned vacant and derelict properties along the high street by working collaboratively with Wigan planning and environmental services team. The aim is to convert Tyldesley into a desirable leisure and entertainment destination providing new jobs for our school leavers and start-ups, new experiential retail opportunities, rebuild the confidence of the town and restore the historic town centre for residents and visitors to enjoy.

Alongside interventions on specific local buildings, the HAZ had the following broad social and environmental goals:

- Develop and improve communal social meeting spaces
- Provide low-cost pop-up shop space to trial new business ideas
- Create new youth provision
- Attract major supermarket anchor tenant
- Promote local heritage through fun days on the market square and walks through the town
- Deliver training to landlords and traders regarding the benefits of trading in a Conservation area
- Deliver heritage talks and trails with school children
- Use Town Hall as a community hub for statutory and medical services and business incubator unit space
- Encourage businesses that provide experiential retail experiences
- Reduce the fear of crime by improving the street scene
- Deliver community safety interventions with partners

In Tyldesley I met with two local organisations:

1. **ForTyldesley** a community interest company set up especially to deliver the HSHAZ project. They describe themselves as:

For Tyldesley is a community-led scheme funded by Historic England to revitalise and transform Tyldesley. The projects will bring physical improvements and cultural activities to regenerate and restore local historic character. With grants offered to local enterprises to stimulate trading in newly refurbished spaces.

By coproduction of this project with our partners, stakeholders, and young people. We intend to develop a prosperous and attractive community, retain and promote our heritage, and ensure that this legacy is sustainable for the future of Tyldesley and its historic buildings within.⁴³

⁴³ [ForTyldesley website](#), (accessed Feb 2024)

I interviewed two Directors from ForTyldesley

2. **The Tyldesley Historical Society** a group without a formal constitution who meet regularly to learn about and discuss local heritage in the town. I interviewed the main convenor of the group.

Analysis: Key themes and learnings from the research fieldwork

The relationship between HAZ programmes and local voluntary sector ambitions/mission

Overall, there was a sense the HAZ programmes work well to bring together local ambitions for heritage and place. This came through differently in different places. For example, in Coventry the overall impression from all the stakeholders I interviewed was of a solid focus on historic building conservation, with some sense of the wider economic and social dimensions, particularly in relationship to local tourism and economic activity. In Tyldesley, by contrast, my conversations linked heritage conservation and restoration to a whole range of wider social policy areas, stressing their link with reduced antisocial behaviour, increased aspiration, or better-quality local housing. The impression that HAZ programme work chimed with local ambitions for heritage came through more strongly in Ramsgate than perhaps anywhere else. It's notable here that the Ramsgate HAZ was a trailblazer programme which meant a different approach to support from Historic England through the bidding process.

The nuances of this in the different case study areas can be understood better if we think about three key factors in relation to the voluntary sector stakeholders. Firstly, there is the matter of the remit of the different stakeholder organisations. Secondly, the way that different professional backgrounds and experiences appear to influence the focus of different organisations and the way they act as local leaders through HAZ delivery. Finally, there is a question of the geographical and programmatic scale of the HAZ programmes at play.

Firstly, too take the matter of the different remits. During the conversations two kinds of constituted voluntary sector organisation emerged in relation to this research. The first, my original focus for the study, are volunteer-run historical or amenity societies, in this case The Coventry Society and The Ramsgate Society, who I knew from my own previous experience were often involved with HAZ programmes as stakeholders, providing research to support bids, taking part in steering groups, or supporting events through volunteering as guides or speakers. As we can see from the descriptions of these organisations in the previous section the nature of this activity and participation takes different forms. The charitable objects of the Coventry Society focus on promotion rather than delivery, and in my conversation representatives of the group strongly identified as campaigners, advocating for programmes and scrutinising activities rather than delivering them directly. The Ramsgate Society's objects focus much more strongly on delivery, featuring activities from saving buildings to litter picking, and this is reflected in their much closer partnership role in the HAZ. What both organisations have in common is a broad amenity role, meaning that whether campaigning or delivering their focus ranges across different social policy areas, blending heritage with other environmental concerns.

The second kind of organisation I encountered is a more professionalised one, exemplified in this study by Historic Coventry Trust and ForTyldesley CIC, both established to deliver heritage conservation activity, and in the case of the latter specifically to deliver the HSHAZ scheme. I found that conversations with these organisations focussed much more on project delivery, and one might

assume therefore a closer focus on heritage. However, I believe this is where the different professional backgrounds of those I interviewed comes into play.

Historic Coventry Trust was, by their own admission, highly focussed on heritage building restoration throughout the HAZ delivery, with other programme partners focussing on public facing activities like events, and rightly proud of their achievements. HAZ funding had directly enabled (or helped to unlock other funding) the restoration of numerous historic buildings which had been of concern to local campaigners like the Coventry Society and to Historic England itself. When I interviewed them, the organisation's current challenge was around assuring a solid operational future for these buildings, with both representatives I interviewed emphasising how big a shift away from their previous focus this was. We can understand this approach that privileges the fabric of the building when we consider the professional backgrounds of the key individuals, both of whom were involved in historic building conservation, one from a local authority background and the other in commercial property.

ForTyldesley, by contrast, is operated by individuals who are passionate about heritage but bring considerable experience of community development work and wider social considerations. The two individuals I interviewed had professional backgrounds in community development and personal finance respectively. I gained the impression here that this broader range of skills allowed them to see different links to other social issues, like skills & employment or community cohesion and that this approach permeated the HAZ delivery, always linking the heritage conservation with other social dimensions of the life of the town.

In Ramsgate, the interviewee brought together the passionate social commitment of amenity society work (they are involved in several of them locally), with a professional background in commercial property development. This does seem to account for some of the focus and approach in the HAZ particularly in terms of being able to advocate as a full partner in the project. We do here also have to consider that The Ramsgate Society is an especially longstanding and almost professionalised example of an amenity society, something I'll explore further later in this section.

The scale of these different programmes is an important qualifier here. The Coventry HAZ successfully developed a city-wide approach to historic building conservation across a substantial city of over 300,000 people. The much more local and human scale of the Tyldesley HSHAZ, on the other hand, allows for a deeper view into links between heritage restoration and other social issues. In Ramsgate the coalition drawn together by the HAZ directly led to further projects for The Ramsgate Society, funded by new income streams such as Levelling Up investment and had taken on wider regional activities such as the delivery of Heritage Open Days for the whole of Thanet. This question of scale and how it enables heritage-led regeneration to engage with different sociopolitical, economic, and environmental subsystems in different places is a theme in the academic literature and my findings here bear out how important a consideration it is in this field.⁴⁴

One theme that all the stakeholders I interviewed highlighted when the issue of local goals and ambitions linked to HAZ activity was raised, is the importance of engagement with, and interest from, local government. This played out differently in different places, however what came through clearly in all cases was that HAZ delivery worked better, and embedded more effectively in place, where local government support was present. This suggests, I believe, that if schemes like HAZ and

⁴⁴ Kalliopi Fouseki & Mariana Nicolau (2018) 'Urban Heritage Dynamics in 'Heritage-Led Regeneration': Towards a Sustainable Lifestyles Approach', *The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice*, 9:3-4, 229-248, DOI: 10.1080/17567505.2018.1539554, p.236.

SHAZ projects are to contribute directly to sustainable development and the SDGs, then the overarching and multivalent involvement of local government is important to this.⁴⁵

Changing levels of local authority support for HAZ programmes occurred for political reasons. For example, there were tensions in the relationship between local authorities and Historic England. This was due to decisions not directly related to HAZ work for example the listing of local buildings slated for demolition and regeneration, or were sometimes related more specifically to particular personnel who were committed to HAZ activity leaving or being made redundant. It bears noting that all stakeholders I interviewed made the explicit link between this fluctuating local authority support and the period of austerity that England has experienced since the coalition government of 2010.⁴⁶

Relationship between HAZ programmes and voluntary sector organisational development

Profile

The majority of those I interviewed felt that the HAZ programmes they had been involved in had positively affected their organisations profile, driving increased contacts and enquiries and drawing folks with an interest in caring for heritage and for their places out of the woodwork. For delivery organisations this was something of a given as they were directly leading HAZ related projects and were profiled and branded across them.

The amenity societies presented a different picture. The Coventry Society often helped at HAZ events but when I interviewed them about profile they indicated that under these circumstances audiences didn't necessarily see the Coventry Society as distinct from the HAZ. In Ramsgate, where the society was closely involved in a great deal of delivery, it was also heavily branded across all events and media related to HAZ projects. This was directly associated with increased profile and membership.

In Tyldesley, it was felt that the profile and focus on the value of local heritage drawn out by the HAZ had produced a groundswell of enthusiasm that directly resulted in the founding of a new organisation, The Leigh Atherstone and Tyldesley Heritage Trust. They had goals around restoring local buildings in each of those places for community use that were directly inspired by the HAZ model. Tyldesley stakeholders clearly felt that the impact of the HAZ on their place had driven interest from the nearby towns of Leigh and Atherton in this mode of heritage-led regeneration. This is something recognised in the literature as a collective act, unlocking the potential for heritage to be at the centre of just and redistributive community activity.⁴⁷

Sustainability

The conversations I had about sustainability varied across different voluntary sector orgs. For the Tyldesley Historical Society, an unconstituted group with no bank account, sustainability rested on maintaining volunteers to run the group and attendees to take part, which profile supported.

Both The Ramsgate Society and The Coventry Society reported significant increases in membership around the same time that HAZ programmes were live. In the case of The Ramsgate Society it was felt that this was a direct impact of HAZ involvement (perhaps in relation to the extensive branding mentioned above). However, representatives of The Coventry Society were less content to directly

⁴⁵ Lerario, A. 'The Role of Built Heritage for Sustainable Development Goals: From Statement to Action'. *Heritage* 2022, 5, pp.2444–2463 <https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage5030127> (Accessed Feb 2024)p.2450.

⁴⁶ Bethany Rex & Peter Campbell (2022) The impact of austerity measures on local government funding for culture in England, *Cultural Trends*, 31:1, 23-46, DOI: 10.1080/09548963.2021.1915096. p.24

⁴⁷Robert Johnston & Kimberley Marwood (2017) *Action heritage: research, communities, social justice*, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 23:9, 816-831, DOI: 10.1080/13527258.2017.1339111, p.827.

link the two things. In both cases membership increase had had a positive impact on both financial sustainability and volunteer capacity.

When I interviewed them, both ForTyldesley CIC and Historic Coventry Trust were facing quite serious challenges in terms of sustainability, related to the end of HAZ programme delivery. HCT was undergoing a major contraction of paid staff, and ForTyldesley facing a similar situation at the end of the 23/24 financial year. In both cases there was a clear will and a belief in the value of sustaining the organisations. In Tyldesley this value seemed to be as much in terms of its engagement with a wide range of social issues in the town as its continued focus on heritage.

Diversity

I know from my own experience that the question of diversity in the heritage sector, both in terms of workforce (professional or voluntary) and audience, can feel like a challenging one. In my fieldwork I got the sense that all the HAZ stakeholders I interviewed to were quite conscious of diversity as an issue, however I didn't get the sense that any of them felt especially confident about it. For context here it is worth noting that Historic England's Inclusion, Diversity, and Equality strategy was first published in 2020 and revised in 2023.⁴⁸

It probably does bear mentioning, at this point, that all of the individuals I interviewed to were white, male, and had experience of working in clerical professional settings. There was a clear understanding of the need to work with diverse communities around heritage, and of the importance of doing so for reasons of equity or social cohesion. It is remarkable how this mirrors findings that whilst awareness of inequality in the wider cultural and creative industries is prevalent amongst senior men, this act of recognition alone cannot drive systemic change.⁴⁹ No one I interviewed could draw a clear link between HAZ programmes and either engaging with a wider range of people or putting in place plans and structures to do so.

My research also highlighted some challenges around understanding diversity amongst HAZ stakeholders and around programmes or events.

In some, but not all, conversations, the question of diversity seemed to quickly boil down to that of ethnic background, rather than a wider consideration of other characteristics such as faith, health, or ability, protected under equalities law. How relevant ethnicity was varied with the demography of different places – it is for example highly relevant in Coventry which has a significant Global Majority population – but the key thing for me was this preoccupation with ethnicity amongst many individuals.

In terms of understanding diversity within stakeholder organisations or around engagement with HAZ events and programmes, it became clear as my research went on that concerns around General Data Protection Regulations and data processing limited the data being collected. This applied to both memberships in local societies and event attendees or volunteers.

⁴⁸ Historic England, *Inclusion, Diversity, and Equality Strategy*, (Accessed February 2024).

⁴⁹ Brook, O., O'Brien, D. and Taylor, M. (2021) Inequality talk : how discourses by senior men reinforce exclusions from creative occupations. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 24 (2). pp. 498-513. ISSN 1367-5494, p.511

Relationship between HAZ programmes and linking built heritage to environmental sustainability

I encountered a highly varied level of thinking or experience in terms of environmental sustainability in relation to historic buildings and conservation in my fieldwork. This ranged from passing interest to direct professional experience in a commercial development setting.

It was clear that some element of this approach had been present in all three case study areas prior to HAZ involvement. What came through most strongly in many conversations was a consciousness of energy efficiency in relation to reducing or managing costs, however work in Coventry around the river Sherbourne also had a direct nature recovery dimension to it. As such different elements of sustainable lifestyles like better walking routes and access to nature, or reducing emissions, are coming together around HAZ projects but require further support.⁵⁰

There was some awareness of Historic England's *Heritage and Climate Change Strategy*, a key policy document in this area, but not a great deal of confidence around its specifics amongst anyone whom I interviewed to except Historic Coventry Trust.⁵¹ There were also quite strong preconceptions or received wisdom at play amongst those I interviewed to about the kind of climate positive measures Historic England would support. For example, one HAZ stakeholder was convinced that Historic England would never countenance the installation of solar panels on a local listed church building, when I know from my own experience that there are instances where HE has supported exactly that, and that the strategy makes direct provision for this kind of measure.

Ramsgate was the place where the potential of climate positive measures in historic buildings seemed from my conversation to have had the most impact through the HAZ programme. Its notable that this was linked in the conversation to a specific briefing to HAZ stakeholders in Ramsgate from a member of HE's central team. Here again, there is clear evidence that with support and sensitive intervention it is possible for heritage-led regeneration projects to take an "approach ... with communities and sustainable lifestyles at its heart".⁵²

Conclusions, recommendations, and potential for further research

Ultimately, and especially given that this research is being undertaken and published in advance of any synthetic evaluation of the impact of Heritage Action Zones, I believe the most important conclusion is that HAZ programmes appear to be effective at what they do. This is something for those involved to be especially proud of given that a significant amount of this work has taken place through the huge upheavals and disruptions of COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis.

The fieldwork undertaken seems to indicate that they draw together a range of voluntary and professional partners around heritage. These partnerships appear to achieve local goals, as in Coventry around the building restoration work undertaken by Historic Coventry Trust aligning directly with concerns long held by The Coventry Society. The conversations started through HAZ programmes also lead to the development of new goals around local heritage, as at Tyldesley with the foundation of the Leigh, Atherton, and Tyldesley Heritage Trust, and in Ramsgate in relation to

⁵⁰ Kalliopi Fouseki & Mariana Nicolau (2018) 'Urban Heritage Dynamics in 'Heritage-Led Regeneration': Towards a Sustainable Lifestyles Approach', *The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice*, 9:3-4, 229-248, DOI: 10.1080/17567505.2018.1539554, p.240.

⁵¹ Historic England, [Our Climate Change Strategy](#), (Accessed Feb 2024)

⁵² Kalliopi Fouseki & Mariana Nicolau (2018) 'Urban Heritage Dynamics in 'Heritage-Led Regeneration': Towards a Sustainable Lifestyles Approach', *The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice*, 9:3-4, 229-248, DOI: 10.1080/17567505.2018.1539554, p.244.

the restoration of the harbourside Clock House.⁵³ In each of the case study places this was explicitly linked to wider social goods like a sense of pride in place and identity, stronger local economies and issues like access to housing, justifying the links to the broad range of UN Sustainable development goals in the academic literature.

There is a great deal more to explore here in terms of the specific links to these goals in practice which should certainly be the subject of further research in the field and of particular evaluations of future or even currently live programmes. The forthcoming evaluation of HAZ and HSHAZ programmes commissioned by Historic England will no doubt offer significant data and new conclusions to further inform this work.

Capacity Building in future Place based investment

In terms of the different domains of organisational development I set out to explore in my fieldwork, I've developed my conclusions into a set of recommendations around capacity building that I hope could be usefully integrated into future place-based schemes. In all three places voluntary sector representatives all valued highly the personal relationships and understanding of place that Historic England personnel brought to their work on HAZ programmes. The published literature highlights that generic capacity building initiatives are often not well received or effective for voluntary sector groups that come together around place, and that a more tailored approach is needed, something which it seems Historic England could be well placed to support.⁵⁴ Key Recommendations are:

1. In the domains of profile and resilience, it was really clear that which HAZ programmes draw together different kinds of voluntary sector groups with local government and other stakeholders, there was less consideration of how these ecosystems would operate to preserve and celebrate heritage and the wider social goods it supports *after* the period of investment. I would suggest that future bid and project development processes could improve this situation by encouraging applicants to conceive a picture of what this constellation of different orgs involved in governing and advocating for historic places, and linking this to wider social issues, could look like long-term in their places. There is the beginning of a model for this at the NLHF, where the application process has included governance review for higher value projects, and Organisational Sustainability is one of the four new Investment Principles in the *Heritage 2033* Strategy and delivery plans.⁵⁵ This would enable future schemes to leave a legacy of good governance and cooperation around historic places.
2. In terms of fostering diversity in HAZ programmes, around both governance and other forms of participation, the fieldwork indicated that there is very varied consideration of this in the HAZ programmes and process. Given how much of a focus equity, diversity and inclusion have been in the heritage sector for some time, there exists a huge amount of specific expertise in establishing diverse governance, developing programmes in collaboration with underserved audiences, and data collection on participants that is simple, robust, and GDPR compliant. There is a clear opportunity to use this expertise in developing guidance and offering consultancy support to help future schemes address the needs and interests of a wider range of local people in a proportionate and place-based way. I'm conscious in making

⁵³ [Leigh, Atherton, and Tyldesley Heritage Trust website](#); Terry Prue, [The Clock House – Small Steps are good steps](#), The Ramsgate Society, Feb 2024 (Accessed Feb 2024)

⁵⁴ Ockendon, Nick and Hutin, Mark. *Volunteering to lead: A study of leadership in small, volunteer-led groups*. The Institute for Volunteering Research, 2008. (Accessed Feb 2024)p.40.

⁵⁵ Governance Review in application guidance: [Application Form Help Notes: National Lottery Grants for Heritage £250,000 to £5 Million](#), (Accessed Feb 2024)

this recommendation that I have only looked at a tiny fraction of the total cohort of HAZ and HSHAZ schemes, and I imagine that the kind of guidance I'm suggesting here would have a lot of useful learning to draw on from schemes in that wider cohort.

3. Approaches and attitudes to the relationship between heritage-led regeneration, climate change, and environmental sustainability were also highly varied across the stakeholders I interviewed to, and as mentioned some of them appeared to be working on the basis of misunderstandings about what was possible in terms of adapting historic buildings in climate positive ways. Given that climate adaptation is an inherently place-based process, there seem to be a range of opportunities to embed and pursue goals from Historic England's own *Climate Change and Heritage* strategy, and also to embed evaluation around this dimension of projects so that the impact and learning can be captured and shared.

The conclusion I want to close on is one that came through so strongly in my fieldwork and wider conversations around this project that it cannot be omitted. It is that the role of local government as a partner alongside voluntary sector organisations and heritage bodies seems to be a central one to the effectiveness of place-based schemes like HAZ's.

In the UK, and in particular England, there is currently a trend of place-based investment in Arts, Culture and Heritage, of which HAZ and HSHAZ schemes are a part, which is made by national bodies. This is by arms-length agencies like Historic England (HAZ and HSHAZ programmes), National Lottery Heritage Fund (Heritage Places), or Arts Council England (Creative People and Places), or central government investment through ministries like the Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities and *The Long-term plan for towns*.⁵⁶ This is against a backdrop of widescale local authority cuts in investment across arts, culture, and heritage, with The Guardian finding that 83% of council areas had cut funding for them since 2011.⁵⁷

For this project I interviewed local stakeholders who care deeply for their places but were frustrated at the fluctuating interest and capacity of local government in them. There was a clear sense that only local government with its statutory responsibility and statutory clout could work to join up plans, support them and steward their goals into a long-term visions.

The risk I see here is that without robust local government capacity and involvement in these various place-based investment schemes, which often overlap and intersect, there is a significant risk of really ineffective place-based investment, which duplicates effort and work undertaken in another programme, fatigues local communities through excessive consultation or its opposite, and fails to achieve the long-term results it sets out to. In the current political climate the only safeguards against this can be the agencies delivering these schemes, who need to work to understand the overlaps between them and to ensure that provision is in place for long term governance of culture in these places. Understanding the overlaps of these schemes and the conditions under which they do or don't positively intersect is another key area for additional independent research. There are key questions here about the role of regional authorities, especially given the growing trend of regional devolution in England.

⁵⁶ Historic England [Heritage Action Zones: Breathing New Life Into Historic Places](#); National Lottery Heritage Fund [£200m for Heritage Places will boost local economies and pride in place](#); Arts Council England [Creative People and Places](#); Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities [Long-term Plan for towns: Guidance for local authorities and Town Boards](#) (All accessed Feb 2024)

⁵⁷ Lanre Bakare, Carmen Aguilar García and Michael Goodier, [‘This system is broken’: protesters say Suffolk cuts encapsulate UK arts crisis](#), *The Guardian*, Wed 31 Jan 2024 (Accessed Feb 2024).

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