Response to LUHC Inquiry into 'Children, young people and the built environment'

December 2023

The Heritage Alliance

About Us

The Heritage Alliance is England's largest coalition of independent heritage interests. We unite more than 200 organisations, which together have over seven million members, volunteers, trustees, and staff. The majority of England's historic environment is owned, managed, or cared for by Heritage Alliance members. Many of our members are either estate managers, housing providers, active campaigners on housing and planning matters, or specialists in heritage skills and education – including the National Trust, Historic Houses, the Canal & River Trust, the CPRE, and the Council for British Archaeology. Our Spatial Planning Advocacy Group draws together expert representatives from our nationwide member organisations to review the impacts of planning policy on the historic environment and consider solutions; and our Skills, Education, and Engagement Group unites policy leaders to promote the role of the heritage sector as a provider of world-leading educational programmes and opportunities for skills development.

In our recently published <u>Heritage Manifesto 2023</u>, we outlined several policy and fiscal priorities for supporting the UK heritage sector and maximising its benefits for communities and the environment. Several of our Manifesto priorities align closely with the goals of this Inquiry – including supporting community cohesion through heritage-led regeneration, and harnessing cultural learning and skills at every age.

General Comments

Heritage considerations surrounding young people and the built environment

Heritage encompasses the historic, cultural, and environmental legacy handed down to future generations. Understanding one's community and its history has long been recognised as key to an individual's sense of identity and belonging. From this perspective, we believe that heritage should play a pivotal role in any conversation surrounding how young people access and experience the built environment.

By incorporating a heritage dimension into policies for planning, building, and urban design – from conserving historic sites and assets, to integrating cultural elements into new developments, to providing or protecting green spaces – we can enrich young people's experience of their built environment. Within outdoor spaces such as streets, estates, and parks (a particular focus of this Inquiry), heritage adds an important cultural element which enhances the health, wellbeing, and educational benefits they provide. Approaching built environments as evolving historical assets – to which today's young people are the latest contributors – promotes a sense of stewardship, pride of place, and cohesion within

communities. By preserving connections to the past, **heritage assets and interrelated** educational programming can help young people to make meaning of the present and become its custodians in the future.

Identifying 'heritage value' within built environments

The heritage value of individual built or natural spaces may not always be obvious: it can be challenging to assess whether a particular site holds significance for particular people, and whether steps can or should be taken to conserve or celebrate this. One useful framework to refer to is the <u>Conservation Principles</u> (published by Historic England), which set out a clear, transparent, and sustainable management regime for all aspects of the historic environment. It concludes that people value historic places in many different ways, but that these can be grouped into four chief categories:

- 1. Evidential value: the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity.
- 2. **Historical value:** the ways in which past people, events, and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present this tends to be *illustrative* or *associative*.
- 3. **Aesthetic value:** the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place.
- 4. **Communal value:** the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory.¹

It should be emphasised that – like the spaces themselves – these values are not static, and that 'judgements about heritage value ... tend to grow in strength and complexity over time, as people's perceptions of a place evolve'.² Any existing (or potential) built or natural space may hold 'significance' from a heritage perspective because some or all of the above values are attached to it by individuals or communities. Therefore, **even the most unassuming sites may hold heritage significance and meaning for young people (now, or in the future) who access and experience them daily**.

Responses to Inquiry Questions

Q1: How do children and young people experience outdoor spaces in towns, cities and rural areas across the country? For example, their streets, estates, villages, neighbourhoods and parks?

Our answer to this question focuses on the role that heritage plays in influencing and enhancing young people's experiences of outdoor spaces.

Heritage supports and empowers young people

It is well-established that heritage brings significant value to individuals, communities, and wider society – be it in improving health and wellbeing, fostering social cohesion, or supporting the natural environment.³ More specifically, it is recognised that **heritage can play a key role in supporting and empowering younger audiences**, particularly in "supporting young people's education and development, relationships with place, and

mental health".⁴ Recent research by Arts Connect and the ICRD (University of Wolverhampton) has found that engaging young people with heritage:

- 1. is effective in supporting personal, social, health, and learning benefits for young people;
- 2. provides unique opportunities for fostering identity and belonging, allowing young people to reinterpret and represent the places where they live;
- 3. contributes to diverse social impacts, including intergenerational and intercultural components that bring together people from different backgrounds; and,
- plays a considerable role in developing social mobility within deprived places, offering unique opportunities for young people to contribute to community revival and 'levelling up' policy goals.⁵

Evidential examples of the opportunities and benefits of heritage for young people (sourced from the latest edition of Historic England's *Heritage Counts*).⁶

- Research commissioned by Historic England (2022) found that the vast majority of teachers (98%) agreed that as a result of learning about local heritage, their pupils had an increased sense of place.
- Projects that connect young people with natural heritage are beneficial for mental health. For example, the *Keeping It Wild* project run by the London Wildlife Trust concluded that 77% of young people involved reported that their overall health and wellbeing has improved (<u>Keeping It Wild, 2021</u>).
- Analysis of data from the Understanding Society Youth Survey found that visiting heritage sites was significantly associated with increased self-esteem amongst young and adolescent girls aged 10 to 15 (Lakey et al, 2017).
- Encouraging heritage engagement can counterbalance the effects of the "shrinking world of childhood" due to restricted use of one's local environment – particularly during the primary and early secondary school years (Jack, 2010 and Gill, 2008).

Heritage drives exploration and education

Where outdoor spaces are concerned, heritage assets – from statues, to commemorative plaques or art installations – **contribute to the aesthetic and educational enrichment of the space**, allowing people to learn about the area's history, culture, and natural environment. Meanwhile, the presence of 'natural heritage' – from street trees, to greenhouses, to lakes and ponds – can add significant social, cultural, and ecological value to any site.

Heritage can also be a key motivating factor in encouraging young people to visit outdoor spaces (on their own, or as part of an organised activity or trip), and participate in education, recreation, or reflection. For example, the London Wildlife Trust's Keeping It Wild project (funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund) engages with young people from traditionally underrepresented groups, and helps them to take part in nature conservation projects in their local communities. One young participant reflected:

"I was in youth council and I didn't really have much going on. I was like, might as well go along and see what it's all about. And then I got involved. And then it was so much better than we'd actually expected. I didn't know that we'd all go on a trip, which was really fun, because the park that we went to is really close to my house. And we got a tour guide and the part that we actually went and visited I didn't even know existed. I got to learn new things about my own community, that was quite interesting. And we got to meet loads of artists when we were designing our logo, and some of my work was put in the book that we've made. It was a good experience."⁷

Other young people reported that they "had no idea" that historic outdoor spaces existed near them, and that the project's heritage workshops and activities facilitated their first visits to these sites.⁸

Heritage promotes health and wellbeing

There is strong evidence that **engagement with heritage sites is good for our physical and mental health**. Simply spending time in historic places is proven to lift happiness and life satisfaction whilst lowering stress and anxiety levels. Historic parks, gardens, canals, and other 'green' or 'blue' heritage spaces draw people in for physical activity and recreation. Participatory heritage activities – from participating in archaeological digs, to handling museum artefacts – are clearly evidenced as being therapeutic and restorative.⁹ According to a 2015 study (commissioned by DCMS), visits to heritage sites are estimated to save the NHS over £193.2m every year from reductions in GP visits and the use of mental health services.¹⁰ The social and interactive aspects of heritage educational programming (both in-person and through digital platforms) may be particularly beneficial for young people's mental health, providing them with opportunities to make friends, learn new skills, and develop their confidence and self-esteem through an enhanced 'sense of place'.¹¹

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Heritage Alliance worked with the Government to allow the public to access local historic parks and gardens as a 'first step' out of lockdown in May 2020. The research project *Places of Joy: Heritage After Lockdown* (2020) demonstrated that access to these **outdoor heritage spaces provided critical social connections, physical and psychological wellbeing, and places of security and safety during this national health crisis.¹² Visitors often cited that they chose to visit outdoor heritage sites (as opposed to other outdoor spaces) because of their perceived aesthetic value, their ability to enhance emotional experiences, and the sense of community and kinship that they fostered.¹³**

Our *<u>Heritage</u>, <u>Health and Wellbeing</u>* report (2020) provides more than 30 case studies from the lockdown period, including several projects which targeted children and young people:

- Wild in the Park at Alexandra Park and Palace ('Ally Pally') combined regular outdoor learning with ongoing therapeutic support for young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. One teacher in a Pupil Referral Unit stated: "we've seen a significant shift in the pupil's behaviour back at school".
- Connecting through Craft Skills at Seventeen Nineteen formed part of ongoing construction work at Holy Trinity Church in Sunderland. In addition to practical learning sessions and tours for hundreds of people, <u>young apprentices</u> were able to gain construction skills and boost their confidence.

The Youth and Wellbeing Programme at Historic Royal Palaces (HRP) supported the emotional wellbeing of local young carers through a series of interactive sessions. 84% of participants reported that the programme helped them to develop social connections.¹⁴

More broadly, our <u>Inspiring Creativity: Heritage and The Creative Industries</u> report (2019) illustrates how heritage spaces can also be used to showcase local art, theatre, performance, and music – again, with multiple case studies of engagement with young people, including **playground design workshops** (at Merton Council's Canons Recreation Ground), **graffiti artwork** (as part of community archaeology activities through the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust), and **recording heritage podcasts** (through the Culture& traineeship scheme).¹⁵

Q2: How do these experiences vary across income, race, gender, age?

Whilst there are many excellent examples of good practice in heritage youth engagement, it is widely recognised within the sector that **there is a need for more ambitious youth programming**: moving beyond school visits and work experience to a more diverse range of activities that are (ideally) shaped by young people's own needs and interests.¹⁶ A key recommendation of the recent Arts Connect/ICRD report was that:

Young people should be invited to explore aspects of their own heritage and/or that which they themselves consider to be important. They should also be engaged in the coproduction of activities from the outset, and empowered to define their own visions of heritage (with the guidance of the heritage experts).¹⁷

However, heritage organisations are often hampered by **capacity constraints and a lack of funding**, which make it challenging to deliver youth engagement work. Research commissioned by the National Lottery Heritage Fund concluded that the sustainability of most heritage youth engagement outside of schools is dependent on the availability of external funding, which is heavily impacted by "continued austerity and the priorities of funders and commissioners".¹⁸ There is also a need for external bodies (such as Government departments) to assist in building and sustaining links between the heritage and youth sectors.¹⁹

More broadly, there are many demographic factors that can limit young people's access to – or experiences of – heritage sites. Surveys conducted by DCMS suggest that people from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds, as well as residents of more deprived areas, are less likely to engage with heritage sites and activities.²⁰ This could be caused by issues of proximity and access, cost and affordability, and awareness or perceptions – or a combination of all of these factors. Widening participation in heritage (including amongst younger audiences) is a key priority for the sector.²¹

Despite these factors, it should be emphasised that **heritage can play an effective and important role in bringing together diverse groups of people and supporting social mobility**. Educational heritage programming can be explicitly focused on challenging discrimination or other barriers that create social exclusion, but it can also help young people to feel 'accepted' by society in a much broader sense – by connecting and involving them in the shared histories of their local community.²² Heritage programming can also be used as a means to connect vulnerable young people to other cultural activities or targeted support services.²³ For example, the **Proud Places** initiative run by the Heritage of London Trust (HOLT) provides site visits and creative workshops for young people aged 11 upwards – with a particular focus on groups from alternate provision schools, pupil referral units, or young refugees. It aims to create curiosity, build skills, break barriers, and instil a sense of local pride and community. After a craft skills workshop on heritage restoration at a London monument, one thirteen-year-old participant questioned:

"Will we go on more trips like this? We need more trips because like we saw a different place. It is our first time to see something like this. I want to know about it. To go on trips to know the world – what happened to the world."²⁴

Q6: Where are the examples of policy and good practice that are improving children and young people's experiences in the built environment, either directly or indirectly, in the UK or internationally?

The UK heritage sector is consistently creating innovative activities, programmes, and initiatives to engage children and young people. These efforts enrich young people's relationship with the built environment by connecting them with local history, improving their education, and stimulating their creativity, wellbeing, and sense of identity.

Examples of good practice in heritage youth engagement

In 2020, the Heritage Alliance's annual 'Heritage Debate' focused on the theme of <u>'Young</u> <u>People and Heritage'</u> – exploring how young people can be supported and empowered to advocate for heritage into the future, and showcasing a wide range of ideas and initiatives. There are several major heritage projects we wish to highlight as examples of good practice in this area:

- Historic England recently launched its History in the Making programme, which will empower young people in the north of England to explore and celebrate their local histories. This will, in turn, improve their wellbeing: from increasing connection to and pride in their local place, to gaining skills, confidence and social connection. In addition, its long-running Heritage Schools programme (funded by DfE) continues to work with schools across the country to co-ordinary teacher training, offer curriculum support, and broker partnerships with local heritage providers.²⁵
- The £10 million Kick The Dust programme, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, awarded grants to 12 large-scale youth engagement projects across the UK.²⁶ One funded project was 'Future Proof Parks', which inspired young people to get involved in preserving their local parks and green space heritage. Another, the ongoing 'Shout Out Loud' initiative, organises activities for young people to discover and share the hidden stories of their local communities. One young Kick The Dust participant stated that projects which foster diverse histories and perspectives helped them "to feel included in something ... to not feel alone".²⁷

There are also long-running initiatives, like the Young Archaeologists Club (YAC), founded in 1972 and run by the Council for British Archaeology (a Heritage Alliance Member). There are over 70 YAC branches across the UK, offering young people the opportunity to participate in real archaeology and discover why it matters.²⁸

Supporting heritage youth engagement

However, the success of heritage programmes for young people relies on policy frameworks that prioritise engaging with the past. Government departments must champion the inclusion of young people in heritage through guidance, funding streams, and cross-sector collaboration. By investing in cultural learning, more young people can experience the personal, social, and educational benefits of engaging with heritage whilst boosting sector capacity. Free educational heritage visits are an important part of this, but are in steady decline. Our Heritage Manifesto 2023 calls for government-subsidised youth entry to heritage sites, and embedding visits to local heritage sites in the curriculum to strengthen young peoples' connections with their communities and develop a pipeline of future talent. We also call for cross-subsidy mechanism, shared apprenticeship schemes, and reform of the Apprenticeship Levy to boost heritage apprenticeships and safeguard specialist craft skills,

Where planning, building, and urban design is concerned, **local planning authorities require ringfenced investment in archaeological and conservation teams, and targeted investment in skills and training to build their resilience**. The Heritage Alliance supports the statutory requirement for local authorities to provide historic environment services and Historic Environment Records (included in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, but awaiting enactment), and calls for the interim protection of assets under consideration for designation as a further practical step to prevent unintended damage.

Ultimately, we believe that heritage considerations should help to shape built environments from the point of their inception. If natural or built heritage assets are overlooked or destroyed during development, then young people will no longer be able to access their many direct and indirect benefits. Attempts to retrofit heritage programming around poorly-conserved assets will inevitably prove more challenging than with sites where heritage has been integrated throughout the planning and construction stages. The best way to achieve this integration is to engage closely with local communities – including young people. By providing young people with opportunities to explore and preserve their local heritage during any development, they will have a greater stake in the built environment's past and future.

Further suggestions for heritage youth programming

Valuable resources for heritage youth programming have been developed by <u>the National</u> <u>Lottery Heritage Fund</u>, <u>Historic England</u>, <u>the National Museum of Scotland</u>, <u>Kids in Museums</u>, and <u>Arts Connect/ICRD</u>. Some of our own further suggestions for ways to celebrate and incorporate heritage within built environments – and to involve young people in particular – include:

Hosting heritage workshops, activity days, and events in collaboration with local youth organisations and schools, focusing on practical and creative activities (including traditional building techniques and craft skills.	See the case studies showcased in the Heritage Alliance's <u>Inspiring</u> <u>Creativity</u> report and through the <u>Heritage Open Days</u> initiative, in addition to resources created by the <u>Heritage Crafts Association</u> .
Funding research into the history of a site, partnering with local youth groups, schools, and museums. Participants can develop skills in collaborative research, writing, and design as they interpret key findings to create information panels, interpretative trails, or digital content.	See the case studies from the National Lottery Heritage Fund's <u>Kick The Dust</u> programme, and the <u>Kids in Museums 'Takeover Days'</u> .
Allowing schools to access artefacts that were discovered during local archaeological surveys for hands-on learning in the classroom. Provide opportunities for students to participate in local archaeology digs to improve their teamwork, problem solving, and scientific skills.	See the case studies from Historic England's <u>Heritage Schools</u> , the MOLA's <u>Thames Discovery</u> <u>Programme</u> , and the <u>Young</u> <u>Archaeologists Club</u> .
Identifying tree or plant species with historic significance to the area, and working with youth gardening groups to replant these throughout the site and to create signs educating visitors about their uses and origins.	See natural heritage initiatives such as <u>Keeping It Wild</u> (London Wildlife Trust), <u>Future Proof Parks</u> (Groundwork UK), or the Chelsea Physic Garden's <u>Youth Panel</u> .
Involve young people in efforts to commemorate historic events, industries or movements associated with the site or wider area: selecting candidates for commemorative plaques and markers; creating or commissioning new public art; researching historic names for new areas or routes; and burying time capsules for future generations.	See Historic England's <u>History in the</u> <u>Making</u> programme.

Q8: How does the relationship of children and young people with the built environment overlap with policy areas beyond the work of DLUHC, such as public health, transport, policing and net zero?

We believe that the relationship of children and young people with the built environment has profound implications for community cohesion, education, health and wellbeing, environmental sustainability, and economic prosperity. As such, it necessitates an integrated policy approach spanning multiple sectors:

- Education: A vital element of urban planning is to ensure that young people are able to access schools and colleges. However, it must be recognised that children's learning extends beyond the school grounds to neighbourhood streets, parks, museums, and community centres. Policy levers such as funding for school trips can enhance the ability of teachers to utilise place-based assets, fostering children's connections to local history and culture.
- Culture: Similarly, it is vital to ensure that young people have access to cultural sites and programming from a young age. Exposure to diverse and creative perspectives is not only beneficial for a child's sense of self, but for their long-term mental and physical health. Participatory arts activities with children is proven to improve their cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional development.²⁹ Our report on *Inspiring Creativity: Heritage and The Creative Industries* (2019) highlights how heritage spaces can also be used as a showcase for local art, theatre, performance, and music.
- Environment: We believe that it is artificial to create a divide between built and natural environments. Acknowledging the interconnectedness of these spaces leads to more resilient, innovative, and adaptable urban planning and creating ecologically-sustainable built environments for current and future generations should be an urgent public policy priority. When young people experience built areas that are enriched by trees, parks, or other greenery, it cultivates a lifelong appreciation for nature and environmental stewardship. Furthermore, preserving or integrating local heritage assets (like ancient woodlands or historic gardens) ties this natural legacy to a community's unique culture and story.

Ultimately, we believe that a holistic approach needs to be taken to the question of young people and the built environment – one which aligns priorities across a variety of government departments and agencies. From the perspective of the Heritage Alliance, heritage preservation and community-based educational programming has a significant role to play in this cross-cutting agenda.

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