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Department  
for Culture,  
Media & Sport

Research and analysis

# Impacts of changes to local authority funding on small to medium heritage organisations

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Report authored by Dr Tamara West and Professor Rafaela Neiva Ganga.

## Executive summary

This rapid evidence review has been commissioned to gather case study evidence of the impact that increased budgetary pressures on local authorities (LAs) can have on small to medium heritage sector organisations (HOs). In particular, the research sought to understand levels of support, dependency, impact to communities, mitigating strategies, business model, and the funding lifecycle.

A qualitative case study approach was adopted to encompass:

### 1. Size

- £50k threshold to qualify as a small organisation
- medium over £250,000 and less than £1 million

### 2. Dependency rate

- based on reliance on LA funding
- eg low is below 20%, moderate is 20 to 50%, high is above 50%

### 3. Heritage type

- cultural (eg museums)
- natural (eg reserves)
- built heritage (eg historic landmarks)

The sites were chosen to reflect different heritage types (eg asset and non-asset based, urban, rural, community asset transfers and volunteer run sites or collections) and representative of the sector as a whole, ie museums, historic sites and houses, intangible heritage, outdoor heritage etc [\[footnote 1\]](#).

In order to provide depth across each of these requirements within a short timeframe the review utilised a regional case study approach (West Yorkshire Combined Authority). The richness of this approach has limitations, for example, geographical specificity. This is in part countered by the selection of diverse heritage types and differing dependencies on LA support. In order to provide a robust and necessary context, the review also undertook a systematic review of literature. Whilst this was not a prerequisite of the commission this combined approach ensured that the in-depth and geographically

specific case studies could be framed by existing studies and therefore a broader understanding. Together, this has yielded the following results.

## Case study findings

### **Differing access to and usage of reduced LA funding**

The qualitative data evidenced differing levels of LA support and reliance. Often available LA funding was targeted at micro or community level activities (small funding pots) or at larger scale capital investments. Almost all of the case study sites had either experienced decreasing levels of LA funding or were actively seeking ways to mitigate for any future loss of funding or in-kind support. Case studies of Community Asset Transfer sites undertaken for this report highlighted the challenges faced by those accessing a set amount of LA support that had not increased in over a decade. Several council-run museums, galleries, and heritage sites interviewed during this research had experienced significant cuts resulting in site closures, reduced hours, and reduced programming. In part, this has led to the curtailment of some public access to heritage, impacting more deprived areas and communities. It has also led to several mitigating and entrepreneurial strategies.

### **Mitigating strategies and impact**

Smaller organisations, particularly volunteer and trust-run sites reliant on core council support for essentials such as utilities, faced the more severe risk. This was most evident in the community asset transfer case studies. Those with early commercial adaptation or access to large umbrella charities report greater stability. For most of the case study sites volunteers are central but often overburdened, especially for smaller HOs and particularly at community asset transfer sites. This echoes the findings of the literature review. In some cases, site diversification via rent, paid-for activities, or private hire helped fund vital paid-for administrative or similar support on a longer term. The case studies highlighted that intangible heritage in particular is at significant risk due to its dependency on annual funding and unpaid labour. All case study sites were aware of the need to apply for other funding streams, but not all felt that they were able or eligible to do so. LA owned and run sites drawn upon in the case studies and via interviews had adopted strategies such as bespoke programming and usage (eg social prescribing, private event hire). All case studies found there was a difficult balance that needed to be struck between their public access and educational remit and the need to diversify income.

### **Impact on place and community (end users)**

Despite reduced resources, LA-owned-and-run heritage sites interviewed highlighted their central role in providing space for diverse community activities and in amplifying the uniqueness of their districts. During the interviews, it was also evident that volunteer-run community asset transfer sites and heritage trusts see themselves as guardians and advocates for place-based heritage, education and identity. Interviewees reflected upon how a reduction in income would affect more vulnerable or disadvantaged groups via reduction in educational or outreach services offered, or via decreased public access.

## **Networks and interdependency**

Some HOs also referenced the value of accessing in-kind support via LA Heritage or Culture Team advice or services, though several commented on the decreasing amount of LA funded staff. HOs also gave examples of using small LA grants to fund contributions from independent or community creative groups. Almost all case study sites highlighted the vital knowledge and advice of external support (advice and development) organisations. Here, the wider literature and the qualitative interviews and case studies confirm the need to understand the whole support ecosystem, including interdependencies across scales and organisational types.

These case study findings are accompanied by the following secondary data analysis.

## **Summary findings of the literature review**

The literature review drew on 40 peer-reviewed studies to assess how local and combined authority budget pressures have affected heritage sector funding, delivery models, and resilience. The focus is on England in the period since 2010, and on small and medium-sized organisations.

### **Funding reductions**

Across the literature, there is consistent evidence of funding reductions to heritage and broader cultural services at the local level. Local Authorities - still the main providers of heritage services - have seen real-term cuts of up to 49% in central government grants (Rex & Campbell, 2021), alongside a 35% fall in cultural service spending (Rex, 2019a) and a 36% per capita reduction in planning, environmental, and cultural expenditure (Fahy et al., 2023). In parallel, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) reported real-term reductions of up to 24% over 2011–2015 (Newman & Tourle, 2012; Aroles et al., 2019). These cuts have led to closures, reduced opening hours, and the scaling back of public programmes, particularly in more deprived areas (Marks, 2018; Newman & Tourle, 2012).

### **Mitigating strategies**

To mitigate the impact, LAs and communities have implemented a range of adaptive strategies, including asset transfers (Rex, 2018; Smith et al., 2023), volunteer-led service delivery (Beale, 2016; Smith, 2019), and diversification into earned income streams (Thelwall, 2015; Barker & Pina-Sánchez, 2019). While these approaches have supported continuity in some settings, their sustainability remains contested - particularly for smaller organisations reliant on unpaid labour and lacking reserves (Rex, 2019b; Forbes et al., 2015).

### **Impacts**

Impacts differ significantly by heritage type. Urban and asset-based heritage often attract regeneration-linked investment (Peacock, 2015; Stanziola, 2011), while rural and intangible heritage remain underserved and under-researched (Montague et al., 2015; West Yorkshire Combined Authority, n.d.). There is also emerging evidence that funding

cuts risk diminishing social cohesion and wellbeing, especially where heritage spaces serve critical civic and educational roles (Lennox, 2016; Bell et al., 2017; Heritage Fund, 2020).

## Ecosystem

Governance reform - including the dissolution of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and centralisation of strategic decision-making - has reduced local accountability and specialist support (Clark, 2001; DCMS, 2021). At the same time, the rise of hybrid models (eg charitable trusts, community enterprises) has diversified delivery, but also exposed gaps in regulation, equity, and professional capacity (Veldpaus & Pendlebury, 2019; Knights, 2018).

# Introduction

This report has been undertaken as part of a 'Rapid Evidence Review' (see Tricco et al 2017). The purpose is to fill an evidence gap via a qualitative research approach that gathers case study evidence of the impact that increased budgetary pressures on LAs can have on small to medium HOs. In particular, the research sought to understand:

- a) the financial and non-financial support the organisation receives from the LA
- b) the impacts and risks the organisation would face if LA funding increased or decreased, including their mitigating strategies
- c) the impact on final users – who is affected, and how

A qualitative case study approach aims to provide a more multifaceted picture than a standalone systematic or literature review, or a quantitative study, would be able to do. This is first framed within a systematic review of existing literature to enable our in-depth case studies to be set within wider debates and findings.

Heritage funding in the UK comprises a mix of public, private, and community-based sources that support the management, preservation, and public engagement with historic assets and cultural services. Key public funding streams include central government grants to local authorities (Rex & Campbell, 2021), LA cultural budgets (Rex, 2019a), and Combined Authority (CA) allocations. Alongside public investment, HOs increasingly rely on diversified income streams, including venue-based income generation (Rex & Campbell, 2021), charitable donations (Barker & Pina-Sánchez, 2019), and community-led funding models (Forbes et al., 2015). However, private sector investment has declined over time, with a 7% drop noted in earlier evaluations (Mermiri, 2011), prompting greater emphasis on earned income and financial self-sufficiency across the sector (Thelwall, 2015). Our research sought to capture this range of support. It was evident that most case studies accessed – or were preparing to access- a range of income streams in order to either maintain or grow.

To provide the necessary detailed approach and capture the variety of organisations in the sector, in terms of size, business models and also degree of dependency from LA funding, the decision was made to concentrate on a specific CA. It is recognised that this may not be a representative sample or illustrative of the complete range of support seen in the sector. However, as the aim of the research is to understand in more depth the 'end-to-end' life cycle of the LA grants, and hence the implications of changes in the availability of LA funding, a defined geographical approach afforded the most scope. The limitations of this defined geographical approach are outlined in the Methodology section.

The decision to focus on the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) region was reached at a working level with colleagues at Historic England and DCMS. The region holds a diversity of heritage asset types, has a mix of urban and rural districts, a diverse population, and a mix of tangible and intangible heritage. Its LAs face significant funding challenges, with severe reductions in council budgets. The case studies were chosen to reflect different heritage types (eg asset and non-asset based, urban, rural, community asset transfers and volunteer run) and dependency levels, and also to draw from each of the LAs within the WYCA.

The region's LAs also own and run several heritage sites and collections, some of which have closed or restricted opening hours or public access. LAs have faced increased budgetary pressures for some time, with in some cases a significant reduction in services. Some have issued Section 114 (bankruptcy) notices and have had to make very difficult choices in this context. This has had a significant effect on HOs. LA funding, via grants, regular funding streams, or in-kind services have been rolled back (Rex & Campbell, 2021; Fahy et al., 2023; Carrington, 2018; Smith, 2019). Similarly, council-owned cultural heritage sites and services have faced cuts. These can have impacts on the places and communities they serve, for example via the closure and sale of council owned heritage sites. The research also included examples of council-run sites within the case studies in order to reflect a snapshot, albeit geographically limited, of the state of services, risks and opportunities for the future. The full approach and limitations are set out in the Methodology section below, including the definitions of small and medium and our level of flexibility in approach to allow for a fuller understanding of the current picture.

The report firstly sets out the methodology for the report. This is followed by the systematic literature review which provides the wider national context. The report then sets out the regional context, followed by the qualitative case study findings.

# Methodology

## Research design & methods



The Rapid Evidence Review employed a structured, multi-step methodology to assess how budgetary pressures have affected heritage sector support by LAs in England, with specific attention to small and medium-sized HOs and the regional context of West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA). Here, the remit was to provide evidence of individual HOs and their relationships with the LA in question. In particular, the research sought to understand levels of support, dependency, impact to communities, and mitigating strategies across the funding lifecycle.

The agreed case study approach was to encompass:

1. Size (£50k threshold to qualify as a small organisation; medium over £250,000 and less than £1 Million)
2. Dependency Rate (based on reliance on LA funding eg low is below 20%, moderate is 20 to 50%, high is above 50%)
3. Heritage Type: case studies needed to be both asset and non-asset based and representative of the sector as a whole ie cultural (eg museums), natural (eg parks or reserves), intangible (eg heritage practices), and built heritage (eg historic landmarks).

Additionally, a literature review was undertaken in order to frame the case studies within a wider national operating context. The literature search retrieved 498 relevant articles, and 40 included peer-reviewed studies. Studies were included based on criteria covering geographic relevance to England, heritage focus (tangible or intangible), LA involvement, documented impacts (economic, social, environmental, governance), organisational size (small, medium, large), empirical research design, and inclusion of outcomes from funding reductions. Screening involved a judgment of relevance. Studies were considered eligible if they met several of these dimensions and directly engaged with the effects of financial constraints on the heritage sector.

Data extraction was supported by a large language model and focused on five dimensions: study design, geographic scope, nature of budgetary pressures, impact categories, and organisational adaptation strategies. These were coded across qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods; mapped to urban and rural and authority types; and analysed for short, medium, and long-term impacts.

The case study phase of the review employed a qualitative research design, enabling the collection of in-depth, place-based information. Case study organisations were selected through purposive sampling based on size (small, medium), dependency on LA funding, heritage type (cultural, natural, built, intangible), and ownership or business model. Eight HOs were chosen to reflect this diversity. These included sites that were owned by the LA but had transferred to volunteers or trusts via community asset transfers, independent museums, community-owned buildings, LA-run sites, and one intangible heritage organisation. 15 semi-structured interviews involving a total of 22 people were undertaken and supplemented by email communications and supporting documents. Interview participants included representatives from WYCA, the local councils, and HOs selected for case studies. All interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour, were conducted online, and followed a semi-structured schedule to ensure comparability across sites while allowing for contextual specificity. Interviews and supplementary

documents were analysed with key areas of focus including funding dependency, risks and mitigation, and socio-economic and governance impacts.

## Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged in interpreting its findings. First, the regional focus on West Yorkshire provides rich, context-specific insights but limits transferability. Whilst the region offers a valuable case study, its unique policy and funding environment may differ from other localities across England. This focus allows for an in-depth understanding but must be read alongside wider national patterns.

Second, the research aimed to reflect diversity in organisational size, heritage type, and locality, however, the case study selection was not exhaustive. Although a mix of urban, rural, asset and non-asset-based organisations was included, intangible heritage remains underrepresented due to its often less formal structure and documentation. Furthermore, the turnover thresholds used to categorise organisations, particularly the lower limit of £50,000 for 'small' organisations and up to £1 million for 'medium', may not align with other sectoral definitions and do not account for fluctuations in income related to one-off grants or project-based funding. To mitigate this, some organisations slightly outside these thresholds were included to better capture a representative range.

Third, the study centres on small and medium-sized organisations but acknowledges that these actors operate within a broader heritage ecosystem, including large institutions, national agencies, and commercial heritage providers. Added to this are micro and community HOs and freelancers who contribute to the diversity of the offer within the small to medium organisations (eg via their community outreach work or cultural programming). Whilst the focus offers insights into the specific vulnerabilities of this segment, a complete understanding of systemic dynamics requires further exploration of interdependencies across scales and organisational types. Future work should complement this research with broader ecosystem-level analyses, longitudinal funding, and organisational outcomes tracking. Finally, the case study findings on the importance of heritage sites and organisations to place, community and education might also be read alongside moves towards a broadening of economic analysis. For example, the developing DCMS Culture and Heritage Capital Framework, which seeks to provide better guidance on capturing and measuring the total value of culture and heritage interventions, constituent of both use and non-use, and economic and non-economic values [\[footnote 2\]](#).

## Background context to the literature review

The literature review highlighted specific factors that have affected the heritage sector in

England and these are presented thematically here before proceeding to the full discussion of secondary data analysis.

For example, the effect of budget cuts to LAs since 2010 is a key theme throughout the existing literature and studies. Reductions in central government funding for LAs compelled a wholesale restructuring of LA operations and priorities (Gray & Barford, 2018). Faced with diminished resources, LAs have prioritised statutory services such as adult social care and waste collection, often at the expense of discretionary services, including heritage.

The UK's departure from the European Union has closed access to significant funding sources such as the European Regional Development Fund and Creative Europe, which previously contributed approximately £450 million to UK heritage projects between 2007 and 2016. This loss has created a substantial funding gap, particularly affecting regions that relied on EU support for heritage-led regeneration efforts (Culture Hive, 2021). In response, the UK government introduced domestic programmes to help fill the gap. Notably, the 'Levelling Up Fund' allocated about £1.1 billion to cultural and heritage projects over its competitive rounds (Key Cities, 2023). Additionally, the UK 'Shared Prosperity Fund', with an overall budget of £2.6 billion for 2022–25, includes a 'Communities and Place' strand specifically intended to support heritage initiatives through LAs and community groups (UKSPF Prospectus, 2022). These targeted investments reflect a deliberate effort to counterbalance the withdrawal of EU funding and sustain heritage-led regeneration efforts.

LAs have had to develop organisational resilience, including strategies such as efficiency measures, revenue generation, and alternative funding sources (Barbera et al., 2017). This includes introducing efficiency measures, increasing local tax revenues, and seeking alternative funding through grants or private investment.

As Coles, Dinan, and Hutchison (2012) highlight, the implementation of "localism" - a policy framework designed to devolve power and responsibility to communities - has exposed significant disparities in local capacity. While some LAs have been able to take on enhanced roles in managing cultural assets, others have lacked the financial resources, strategic support, or workforce needed to invest in or maintain heritage infrastructure. This uneven landscape has placed particular strain on heritage assets that rely on LA stewardship. Barbera et al. (2017) observe that these broader pressures can impair councils' ability to meet the needs of vulnerable communities, while Coles et al. (2012) note that reductions in public investment have undermined the sustainability of community-based cultural and heritage initiatives. O'Brien and Oakley (2015) highlight enduring structural inequalities in cultural access, with national funding mechanisms often privileging already well-resourced areas.

Historic England's 'Heritage and the Economy' (2022) underscores the continuing economic and social value of heritage (see also West Yorkshire Combined Authority, n.d.; Lennox, 2016; Newman & Tourle, 2012), while drawing attention to the growing challenges councils face in maintaining heritage assets amid persistent financial constraints (Marks, 2018; Rex, 2019b; Clark, 2001).

## National policy

### Local government funding changes 2010 to 2025

LAs play a foundational role in supporting England's heritage sector, not only through direct funding but also by enabling access to infrastructure, expertise, and networks. However, according to the Local Government Association (LGA), councils made £24.5 billion in cuts or efficiencies between 2010 to 2011 and 2022 to 2023. If funding had kept pace with inflation and demand, net service spending would have been 42% higher in 2022 to 2023 than it was in reality (LGA, 2024). Despite real term increases in recent years, local government funding per resident remains 19% below its 2010 levels. Between 2010 and 2024, English councils reduced per capita spending on culture and leisure services by over 40% in real terms. Notably, while overall core funding per person fell by 35% in the most deprived tenth of councils and by 15% in the least deprived areas, the cuts to culture and leisure services were even more pronounced across the board (Museums Association, 2024). This indicates that, irrespective of the general funding reductions, culture and leisure services faced disproportionately higher cuts, underscoring the vulnerability of non-statutory services during periods of fiscal constraint.

Councils have responded by prioritising services they are legally required to provide, with many reducing, externalising, or ending support for heritage assets. As a result, since 2000, the number of LA museums in the UK has declined by 9%, with closures concentrated in regions such as the North West, South West, and Scotland—areas that have also seen limited growth in independent museum provision (Candlin & Margree, 2024).

Between 2012 to 2013 and 2022 to 2023, LA expenditure on heritage fell from £31.28 million to £17.09 million - a nominal decline of approximately 45%. (MyCake Ltd, 2024). While heritage accounted for around 1.7% of cultural services spending in 2012 to 2013, this proportion fell to just 1.3% by 2022 to 2023, highlighting the sector's ongoing vulnerability amid broader budgetary pressures. Furthermore, staffing costs account for 38% of the remaining heritage budget, underlining the sector's reliance on personnel-intensive activities and the vulnerability of employment in the face of further reductions (Historic England, 2025).

The UK government launched a consultation in December 2024 on reforming LA funding to better reflect local needs and revenue-generating capacity. The reform aims to implement a new funding model for the 2026 to 2027 financial year, adjusting the relative needs formula and the retention system of the business rates. However, as of April 2025, no specific modelling or impact assessment has been published regarding discretionary services, including heritage.

### Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic further strained LA budgets and accelerated structural challenges already facing the sector. The LGA estimated that councils faced a funding gap of at least £2 billion in 2020 to 2021 due to increased social care and public health

costs combined with significant reductions in income from business rates, parking, and fees and charges.

Analysis from the National Audit Office (2021) revealed that nearly all LAs experienced income shortfalls, with metropolitan councils and those in more deprived areas among the worst hit. Cultural and leisure services, including heritage, experienced significant revenue losses due to site closures, cancelled events, and reductions in tourism and commercial activities.

Due to their reliance on self-generated income and visitor footfall, heritage sites operated by LAs or third-sector partners were particularly vulnerable. A survey conducted by Historic England in 2021 reported that 76% of heritage organisations experienced a drop in income during the pandemic, and 40% reported drawing on reserves to maintain basic operations.

Although emergency support schemes such as the Culture Recovery Fund provided temporary relief, many HOs emerged from the crisis with depleted reserves, reduced staffing, and heightened precarity. These effects continue to compound funding pressures.

### **Section 114 notices and the heritage sector**

A Section 114 notice is issued by the LA's Chief Financial Officer when they believe the council cannot meet its legal obligation to balance its budget. Under the Local Government Finance Act 1988, issuing this notice immediately halts all new expenditure except for statutory services. It is a signal of de facto bankruptcy and requires urgent remedial planning.

A March 2024 report commissioned by Historic England and produced by MyCake Ltd found that heritage organisations located in areas where a Section 114 notice has been issued are significantly more financially strained than the sector at large. In these areas, the aggregate expenditure of heritage organisations consistently exceeds income, a trend that may reflect both limited financial resilience and constrained access to diversified income streams. The report highlighted that this financial pressure is most acute for smaller, volunteer-led organisations, which constitute a significant share of the heritage sector. While precise figures are not provided, these groups are widely recognised as the backbone of local heritage delivery, particularly in rural and under-resourced areas, and often operate without long-term reserves or institutional infrastructure.

The report also developed a classification system that segmented LAs into three groups based on historic and current heritage spending trends:

- Group 1 authorities demonstrated a notable and sustained increase in heritage investment, often tied to wider place-based cultural regeneration strategies. An example is Leeds City Council, which has invested significantly in culture and heritage through initiatives such as Leeds 2023 and the British Library North. Group 1 authorities exhibited a nominal 163% increase in heritage spending during 2012 to 2013 to 2022 to 2023, reflecting a strategic commitment to place-based cultural

development.

- Group 2 authorities had historically high spending but experienced modest reductions. For instance, Bristol City Council maintained strong support for museums and archives through most of the last decade but has recently implemented targeted cuts. Although starting from a similar baseline as Group 1, Group 2 authorities experienced a 60% decline.
- Group 3 authorities had low historic spending and saw the most significant cuts over the ten-year period. Group 3 authorities cut their already limited spending by a further 81%.

This stratification offers critical insight into geographic and policy-driven disparities in heritage support.

These findings indicate that consistent public investment is an important enabling factor for the resilience of third-sector heritage organisations. In particular, access to core operational funding supports organisational stability, facilitates long-term planning, and allows the development of financial buffers. This improves the sector's ability to manage funding volatility and maintain service continuity during periods of economic uncertainty. While causality cannot be conclusively determined, the data reinforce the strategic value of LA support in enabling a stable and diverse heritage ecosystem (MyCake Ltd, 2024).

### **Heritage sector perspectives**

The March 2024 'Heritage Pulse' update, produced by Baker Richards on behalf of Historic England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, offers a timely snapshot of how ongoing LA funding pressures are affecting HOs across England. The survey revealed widespread concern within the sector, with 86% of respondents expressing anxiety about the future of heritage services under current financial conditions. This concern stems from the increasing vulnerability of discretionary services—such as museums, archives, and cultural heritage—which are often the first to be reduced or eliminated in times of budgetary constraint due to their non-statutory status.

Many respondents drew a direct link between the closure of heritage facilities and the broader financial distress facing councils, particularly those that have issued Section 114 notices. The impacts are especially pronounced for small and medium-sized organisations that rely heavily on LA partnerships, access to publicly owned premises, and in-kind support such as shared services and promotion. As these forms of indirect support are withdrawn, organisations with limited financial reserves find themselves increasingly at risk of downsizing or closure.

The survey also pointed to a gradual but steady erosion of heritage-related capacity within local authorities. Respondents noted the disappearance of specialist roles, such as conservation officers and heritage planners, and the weakening of strategic leadership for heritage at the local level. This loss of institutional memory and professional expertise has consequences for how heritage is valued, protected, and integrated into wider place-making agendas.

One of the most pressing concerns raised in the 'Heritage Pulse' report was the threat

posed to place-based heritage initiatives, such as the 'High Streets Heritage Action Zones'. These programmes depend on strong local leadership, stable partnerships, and long-term planning—conditions that are increasingly difficult to sustain in the face of financial uncertainty and staffing reductions. Respondents were concerned about not only the loss of individual organisations but the fragmentation of the wider heritage infrastructure that supports collaborative regeneration and community engagement.

In response to these findings, HOs called on national bodies to take a more proactive role in advocacy and strategic intervention. Recommendations included lobbying for greater recognition of LA heritage services within broader cultural policy, providing emergency support for at-risk areas, and developing more robust frameworks to safeguard heritage in councils experiencing financial distress.

Taken together, the results of the 'Heritage Pulse' survey paint a picture of a sector under pressure from multiple fronts. The financial fragility of many organisations is compounded by the weakening of the public sector structures that traditionally supported them.

The employment of historic environment professionals in LAs across England has shown notable fluctuations over the past two decades, reflecting ongoing challenges in public sector staffing and funding. According to the Local Authority Staff Survey, an annual survey funded by Historic England and conducted by Essex Place Services in collaboration with the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO), there were an estimated 807 historic environment professionals in English LAs in 2023. This represents a modest increase of 1.5% from 2020 to 2023, with staffing levels nationally rising from an index of 100 in 2020 to 102 in 2023. However, between 2022 and 2023, there was a decline of 16 employees, highlighting recent instability. Previous surveys indicate that between 2006 and 2018, LA staffing for the historic environment fell by 35%, dropping from an index of 100 in 2006 to 65 in 2018. It is important to note that changes in survey methodology from 2020 onwards limit direct comparisons with earlier data (ALGAO, 2023).

Regional variations in historic environment staffing reveal that Yorkshire and the Humber have experienced a more pronounced decline compared to the national average. Historic environment staffing in Yorkshire fell from an index of 100 in 2006 to 67 in 2018, a 33% reduction, which is slightly less than the national decline of 35%. More recently, between 2020 and 2023, staffing in Yorkshire continued to decline, dropping from an index of 100 in 2020 to just 83 in 2023, even as the national average slightly increased to 102. This ongoing decline highlights Yorkshire's particular exposure to budgetary pressures. While some regions, such as the North West, saw a significant increase in heritage staffing (from 100 in 2020 to 131 in 2023), Yorkshire has faced continued reductions. This pattern reflects broader geographic disparities in public sector funding, including within the cultural and heritage sectors. While reductions in cultural funding—such as for museums, libraries, and community programmes—have been more widely documented, LA heritage services encompass a wider spectrum of functions. These include both access-oriented services (e.g., museums and archives) and regulatory functions such as historic environment teams, where staff like conservation officers support planning and development control. The impact of funding reductions can therefore manifest differently across these service areas, with deprived areas often facing more acute constraints on

both cultural programming and statutory heritage functions. As LAs continue to balance competing funding priorities, heritage teams in Yorkshire may remain particularly vulnerable to further cuts (ALGAO, 2023).

Against this backdrop, the present Rapid Evidence Review focuses specifically on the impact of changes to local authority funding on small and medium-sized heritage organisations – an issue underscored by the MyCake Ltd (2024) report. The report found that the median annual turnover across the sector is just £80,000, with a significant proportion of organisations operating on less than £10,000 per annum. In areas affected by a Section 114 notice, this median drops to £20,000, signalling acute financial fragility.

## Literature review

Before concentrating on the regional case studies, a systematic review examined how budgetary pressures on LAs in England have affected funding, operations, and strategic responses within the heritage sector. This review was restricted to peer-reviewed studies (ie not capturing so-called grey literature) and aimed to frame and expand our in-depth regional case study and qualitative approach within wider studies and findings.

This systematic literature review explores how increased budgetary pressures on LAs in England, especially in the period after 2010 have affected funding and support for HOs. The review examines the resulting short, medium, and long-term impacts on local HOs, communities, and regional ecosystems, with a particular focus on small and medium-sized organisations in West Yorkshire. It considers a broad set of outcomes, including economic, social, environmental, and governance dimensions.

The review is guided by the research question: How do increased budgetary pressures on local and combined authorities in England affect funding and support to heritage sector organisations, and what are the resulting short-, medium-, and long-term impacts (economic, social, environmental, governance) on local heritage organisations, communities, and regions—particularly in West Yorkshire?

Drawing on 40 peer-reviewed studies retrieved through a structured search of the Semantic Scholar corpus [\[footnote 3\]](#), the review explored variations across organisation size, authority type, heritage type, and geographic context, with particular attention to West Yorkshire.

## Characteristics of included studies

The review of 40 studies reveals fragmented but valuable evidence on the impact of budgetary pressures on heritage support within local and combined authorities in



England. The studies vary in geographic coverage, institutional focus, and heritage categories, but collectively, they provide important insights into how financial restructuring since 2010 has affected the operation and sustainability of heritage organisations.

Many studies focus on LAs, with a smaller number engaging with CAs or national frameworks. Reduced funding support was mentioned in 22 studies, with significant reductions reported in four. Despite these reductions, 15 studies identified positive or resilient community impacts, including increased local engagement and volunteerism (Crowe, 2018; Carrington, 2018; Smith, 2019), suggesting that community-level heritage work continues to provide social value even under constrained financial circumstances. Conversely, several studies identified worsening inequalities, declining public access, and reductions in service quality (Fahy et al., 2023; Newman & Tourle, 2012; Rex, 2019b). Several studies, including those by Aroles et al. (2019), Marks (2018), and Newman & Tourle (2012), document the detrimental impact of funding cuts on LA museums, citing closures, staff reductions, and the erosion of public access. These findings align with broader accounts of diminished capacity and strategic vision at the local level.

Other contributions – such as those by Rex (2019a, 2019b) and Forbes et al. (2015) – examine Governance transformations, particularly the rise of asset transfers and community-managed models, are often emerging as reactive strategies to mitigate funding cuts, but their sustainability remains contested. Rex (2019a) explores the application of Community Asset Transfer (CAT) processes to cultural infrastructure in England, focusing on case studies in Bristol, Leicester, and Grimsby. The study highlights how LAs have transferred public buildings used for cultural activities to community organisations in response to funding cuts. Similarly, Forbes et al. (2015) critically examine the asset transfer of leisure services, such as leisure centres and libraries, from the public to the voluntary sectors. The research assesses the balance between ‘austerity localism’ – where volunteers fill gaps left by retreating public provision – and ‘progressive localism,’ which envisions more locally responsive, cooperative models.

Studies by Fahy et al. (2023) and Rex & Campbell (2021) emphasise spatial inequalities, noting that more deprived and urban areas were most impacted by cuts during the period of austerity. This aligns with the findings of Gray & Barford (2018) and reaffirms concerns that national policies have exacerbated pre-existing geographic disparities in public service provision.

While several studies discuss the economic and governance implications of cuts during 2010 to 2015, fewer address the social and environmental dimensions of heritage loss. Exceptions include Carrington (2018) and Montague et al. (2015), who consider community engagement and place-making, highlighting the importance of heritage in shaping local identity and cohesion.

Montague et al. (2015) examine how economic and institutional pressures have reshaped the relationship between communities and heritage in Huddersfield, a post-industrial town in West Yorkshire. Their study highlights the interplay between urban design, regional cultural offerings, and civic society, emphasising the role of ‘cultural economics’ in understanding these dynamics.

## Geographic Coverage

Of the 40 studies reviewed, 37 explicitly focused on the United Kingdom, suggesting a strong national emphasis within the literature. The remaining three studies did not specify their geographic setting, reflecting occasional limitations in contextual clarity or reporting practices.

## Heritage type

A wide range of heritage types was represented across the studies, although 18 of the 40 studies did not clearly specify the type of heritage under investigation. Among those that did, urban heritage was the most frequently studied (9 studies), followed by asset-based heritage, such as buildings and landscapes (8 studies), rural heritage (6 studies), and intangible heritage, including cultural traditions and practices (2 studies). Several studies have examined more than one type of heritage, highlighting the overlap and complexity inherent in cultural heritage research. Nonetheless, the lack of specification in nearly half of the studies points to a potential gap in the field regarding the categorisation and contextualisation of heritage types.

## Research design

In terms of methodological approach, 14 studies employed qualitative methods, 12 used mixed methods, and 10 applied quantitative designs. Two studies were based on theoretical or conceptual analysis, while three did not clearly specify their research design. The predominance of qualitative and mixed-method approaches indicates a preference for in-depth, context-rich inquiry, often aimed at understanding complex socio-cultural dynamics rather than producing generalisable quantitative findings.

## Study focus

The studies covered a diverse range of focus areas. Museums and asset transfer processes were the most common themes, each appearing in four studies. Other recurrent topics included the historic environment (three studies) and industrial heritage (two studies). Additional areas of interest spanned world heritage sites, landscape partnerships, social media use, national parks, arts festivals, climate change impacts, community management, and heritage-led development.

Despite the breadth of themes covered, the literature remains limited by a lack of longitudinal research, incomplete geographic coverage, and under-exploration of combined authorities. Few studies evaluate financial shocks' medium- or long-term impacts on heritage resilience. Nevertheless, this body of work provides a critical foundation for understanding the evolving relationship between fiscal policy, governance models, and heritage provision in England. It also highlights the need for further research into underrepresented authority types, rural and intangible heritage, and long-term funding trajectories.

This synthesis informs the next stage of the review, which will examine specific pathways through which budgetary pressures shape heritage outcomes in regions such as West Yorkshire and identify strategies that have either mitigated or exacerbated vulnerability within the sector.

## Funding mechanisms and economic impact

This subsection synthesises the findings of the systematic literature review, with a particular focus on funding reductions, regional disparities, and their implications for the heritage sector. The review confirms that there have been widespread consequences for the funding and operation of heritage services from budgetary pressures. Heritage services refer to the range of activities that support the preservation, management, and public engagement with cultural, historical, and environmental assets. These include museums and cultural collections, historic parks and landscapes, archives, local studies, and conservation services (Aroles et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2023; Maxted, 2019).

These services are delivered through a mix of LAs, national and combined authorities, and community organisations or trusts. In many cases, delivery models now combine statutory oversight with community-led management, reflecting a shift toward more decentralised and collaborative governance structures (Rex, 2019a; Baxter, 2015). In addition to managing physical heritage assets, some services also support intangible cultural heritage.

Across the 40 studies reviewed, 27 reported a clear reduction in funding for either heritage or broader culture-related services. While the two are closely linked, they serve distinct functions: “culture-related” funding typically encompasses libraries, museums, theatres, and community arts, whereas “heritage” funding is more narrowly focused on the conservation of historic sites, archives, and built environment assets. Examining both categories provides a fuller picture of the pressures facing LAs, particularly as these services are often delivered through shared budgets or overlapping programmes. LAs remain the predominant providers of these services, with 27 of the 37 studies explicitly identifying them as the traditional delivery mechanism for heritage and culture. Over the past decade, LAs have experienced substantial financial constraints, with central government grants reduced by up to 49.1% (Rex & Campbell, 2021), a 35% fall in cultural services spending (Rex, 2019a), and a 37% cut in grants to local authorities overall (Smith et al., 2023). These reductions have resulted in constrained spending capacity, increased reliance on alternative revenue sources, and a marked decline in service levels. For example, Fahy et al. (2023) observed a 36% reduction in per capita LA spending on cultural, environmental, and planning (CEP) services in England between 2009 to 2010 and 2018 to 2019. While Aroles et al. (2019) and Newman & Tourle (2012) reported departmental-level cuts of up to 24% in real terms over the period from 2011 to 2012 to 2014 to 2015 within DCMS.

LAs have had to make difficult decisions, frequently prioritising essential services over discretionary ones, such as heritage. This is particularly evident in regional contexts, such as West Yorkshire and the North West, where multiple case study examples and reviewed literature highlight recurring outcomes, including closures of museums, reduced opening hours, and asset transfers (Marks, 2018; Rex, 2019a; Newman & Tourle, 2012).

At the regional level, funding variations are significant. While some CAs have shown resilience and continued investment in culture—West Yorkshire being a case in point—

the literature reveals a gap in specific data on these newer governance structures. Only two of the reviewed studies explicitly referenced CAs (Fahy et al., 2023; Barker & Pina-Sánchez, 2019), indicating a pressing need for further research.

The closure of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) in 2012 and the subsequent transfer of its responsibilities to Arts Council England (ACE) were intended to streamline cultural governance. However, this consolidation coincided with significant funding reductions – ACE faced a nearly 30% budget cut between 2010 and 2014, which strained its capacity to support the expanded portfolio of museums and libraries (Clark, 2001; Rex, 2019b). The dissolution of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) in 2012 led to the loss of specialised regional expertise and disrupted longstanding support networks, weakening structures for local heritage management. Previously, the MLA had coordinated programmes like 'Renaissance in the Regions', provided statutory advice (eg export licensing, export reviewing, the Acceptance in Lieu and Government Indemnity Schemes), and offered hands-on support to local museums, archives, and conservation services—functions now transferred to Arts Council England and The National Archives (Gov.uk, 2010). The consequences have been uneven, but in many areas, LA-funded heritage provision has declined—not through the loss of heritage assets themselves, but through reduced public access to them. This has manifested in shorter opening hours, the scaling back of educational outreach, and the discontinuation of staff-led programmes and events (Historic England, 2014). These changes risk reducing opportunities for community engagement with heritage (Bell et al., 2017; Maxted, 2019; Newman & Tourle, 2012), potentially eroding local identity, social capital, and cohesion, particularly in places where heritage plays a central civic or cultural role (Lennox, 2016; Montague et al., 2015; Clark, 2001).

These findings point to a fragmented funding landscape with regional and local disparities. Subsequent case study analysis will further examine these regional variations, highlighting how different authorities are responding to heritage funding pressures and what this means for small and medium-sized organisations operating within their jurisdictions.

## **Organisational adaptation and resilience**

In response to sustained financial pressures, HOs have adopted a range of strategies to adapt and remain operational. These adaptations reveal sector-wide resilience, but also point to systemic challenges, particularly for smaller organisations.

One prominent adaptation strategy has been the transfer of heritage asset management from LAs to community organisations or charitable trusts. This trend, documented in multiple studies, reflects both a shift in local government delivery models—aimed at improving efficiency and resilience in the context of budget constraints—and proactive efforts by communities to take on stewardship of assets at risk of closure (Rex, 2018; Smith et al., 2023). These transfers often involve varied models, from charitable trusts to social enterprises, and frequently combine formal partnerships with grassroots

governance (Carrington, 2018). While driven in part by reduced public funding (Rex & Campbell, 2021; Rex, 2019a), the model has in some cases resulted in enhanced community participation and responsiveness to local needs (Beale, 2016; Smith, 2019; Forbes et al., 2015). At the same time, studies raise concerns about long-term sustainability, reliance on volunteer labour, and the risk of uneven outcomes depending on local capacity and resources (Marks, 2018; Rex, 2019b; Knights, 2018). Rex (2018) and Rex (2019a) detail the museum asset transfer process in England as a direct response to reduced funding, while Smith et al. (2023) report similar developments in public park management, with control often shifting to charitable trusts and social enterprises.

Community-led management has become more prevalent, as described by Forbes et al. (2015) in the case of libraries that transitioned to volunteer-based operations. Carrington (2018) discusses hybrid partnership models that balance local government oversight with community group participation. Social enterprises have also emerged as a more prevalent model, allowing heritage sites—such as public parks—to adopt more commercial operations while maintaining public value (Smith et al., 2023).

Faced with lower public subsidies, many organisations have also restructured their funding models. Thelwall (2015) notes an increased reliance on income generated through venues, events, and other commercial activities. Barker and Pina-Sánchez (2019) examine the growing role of charitable giving in sustaining public park operations, while Rex and Campbell (2021) document a broader shift towards earned income from cultural programming and events.

Community engagement has played a central role in organisational adaptation. Studies by Smith et al. (2023) and Forbes et al. (2015) emphasise the growing reliance on volunteer labour to sustain heritage services. Beale (2016) illustrates how social media has become an important tool for enhancing community involvement in interpretative and operational decision-making. Similarly, Smith (2019) shows that responsiveness to local needs has increased following community takeovers of heritage assets.

The effects of budgetary pressures on HOs vary considerably depending on organisational size, with smaller and community-run entities facing disproportionately greater challenges compared to larger institutions. Small organisations, typically with annual turnovers above £50,000, emerged as the most vulnerable group. These organisations often rely heavily on venue-based income and possess limited financial reserves, making them especially sensitive to funding cuts. Adaptation strategies have included intensified efforts to generate earned income and, in some cases, transitioning to community-run models. These models typically involve the transfer of management responsibility or asset ownership from LAs to community organisations or trusts, often accompanied by a greater reliance on volunteers in place of paid staff (Smith et al., 2023; Rex, 2018). While this shift can reduce operational costs, it does not automatically guarantee financial sustainability. Instead, organisations often pursue a combination of cost-saving and income-generating strategies—such as diversifying revenue streams, developing venue-based and entrepreneurial income (Thelwall, 2015; Stanziola, 2011), and integrating staff with commercial expertise (Rex & Campbell, 2021). Outcomes have been mixed: some organisations have ceased operations entirely, while others have

managed to sustain services through volunteer-led delivery and local mobilisation. However, concerns remain about the long-term viability of this model, particularly around volunteer retention, equity of access, and maintaining professional standards (Marks, 2018; Rex, 2019b). Medium-sized organisations, with turnovers above £250,000 and below £1 million, demonstrated comparatively greater resilience. These institutions often employed income diversification strategies—such as introducing commercial services, broadening funding sources, and enhancing fundraising capacity—to absorb the impact of reduced public funding. Although affected, most have been able to maintain core operations, albeit with structural or programmatic adjustments.

Community-run organisations, which span various sizes, have increasingly assumed responsibility for transferred heritage assets as part of LA divestment strategies. These groups often rely on volunteer labour, local fundraising, and in-kind support to sustain operations. Many smaller or community-based heritage organisations rely on volunteer labour, local fundraising, and in-kind support to sustain their operations. This model has been associated with increased local engagement and stewardship (Carrington, 2018; Beale, 2016; Smith, 2019), but also presents ongoing challenges related to long-term financial sustainability, organisational capacity, and governance. Studies have documented rising dependence on volunteers (Smith et al., 2023; Forbes et al., 2015), with concerns about maintaining commitment over time (Forbes et al., 2015). Inequities in access based on community wealth and capacity have also been noted (Rex, 2019b), alongside difficulties in adapting governance models to new responsibilities and risks (Rex, 2019a; Marks, 2018; Rex & Campbell, 2021). While these findings highlight significant pressures, the Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF) has produced positive evidence on the long-term outcomes of community-led models, suggesting that with the right support, this approach can yield sustainable and impactful results (Architectural Heritage Fund, 2022). Taken together, this differentiated impact profile suggests a potential reconfiguration of the heritage landscape. The combination of reduced support for statutory responsibilities—such as the conservation of listed buildings, which LAs are legally required to uphold—and the broader devolution of non-statutory functions, including cultural programming and community heritage initiatives, may contribute to increasing polarisation between larger, more stable institutions and smaller or community-based organisations that operate with greater financial uncertainty and fewer resources (Rex & Campbell, 2021; Fahy et al., 2023; Rex, 2019a; Smith et al., 2023; Thelwall, 2015; Rex, 2019b; Marks, 2018)... As funding structures evolve, the sector may see a growing reliance on hybrid and localised heritage management models.

While the heritage sector has demonstrated considerable adaptability, the evidence suggests that many current strategies reflect a mixture of reactive, compensatory, and potentially transformational responses to ongoing pressures (Rex, 2018; Thelwall, 2015; Carrington, 2018). New management approaches and diversified income streams have been adopted (Thelwall, 2015), and partnership models have emerged in response to changing funding landscapes (Carrington, 2018). However, some adaptations appear more short-term and necessity-driven—for example, increased reliance on volunteers (Smith et al., 2023), asset transfers prompted by financial strain (Rex & Campbell, 2021), and the shift toward earned income as a survival strategy (Rex & Campbell, 2021). Concerns remain regarding the sustainability of these models, particularly the long-term viability of volunteer-based management (Forbes et al., 2015), the strain on professional

standards (Knights, 2018), and bureaucratic constraints limiting organisational agility (Marks, 2018). Nonetheless, there are also indications of more transformative change, including the restructuring of cultural service departments to integrate commercial expertise (Rex & Campbell, 2021), and successful community-led transitions in some contexts (Smith, 2019). Overall, the evidence points to a complex and uneven picture, where reactive strategies coexist with more strategic innovations—though the durability and impact of these changes remain uncertain (Rex, 2019b).

## Heritage type vulnerabilities

The impact of budgetary pressures on the heritage sector is not uniform; it varies significantly depending on the type of heritage in question. The evidence reviewed suggests differentiated vulnerabilities across urban, rural, asset-based, and intangible heritage, each shaped by their specific management structures, funding dependencies, and community ties.

Urban heritage is increasingly framed within economically oriented policy agendas, with an emphasis on performance metrics, regeneration potential, and contributions to local competitiveness (Peacock, 2015; Rex & Campbell, 2021; Stanziola, 2011). This has led to a shift towards ‘other-than-public’ forms of management, including public-private partnerships, social enterprises, and community trusts (Rex, 2018, 2019a; Smith et al., 2023; Carrington, 2018). While these models can open up new opportunities for heritage-led regeneration - attracting investment, enhancing visitor experiences, and securing long-term viability - they also carry risks. Chief among these is the potential for over-commercialisation, where financial imperatives overshadow cultural, educational, or community functions (Rex, 2019b; Aroles et al., 2019; Newman & Tourle, 2012). In such cases, heritage sites may be preserved physically but lose aspects of their public value, such as accessibility, and inclusivity (Maxted, 2019; Rex, 2019b; Knights, 2018). The challenge, therefore, lies in ensuring that alternative governance models sustain not only the economic viability of heritage assets, but also their role as shared cultural resources (Forbes et al., 2015; Aroles et al., 2019; Rex, 2019b).

Rural heritage, by contrast, faces a distinct set of challenges, albeit further research is needed to fully understand their scope and impact. Existing studies point to difficulties in maintaining traditional farm buildings, rural landscapes, and dispersed heritage assets has become increasingly difficult in the face of funding reductions. While there is some indication that community-based management approaches in rural areas, the specific impacts of budgetary pressures remain under-documented, indicating a significant evidence gap. The geographic dispersion and lower population density in rural areas may further exacerbate resource mobilisation and service sustainability challenges (Clarke, 2016; Rex, 2019a).

Asset-based heritage, such as historic buildings, museum infrastructure, and archaeological sites, significantly affected by asset transfer processes, with outcomes varying depending on local capacity, and governance arrangements (Rex, 2018, 2019a,

2019b; Smith et al., 2023). These assets are often costly to maintain and highly dependent on public funding (Rex & Campbell, 2021; Newman & Tourle, 2012; Smith et al., 2023). Reductions in support have prompted both challenges, such as deferred maintenance and closures, and innovations, including adaptive reuse and community management models. Nevertheless, the physical upkeep of heritage assets remains a significant financial cost, particularly for smaller organisations (Thelwall, 2015; Rex, 2019b; Marks, 2018; Knights, 2018; Rex, 2019).

Intangible heritage, including traditions, languages, crafts, and cultural practices, tends to receive less explicit focus in both academic literature and policy frameworks addressing financial pressures (Montague et al., 2015; West Yorkshire Combined Authority, n.d.). Although direct data on the effects of funding cuts is limited, the potential for tradition loss is a noted concern, especially where formal support mechanisms (such as documentation, events, or specialist training) are reduced. On the other hand, some opportunities have emerged for community-led preservation efforts, which may offer more sustainable and culturally embedded models of safeguarding (Montague et al., 2015; West Yorkshire Combined Authority, n.d.).

The evidence suggests this is not a simple transformation but a complex restructuring that raises significant questions about long-term sustainability and the maintenance of cultural values while pursuing financial stability.

## **Social and community impact**

The social and community impacts of changes in heritage sector funding and management are complex and often context dependent. Several studies report increased levels of community involvement in heritage governance and delivery. Carrington (2018) documents a high level of public participation in governance processes and local activities following community-led initiatives. Similarly, Smith (2019) observes increased use and diversification of services in libraries transferred to community management, while Beale (2016) highlights how digital engagement, particularly through social media, has facilitated greater community input in interpretation and decision-making.

Access to heritage has changed in mixed ways. Maxted (2019) warns of declining community access to local studies collections due to funding constraints, while Bell et al. (2017) report falling visitor numbers at archives. Rex (2019b) further raises concerns about unequal access based on community capacity and wealth, highlighting geographic and socioeconomic disparities.

Despite these challenges, some studies suggest positive impacts on community wellbeing. The West Yorkshire Cultural Framework study notes improved quality of life and enhanced physical and mental wellbeing associated with local cultural programmes. Peacock (2015) similarly documents how heritage outreach initiatives have been shaped around wellbeing and social inclusion goals.



Meanwhile, the relationship between communities and heritage is evolving. Aroles et al. (2019) describe a shift away from traditional museum ethos, suggesting changing expectations in how communities relate to heritage. They conclude that increasing commercial pressures are leading museums to adopt corporate practices, which can, in some cases, compromise their cultural missions and public service ethos. This shift is particularly evident in institutions grappling with ongoing funding constraints. Evidence shows a sharp reduction in public funding (Rex & Campbell, 2021), prompting museums to prioritise earned income and entrepreneurial strategies (Stanziola, 2011; Thelwall, 2015). As a result, many have restructured to include staff with commercial expertise and are experimenting with “other-than-public” management models (Rex, 2018). While such adaptations may enhance financial resilience, they often entail a greater focus on commercial metrics and performance indicators (Peacock, 2015), sometimes at the expense of community-oriented programming or curatorial independence. Aroles et al. (2019) document a shift away from traditional museum values, while Newman and Tourle (2012) note a decline in the quality of provision. These tensions raise questions about how museums can sustain their cultural and civic roles in an increasingly market-oriented policy environment.

Montague et al. (2015) explore how community perceptions and values surrounding heritage are adjusting in the face of economic and institutional pressures. They argue for more participatory and locally grounded heritage practices, highlighting the need to reconfigure governance models to better reflect community identities and foster cultural resilience in post-industrial regions.

Volunteerism has become increasingly central to heritage management. Smith et al. (2023) report growing reliance on volunteers across a range of settings. While this can foster civic participation and local stewardship, it also raises concerns about the long-term sustainability and equity of models that depend on unpaid labour.

Heritage continues to play a role in fostering community identity and cohesion. Lennox (2016) emphasises the delivery of socially relevant heritage programmes, contributing to a sense of place and shared memory. However, Newman and Tourle (2012) caution that declining resources and reduced service quality may undermine these outcomes, weakening the sector’s contribution to social cohesion.

Lastly, geographical inequalities remain a significant concern. Fahy et al. (2023) highlight how heritage funding cuts have widened disparities in access to cultural services and their associated wellbeing benefits, particularly between affluent and less affluent regions. Meanwhile, Clark (2001) notes a mismatch between rising public expectations for heritage conservation and the resources available to meet them.

Further analysis reveals several distinct dimensions of these social impacts. First, the neglect or erosion of local heritage resources contributes to a loss of community identity and pride. Reduced opportunities for communities to connect with their histories weaken social cohesion and diminish local distinctiveness, undermining both well-being and social capital (Heritage Fund, 2020).

On the other hand, many LAs have facilitated asset transfers to community groups,

prompting increased levels of volunteer involvement and civic participation. These shifts have created opportunities for strengthening local identity and social cohesion, especially where heritage is closely tied to community narratives. However, the withdrawal of public services also risks exacerbating inequalities, with disadvantaged communities often facing reduced access to cultural heritage resources and fewer opportunities to sustain local initiatives without adequate support.

The deterioration or closure of cultural facilities such as museums, parks, and historic buildings can harm community wellbeing (Peacock, 2015). These venues often serve as vital social spaces, supporting informal interaction, learning, and leisure (Bell et al., 2017; Newman & Tourle, 2012; Rex & Campbell 2021). Their loss, particularly in areas already facing deprivation, exacerbates social exclusion and limits community development opportunities (Culture Commons, 2022; Fahy et al., 2023; Heritage Fund, 2020; Rex 2019a, 2019b).

Together, these studies paint a nuanced picture of the evolving social role of heritage. They reveal both the potential of community-based approaches and the fragility of local systems under fiscal strain, underscoring the importance of equitable, sustainable policy responses tailored to local contexts.

## Environmental impact

Environmental considerations appear infrequently in the literature, yet they represent a critical dimension of heritage funding and management. Reduced financial support can compromise the maintenance of historic buildings and landscapes, many of which require ongoing conservation efforts. Where maintenance is delayed or withdrawn, deterioration can lead to environmental degradation, especially in structures that lack energy efficiency and generate waste (Historic England, 2022).

At the same time, reductions in funding have incentivised adaptive reuse of heritage buildings. Repurposing historic structures for contemporary uses—such as housing, offices, or community venues—can produce positive environmental outcomes by preserving embedded carbon, reducing demolition waste, and limiting new construction (Heritage Alliance, 2023).

More direct environmental effects are evident in the neglect of historic landscapes and gardens. These spaces, while valuable for heritage and recreation, also provide biodiversity and ecological services. When funding is cut, such areas can fall into disrepair, leading to biodiversity loss and degradation of green infrastructure (Heritage Fund, 2020; DCMS, 2021). Damage to natural environments associated with heritage sites has also been reported in rural and peri-urban locations, where management capacity is weakest.

The deterioration of heritage buildings contributes further to environmental harm. Poorly maintained buildings often lack energy-efficient systems, leading to increased carbon

emissions and resource inefficiency (Clark, 2001; Culture Commons, 2022). Additionally, the loss of urban green spaces embedded in heritage assets exacerbates environmental inequalities in densely populated areas.

Beyond physical impacts, the decline of the heritage sector has contributed to the erosion of traditional environmental knowledge. Crafts such as sustainable building practices, natural material use, and landscape stewardship are integral to heritage conservation and ecological resilience. Their decline has weakened the transmission of low-impact resource management practices, which could otherwise contribute to broader environmental sustainability goals (Crafts Council, 2021; Heritage Alliance, 2022).

Altogether, the literature suggests that heritage funding reductions not only pose a threat to cultural value and community wellbeing but also undermine environmental sustainability.

## Governance impact

The analysis reveals significant changes in governance structures within the heritage sector, driven by reductions in funding and evolving funding landscapes. These shifts raise questions around regulatory capacity, accountability, and the long-term sustainability of heritage management systems.

Budget cuts have reduced the capacity of local authorities to monitor and enforce heritage protections under planning law and listed building regulations (Patrick, 2019). This diminished capacity heightens the risk of inappropriate development and physical damage to heritage assets (Clark, 2001; DCMS, 2021).

Stakeholder engagement has also been curtailed due to resource constraints. With fewer staff and limited consultation budgets, many authorities have reduced their engagement with local communities and interest groups (Heritage Fund, 2020; Carrington, 2018). This erosion of participatory processes diminishes democratic accountability in heritage governance and may lead to decisions that fail to reflect local priorities.

There has also been a marked shift in management models. Numerous studies report a move toward 'other-than-public' arrangements, such as charitable trusts and community enterprises (Rex, 2018; Rex, 2019a; Smith et al., 2023). These arrangements introduce new challenges around governance capacity, transparency, and long-term viability.

Changing roles and responsibilities are evident across the heritage sector. Veldpaus and Pendlebury (2019) observe that conservation planning has become increasingly fragmented, with responsibilities spread across multiple actors and levels of governance. This diffusion can lead to inconsistencies in policy implementation and challenges in coordinating heritage protection. Meanwhile, Knights (2018) highlights how museum professionals are expected to take on broader roles, including adapting to heightened managerial demands and commercial imperatives. This shift reflects a wider trend toward

professional hybridisation, where curatorial and conservation expertise must now be balanced with skills in fundraising, audience development, and business strategy.

New funding mechanisms have influenced institutional structures. Rex and Campbell (2021) describe how cultural departments have restructured to prioritise commercial expertise. Stanziola (2011) points to the rise of entrepreneurial governance models as organisations seek to generate income in the absence of public subsidy.

Policy and regulatory changes have further reshaped heritage governance. Patrick (2019) highlights how changes to planning frameworks have altered the protection of heritage sites, while Lennox (2016) notes efforts to develop more flexible heritage policies in response to economic constraints.

These changes have prompted a revaluation of accountability and performance metrics. Several studies advocate for evaluation systems that extend beyond economic return, capturing broader social and well-being outcomes (Peacock, 2015).

Regional and local variations also persist. Fahy et al. (2023) note uneven distributions of cuts and resources across different LA structures and UK nations, leading to disparities in heritage protection and service delivery. Concerns over sustainability are frequently raised. Forbes et al. (2015) caution that many new governance models rely heavily on volunteerism and lack stable income sources, threatening their long-term viability. Finally, equity and access remain pressing concerns. Rex (2019b) warns that under new governance arrangements, communities with fewer resources may be less able to engage with or manage local heritage, exacerbating existing inequalities.

Overall, the literature highlights a major shift in the governance of heritage—from public-led systems toward hybrid and community-based models. While these changes may increase flexibility and engagement in some contexts, they also present significant risks around equity, accountability, professional standards, and sustainability that warrant continued scrutiny.

## Summary

The combined analysis of national policies, regional circumstances, and systematic evidence highlights how changes in LA funding arrangements since 2010 have significantly influenced local government priorities and operational capacity. The effects have been particularly noticeable in discretionary areas such as heritage, where many services have experienced ongoing financial pressures. These trends stem from long-term funding reductions, the withdrawal of EU funding, and the fiscal challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is important to recognise that these pressures were significantly offset by emergency government interventions. For example, the government allocated £1.57 billion through the Culture Recovery Fund—including a dedicated Culture Recovery Fund for Heritage—which supported around 5,000 organisations with over £1.2 billion in grants, including the Heritage Stimulus Fund

(£138 million) (DCMS, 2020; Historic England, 2025). The systemic review of 40 peer-reviewed studies revealed that the most significant pressures have been borne by LAs and small to medium-sized HOs. National institutions have retained a degree of resilience due to protected funding arrangements and public visibility, whereas local actors—particularly those embedded in deprived regions—have encountered intensified precarity. Funding reductions have led to a fragmented heritage ecosystem, with rising regional disparities, structural vulnerabilities, and service discontinuities.

HOs have responded through a mix of adaptation and innovation. Strategies have included asset transfers to community groups, diversification of income, and the adoption of alternative governance models such as social enterprises and charitable trusts. These responses have supported continued operation in some cases but raise critical concerns about long-term sustainability, equitable access, and the over-reliance on unpaid labour.

Importantly, impacts vary not only by organisation size and governance type but also by heritage form. Urban and asset-based heritage dominates the literature and often benefits from regeneration-linked investment. By contrast, rural and intangible heritage remains under-documented and underserved, limiting policy responsiveness and sectoral inclusivity.

Thematic analysis has shown that the consequences of fiscal contraction stretch across economic, social, environmental, and governance dimensions. Economically, funding shortfalls have potentially curtailed heritage tourism and stifled regeneration potential, as reduced LA spending (Fahy et al., 2023; Rex & Campbell, 2021) and the closure or scaling back of cultural institutions (Marks, 2018; Newman & Tourle, 2012) have limited the sector's capacity to contribute to local economic development. Socially, communities have become more involved in managing assets through volunteer-led and community-run models (Carrington, 2018; Smith, 2019; Beale, 2016), but this shift has exposed inequalities in local capacity and access, particularly in more deprived areas (Rex, 2019b; Fahy et al., 2023). Environmentally, reduced maintenance of heritage sites undermines sustainability goals, leading to deterioration of assets and missed opportunities for low-carbon practices (Historic England, 2022; Culture Commons, 2022), though adaptive reuse of historic buildings has offered green alternatives by preserving embedded carbon and reducing waste (Heritage Alliance, 2023). Governance-wise, the rise of hybrid and decentralised models—such as community trusts and social enterprises—presents both opportunities and challenges. While these arrangements can expand local stewardship (Rex, 2018; Smith et al., 2023), they are often accompanied by weakened regulatory enforcement due to diminished local authority capacity (Patrick, 2019; Clark, 2001; DCMS, 2021) and reduced community consultation (Carrington, 2018; Heritage Fund, 2020), raising concerns around long-term viability and equity (Forbes et al., 2015).

Methodologically, the literature prioritises qualitative and mixed-methods research with a focus on place-based dynamics, though it lacks longitudinal and comparative analysis. There is also a deficit in clarity around heritage typologies and insufficient attention to the governance role of combined authorities.

In sum, Section 4 evidenced how tailored, place-sensitive, and heritage-type-specific

approaches would increase the effectiveness of funding and policy interventions. Such approaches have the potential to address existing fragmentation, help mitigate regional inequalities, and strengthen the long-term sustainability of the heritage sector. Supporting more inclusive, resilient, and regionally balanced models – particularly in areas like West Yorkshire, where strong cultural infrastructure coexists with acute financial pressures – may yield more impactful outcomes. The regional case studies that follow will assess how these dynamics manifest at the local level and identify potential models for reform and resilience-building across England’s heritage landscape.

## **The case study context: West Yorkshire Combined Authority**

As a combined authority anchored in a Group 1 heritage investor, West Yorkshire offers a timely case study for understanding the effects of sustained public investment, regional coordination, and emerging vulnerabilities in an increasingly constrained fiscal environment. West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) comprises the local authorities of Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds, and Wakefield. Formed in 2014 under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, the Mayor of West Yorkshire position was introduced in 2021 following the devolution deal in 2020. Tracy Brabin, who was re-elected in 2024, currently holds the role.

According to data from WYCA, 23% of the region’s population identifies as Black, Asian, Mixed, or other ethnic groups. This is higher than the national average for England, where approximately 19% of the population belongs to these ethnic groups, based on the 2021 Census data (ONS, 2023; WYCA, 2023).

The region’s heritage encompasses a wide range of assets. These include historic country houses, heritage railways, and industrial legacy rooted in coal mining and textile production. Beyond physical sites, the region also has intangible heritage, with traditions and cultural practices such as sporting events, music, and festivals. Channel 4 chose Leeds as its home outside of London in 2023, and the region saw the Leeds 2023 Year of Culture, Kirklees Year of Music, Calderdale Year of Culture in 2024, and Wakefield Year of Culture 2024. Bradford is the UK City of Culture in 2025. Employment in the culture, heritage, and sport sector in West Yorkshire is a substantial part of the local economy, accounting for 15% of all employment, with a stronger representation in Leeds.

WYCA includes several key cities such as Leeds and Bradford, and there are 7 Universities within the region. It also faces several challenges. For example, 22% of residents live in areas classed as amongst the most deprived 10% in England according to the 2021 West Yorkshire Governance review. The WYCA State of the Region report 2023 to 2024 estimated 30% of West Yorkshire households are in fuel poverty and that relative levels of deprivation and wider place-based challenges have increased over the last years.

In terms of the individual LAs, Leeds City Council has been navigating financial challenges while striving to maintain essential services. For the 2025 to 2026 budget, the council plans to save £103.8 million to meet legal requirements. Kirklees Council has been facing financial pressures, leading to budget cuts across various services. For the 2025 to 2026 budget, the council has proposed £11.4 million in new savings. The council is also planning a 2.99% increase in core council tax [\[footnote 4\]](#). This is in line with many other councils across the UK facing a collective funding shortfall that is leading to cuts, reduced services, and increased charges.

Bradford Council is facing significant financial challenges, leading to budget cuts and a substantial council tax increase. For the 2025 to 2026 budget, the council has approved a 9.99% council tax raise, one of the highest in the UK. This increase aims to reduce borrowing costs over the next 20 years and address a structural budget gap of £120 million (Bradford City Council, 2023). The council has proposed savings of £43.6 million [\[footnote 5\]](#).

Despite these constraints, Bradford has invested heavily in heritage and cultural regeneration. The city secured £10 million in core funding from DCMS for its year as UK City of Culture 2025, complemented by £5 million from Arts Council England and £4.95 million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2023). Additionally, Historic England granted £2 million toward a three-year Heritage Action Zone in Bradford's historic heart, supporting renovations, public programming, and community engagement (Historic England, 2024). These initiatives illustrate Bradford's commitment to leveraging heritage investment for local economic growth, civic pride, and tourism, mitigating some of the fiscal pressures facing the council.

Wakefield Council is addressing a £39.4 million budget gap for the 2025 to 2026 financial year. The council has outlined savings totalling £29 million and plans to raise £9.1 million by increasing council tax and the Adult Social Care Precept by a combined 4.99% [\[footnote 6\]](#). Calderdale Council is also navigating financial challenges for the 2025/26 budget year. A council tax Increase of 4.99%, including 2.99% for general services and 2% for the Social Care Precept, is proposed [\[footnote 7\]](#).

## Introduction to the case studies: Overview and emergent themes

For the qualitative component of this report, 15 semi-structured interviews involving a total of 22 people were undertaken and supplemented by email communications and supporting documents. These included interviews with representatives from the 8 HO case studies drawn from across the region – Undercliffe Cemetery, Bradford; Leeds West Indian Carnival; Kirklees Museums and Galleries; Hyde Park Picture House, Leeds; Ilkley Manor House, Bradford; Castleford Heritage Trust, Queens Mill, Wakefield; Bronte Parsonage Museum, Bradford; Calderdale Industrial Museum. These form the basis for

the case studies that follow in the next section.

Heritage and/or cultural managers from the 5 LAs of Leeds, Bradford, Calderdale, Wakefield, Kirklees, and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority were interviewed. The LAs are uniquely positioned to understand the funding landscape, opportunities and plans for culture and heritage, along with any operating pressures and threats. Additionally, conversations with LA representatives expanded our understanding of the extent of heritage and the LA services offered or not offered, highlighting the limitations of this report. Several of our case studies are either directly owned or operated by the relevant LA, while others obtain funding or collaborate closely with other council departments and services. Interviews with specific HOs informed our case studies and allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the specific operating conditions and mitigating strategies related to each site, collection, or community. A further two interviews explored the wider landscape from the perspective of a support organisation outside of the LA (Museum Development North), and from the perspective of a larger organisation that has capitalised on transformative funding, and which operates a different type of heritage than those consulted in the case studies (Keighley and Worth Valley Railway).

Some organisations have site or organisation-specific concerns, especially the LA-owned and operated sites; equally, there were shared thematic findings in terms of operating conditions and concerns. These are set out thematically below as general context for the detailed case studies that follow.

## Funding landscape

All LAs confirmed a reduction in the HO grants they have been able to offer. Most funding for Regular Funded Organisations (RFOs) is small - between £5,000 - £10,000- and for specific projects. Grant funding for other HOs is even smaller, averaging well below the £500 mark for defined community projects via streams like the Community Fund. Most large and small grants programmes have ceased due to budget cuts. This has resulted in a very limited amount of money being available for local HOs. Other key funding is capital in nature (eg Levelling up, Towns fund, Heritage Lottery Funding).

Some small HOs who have been reliant on funding, for example, community volunteer asset transfer sites, are facing increasing pressures with rising cost of living, less reliable LA maintenance support, and a worry that existing funding or support might be reduced.

Council-run heritage sites and provisions have faced cuts across each of the LAs. This has resulted in public access to museums, galleries and heritage sites being reduced and, in some cases, sites have been completely closed. This has left some districts with no access to their public heritage sites or collections.

“We have shrunk over the last few years. You know we’ve had restructures where we’ve lost staff, we’ve had sites that we used to run that we’ve had to pass over,



reduced opening hours and reduced staffing”

– **LA representative interview**

“We’re perceived as an easy win when it comes to savings as we’re not a statutory service”

– **LA representative interview**

Here Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) accreditation and funding have been seen as a real lifeline and have enabled council-run museums and galleries to develop programming.

## Infrastructure and maintenance

Challenges around the upkeep of heritage buildings were a key issue across all of the case studies and LA interviews. This is with the exception of the intangible heritage case study (although even this organisation used a council-run building, leased on a peppercorn rental, as a base). Building maintenance or upgrades were most often identified as the main issue that could directly impact communities using them.

Almost all HOs referenced the need to fund ‘unglamorous’ infrastructure and back-of-house. Large grants obtained via Towns, Levelling Up, or National Lottery Heritage Funding streams—and in one case, UK City of Culture funding from Bradford Council—had enabled better building accessibility, a key concern in heritage buildings. HOs also welcomed LA advice around accessibility and sustainability. The positive impact of the Museum Estate and Development Fund (MEND) was also referenced.

For several of the volunteer-run sites, building upkeep was an existential issue. They were often dependent on LAs (as landlords) to undertake external repairs and felt that, due to budget cuts, they were low down on the priorities list, or they needed to raise money for basic internal repairs, which were preventing or endangering continued public access.

## Staff capacity and volunteer dependency

This was a cross-cutting theme. From an LA perspective, there was no longer full capacity to advise HOs. Council heritage officers and adviser roles were either halved,

cut, or filled by fixed term externally funded contracts (eg via National Lottery Heritage funding). This was the case across all of the LAs interviewed.

From the HO perspective, several of the case study sites welcomed having a particular contact at their LA, but some had seen their contact go. This is also related to changes within the council leadership or focus.

“You’re very dependent on the vision and competency and passion and belief of the person in that post”

– Interview, Heritage Sector Organisation

Whilst all HOs relied heavily on volunteers, nowhere was this more visible than in the community trusts and community asset transfer sites. Several of the case study organisations made it clear that without volunteers, the sites would simply not run.

## Impact on end-users

Each of the case studies below further discusses the impact on end users. However, there were cross-cutting issues.

### a. Heritage in place and as community ‘glue’

Every case study site—and each LA—highlighted the importance of heritage in place. For good or bad, the HOs were tied to locale.

“The sense of place that attaches itself is terribly important. We could not be anywhere else”

– Interview, Heritage Sector Organisation

For the LA run sites, they were often filling a role of community hubs, education centres, arts and cultural sites and visitor destinations.

A local site or collection is embedded in that place, and a reduction or loss directly impacts those who use it and removes the potential for interaction for those who might (eg future generations). Sites that have been closed or sold represent a loss of public accessibility to heritage, community memory and identity. Community Trusts who stepped in to run former council-owned sites feel a responsibility to the wider community and to foster a sense of pride, memory and belonging. However, reduced opening hours due to limited volunteers or staff, trade-offs between charitable objectives and the need to raise

income, and increased financial pressures on local authorities limiting capacity to fulfil building landlord duties all have a real and future impact on end users.

### **b. User accessibility**

Where more recent grants have been received, these have primarily been used to either make the building or site more accessible to enable greater access for end-users or specific communities, or they have been used to engage communities. In terms of the building maintenance or upgrades all those case studies that had received larger grants advised that these were essential for communities with specific needs (eg a disability). Those sites that have only been able to undertake the bare minimum, for example the smaller HOs, make clear that without more funding or LA maintenance, they cannot meet the needs of diverse audiences.

From an LA owned heritage perspective, some museums or galleries were also designated warm spaces, highlighting their dual role as cultural sites and as community hubs. However, when boilers or windows remained broken, then they were no longer warm.

Reduced opening times or closures of LA-run sites impacted primarily the communities in specific catchment areas. In the case studies, these were deprived areas left with little or no local heritage site provision. Reduced opening hours due to less funding were seen to impact all users regarding uncertainty or reduced confidence.

### **c. Outreach activities and vulnerable groups**

Those case studies that had not needed to make significant changes because they were in receipt of funding advised that if funding were to be reduced or discontinued, then it would be community work that would be affected. In one case study example, this would impact outreach work, for example, to elderly people (outreach to nursing and retirement homes). Another case study site advised that a reduction in funding would impact on their outreach work with local schools in deprived areas. For example, funding for school children and families to access transport, so they can even get to the venue. It would also affect outreach work with potentially vulnerable communities such as isolated women, displaced people or migrants.

### **d. Implied or tangential impacts**

Some impacts were tangential. For example, an increase in ticket prices would most impact those with less money. For those sites that did not charge entry, two case study sites and two LAs advised that the need to generate income from alternative sources such as private visits, weddings or other private hires, would mean closing a site to the public during that time. These sites already run reduced hours, with some opening only at weekends, so the need to generate more private income would impact on their remit to provide free public access.

## **Mitigating strategies**

### **a. Diversification**

For the LA-owned sites and the independent HOs, diversification was key. For example, they could open for specific groups or activities, host weddings, or offer bespoke tours. While this could cover costs, it was not always viable, as often there were not enough staff to facilitate this.

“Every year, even though the latest budgets, we’ve got to find savings and then there’s this impetus to generate income and that’s right across our service (...). But actually, in order to generate an income, you also need to have the capacity in order to do it. So, it feels like it’s a catch 22”

– LA interview

HOs that are volunteer run also found that there is a balance to be made. They could generate income hosting a private function, but that would mean closing the site to the public. They do not have the capacity to do both.

### **b. Raising prices**

Several sites are free to use; those that are not do cover costs via entrance fees but are wary of increasing these due to the cost of living. Again, it is a trade-off between generating income and meeting charitable objectives. Commercial models, such as renting space, work well, but these aren’t possible for smaller or non-asset-based organisations.

### **c. Joining up**

Joining up – either as a larger operating organisation or in terms of accessing support—was seen as a way forward for some HOs. This might be formal or informal, via networks or communities of interest. Of the volunteer-run organisation, strong community links and capacity within the boards of trustees was a clear advantage. Those who could draw upon set skills or pro bono work had increased potential and could significantly minimise costs.

## **The case studies**

Figure 1. case study locations

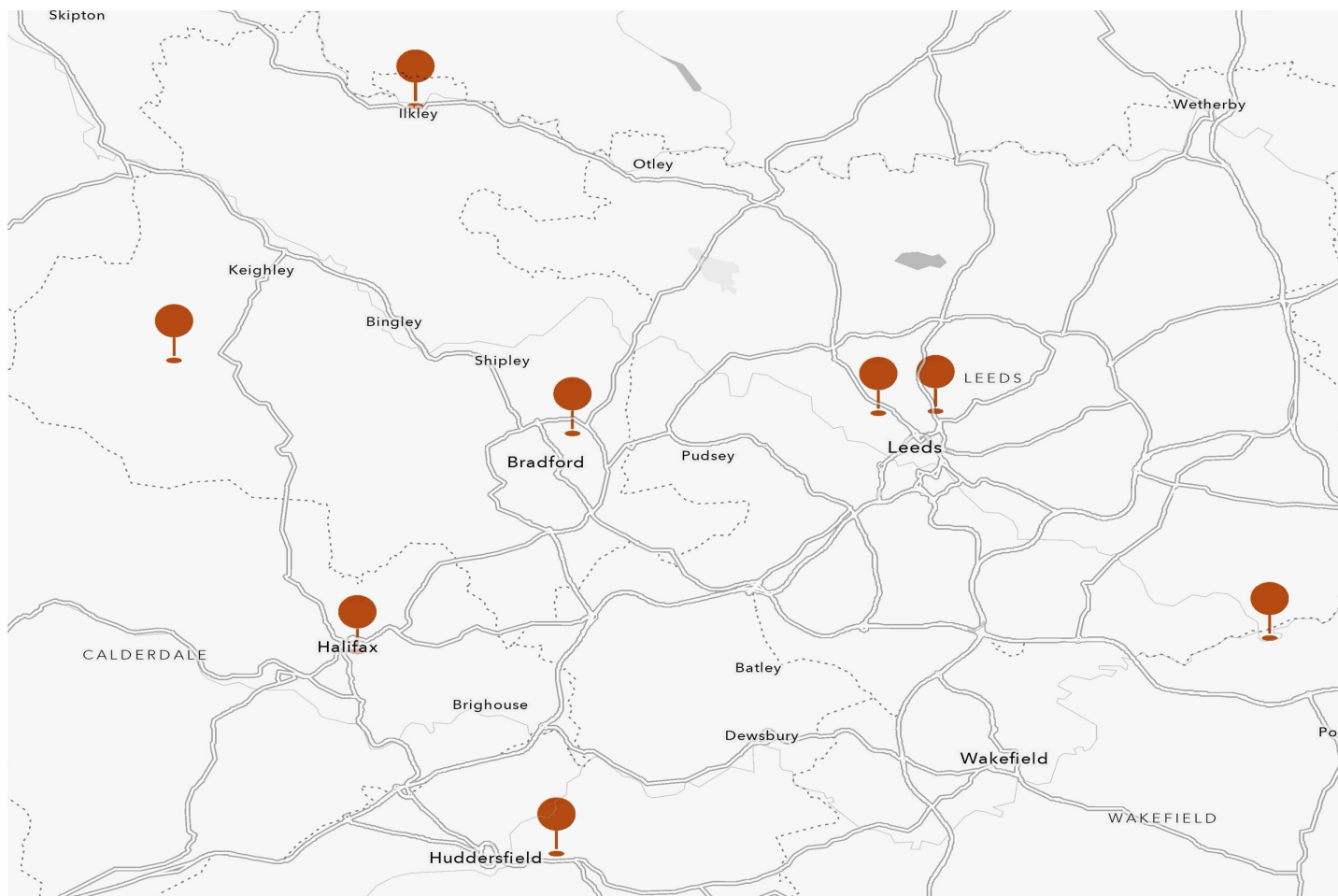


Figure 1 map above shows the case study locations which are:

- Undercliffe Cemetery, Bradford, Leeds
- West Indian Carnival
- Kirklees Museums and Galleries
- Hyde Park Picture House, Leeds
- Ilkley Manor House, Bradford
- Castleford Heritage Trust, Queens Mill, Wakefield
- Brontë Parsonage Museum, Bradford
- Calderdale Industrial Museum, Calderdale

## Undercliffe Cemetery, Bradford

“The cemetery is something that uplifts”: a site run on volunteer passion and a commitment to the history and the heritage of Bradford

## Context

Undercliffe is a historic cemetery in Bradford. The first internment took place in 1854, and several wealthy Bradford families purchased plots during the 19th Century. The Society of Friends also purchased a small section in the cemetery. Many people used the site as a place of recreation. Over time the cemetery fell into disrepair, and, in the 1980s, it was acquired by a property developer. However, there was concern over the condition of the site, leading to the formation of the Friends of Undercliffe Cemetery who pressured Bradford Metropolitan Council (BMC) to purchase the site in 1984. The site was declared a conservation area and restored. In 1985 a Limited Liability Cemetery Company was formed, with council backing. The new company achieved charitable status and became the Undercliffe Cemetery Charity. The cemetery is still owned by BMC but it is run by the charity (community asset transfer). The site is 26 acres. In addition to the landscape, it contains 6 listed monuments, and several war graves; all of these are maintained by the charity. They have adopted a model where they promote the cemetery as a place to be buried, and the only paid staff they employ are linked to this; everyone else is voluntary. Their aims as a charity are to help educate people about death, about the Victorian architecture that they have, and about the social and industrial history of Bradford.

The Undercliffe Cemetery Charity has an average annual turnover of £66,000 (Data 2023 shows an income of £66,926, expenditure of £59,942; the total income includes a yearly £20,000 grant).

## Funding, dependency and impacts

“£20,000 a year, it’s not a lot for what I feel we are giving.”

– Undercliffe Cemetery Trust Deputy Chair

In 2006 an independent audit recommended that the charity needed £40,000 annually to maintain the cemetery, and they were allotted £20,000 per year from the council. Whilst that amount has remained the same over the last two decades, running costs- from electricity through to petrol for the gardening equipment – have risen significantly in this time.

The £20,000 is essential for the cemetery. They are very much aware of the financial situation the council is in, and there is a constant worry that funds could change due to budgetary pressures on BMC. They also rely on the council upholding the external maintenance agreements (eg removing fly tipping). They have received small community arts grants from BMC, at £1500, and are involved with Bradford’s City of Culture programme. They also received alongside a grant of just over £3000 towards visitor interpretation panels, from West Yorkshire Authority Combined Authority as part of a project to promote walking and cycling.

## Mitigating strategies

They run paid tours for members of the public, which are sometimes theatrical. In addition to charging for tours, they also sell booklets about the cemetery’s history. They

have also raised small amounts via film rights (eg the cemetery was used as a location in the TV series *Peaky Blinders*). These are not, however, regular income streams. Occasionally, they receive legacies, and they also get small donations. They raise some small funds from charity membership fees of £10.

## Challenges and impacts

“it’s difficult to work without certainty”

Were the money to reduce or cease, it is likely they would have to close down the education and community events to focus on financing work, having a direct impact on local outreach. The cemetery is integral to an aspect of the city’s past and a testament to its place in history.

“It’s very important in my view to have sources of pride for children and for everyone really about the place where they live. Sometimes when we’re thinking about finance, we don’t think about the knock-on effects, but this is an important knock-on effect of the cemetery.”

Like other community asset transfers explored as case studies, Undercliffe Cemetery relies on the commitment and passion of volunteers. They work tirelessly to keep the site going and fulfil their educational remit. However, in common with the other sites, this is becoming increasingly difficult, set against a backdrop of financial uncertainty.

## Leeds West Indian Carnival

A route through memory, intangible heritage, community and wellbeing

### Context

Leeds West Indian Carnival (LWIC), first held in 1967, was the first formally organised authentic Caribbean carnival in Europe and is now Europe’s longest running. It takes place outside of the city centre and attracts over 150,000 spectators and participants. LWIC is run by a committee of trustees and is wholly reliant on Leeds City Council funding (received from the Cultural and the Parks budgets). Income and expenditure for the carnival averages around £100,000. For example, in 2023 income was £107K, expenditure £107K; of this income from LCC was £89K.

### Funding and dependency

The LA funding is received, though not guaranteed, annually. As the Head of Culture Programmes at Leeds City Council (LCC) comments “The squeeze in local government budgets will make this more and more difficult in years to come.” Both LWIC and LCC are aware that a longer-term strategy is needed to ensure the carnival’s future.

The shortfall in funding is supplemented by donations and fundraising, for example, local business support. Income is also generated by providing creative services. For example, the delivery of carnival classes or activities. LCC in-kind support is also essential to the



running of the carnival. For example, logistics for the weekend (infrastructure, clean up, traffic management and movement of carnival troupes), asset management (provision of affordable creative workspace at 'Carnival House'), and planning, advice and support from the council's Parks and Cultural teams.

### **Community impact**

That the carnival relies on monetary and in-kind support from LCC means that any cuts to this funding impact its scale and the route the carnival can take, and therefore the communities it can involve and pass through, and who can be included. This is not without impact. Carnival is both a contemporary cultural celebration and a showcase of heritage that traces its roots back to enslaved peoples. It is central to histories and identities, and to intergenerational memory.

"Carnival is a celebration of culture – it is not just one day"

– **LWIC Creative Director**

It is also central to intangible heritage practices, the passing down and learning -or relearning- of skills. LWIC's financial director for several decades was part of the carnival growing up and learned from the trustees. He comments on how several UK cities no longer hold carnivals, and because of this, the passing down of knowledge, skills and creative practices is broken. Creating and taking part are national and international in scope and significance, but also local and personal, with memories of family and community members. LWIC's Creative Director highlights that taking part in carnival is central to wellbeing and to community cohesion, citing the example of COVID-19 and the negative impact that not being able to hold carnival had on communities and on cross-community links and understanding. Carnival passes through different neighbourhoods and spaces, for example, across Muslim, predominantly white, and more recently settled communities such as Eastern European. By doing this, it creates networks and links, increases visibility, and fosters shared experience.

### **Mitigating strategies**

LWIC realise the need for sustainability and look at different ways to generate income or funding. This could be via paid workshops or classes, business and public donations, and funding bids. However, the carnival is not just one day. A considerable amount of planning is required in terms of logistics and creativity, for example, costume design and creation, setting up networks and coordinating with other artists and performers. This means that a vast amount of the delivery relies on volunteers. There are currently no funds to employ a staff member to help with administrative duties or grant writing. They also identify that an issue with a lot of funding is that it is project-based. Carnival is an annual event and a year-round activity, and it needs sustained funding to become self-sufficient.

"Intangible heritage requires the same consistent funding and upkeep as tangible heritage"



## – Head of Culture Programmes, Leeds City Council

LCC recognise that carnival is key to the city, with an impact beyond the economic. Its importance to the city is in terms of visitor economy, participation, pride in place, and community. This is all endangered if there is a failure to recognise the importance of intangible heritage as a constant, ie not a one-off project, but embedded and vital as built or tangible heritage. It needs sustained funding in the same way as a tangible heritage site's upkeep. LCC and LWIC representatives comment that this cannot be achieved on a year-by-year funding basis; it must be in 3 or 4 yearly cycles to enable planning.

## Kirklees Museums and Galleries

Resilience, Innovation, Amplification.

### Context

Kirklees Museums and Galleries (KM&G) sit within Kirklees Council's Culture and Visitor Economy Service (Corporate Services and Public Health Directorate). They currently operate three sites, Tolson Museum in Huddersfield, Bagshaw Museum in Batley, and Oakwell Hall and Country Park in Birstall. A fourth, Huddersfield Art Gallery, is closed for major redevelopment as part of Our Cultural Heart, the council's major town centre cultural regeneration project, which includes the development of a new museum and art gallery in Huddersfield. KM&G manages a collection of 250,000 objects, a small team of 27 full-time substantive equivalents, and a large team of volunteers. In 2023, they became an NPO. Kirklees became an Arts Council England Priority Place in 2021 and a Levelling Up Place for Culture in 2022. In 2024, KM&G created a collaborative heritage strategy, which was adopted and published by the council. It was supported by NLHF Resilient Heritage funding and aimed to create a clear strategic direction and protected future for heritage in Kirklees after a period of LA funding cuts, which saw council cuts to the budget and closure of museums.

### Funding challenges and Impact on communities

KM&G have not had an easy decade. The service lost 27% of their budget in 2012, and a further 52% in 2017. In 2024 they had service income targets increased by £47,000 constituting a 7% decrease in funding. Deborah Marsland, KM&G Manager, explains that the first round of cuts caused the service to become highly entrepreneurial, with a significant focus on generating income and the team responding as best they possibly could. The next lot of cuts left them with few options. This resulted in a radically downsized team (reduced by 7 FTE) and substantially reduced opening hours (visitor numbers reduced from 226,208 in 2014-15 to 159,436 in 2017-18) and the closure of two museum sites, Red House Museum and Dewsbury Museum.

Red House was a Grade II\* historic house museum, built in 1660 with significant connections to Charlotte Brontë. It closed to the public at the end of 2016 and was

auctioned in 2024. The grade II-listed Dewsbury Museum sits within Crow Nest Park. The museum opened to the public in 1896 and was closed in 2016. The closure of these two sites meant no free heritage provision in large parts of that district (North Kirklees, an area of high deprivation). This was coupled with reduced opening hours at other sites, which disenfranchised a lot of visitors. There was also a reduction in service provision due to cutbacks, for example, learning and schools' programmes were much smaller because of the lack of a learning team.

## Mitigating strategies

“We kind of clawed our way back (...) we had to be very, very innovative”

– **Deborah Marsland, KM&G Manager**

KM&G found themselves in a situation where they had an almost impossible task. Cuts, closures, and loss of staff had impacted their service and their morale. Deborah describes how they had to create a culture change and inspire a change in perception of their services as a key council resource and an indispensable core council team, in order to protect the services for the future. Connectivity of the service across the whole council became a survival strategy. They created a business plan that also incorporated new opportunities on the enforced closed days and used the sites in different ways, for example, exclusive school events, enhanced commercial activities such as weddings and private hires, and social prescribing events. One such event, ‘Mondays at the Museum’, is a social prescribing weekly event at Tolson Museum, which is attended by, on average, 63 people weekly. This capitalises on the softer settings of a museum for health-related well-being activities.

## Limitations and threats

“We’ve gone right down to the bare bones”

– **Deborah Marsland, KM&G Manager**

There are limitations to what can be achieved. Income targets are raised with each new round of cuts. The problem would be when the balance tips and the museums' core purpose is put at risk. Similarly, museums can help deliver community services, but there also needs to be a place for cultural services in local authorities. Further cuts, Deborah stresses, would be catastrophic.

“We couldn’t go any further - we’ve gone right down to the bare bones. We’re in the sub sub-basement level. That would be wholesale sort of loss of the service I think because we couldn’t continue to run our sites. And there would be major consequences for the collection”

“There’s a lot of place making activity that happens, but it happens with additional funding rather than part of core capacity”

– **Deborah Marsland, KM&G Manager**

### **Applicable learning and practice**

Whilst a specific locale-based case study, much of what Kirklees have experienced is echoed across other council-held cultural services interviewed as part of this report. As such, the experiences and learning made have far wider applicability. NPO funding has helped enormously, as has the business tax rebate on museums. KM&G have also become much better connected with other civic museums, for example, via the English Civic Museum Network. Whilst fundraising and external funding is key, it is often project-based and does not provide sustainability. This is coupled with the lack of certainty in relation to council funding, with the budget setting process being year to year and responsive to external factors, which makes consolidation difficult. KM&G have undertaken extensive work on communications and strategy. However, wider LA understanding of collections management, and museum sector standards, requirements and commitments is also key. For example, leaders of LA organisations might be offered training and awareness processes about culture, and its economic and social benefits.

## **Hyde Park Picture House, Leeds**

“The picture house exists in a little bubble. But it’s a bubble that’s dependent upon the whole”

– **Hyde Park Picture House manager**

### **Context**

The Hyde Park Picture House (HPPH) in Leeds is one of the UK’s oldest cinemas, having first opened its doors in 1914. In the 1980s, it was at risk of closure and was overtaken by Leeds City Council (LCC). It became part of a separate charity, Leeds Heritage Theatres, which includes two other historic theatre venues (Leeds Grand Theatre and City Varieties Music Hall). HPPH obtained funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, LCC and private sponsorship for the Picture House Project (2020 to 2023). The cinema, historically a single-screen cinema Grade 2 listed building, secured funding to make the building more accessible and to create a new screen.

HPPH is a distinct example of how a smaller organisation sits within a larger support organisation and network. As a venue, their annual turnover averages around £710,000 (net), but the funding picture is wholly linked to Leeds Heritage Theatres, whose yearly turnover averages £14 million. The wider group has a workforce of about 300 people,

whereas HPPP has 30 people. As the HPPH Manager explains, the dependency is on the wider organisation. This extends to their relationship with LA funding, which is through the wider organisation.

### **Funding, support and challenges**

HPPH have independently received a lot of support through the National Heritage Fund, but the wider charity brings stability and safety and “fundamentally the picture house wouldn’t exist if not for it” (HPPH Manager). The picture house has been working with a deficit, especially as the business comes out of the renovation and COVID-19. LCC Council historically were a critical funder of the wider charity, with an annual contribution of around £300K. For this financial year, this figure is £35,260, a significant reduction which has gradually decreased over the last 20 years. The funding comes in specifically towards cultural activity through LCC’s cultural strand.

HPPH, and the sister venues are all heritage buildings. The Council has contributed to different capital projects across all three. The key challenge for HPPH is around the maintenance of the heritage building and trying to kind of bring that in line with contemporary standards like health and safety. Between that 2004 and 2014 audience numbers doubled. The expectation is that, with the new screen, numbers will double again. However, all of the costs have escalated rapidly.

During the interview, HPPH advised that capital support from the LA was critical in enabling them to leverage National Lottery heritage funding, alongside funding from trusts and donations. Even though LCC funding was not enough in isolation, it has been seen as a vital leveraging force. However, along with other organisations interviewed for this report, HPPH also raised the issue that some funding sources are often very project-based, and that it can feel like “there’s a massive tension between that and then the ongoing sustainability of the work”. This does not always match up with long term change.

HPPH also identified some site and asset-specific in-kind support from the LA that they draw upon. For example, any film that is played requires a BBFC certificate and a lot of small films that might be of community interest do not have these, but they can be issued on a local authority level. LCC does not charge HPPH for this. Another key element of support was advice from LCC’s Access Officer (Buildings) which was seen as quite critical.

### **Mitigating strategies**

Finally, where HPPH were quite unique within the case study sample was the mix of venue specific concerns and opportunities and also being part of a larger charity. This for them was a key mitigating strategy in terms of future stability. Being part of Leeds Heritage Theatres was seen to be essential at the moment, framed by a backdrop of financial cuts and challenges around income generation, but also in terms of knowledge, experience and allyship.

## **Ilkley Manor House, Bradford**

People in-place and in-practice.”We would stop functioning in a matter of weeks without the input of people who give their time for free”

## Context

Ilkley Manor House is a historic Grade I-listed building dating from 1390, which stands on the remains of a Roman fort. It was owned by Bradford City Council, with the help of the Friends of the Manor House. In 2013, Bradford Council decided to close the House. In 2017, the Ilkley Manor House Trust emerged and formally took over the running of the site in 2018 following a community asset transfer. The lease was for 5 years (amended to 7 the following year), at a peppercorn rental, with the option to extend at the end of the term currently being negotiated (no value is assigned to the lease in the company accounts).

The Manor House is largely volunteer run. The board and trustees are volunteers, and they have a small paid team that is equivalent to about one whole-time equivalent, though all do more hours than they are paid for. The house, which became an accredited museum in February 2024, offers free public admission, but can only afford to open at weekends at the moment due to staff costs. Charges are made for concerts. There are galleries which are hired out to artists, and a commission is taken on their sales. Including concerts, the site has c.10,000 visitors a year. Turnover is approximately £80,000 (£86,660 in 2022; £73,830 in 2023).

## Funding and dependency

The Manor House has not received any significant funding from the LA. According to the interviewee, they have obtained three very small Community Chest grants. These are c. £300 to do specific small projects. However, the council are responsible as landlords for undertaking specific (external) maintenance work, for example, roof repairs, under the lease terms. This agreement was a short-term lease, and the Trust is currently looking at a 99-year lease, which would alter the terms and would mean the Trust assumes responsibility for repairs. In terms of help in kind, they advised that they would welcome the development of partnerships with the wider population of Bradford District. The Trust are very conscious about where they are located- a largely middle-class area- and the different socio-economic picture in other parts of Bradford.

## Mitigating strategies, challenges and impacts

A key element in the income stream for the Manor House rests on the fact that when the site was transferred to community management, the Trust negotiated to retain three Victorian cottages that had been used as storage units by Bradford Council. The Trust were given a donation by a local trust, which allowed them to renovate those 3 Victorian cottages and turn them into business units. These house small startup businesses. All 3 cottages are now occupied to differing degrees and provide around 40% of the income needed to run the house. Without those cottages, the house couldn't remain open. The Trust needs to earn about 65,000 a year to keep the house open and running. Last year, the Trust ended the year with a small loss of c. £3000; this year, the budget forecast is showing a loss of about £5000.

The Manor House is also a registered licensed wedding venue. Individually, activities such as weddings generate income. However, there is a potential impact on end users.

Here, one of the issues for them is that people want to have their weddings at weekends, which means they have to close the house to the public. As they are only open at weekends, they find there is a balance to be made between the Trust's charitable objectives and the commercial side of the business.

The Manor House have found applying for external funding challenging regarding funder remit. They have been unsuccessful at applying for National Lottery Funding and are realistic about not relying on grants. During lockdown, they received a grant from the Arts Council for a specific task (to bring power to the courtyard). As it's a Grade I listed building, they are able to apply for building grants eg they have held Pilgrim Trust funding.

The main concerns raised were the current economic climate and the widening gap between what things cost to run and people's ability to pay. It was also made clear that if everyone stopped doing their volunteer hours:

"We would stop functioning in a matter of weeks without the input of people who give their time for free. It is reliant on that level of input and if and if everyone's hours were to be accounted for, it would cost us far more than 65,000 to keep the house open."

– Interview, Chair of the Ilkley Manor House Trust

"We would stop functioning in a matter of weeks without the input of people who give their time for free. It is reliant on that level of input and if everyone's hours were to be accounted for, it would cost us far more than 65,000 to keep the house open." (Interview, Chair of the Ilkley Manor House Trust)

## Castleford Heritage Trust, Queens Mill, Wakefield

Place Funding as a Catalyst for Sustainability and Community.

### Context

Castleford Heritage Trust is a registered charity located at Queen's Mill in central Castleford, sitting within Wakefield Metropolitan Borough. They provide a case study example of a successful business model that has capitalised on funding, and they are also an inherently place-based initiative that foregrounds heritage and community. The Trust was established in 2000 by Castleford community members, with the remit of heritage and community development. In 2013, Castleford Heritage Trust purchased Queen's Mill, a former flour mill, as a community hub for the town. The mill is now a thriving community centre. It continues producing flour, has undergone major refurbishment, and now provides space for local businesses. The Trust has a recent average annual turnover of between £150,000- £200,000. Last year turnover reached

£547,530, though this encompassed a £318,813 grant.

## Development through funding

“We couldn’t have moved forward with our plans for the building. Therefore, we’d have been at a standstill”

– Interview, Castleford Heritage Trust Chair

The remit of the Trust is heritage but also community development, and as such, funding streams reflect this (eg. National Lottery Community Fund grant). The Trust has a group of volunteers with technical skills, and a breadth of expert knowledge. From the outset, the Trust recognised that they needed income generation. The mill was repurposed with the dual purpose of community use and to generate an income through rent, and a firm foundation of tenants was established.

During COVID-19, the Mill was recognised by the LA as a Community Hub, and tenants had been eligible for government grants, and so the site kept going. The building needed further renovation and refurbishment, and the Trust received 3-year government funding via Wakefield Council’s Towns Deal for Castleford. This, in turn, would enable them to rent more space and to generate more income to offset costs. Income keeps the building going - it costs £160,000 (including overheads) to run the mill – enabling them to undertake the community work. The Town’s Fund grant was vital, and they would not have been able to obtain it without the support of the LA. As the Chair of the Trust explains, whilst they might have survived without LA money, they could not have survived without their support. The LA are also supporting the mill as part of the wider plans for the riverside (ie greening of the site and replacement car parking), and support via ‘Help at the Hub’ funding. The Trust have also had curatorial and archaeological services support via expertise from the Combined Authority and have developed a strong relationship with Wakefield Council.

## Dependency, impact, and mitigating strategies

Whilst the commercial part of the remit (tenants and local business spaces) carries some risk, it is the charitable aims of the Trust that would be most affected and are linked to public funding. Here, the main risk is the funding streams ending and leading to a shortfall. The impacts of this would be on current staffing and delivery of service. Before the funding was available, the Trust relied on volunteers, but this would not be viable now. In terms of community involvement and participation, the only way to continue that would be to make it commercial, which could not work. An example would be the work the Trust undertakes with residential homes, which would be significantly affected.

Finally, whilst the building has required an injection of cash -and will continue to need development and regeneration – and may carry with it an element of risk, the physical sense of place is essential:



“It’s a big responsibility having a building, but we couldn’t do the stuff we do with the tenants and the community without that physical building”

– Interview, Castleford Heritage Trust Chair

## Brontë Parsonage Museum, Bradford

Literary Heritage at the Intersection of the Regional and the International: The view from a larger organisation

### Context

Brontë Parsonage Museum is an example of an independent HO that sits beyond the threshold of the upper limit of our medium-sized case studies. It is included here because of the journey it has undertaken towards NPO status, its independent funded status, and its significance to the heritage landscape of the region. It is locally embedded and is known internationally. The Museum is housed in Haworth Parsonage, built in the late 1700s, where the Brontë family lived and wrote. It was gifted to the Brontë Society, a membership organisation responsible for the museum and its collection, in 1928. Haworth is a village in the Worth Valley; the nearest town is Keighley, and it is part of the Bradford Metropolitan Borough. Before COVID-19, the museum was open 7 days and in 2019 visitor numbers were at c 69,000 visitors (incl. educational visits). After COVID-19, there was a need to reduce staff costs, and the site now opens from Wednesday to Sunday, with closed days used for maintenance, filming, and for private tours. Turnover has fluctuated in the past 4 years, due in part to COVID-19 (where it fell under £1M), and risen due to donations (in 2023 turnover was £5.93 due to a large donation), but sits around the £1M turnover p.a. mark (at £1.65 M. in 2024).

### Funding and development

“I think the organisation has just got stronger. We’ve spent a lot of time on governance, a lot of time on being more outward looking and modern and resilient”

– Interview, Director of the Brontë Parsonage Museum

The museum became an NPO in 2018, which the Director of the Brontë Parsonage Museum calls “a game changer.” It demonstrated the organisation’s professionalism and its scope across different audiences and communities beyond what had been seen as its traditional base. Funding-wise, prior to NPO funding, the museum applied to Arts Council England for grants for the arts and literature programme (around £130,000 in 2017). Being an NPO brought £236,000 a year, around an extra £100,000.



As an independent museum, there is an admission charge, which the organisation relies on. This is not without challenges. The museum tries to keep the experience dynamic, but space is limited. There are also paid subscriptions to the Bronte Society membership (c. 1600 worldwide). The GiftAid stream also contributes around £45,000. The museum has previously raised funding for collections through donations and crowdfunding. External funders (eg Garfield Weston) have supplied smaller project grants.

LA funding has not significantly featured. Recently, the museum applied to Bradford Council under the Regular Funded Organisation (RFO) stream. However, the most they could ask for was £5000 each year for three years (this has now been raised to £10,000). Feedback here was that this, in effect, was a drop in the ocean, but that the funding was welcomed, as was the connection to and relationship with the council. The funding was used to contribute to a school's outreach project, and another £5000 was used for a specific, time-limited project.

Additionally, the museum recently had a significant grant administered through the Council via Bradford 2025 (UK City of Culture) funds to build visitor toilet facilities. As with several of the other case studies, the limitations of the historic building impact on visitor accessibility and experience. As the Director comments: "It was difficult to acquire funding for toilets because they're not seen as "interesting" and the outcomes are less tangible but not having them is a basic barrier to access". The grant limit was £315,000, the Arts Council contributed a further £100,000, and the museum raised the rest.

## Challenges, impacts and mitigating strategies

"It is a privilege that the Brontës are known across the world and they're still on curriculum. We're fortunate in that we don't have to try too hard to get people over the threshold"

**– Interview, Director of the Brontë Parsonage Museum**

The Museum is not dependent on LA funding, and the levels that could be offered to them would not make any significant difference. However, all expenses have gone up, and the museum has also become a Real Living Wage Employer. The Director points out that they are still not as wealthy or resourced as people might imagine, and they also rely on volunteers.

The main impact would be seen if funds were lost from NPO status. Here, the cutback would be on outreach and community programmes. Whilst the museum has high-profile supporters and national and international events, they also run local outreach programmes – for example, free school visits and transport, opportunities for community groups, and programmes with refugees in Bradford. They could continue with the learning programme as it is a core of their charitable objectives, but it, along with other programme strands, might have to become more commercially driven. In addition to the suffering of outreach work, there could be less capacity for work with emerging artists, writers, and creatives. Other mitigating strategies would be to grow the online shop and

to put additional resources into developing individual giving.

## Calderdale Industrial Museum, Calderdale

A Museum as Community.

### Context

Calderdale Industrial Museum was opened in 1985 by Calderdale Council Museum Service to promote the industrial heritage of the Calder Valley. In 2000, the museum was closed due to cuts in Council funding. Calderdale Industrial Museum Association (CIMA) was formed in 2011, and the museum operation was handed over to CIMA volunteers in August 2016 under a community asset transfer. This was followed by extensive refurbishment before the museum's reopening in September 2017, with full accreditation granted by the Arts Council in 2019. CIMA presents a key example of the wealth of experience and dedication offered by volunteers, as well as the benefits of volunteering on the well-being of individuals. The museum is open every Saturday and is entirely volunteer run. Volunteers gather on Tuesdays to look after exhibits, which include ensuring the machinery is in running order, and they provide tours and activities when the site also opens for school visits on Thursdays. Total income is around £60,000 pa, including a yearly £15,000 council grant.

### Funding and dependency

“The risk of not getting that funding, it's existential. If we didn't get some external funding, we would not be able to operate on just the takings at the door”

– Interview, Chair of Calderdale Industrial Museum Association

The museum charges admission and decided early on that this was the way to go. This just about covers costs. Additionally, they charge for pre-booked tours and school visits, which also include activities. Income generation occasionally involves appeals (eg to raise funds to restore steam power to one of the engines). They have also applied for and received very small council grants from the council for specific things (eg to show objects outside).

CIMA receives an annual grant from Calderdale Council that formed part of the original community asset transfer deal. The £15,000, which goes towards utilities, was offered as the equivalent of what the council would cost to maintain the building. It has not increased since 2017, so it is gradually getting smaller in real terms.

This means CIMA hasn't got the capital to do anything significant in terms of upgrading the building. At the moment, they are putting together an Arts Council bid to have work done on the building. Cost of upkeep is a key issue. The building has only ever been

patched up. This is a difficult balance for CIMA, as the Collections Director comments: “The major threat to our sustainability is that we only have a short-term lease on the building, which is by choice as we’re not prepared to take on the repair. We can’t afford to”. Whilst the council, as building owners, looks after the external building, CIMA suggest that it is low down on the list of priorities.

In the interviews with CIMA’s Chair and with the Collections Director, it is made clear that the £15,000 from the council is essential: “At the moment the business model kind of works, but there’s no surplus, there’s no slack”

### **Mitigating strategies, impact, and volunteers as capital**

“The number of people that have said to me, it’s coming here that keeps me going”

If the funding were to be reduced or cease, they would need to make an equivalent saving, which they say would be difficult. The only way to do this would be to increase entrance fees, currently at £7.50 per adult (already increased from £5). If utilities and building costs rose, the offer would reduce, and with this, the visitors.

It is clear, though, that an already existing mitigating strategy and an unavoidable dependency is the community itself. CIMA have a wealth of experience and skills. Of the 250 members, 100 are signed-up volunteers, of which 60 to 70 are regulars and clock up more than 20,000 hours of volunteer time p.a. on average. Additionally, CIMA draw upon pro bono work from local businesses. For example, a local solicitor and an accountant offer services, and a printing company produces interpretative panels for free. Advice and support from Museum Development North have also been essential.

Whilst CIMA charges for school visits, and could increase the educational offer, each educational visit requires around 10 volunteers. CIMA recognise that there is a need for a flow of visitors to survive. Whilst the average age is around 65 to 70, they also see younger and more diverse people. Several volunteers have been referred to them by the Council’s Welfare Services. Here, people who suffer from loneliness, depression, or who are new to the area have “have come and prospered”. The CIMA Chair describes how, as well as the museum needed volunteers, often volunteers need the museum.

## **Summary and implications**

This review presents a detailed picture of the contemporary pressures facing England’s heritage sector, particularly at the local and combined authority levels. Whilst there were recognised limitations here in terms of the specificity of locale, the more detailed geographical lens enabled the exploration of several different heritage organisations, asset types, and funding dependency levels. This allowed the drawing out of key thematic findings across examples while allowing for asset-type specificities. The richer qualitative focus further allowed for testing ground-level responses and concerns.

This was complemented by a broader literature review that enabled the exploration of the

national, regional and local levels. The combined analysis of national policies, regional circumstances, and systematic academic evidence highlights the profound impact of LA funding cuts introduced since 2010. These measures have drastically reshaped local government priorities and capacities, particularly severely affecting discretionary areas, such as heritage. These pressures have been further exacerbated by the loss of EU funding streams and the financial repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The systematic review of 40 peer-reviewed studies revealed that LAs and small to medium-sized organisations have shouldered the most significant burdens. While national institutions have retained a degree of resilience, regional actors, particularly in deprived areas, have experienced heightened precarity. HOs have responded with a mix of adaptation and innovation, including asset transfers, income diversification, and adopting hybrid governance models. However, concerns remain about long-term sustainability, especially for organisations reliant on irregular funding or volunteer-led models. Significantly, impacts vary not only by organisation size and governance type, but also by heritage form: urban and asset-based heritage benefit from regeneration-linked investment, while rural and intangible heritage are underrepresented in both research and policy.

The interviews and case studies demonstrated that LA support for heritage has declined significantly, with councils having to significantly reduce Heritage and Culture Teams and streamline funding pots. Many council-run museums, galleries, and heritage sites have experienced significant cuts, resulting in site closures, reduced hours, and reduced programming. This was reflected in the Kirklees case study and across the LA interviews. Often this has resulted in diversification of offer – for example, bespoke openings or usage- and this was also reflected in some of the other case studies (eg private bookings). There was however a balance to be struck between the educational and public remit of some organisations and the need to develop income streams.

Project-based grants, while sometimes catalytic, rarely provide sustained operational support for small to medium-sized independent heritage organisations and this was raised across several of the case studies. Smaller organisations, particularly volunteer and trust-run sites, reliant on core council support for essentials such as utilities, face a severe risk. This was most evident in the community asset transfer case studies. Meanwhile, those with early commercial adaptation or access to large umbrella charities report greater stability. For example, one case study site drew upon shared funding, knowledge and networks, which were seen as a key survival strategy.

Intangible heritage, in particular, appears at significant risk due to its dependency on annual funding and unpaid labour. The intangible case study drawn upon in this report was almost wholly reliant on LA funding and in-kind support, but these are granted on an annual basis and make forward planning difficult. The organisation was volunteer run, so finding time and resources to achieve more financial independence, for example, via grant capture, was difficult.

Heritage sites and buildings require upkeep. Whilst each site might have its own specificity, it is clear that there is the need to ensure access to building maintenance and repair funding streams. The ‘unglamorous’ or ‘back-of-house’ needs to be maintained or

upgraded. For example, the use of capital funding to provide accessible facilities was key in providing a better offer and in turn attracting more visitors. Where access to funding is not available, then more stable in-kind hands-on assistance needs to be provided.

Networks of support and advice are key. For example, Museum Development North were almost universally praised by all interviewees and sites, and several of the case studies had directly accessed their events, advice or contacts.

Both the literature review and the qualitative interviews and case studies highlighted the need to understand interdependencies across scales, organisational types and income streams. Future work might complement this research with broader ecosystem-level analyses. For example, LA run sites and collections have in part different needs, remits and concerns. Medium size organisations were more likely to attract a wider visitor base, have paid staff in addition to volunteers, and could co-ordinate funding applications. Smaller HOs, whilst dependent on volunteers, were often more fully embedded in their communities for that very reason. However, this is not the full picture. Each LA and HO interact, share communities, histories, and often funding. Loss of funding or capacity at one place – for example an LA – impacts across several sites and organisations.

The case studies show that place and heritage are inextricably linked. Council-run cultural heritage sites - central to any local and in many cases national offer- have faced successive reductions in funding. They have managed nevertheless, to diversify income and activities, to continue to offer space for diverse communities, and to amplify the uniqueness of their districts.

Volunteers running community asset transfer sites and community heritage trusts act as guardians and advocates for place-based pride, education and identity, and their sites often become catalysts for place-based growth, as well as cross-community initiatives and wellbeing. They operate on a bare minimum, often with uncertain funding streams. Yet, they are an existing embedded means of understanding and testing what any place and people-driven agenda might achieve.

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1. eg the Heritage Alliance describes the heritage sector as ranging from “large institutions (such as English Heritage, the National Trust, the Canal & River Trust, and Historic Houses) to specialist charities, local museums, and community initiatives”
  2. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/culture-and-heritage-capital-portal>  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/culture-and-heritage-capital-portal>
  3. The Semantic Scholar is a large-scale academic database, maintained by the Allen Institute for AI
  4. <https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/information-and-data/expenditure-data.aspx>

5. <https://www.bradford.gov.uk/your-council/full-council-agrees-2025-26-budget/full-council-agrees-2025-26-budget/>
5. <https://mg.wakefield.gov.uk/documents/s132015/Initial%20Budget%20Proposals%202025-26.pdf>
7. <https://mg.wakefield.gov.uk/documents/s132015/Initial%20Budget%20Proposals%202025-26.pdf>



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