



Cheshire West & Chester Council

**From our Past, Towards our Future -  
A Heritage Strategy for  
Cheshire West and Chester**



Cheshire West  
and Chester

## Contents

Why have a Heritage Strategy?	2
Methodology	5
Section 1 -From our Past	7
What is heritage?	7
What does heritage mean to you?	9
What is the value of heritage?	14
The value of heritage to Cheshire West and Chester	16
Developing on your comments	16-20
Section 2 -Towards our Future	21
Vision	21
Action 1	21
Action 2	23
Action 3	24
Action 4	26
Action 5	28
Governance and Next Steps	30
Appendix 1- Where is our Heritage	31

## Why have a Heritage Strategy?

Heritage is all around us in Cheshire West and Chester, from a rich prehistoric landscape through to 20<sup>th</sup> Century industry, and of course the memories and places of our own lifetimes.

Cheshire West and Chester Council value and promote the borough's unique and diverse natural and built environments and support the development of opportunities for rich cultural and heritage engagement. The historic environment of Cheshire West and Chester should be something that everybody can be proud of, and part of, building on our strong sense of civic pride.

To achieve this, the draft Cheshire West and Chester Heritage Strategy covering all aspects of built, natural, and cultural heritage, history and archaeology has been developed with the fundamental foundation of it being developed in partnership with our communities.

## What do we mean by a strategy?

A strategy is a high-level plan that aims at achieving long-term objectives, proposes a framework for the future, and sets out a course of action towards achieving those aims.

The purpose of From Our Past, Towards Our Future – A Heritage Strategy for Cheshire West and Chester is to provide an understanding of shared heritage throughout the borough.

The overarching vision of the strategy is to **'Work in partnership with people and communities to safeguard, enhance and celebrate heritage in all its forms for the future'**.

Responding to the aspirations of local people through a set of published aims, the borough's heritage will be collectively conserved, celebrated, and promoted now and for the future.

The draft strategy is the result of a year-long series of events, interviews, and conversations with people both online and in-person across the borough. Everyone was asked the same question:

### **“What do you value from your past?”**

People responded to that question with a wealth of information, experiences, and opinions, everything from special places to family traditions, treasured memories to favourite food. All the views and information we gathered has been used to inform the aims of the strategy.

The strategy document is set out in to two sections. The first, **‘From our Past’**, sets out the context and background for the strategy, discusses what heritage is, explains the results of the community engagement so far, and describes the history of the borough. The second, **‘Towards our Future’**, describes the aims for the borough’s heritage, suggestions for how they might be implemented, and how the strategy will be taken forward.

The strategy is intended to be used by anyone to help understand and guide decision-making within the borough. This includes residents, workers, leisure users, and visitors, as well as professional advisors. It will form part of the Council’s adopted documents/plans and will be a material consideration in decision making.

The engagement process so far has identified the scale of community recognition of, and support for heritage. This draft strategy presents a collaborative effort to recognise what is perceived to be valuable in the borough and to work towards securing its future, recognising this responsibility lies with all of us. It will take many landowners, stakeholders, and partners, including Cheshire West and Chester Council, to deliver it. Together we will celebrate heritage in all its forms and safeguard it for the future.







## Methodology

The draft Strategy represents a collective account of what heritage means to people in Cheshire West and Chester, why heritage is valuable, and how we will look after it for the future.

At the start of the process there were no pre-conceived ideas of what the strategy would look like or what conclusions it would draw, just an overarching and fundamental vision that it would be drawn from the experiences and views of the people of the borough. Also, that it would be a living document that would encourage and require stakeholder and partnership working to deliver it.

Consultants, Heritage Lincolnshire, were commissioned to help the council undertake a widespread and extensive community engagement exercise. The aim was to connect with as many people as possible and we asked the question- "What do you value from your past?"

Over the course of 12 months a series of public workshops were held in historic venues around the borough where communities participated in games and interactive exercises about their history and heritage. Pop-up events were hosted at various markets which welcomed stall holders, residents, and visitors to the conversation. In-person events were held throughout the year, at varying times, in various locations to encourage as wide an attendance as possible.

Online engagement was offered through survey and social media, as well as the opportunity to participate by submitting photographs to the online West Cheshire Museums - My Cheshire Exhibition web page.

The events were open to all, and we found the pop-up events particularly successful, as we were able to capture the thoughts and views of visitors to the borough for an additional perspective.

The borough benefits from many groups and organisations who have a special interest in history and heritage. These groups were key contributors during this process especially through direct one-to-one conversation and interviews and written correspondence.

Overall, we had nearly 3,000 interactions, providing a wealth of insight and experience. The diagram below illustrates the breadth of the engagement exercise.



The diagram above shows the four types of engagement undertaken and the numbers of people interacted with.

Data recorded during the engagement exercises was analysed and categorised based on the initial question “What do you value from your past?” and five key actions emerged.

- Safeguard heritage for the future
- Champion diverse heritage for a diverse borough
- Support local heritage, connections and placemaking.
- Using heritage resources to tackle climate change.
- Unlock the economic potential of our heritage.

These actions are in draft and will be developed further following the public consultation exercise. They are overarching, not prescriptive, and will be presented as a framework for collaborative action now and in the future.

## Section 1- From Our Past

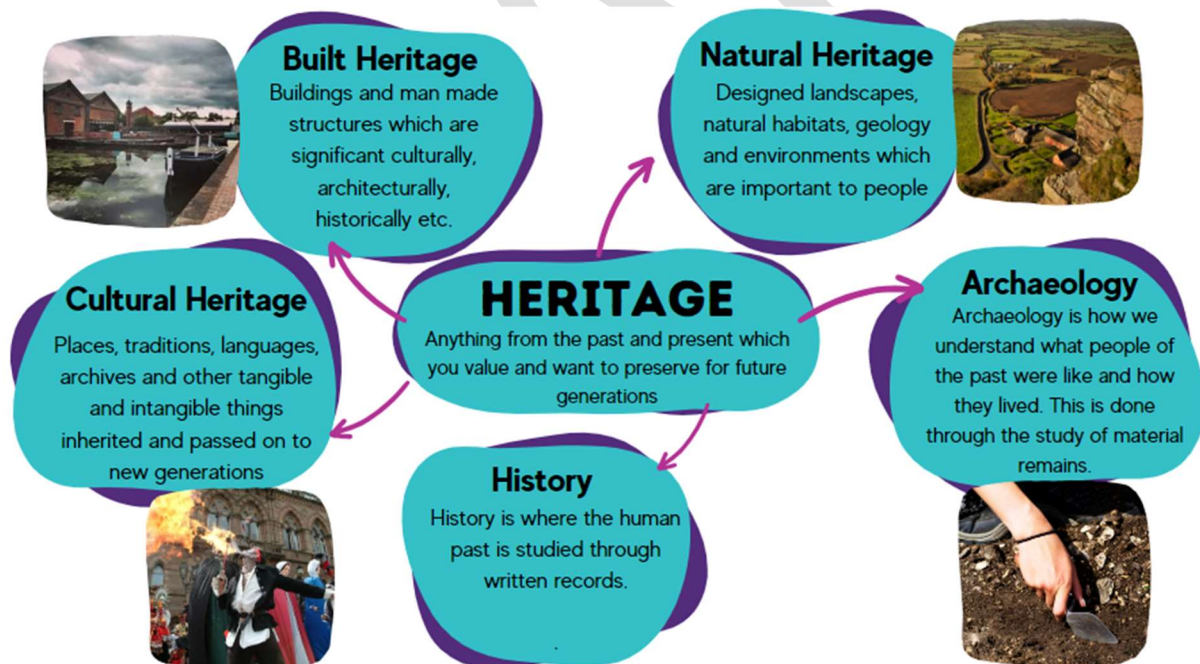
This section follows the journey the engagement activities took around the borough and the information, stories, meanings, and benefits participants considered heritage to have. It focuses on the results of the public engagement exercise. It introduces the vision and aspirations of the strategy.

### What is Heritage?

Heritage is all around us. It can mean different things to different people. This is what makes it so special.

We have purposefully accepted the widest definition of heritage. Where traditions and memories, buildings and structures, landscapes and habitats are intimately linked and connect us to our past.

Some of the ways heritage can be defined are shown in the following illustration. It demonstrates ways in which we view, understand, and investigate heritage.





There are many local, national, and international heritage organisations who have their own definitions of heritage. Some of these are below.

- 'It is intergenerational and potentially expands with the passage of time: new heritage is constantly being created or discovered'. - Chester Archaeological Society
- 'Our heritage is all that has been passed to us by previous generations. It is all around us..... In other words, they have a value to us that is over and above their functional use'. – Historic England
- 'Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations. Our cultural and natural heritage are both irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration'. – UNESCO

However, heritage cannot be defined by one organisation or group, in Cheshire West and Chester, it requires collaboration and co-working across the borough between many organisations and local people.



## What does heritage mean to you?

The vision for the Heritage Strategy was not to develop a single definition of heritage, but to engage with different views and values held by the people of the borough, so we asked the question 'What does Heritage mean to you'. To expand commonly understood definitions of heritage, promote inclusivity, and encourage people to come together and tell their stories.

Through the workshops, pop-up events, surveys, and interviews people expressed their thoughts and experiences. Here are some examples of what participants told us heritage means to them.

People overwhelmingly told us they were optimistic about the future of heritage in the borough.



The image above map of the Chester area of the borough. Coloured stickers are overlaid with comments received from the engagement events.



The image above is a map of the northeast of the borough. Coloured stickers are overlaid with comments received from the engagement events.





The image above is a map of the south of the borough. Coloured stickers are overlaid with comments received from the engagement events.

**Some quotations from participants are presented below in an easy read format.**

“Inspiring museums for whole borough”

“Market days – The market draws people to town”.

“Heritage-led regeneration”

“Heritage is – familiarity – a sense of place and belonging”.

“Diversity – need to work on”.

“All types of heritage are valued.”

“Landscape on local list to”

“Street pattern, historic buildings”

“Pollution levels”

“Children are taught about local heritage in school.”

“More available renewable energy options”

“Heritage ignites the imagination and inspires storytelling”.

“Foundations are good but need to build on it”

“Anderton Boat Lift”

“Need to engage with the community before regenerating the town”.

“Delamere Forest”

“More public recycling bins”

“Keep history alive”.

“Geology and landscape”

“Library staff really pro-active”

“Walks. Attended walks in Chester”.

“Looking after people locally”.

“Heritage helps to improve wellbeing and health.”

“Heritage reflecting ordinary people from diverse backgrounds.”

“Carbon neutral buildings”

“Dairy county. Farming diversity. Cheese. Hedgerows”

“Heritage attracts visitors to the area”.

“Heritage is part of ordinary, everyday life.”

“Reusing/re-purposing old buildings”.

“Heritage helps improve health and wellbeing”.

“Heritage is accessible to all.”

“Green spaces connected and enjoyed all over the borough.”

“Diverse heritage of whole district explored and celebrated.”

“Locally important buildings and nature protected.”

“Waterways are developed and cared for.”

“Markets – remember since young. Particularly EP and Neston – doing better than high streets – bring people to our towns.”

“Local rivalry – Old Nestonians vs New intake since 60s expansion.”

“My house – family memories.”

“Local heritage – local list.”

“Music legacy and culture.”

Visitor to Chester Market – “Chester is a town at a countryside pace”.

“Heritage/people/health linked – I enjoy mix of town and country”.

“Community woodlands enjoyed – freedom – walks – towns close to countryside”.

“Worried about my house flooding”

“Connecting our heritage via trails, highways and byways”.

“Community spirit “

“High streets – regeneration – people want high streets to return”.



“River networks – Wildlife, feeling of calm in nature”.

### **What is the value of heritage?**

You told us that heritage is important for many reasons. The parts of our heritage we value are personal but collectively these values help to shape individual and group identities, preserve cultural diversity, and promote a sense of community.

Heritage also allows us to understand past events and provides educational value which helps us to better understand and appreciate the diverse world we live in today. Heritage also provides significant economic benefits in terms of both jobs and heritage-led tourism, as well as encouraging environmental conservation.

Here are some of the thoughts and comments from participants of the engagement on why heritage is valuable to them. They have been grouped into themes to better understand what people mean.

#### **Sense of belonging:**

“Heritage provides a sense of place which connects us with past, present and future and people are part of those places.”

“Through heritage individuals can connect with our shared past.”

Heritage provides a connection to our past and helps us understand and appreciate our cultural origins. It encompasses many parts of our lives, including traditions, customs, language, art, food, and stories.

“Heritage can create a sense of belonging.”

It creates a shared bond among people who identify with a particular heritage, fostering a sense of unity and pride. Historic sites, and cultural events often serve as gathering places for communities, strengthening social connections, and promoting a sense of place.

#### **Understanding past events:**

“Physical remains allow us to understand and interpret previous lives and cultures. These often help us to understand current issues.”

Heritage gives us a glimpse into bygone eras, providing valuable perspectives on the history, accomplishments, and obstacles encountered by those who came before us. It allows us to learn about the evolution of human civilisation, the repercussions of significant historical events, and the advancement of societies.

### **Benefits to our economy and tourism:**

“Heritage belongs to everybody living in a community at any scale even if they have only just arrived from abroad.”

“Preserving and promoting heritage can boost tourism revenue, benefiting both the local economy and the preservation efforts themselves.”

Heritage sites and cultural attractions are often major tourist destinations, attracting visitors from around the world. This tourism brings economic benefits to communities, contributing to local businesses, job creation, and economic growth.

### **Environmental Conservation:**

“I value the multi-period richness of our rural environment from hedgerows and ancient trees to cropmarks and other sub-surface archaeological evidence.”

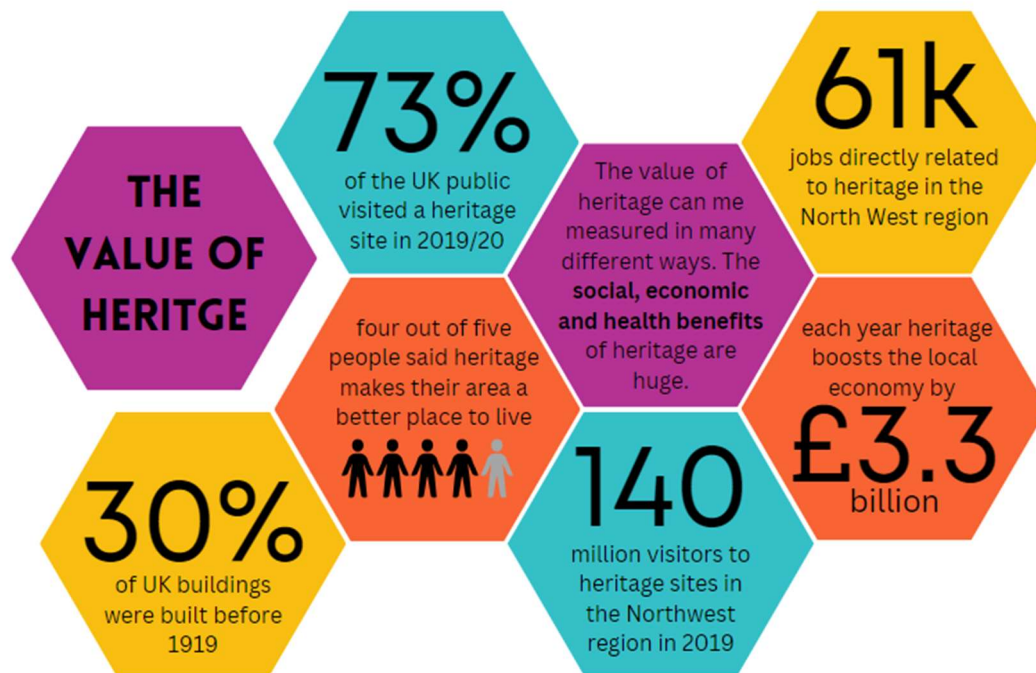
Natural heritage, such as parks, woodland, and biodiversity hotspots, play a crucial role in environmental conservation. Preserving natural heritage helps protect ecosystems, endangered species, and valuable habitats. It promotes sustainable practices and raises awareness about the importance of biodiversity and environmental stewardship.

### **Education and learning:**

“I value learning and understanding how and why people lived the way they did in the locations I inhabit and visit. I value the fact that beliefs and values have changes and I value learning about this.”

Heritage serves as an educational resource, offering opportunities for research, learning, and personal enrichment. Museums, archives, libraries, provide access to historical records, objects, and cultural materials. They facilitate learning experiences that enhance our knowledge of the past and contribute to social and intellectual growth, as developing or skills and activity.

### The value of heritage to Cheshire West and Chester



### Historic England – Heritage Counts

The image above provides facts and figures collected about the value of heritage.

### Developing on your comments about - Sense of belonging

Heritage is part of our everyday lives, sometimes without us realising it! The ways in which we interact and experience our heritage can have profound benefits to our wellbeing, mental and physical health, and our personal relationships. By helping us to understand our past and connect with the places we live, work, and play.

There are many ways in which heritage contributes to our social lives and experiences.

In our towns, cities, and villages art, culture and heritage, events, and pop-up independent shops and features enliven places and inject a sense of vitality, adding to the identity and distinctiveness of Cheshire West and Chester.



Local heritage plays an essential role in creating and reinforcing a sense of local character and distinctiveness in the historic environment and is an important part of the developing community identity. It has been shown that increased levels of connection to a place, neighbourhood, or community are associated with higher levels of wellbeing. A survey by the National Lottery Heritage Fund found that 80% of participants stated that local heritage makes their area a better place to live (NLHF, 2015).

This is true for our borough too, with many participants identifying local heritage as being particularly important to them. An example of this can be seen through historic spaces such as markets and high streets. The pop-up engagement event in Neston was very busy, people told us they felt proud of the market and its longevity and that it provided them with a place to meet up with friends.

They are valued by people for the social role they play in everyday life, by acting as 'social hubs' allowing people to meet and interact with their neighbours, fostering a sense of belonging and community. For example, the Garden Quarter in Chester also has an active community who, amongst other things, host annual street parties.

The use or re-use of historic urban green spaces as things like community gardens and allotments are successful in bringing neighbourhood communities together. They can provide opportunities for volunteering, encourages social inclusion, and a relaxed place for learning. An example of this is the Incredible Edible Network, who have communities in both Handbridge and Beeston, their vision is to 'create kind, confident and connected communities through the power of food'.

### **Developing on your comments about - Understanding past events**

The historic and natural environment are closely interwoven. The landscape of the area has been shaped by human activity over thousands of years, forming the basis of our individual and collective identity. We continue to shape it today and will for centuries to come.

We can see our past by looking at the landscape, the Cheshire Historic Landscape Characterisation study promotes the understanding and appreciation of our historic landscape as well as helping us interpret how past communities have contributed to

the modern landscape. For example, the agricultural history of the borough can be seen through the history and surviving evidence of Cheshire cheese making. Often led by women, this enterprise brought significant income into the agricultural communities, making them prosper throughout the centuries.

The farming history of the borough survives through historic field patterns that remain bounded by hedgerows that are a key characteristic of the borough. Boundaries are an important part of our historic environment, they are also extremely important in terms of ecological connectivity. They are home to birds and small mammals like hedgehogs and voles. Amphibians like toads and newts also use them as highways.

### **Developing on your comments about - How heritage benefits our economy and tourism**

Heritage and the historic environment are closely connected to economic activity. In our borough many businesses and enterprises are attracted to or based in historic buildings and spaces.

Heritage-led regeneration has shown not only to have direct benefits to the buildings being conserved but wider social and economic benefits to surrounding areas following the investment. Historic places are shown to provide uplifts in value for both commercial and residential properties when continual or viable uses are found for them (Heritage Works, 2017).

Research shows that on average, £1 of public sector expenditure on heritage-led regeneration generates £1.60 additional economic activity over a ten-year period (AMION and Locum Consulting, 2010). A recent example of this is the development of Chester New Market and the wider Northgate Quarter around Storyhouse.

In 2021 Cheshire West and Chester welcomed over 24 million visitors ([Culture and tourism | Cheshire West and Chester Council](#)), with over 60% of all visitor days to the Borough driven by heritage.

According to Visit Britain's Annual Survey of Visits to indoor visitor attractions some of the most popular destinations were heritage and culture focused. These include Grosvenor Museum, the National Waterways Museum, Beeston Castle, and Chester

Cathedral. Chester City Walls and the unique Chester Rows are also key attractions for visitors.

Heritage-led tourism generates £1.34 bn of economic value to Cheshire West and Chester's local economy per annum and supports 15,562 jobs. The economic value of heritage is modelled to be worth between £2.07 billion – £2.76 billion by the end of the decade (2030).

### **Developing on your comments about - Environmental conservation**

Heritage and nature combine not only in the countryside but in our towns, cities, and villages where parks, natural green spaces and urban green corridors weave into the built environment providing opportunities for everyone to enjoy.

Across the borough are many examples of this such as Town Park in the heart of Winsford. The Belvedere in Chester's Grosvenor Park provides crucial views across to meadows and grazing land, displaying a colourful mix of city next to agriculture. The closeness of the countryside to towns and the ease of accessing both was identified by participants as being important to them.

Climate change is a global issue presenting a threat to our way of life. During the community engagement many participants expressed great concern about climate change and felt that heritage should play a key part in tackling it. In May 2019 the Council unanimously declared that the borough is in a Climate Emergency.

Changes to our environment also affect cultural heritage, presenting challenges and opportunities for both physical remains including in-ground archaeology, artefacts and collections and intangible cultural heritage.

The UK has made legally binding commitments to become carbon neutral by 2050. Historic buildings contain a substantial amount of embodied carbon with over 30% of buildings in England built before 1919 (Historic England 2019).

In the words of Carl Elefante (former President of the American Institute of Architects):

“The greenest building is the one that already exists.”

As such, sensitively retrofitting those buildings to make them more energy efficient, warmer, and cheaper to run has the potential to reduce the UK's carbon emissions. Commitment to a low carbon economy could create jobs, provide new skills, and play a crucial role in achieving climate targets.

The use of local craftspeople and materials also contributes to tackling climate change. Not only does this contribute to sustainable development through the carbon reduction by locally sourcing materials and workforce but the use of historically sensitive natural materials promotes the longevity of buildings and structures, presents opportunities for and uplift in specialist heritage skills and retains the local vernacular which is crucial to the conservation sense of place and identity.

The conservation of historic and traditional buildings also helps to conserve habitats. In addition to their architectural and historical interest, historic buildings also provide many roosting places for bat species. By re-using buildings existing bat roosts can provide permanent homes for bats without disturbing the fabric of the building

### **Developing on your comments about - Education and learning**

Engaging with heritage, whether physical or digitally, provides opportunities for unique experiences that can enrich our lives. A 2019 survey found that visiting and experience heritage with others, particularly to spend time with friends and family, made the experience more enjoyable. (DCMS, 2019).

It is encouraging to see that visits to libraries, museums and leisure facilities are starting to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic with recorded visitor numbers on the rise, whilst contact with the Cheshire Archive's increased during the pandemic due to the introduction of new online experiences. Digital interactions with heritage are noted as being among the coping mechanisms people used during the national lockdowns. Positively, social media use and online activities and opportunities such as West Cheshire Museums Covid Collection, has led increasing footfall across sites in 2022/23.



## **Section 2- Towards Our Future**

Presents the collective vision for the draft strategy. It also sets out five key actions, drawn out from the analysis and development of the responses to the public engagement. They are overarching, not prescriptive, and presented as a framework for collaborative action now and in the future.

These actions are in draft and will be further informed through further public engagement and consultation.

### **The Vision**

‘To work in partnership with people and communities to protect, enhance and celebrate heritage in all its forms for the future’.

### **Action 1: Safeguarding our heritage for the future**

Safeguarding and protecting heritage for the future was identified as a priority for many participants. People had very clear views and felt passionately about specific things. These included specific buildings, landscape, natural features and waterways. As well as the preservation of more intangible heritage like dialect, and community memories that connected them to their family and homes.

Heritage can be passed on through intergenerational learning, storytelling and sharing memories, as well as ongoing traditional and cultural practices. It is important that everyone, including children and young people can learn about heritage. It is recognised that some of this sharing may not be actively thought of as heritage.

It is important to understand the connections between establishments known as ‘heritage’ or ‘culture’ such as museums, libraries, and theatres. They play an important role in providing access to and interaction with our diverse heritage. In our borough many of these attractions are set within our towns providing increased opportunity for interaction between collections and performances with the wider experience of the historic environment.

In terms of domestic or commercial planning development, early consultation can lead to better understanding of heritage issues and result in more sensitive solutions.

Currently, interested parties can influence planning decisions by commenting on applications. Many participants expressed their dismay that often developers do not take the opportunity to engage meaningfully with communities prior to submitting schemes to the local authority.

The availability and recognition of heritage skills and expertise is a crucial component of the commitment to protecting and conserving the area's unique heritage.

The voluntary sector also has a crucial role to play here. The heritage sector within Cheshire West and Chester relies on volunteers to pass on learning, experiences, and connections with people. Examples include Heritage Open Days, Chester Heritage Festival, Midsummer Watch and Winter Watch Parade.

Taking action to safeguard our shared heritage will take many forms and must be a collective effort between the Council, residents, partners, and other stakeholders.

#### **What success could look like:**

- People of all ages have the opportunity to learn more about heritage.
- Heritage contractors, museums and colleges are brought together to develop new pathways to training and working in the heritage sector.
- New opportunities for young people created. For example, organisations provide targeted events, groups, and projects that young people are interested in.
- The heritage of the borough is safeguarded for future generations.
- Heritage sector has strong leadership and is better connected enabling greater collaboration, better heritage outcomes and more people involved in heritage.
- Heritage Organisations play a key leadership role and have shared ownership with the rest of the cultural sector.
- Opportunities for increased collaboration.

- Cohesive approach to heritage communications and interpretation across the borough.
- Heritage is prioritised at all levels of the council and there is political leadership for heritage.
- Conservation areas are better known and maintained in the borough.

## **Action 2: Championing diverse heritage for a diverse borough**

The areas Heritage should represent everyone's past. A diverse heritage recognises that the story of the past is not singular, nor is it just white or male. The inclusion of a varied range of people and their history reflects the borough's unique background and portrays the breadth of its stories. This includes identifying perhaps some challenging or difficult histories, but also enabling hidden histories of women, LGBTQIA+ and rural communities.

The educational value of heritage should be recognised and promoted as should the benefits for life-long learning. It is crucial that heritage education is accessible across all ages, communities, and groups.

During the engagement many participants identified that heritage often attracted specific ethnic and socio-economic groups. This included membership of heritage organisations, engagement with heritage projects and visits to heritage sites. But often presented difficulty in attracting people from other groups.

For example, if you are white, you are 20% more likely to visit a heritage site than if you are not white. Furthermore, if you are from a higher socio-economic group, you are 20% more likely to visit a heritage site than if you are from a lower socio-economic group. (Taking Part Survey, DCMS).

Championing diverse heritage is a collective responsibility. It includes making heritage accessible and inclusive to all – physically, intellectually, and emotionally. As well as being accessible it means empowering and supporting those whose heritage may once have been hidden to be shared and appreciated.

### **What success could look like:**

- Everyone has the opportunity to get involved with inclusive and accessible heritage.
- Opportunities for existing groups and organisations to interact and attract new members.
- People don't feel excluded from stories told about the past, for example, encouraging people who have often been left out in history to tell their stories and experiences and promoting opportunities to preserve them.
- Volunteering opportunities in the heritage sector are well advertised and open to all.
- More people are involved in heritage and have the value of their heritage recognised. For example, continuing partnerships with organisations who work with adults with special educational needs, older people, and those seldom heard.
- The diversity of the borough is recognised.
- The heritage sector is better connected and can collaborate more effectively.
- Young people recognise the value in their neighbourhoods and communities through targeted opportunities to meet and get involved.
- Communities understand each other's perspectives and stories through heritage.

### **Action 3: Supporting local identity, connections, and placemaking**

Local identity and the recognition of distinctive local character was strongly expressed during the engagement exercise. Participants held fierce attachments and connections to the areas in which they lived and felt this contributed hugely to their personal and collective heritage.

The Council's 2021 Our Place survey found that 73% of people surveyed felt that they belong to the local area.

Regeneration, particularly in town centres, was frequently mentioned by participants who expressed the need for a meaningful understanding of a place to be achieved at the outset of a project.

Many participants also explored how local places, often historic buildings, such as libraries and markets provided informal spaces for communities to share their heritage to the benefit of peoples' wellbeing and health.



Similarly, new active travel routes (making journeys by being physically active, like walking or cycling) are often created using existing historic locations such as old train lines, waterways, former industrial sites, and green spaces, making use of ancient paths and tracks.

These sites have often been part of communities for many years and have attached memories and experience. Their re-use retains these connections whilst offering new opportunities for both physical and tangible connections between people and places.

Town and parish councils and smaller parish meetings can be the tier of local government closest to communities and deliver a range of services at a community level. There are currently 97 town and parish councils in the borough, and they are important in representing the views and needs of local communities.

The Localism Act 2011 introduced new rights and powers to allow local communities to shape new development by coming together to prepare neighbourhood plans. These plans set out the vision, policies, and proposals for the future development of an area. Many communities in the borough have come together to create neighbourhood plans and have been supported in this by the council.

The borough is fortunate to be home to many community groups both formal and informal, online and in-person. These groups confirm pride in their areas and can be a great way to bring people together. There are also many groups online either run collectively by the community or by individuals where historic images and photographs are shared daily. These often provide an easy and informal way to interact, share experiences and learn about their communities.

Recognising and supporting opportunities and places for people to come together where they live can help people to better understand their community and connect with their past in a meaningful way. By supporting these opportunities for connecting, local issues are better understood leading to better decision making.

#### **What success could look like:**

- Continued and enhanced appreciation of the history of our neighbourhoods.
- Active travel is promoted encouraging good health and wellbeing.
- Opportunities for local communities to access heritage and cultural skills.
- Shared stories and experiences add to our sense of community and belonging.
- Opportunities for social interaction. For example, promoting and encouraging local volunteering opportunities.
- Local history and heritage are recognised and celebrated. For example, contributing to the Cheshire Local List Project.

#### **Action 4: Using heritage resources to help tackle climate change**

*“Culture and heritage are vitally important aspects of our lives and resources influencing how our communities and societies adapt to climate change.”*

*Hoesung Lee, Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*

Climate change is one of the most difficult and demanding issues of our time. It is both an immediate and a long-term challenge that requires continuous and collective action.

Throughout the engagement participants continually told us that addressing climate change through our historic and natural environment was an important issue for them. The Council has declared that the borough is in a Climate Emergency and recognises the need to act in-line with worldwide agreements on Climate Change and the best available evidence, which states that, to limit emissions to 1.5°C, there is a requirement to reach 'net zero' by 2045.

The potential impacts of climate change are far reaching. In our landscapes and natural environments invasive plant and animal species may rise due to increased temperature. Native flora and fauna may be reduced or lost, and species' may be lost due to changing environmental conditions of their habitats. Hotter, drier conditions may also increase the risk of fire. This would have a huge effect on the character of historic and designed landscapes, historic woodlands, and wildlife sites. Floodplains are also likely to experience an increase in the frequency and intensity of floods with the potential to affect wildlife as well as the built environment.

Historic buildings are likely to suffer the effects of increased temperatures through increased fungal and plant growth and insect infestation which will affect historic building fabric as well as potential increase in structural problems.

Archaeological remains are at risk from changing temperatures and weather patterns. Rising sea levels are likely to lead to an increased risk of flooding along the Dee and Mersey estuaries as well as affecting areas inland which have rivers subject to tidal influence. For example, Burton Marshes south of Neston and the Ince

Marshes and Stanlow east of Ellesmere Port contain scheduled remains such as Stanlow Abbey and Burton Point promontory fort which will be vulnerable to rising sea levels.

Lowland Cheshire is known for its abundance of mosslands, ranging from sizeable mosses to small kettle holes, there is a potential impact on archaeological material within the peat and on the record of environmental history (pollen, macrofossils, etc) preserved within the peat. Increased flash flooding due to violent downpours may have the potential to affect archaeological sites through erosion or, in extreme cases, washing away of sites.

Heritage, in all its forms, can be a crucial tool in tackling climate change. There are two areas in which heritage can respond to climate change.

- **Mitigation** – reducing our impact on the causes of climate change.

For example, historic buildings and places have embodied carbon (the amount of carbon emitted when original building materials were made), by conserving these buildings and places we not only retain and re-use heritage assets, but we also avoid the often ineffective process of demolition. Another example is limiting emissions by using fuel more efficiently through sensitive insulation of buildings.

- **Adaptation** – adapting to the changes that are already, or will, happen.

For example, planning for a sustainable future by incorporating climate and ecological sustainability into heritage planning and funding, prioritising environmental quality, sustainable living, and transportation.

#### **What success could look like:**

- Thinking differently about how we adapt to look after, use, and re-use our historic buildings and places.
- Natural heritage is conserved and utilised to its full potential. For example, opening up areas of nature to be enjoyed and experienced in a sensitive way.
- Share experiences and actions for reducing emissions with each other.

- Opportunities to build skills in construction for example in retrofitting buildings and using new technology.

### **Action 5: Unlocking the economic potential of our heritage**

*“Preserving and promoting heritage can boost tourism revenue, benefiting both the local economy and the preservation efforts themselves.”* – Engagement Participant.

Heritage is fundamentally linked to economic activity with many economic activities occurring within it, dependent on it or drawn to it. Whilst we often initially think of tourism as the key economic player in relation to heritage, the economic potential of heritage is also closely interwoven with inward investment as housing, businesses, leisure activities, and as a backdrop to our daily lives.

In Cheshire West and Chester our economy is doing relatively well compared to other areas, with lower levels of unemployment and higher levels of productivity. The Cheshire West and Chester Council Plan sets out ambitious plans to build on this success with higher levels of growth, well supported businesses, dynamic town centres and excellent local skills and heritage has a key part to play.

The Visit England report identifies that three quarters of adults (72.8%) in England, visited a heritage site at least once in previous 12 months, and 34% of domestic staying tourists cited being able to visit a historic building or monument as their ‘sole reason’ or a ‘very important reason’ why they took their domestic holiday or short break. In our borough data shows us that out of 39.61m visitor days 23.86m days, or 60%, are driven by heritage.

In terms of economic value, this means that heritage led tourism brings £1.34 billion of economic value to our local economy each year and supports 15,562 jobs. The economic value of heritage led tourism is modelled to be worth between £2.07 billion – £2.76 billion to the local economy by 2030.

Heritage-led regeneration can deliver a broad range of social and economic benefits and has a strong role to play in attractive and sensitive placemaking. Regeneration can not only enhance community cohesion and pride but create employment and inward investment opportunities. It can serve to stimulate footfall and attract more visitors to an area.



Inward Investment from foreign or domestic businesses external to the area are an important way, alongside retention and growth of local firms, that new jobs are created, and our economy can be sustained. Heritage has a key role in helping to shape the quality of place, and therefore can be a critical factor in helping to attract inward investment, and in turn sustain income to support the community. Investing in heritage to help enhance and sustain the quality of place can therefore reap larger dividends through inward investment.

Economic benefits also include skills and employment opportunities. In the built environment the on-going need to repair, maintain, and restore historic buildings creates key connections between the heritage and construction sectors.

The heritage sector has a tradition of working with volunteers. It is estimated that the economic value of heritage volunteers nationally is over £500million a year (Heritage Volunteering Group). Cheshire West and Cheshire has a significant volunteer population who contribute to the wealth of heritage events and attractions all over the borough.

#### **What success could look like:**

- Heritage can sustainably contribute to the economy of the borough.
- Volunteer economy supports health and wellbeing outcomes.
- Opportunity to collect further statistics.
- A great place to grow your business with skilled people and attractive places.
- Opportunity to share resources between communities, businesses, and partners.
- Opportunity for learning and to close heritage skills gap

## **Governance**

A Heritage Strategy must not just be a piece of paper. It will need active involvement and effort from partners and stakeholders (to ensure a strong governance process) including Cheshire West and Chester Council to take it forward. This will be developed following the consultation phase.

## **Summary and Next Steps**

We have gathered the results of the community engagement undertaken so far within this draft strategy, to guide us towards our long term aims for the borough's heritage and help deliver a vision for the future.

Thank you to everyone who has helped us get this far.

This is now a good time to share the findings and ask for further feedback.

The draft strategy will go out to further public consultation for a minimum of 12 weeks, and we would really value your continued feedback.

The results of this consultation will help inform the final strategy and work towards the creation of a dynamic action plan.

DRAFT



## **Appendix 1. Where is our heritage?**

### **The Heritage Background of Cheshire West and Chester**

Cheshire West and Chester has a mix of urban and rural areas with a population of over 357,000 each one with a different story to tell. The borough is characterised by attractive countryside, varied landscapes and diverse settlements ranging from the historic city of Chester to small rural hamlets.

#### **The centre of the borough....**

has an extensive rural area with numerous settlements ranging from market towns to small hamlets, many of them lying within the Green Belt. The area has a rich past and is a crucial part of Cheshire West's cultural and agricultural heritage.

The network of distinct rural settlements, and the countryside in between, contributes heavily to the landscape of the borough. In the historic centres of many towns and villages the street system and the layout of the property boundaries provides a direct link with the settlement's early past. The existence of a variety of historic buildings adds significantly to the distinctive character of a place.

The former Forest of Mara (Delamere) occupies the middle of the borough. This former medieval hunting preserve was enclosed for agriculture and forestry at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Here, economically managed conifers still grow in large blocks, but are slowly being replaced with natural broadleaf woodland. This area is home to an internationally significant assemblage of meres and mosses, which were formed by the receding ice sheets towards the end of the last Ice Age.

Some of these wetlands have evolved over thousands of years with plant species such as Sphagnum bog mosses and cotton grass. Damselflies and dragonflies, like the white-faced darter and black darter, can also be found in these areas.

### **The northwest of the borough....**

Neston is prominent in the area as a medieval market village with some Viking archaeology and connections to Chester as a port town. It became most prosperous during the 16<sup>th</sup> Century when it was an established port with important coaching links to London as well as a principal departure point for Spain, France and Ireland well before the Liverpool port was developed. Neston functioned as a satellite port for goods being traded in the area until the silting of the River Dee and the increasing dominance of Liverpool as an international port in recent centuries.

Similarly, Parkgate, though a small village now, developed as a port in the early modern period and was named after the nearby medieval deer park enclosure. This port was also impacted by the silting in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

The importance of the wetlands and marshes around Neston and Parkgate are recognised by its designation as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area, its listing under the international RAMSAR Treaty, it is also listed as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Designated for its saltmarsh habitats and wetlands that attract large flocks of winter wildfowl and wading birds on their annual migrations.

Both places reflect the influence of industrial heritage on the northwest of the borough with Neston's coalmining heritage and the successive industries surrounding Ellesmere Port along the Wirral but also the long term benefit this industry has provided for biodiversity and habitat creation.

The largest town in the northwest of the borough is Ellesmere Port which developed as an industrial town in the later 19<sup>th</sup> Century around the aspirational Ellesmere Canal. However only certain sections were completed and the section through Ellesmere Port became the Shropshire Union Canal.

The development and success of the canal led to further development of industry throughout the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Companies such as Wolverhampton Corrugated Iron Company (one of the largest manufacturers in the West Midlands)



opened a factory in 1904 and many local families today are descended from the Wolverhampton workers who relocated to work there. The canal basin is now home to the National Waterways Museum, which preserves and shares canal heritage for locals and tourists alike.

Ellesmere Port continued to develop after the completion of the Manchester Ship Canal and in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and the Stanlow Oil Refinery and Vauxhall car manufacturing in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Both industries connected the Port with Liverpool on the other side of the Mersey through the migration of workers from urban Merseyside as well as further afield.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century high street of Ellesmere Port retains its historic layout and is dominated by the prominent catholic church of Our Lady of the Sea evoking these connections to the higher Catholic populations in Liverpool and the rest of the Northwest of England. The industrial heritage of the area is continued by the chemical works which dominate the landscape of this part of the borough.

By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, thanks to the opening of the Manchester Ship Canal in 1894 and the Stanlow Oil Refinery in the 1920s, Ellesmere Port expanded, and housing demand increased with the opening of the Vauxhall Motors car plant in 1962. By the 1990s, the retail sector attracted new workers to the town with the Cheshire Oaks outlet village and the Coliseum shopping park being one of the first out-of-town centre complexes built in the northwest.

### **Moving east....**

Salt extraction has shaped the Northeast of the borough ever since the Romans began extracting salt from brine 2,000 years ago in Northwich. Northwich was known as Condate, meaning confluence as it is where the Rivers Weaver and Dane meet.

There is evidence of a Roman auxiliary fort within the area of Northwich, established in the late first century AD with an associated civilian settlement, which was extracting salt from natural brine springs here from at least the second century AD. This ancient industry moved to mining salt from underneath Northwich and Winsford

and continues to this day with the current town names bearing the suffix 'wich' to reference the salt connection. Not only did these industries shape peoples' lives through their jobs, but the dramatic subsidence resulting from salt mine collapses has shaped the built environment of these towns. Unusual building techniques were developed in Northwich to address the issue of subsidence in the area.

Some buildings still remain, made from light timber frames which could easily be propped up and moved in response to the changing nature of the ground underneath. Northwich Library was designed with this type of framed construction so it could be 'lifted' if affected by the subsidence, and currently sits several feet above the original ground level. The library was gifted to the town in 1905 by Sir John Brunner of the Brunner Mond company.

To support the booming salt industry (and other trade) the River Weaver was made into a navigation from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century for the better transport of goods to other parts of the country. One feature of this system, known as one of the 'seven wonders of the waterways' is the Anderton Boat Lift, the oldest operating boat lift in the world.

Disused Lime waste areas from industry now support rare grasslands, invertebrate and bird species due to the unique soil qualities. Ashton and Neumann's flashes are now a destination in their own right, providing a unique range of food sources for visiting birds with rare sightings of White-tailed Eagles and Eurasian Spoonbills. The flashes form part of the wider pedestrian and cycle network of the Northwich Woodlands.

In 1721 parliament gave permission for locks and other improvements on the River Weaver to allow sea-going vessels to reach Winsford Bridge and the development of Winsford started. The Weaver flat boats were specially designed to carry Lancashire coal to the salt works and then to take the salt to Liverpool for export. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Weaver valley was lined with salt works using open pans to extract salt from brine.

It is clear the Northeast of the borough has a strong industrial heritage. The creation of Brunner Mond & Company in 1873, by Sir John Brunner and Ludwig Mond, saw

the building of Winnington Works in Northwich. The company used the vast salt deposits in the area to manufacture soda ash for the booming cotton industry. Over the course of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century the company expanded, acquiring other plants in Cheshire and further afield.

In 1926 Brunner Mond merged with three other chemical companies to form Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI). ICI is credited with the first industrial production of polythene in 1935, after a team of chemists from ICI rediscovered the material quite by accident after an experiment went wrong. ICI went on to become one of the main employers locally, employing hundreds of people across their production lines and transportation.

Sir John Brunner was well-known for his charitable work funding many projects in the area including the Grade II Brunner Guildhall in Winsford given to Winsford Town in 1897. Winsford Town Council (which holds the Guildhall in Trust for the people of Winsford) is currently undertaking a major project designed to restore the building and bring it back into use. There has been an increase in population in and around Winsford due to significant housing developments in the last decade and a £21million redevelopment of the town centre is scheduled.

### **To the south...**

Runs the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge, this is home to a diverse range of habitats, including woodland, open heath, and pockets of species-rich grassland bordered by further meres and mosses. On its steep slopes, broadleaf and mixed woods also thrive.

Many of the field systems in the south of the borough date from at least the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and reflect the increasing specialisation in dairy farming and cheese production (Cheshire Cheese is one of the oldest recorded named cheeses in England). In places, especially the Dee Valley, these field systems preserve the former boundaries and ridge and furrow earthworks, of the medieval open fields, some of which are described in the Domesday Book entries for Cheshire.

Marl pits were dug for marl as a soil improver with the remaining pits, once filled with rainwater, functioning as a source of water for cattle which appear in almost every field. These are now havens for wildlife, providing biodiversity connections across the landscape. Although more recently, ponds have been filled in due to modern day farming practices, the remaining ponds still hold value and Cheshire is one of the UK strongholds of the Great Crested Newt population.

The common boundary feature is the hedge, often accompanied by hedgerow trees, ditches, banks, and, along the Sandstone Ridge, walls. These ancient field systems with their narrow winding lanes, thick species-rich hedgerows, and mature hedgerow trees provide a very distinctive feeling of the landscape character.

In these areas the farm buildings reflect both the area's dairy farming heritage and the materials available locally. Farm buildings typically include barns, shippens, milking parlours, and cheese rooms, often within one or two combination farm buildings. They are often built using local materials such as sandstone and timber, with later replacements in the red Cheshire brick. These served as functional spaces for housing animals, storing crops, and processing agricultural products.

Areas of later 19<sup>th</sup> Century field systems are equally distinctive, extensively improved and often associated with the great estates of Cheshire, such as Bolesworth and Eaton, or created by the enclosure of the former Forest of Mara. Here field sizes are larger, and the pattern is often more regular. In areas of improvement, infield trees that were former hedgerow trees now indicate lost boundaries and are a common feature. In Delamere, ruler straight quickset hedgerows, associated with straight roads, are the norm.

The farm buildings in these areas reflect the ideas and influences popular in the agriculture of late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries. These buildings, built of brick, have similar functions to their forbears, but here we see model farms and areas displaying distinctive styles of estate architecture.

Recently, agricultural practices in Cheshire have evolved with new technological advancements, changing market demands, and environmental considerations. This has meant that many traditional farm buildings are no longer required for their original purpose, and many have been converted into residential dwellings. However,



the historic agricultural practices have left a lasting impact on the area, shaping its rural character and contributing to its cultural identity.

### **And finally, the west and Chester city...**

There are two dominant characteristics of Chester's heritage: Roman heritage and the unique character of the built heritage of the city. A significant part of the historic county town of Chester is built on top of the Roman fortress known as "Deva", the place on the Dee. Much of the city centre retains the 'rectilinear' street plan of the Roman fortress and the city walls.

The Cathedral, founded as a late Saxon minster, and later re-founded as a Benedictine Abbey in 1093 under the patronage of the Norman earls, is a prominent feature the historic centre and helps shape the life of the city. The Dean and Chapter are a key stakeholder in the heritage of the city; as well as historically influencing the development of the city as a major landholder.

Chester's motte and bailey castle dates from the Norman period and was established to control the most significant town and port of the area and a significant seat of administrative power. The fortifications were expanded in the medieval period and the Civil War, although the latter (outworks) are largely lost. Chester was under siege during this conflict when Charles I's forces were attacked by the Parliamentary army. Nearby the site of the Battle of Rowton Heath in 1645 is protected as a registered battlefield.

Chester was an influential port town for much of its history until its main waterway silted up and Liverpool overshadowed it as with many of the smaller ports in the Northwest in the Georgian and Victorian periods. Chester was recognised as a Heritage Port in 2021 and much like the rest of the borough was well connected by manmade waterways like the Chester Canal developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century with rail connections developing later in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

The River Dee runs through the city and is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and Special Area of Conservation for its unique mix of habitats and mammal

and fish species. Earls Eye and Handbridge Marsh meadows are a local wildlife site and contain extensive areas of flood plain grazing marsh, patches of wet woodland, hedgerows with numerous ditches and ponds. The site has ornithological importance for both breeding and over wintering bird species.

Chester's city centre is well-known for its distinctive style of Victorian and Edwardian black and white revival architecture, especially the unique Chester Rows. This 19<sup>th</sup> Century development of the city is largely due to the employment of architect John Douglas by the Grosvenor family who, owned much of the real estate in the city.

Chester's world-famous Rows, which date from the medieval period, are unique sets of elevated covered walkways on the first floors of the main shopping streets of the city. Recently there has been investment from Historic England through their national High Street Heritage Action Zones programme to improve the accessibility of the Rows and encourage more people to explore them.

With the threat of development and destruction in post-war years the importance of the built heritage was recognised, and the city of Chester was designated one of the first UK Conservation Areas in 1969. This was following the pioneering 'Chester A Study in Conservation' by Donald Insall published in 1968.

### Accessing Cheshire West and Chester Council information and services

Council information is also available in audio, Braille, large print or other formats. If you would like information in another format or language, including British Sign Language, please email us at:

**equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk**

---

**Tel:** 0300 123 8 123 **Textphone:** 18001 01606 275757

**email:** [equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

**web:** [www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)