

Curating Luton

Our town-wide Heritage
Strategy 2021 to 2031



Luton 2040
Transforming lives through
arts, culture and heritage



In memory of Councillor Paul Castleman

We were deeply saddened by the death of Councillor Paul Castleman, following a time in hospital.

Paul, who had lived all his life in the town, was a proud Lutonian, who revelled in the town's cultural diversity. A large part of his motivation for entering the political sphere was to be able to help those less fortunate than himself.

His strong roots and ties to Luton meant he was passionate about its unique heritage and history. Paul was a member of the Luton Heritage Forum for a number of years.

He dedicated significant amounts of his time to promoting projects related to making residents aware of Luton's past and was instrumental in forging the council's Heritage Strategy and obtaining money from the National Heritage Lottery Fund to secure a Heritage Enabler for Luton.

We would like to dedicate Luton's 10 year Heritage Strategy to Councillor Castleman and his family.

Thank you. Rest in Peace, Paul





Vision:

Luton's sense of place is anchored through its heritage; wellbeing, civic pride and our identity as a proud industrious working-class town will be celebrated and sustained.

This heritage strategy has been co-created with residents and partners, setting out our collective ambition to curate Luton.

It will be delivered with everyone in the town, including our key delivery partners: Luton Council; The Culture Trust, Luton; Luton Heritage Forum; The University of Bedfordshire; The Chilterns Conservation Board; and the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire.





Photo credit: Culture Trust

Foreword

I am delighted to present Luton's Heritage Strategy for 2021 to 2031. This is an important document that will be central to our shared ambition to transform lives through arts, culture and heritage, and help to deliver our town-wide vision for Luton 2040.

This strategy has been prepared against the backdrop of the Covid pandemic, and I am incredibly grateful to everybody who has committed their time and energy to co-produce it, including the hundreds of residents and partners that took part in our consultation.

I also want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to my predecessor, Councillor Paul Castleman, who we sadly lost shortly before the launch of this strategy. Paul was passionately committed to preserving and promoting Luton's heritage, and was the driving force behind the beginning of this process. This strategy and all that it achieves will forever be a part of his great legacy to the town.

This is an extremely timely strategy as we emerge from the pandemic. I am certain that heritage will be integral to both our economic recovery and our aims to improve the wellbeing of our population as we build a healthier, fairer and more sustainable town where everyone can thrive.

The case for supporting our town's heritage is clear: benefits to our local economy, our wellbeing and our environment. Heritage activity adds an estimated £1bn to the local economy each year. For every £1 invested by the public sector, around £1.60 is generated in return. We also know that retrofitting historic buildings can result in fewer carbon emissions than some new buildings.

Besides these benefits, supporting heritage helps to create a sense of place, strengthening collective identity and pride in our community.



This strategy sets a clear direction for how we will deliver our ambitious plans collectively, with partners and residents, putting heritage at the heart of our recovery.

Heritage will anchor our place-shaping as we reimagine our town centre and transform our communities, neighbourhoods and greenspaces. The strategy will also help us to preserve and protect our most valued heritage assets, reflecting and embedding the diversity of all parts of our community. It will also enable us to promote skills and opportunities that transform lives, especially for our young people.

This is a highly ambitious strategy that will require collaboration, innovation and input from all parts of our community, including residents and organisations across all sectors, and I look forward to working closely with everyone in Luton to deliver it.



Councillor Robert Roche
Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development



Kadam Dance - The Odissi Ensemble 2017 Imagine Luton Festival 2017 - The Odissi Ensemble credit Milissa Lane Porter



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How we co-produced our Heritage Strategy

Stage 1

Public consultation survey - first ran February 2021 to March 2021; re-opened for use during public consultation workshops.

Stage 2

12 public consultation workshops held between March and May 2021.

Stage 3

Four stakeholder focus groups held between May and June 2021.

Stage 4

Draft documents and input from key strategic delivery partners and elected council members.

We have engaged with **more than 300 individuals** and **more than 30 stakeholder group representatives** to co-produce this strategy. Our formal online consultation ran from February to March 2021, with **152 responses**. Of these responses, **66%** came from people who had never engaged in heritage activity before. This engagement has helped to widen participation in heritage further:

- **almost half** of all newly engaged people wanted to be involved in long term strategy development and monitoring
- **68 new people** asked to join meetings of the Luton Heritage Forum
- **30 individuals** wanted to be involved in work to review Luton's local list
- **10 community representatives** were invited to take part in testing our local list appraisal framework

We asked : 'What is heritage: what does the word mean to you?'



Results from the public consultation survey can be found on the [Let's Talk Heritage Consultation](#)



Introduction



This new, co-created Heritage Strategy for Luton signifies our collective ambition to curate the town. It is, in effect, a commitment: to a future 10 years of ‘joined-up’ partnership working to deliver on our town-wide vision to make Luton a healthy, fair and sustainable town, where everyone can thrive, and no-one has to live in poverty. It is a commitment to transforming lives through embedding heritage at the heart of post-Covid regeneration planning.



We want to thank more than 300 individuals who took part in our consultation process and the 30 stakeholder group representatives (from business, education, arts, culture and heritage communities) who took part in co-creation focus group workshops. We are also developing strategies and frameworks for engagement of wider audience participations in heritage decision making and consequent heritage strategy implementation planning; and have developed two specific heritage strategic priorities to support this.

This document builds upon the previous draft ‘Foundations for a Luton Built Heritage Strategy’ (2019) to embrace all categories of our town’s heritage (natural, built, industrial, cultural and community) and deliver a new strategy driving wider participation in heritage in Luton. The co-creation of this strategy through public consultation and stakeholder engagement has been made possible by funding for a Heritage Enabler from the National Heritage Lottery Fund.

In a series of workshops, designed to open discussion we asked **‘What is the heritage of Luton’**, we discovered what the term ‘heritage’ means to us as individuals and how we collectively define and identify tangible and intangible heritage assets.





In other words, what we choose to value and why. Finally, we asked a series of questions to help map our assets, develop shared vision, co-create this strategy and the consequent implementation plan.

Through research, we have discovered best practice approaches. Through public consultation, we have collated and shared a deeper understanding of our collective heritage, what it means, where we come from and who we are. Through open discourse, we have discovered hidden heritage assets (and the need to reveal them).

We recognised our award-winning parks, nationally accredited museums, designated conservation areas, listed buildings, monuments and prehistoric earthworks. Beyond our physical landscape, Luton is a proud working-class town, continually re-created through generations of settling economic migrants and re-settled diasporas.

We are proud of our multi-cultural population and have acknowledged the need to address the re-interpretation of our historical narratives and our commitment to embed diversity in all areas of heritage interpretation. Through further discussion we re-confirmed that resilience, tolerance, and compassion emerge as characteristics of what makes us 'Lutonian'.

Produced during the Covid-19 pandemic, we have had to overcome unprecedented challenges to engage meaningfully with our community. Nonetheless this has presented a wonderful opportunity to 'deep-dive', research and reflect upon the wider meanings of 'heritage', to discuss what we choose to collect and preserve for future generations, and consider how we cherish and value our collective heritage.

This strategy addresses a range of frameworks and valuation methodologies we can use to help protect local heritage assets. It underpins how we will implement post-Covid recovery by leveraging our own shared research and monitoring data, and the government's current incentivising of investment in repair, maintenance and public appreciation for heritage.



Photo credit: L Smith




Natural assets tend to be protected nationally through a legal and policy context set by DEFRA (Natural England, reporting to Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), while national protection for the more 'historic' built assets are protected through Historic England, reporting to DCMS (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport). While telling our story of place all of our key delivery partners fulfil a range of heritage functions reporting to a range of government bodies, e.g. relating to cultural heritage (Historic England/DCMS), tourism (DCMS), nature conservation (Natural England/DEFRA), local economies BEIS (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) and HM Treasury, community vitality (MHCLG) and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

Different types of 'heritage at risk' are acknowledged within this strategy framework. Identifying local 'heritage at risk' will be a dynamic process that will help shape our future implementation action plans. Over the next 10 years, as we 'recover' our heritage, the risk register will change: reflecting our achievements and our priorities.

Partnership working is essential to embed our heritage narratives of diaspora and diversity across the town. Delivery of this strategy will harness passions of key partners already delivering across all areas of heritage, and involve new communities and stakeholders.





Like many towns, Luton has felt the impact of Covid. Consecutive lockdown measures have accelerated the decline of our historic high streets (two of which are nationally designated conservation areas). Investing in the historic environment generates economic returns for local places. There are economic, sustainability, and public health and wellbeing arguments for committed investment in heritage:

'England's heritage sector generates a larger GVA than the security industry, defence industry, aerospace industry and the arts and culture industry combined.

In addition £7.1 billion in GVA was generated by heritage-related construction activities in England in 2018.'

([Centre for Economic and Business Research](#))

The NHS saves a yearly total of £11.91 for every person partaking in cultural or sporting activity, from a reduction in GP visits and use of psychotherapy services ([Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport \(DCMS\)](#)). Based on this figure, there is the potential to save the NHS £2.5 million each year locally through participation in arts and culture (based on Luton's population of 213,052).

'25% of businesses surveyed agreed that the heritage setting was an important factor in their decision to locate'

([case: The role of culture, sport and heritage in place shaping - Trends Business Research Ltd, NEF Consulting Ltd and Middlesex University, October 2016](#))

'60% of creative industries based in historic buildings are start-ups' ([National Lottery Heritage Fund](#))

'Investment in environmental adaptations can consistently deliver high returns, with benefits between two and ten times the cost...'

([Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2020](#))

'When a typical historic building is refurbished and retro-fitted, it will not only create jobs but also emit less carbon by 2050 than a new building'

([Heritage Counts 2019](#))



The impacts on retail and hospitality have especially affected the income of young adults, many of whom begin their careers in these sectors. Education has been interrupted, and a move towards homeworking has disrupted the chances of young people to enter into worthwhile training and apprenticeships.

This strategy addresses meaningful ways we can use heritage to improve prospects for our young people. For example, investigating how transferable employment skills might be gained through developing a modular heritage apprenticeship, and using the 'High Street Heritage Action Zone' model as best practice for our town centre regeneration.

The need for heritage led place-making and joint arts, culture and heritage place activation has been identified and this will be developed and delivered through our Heritage Implementation Plan, which will compliment the Town Centre Masterplan and emergent planning design codes.

The experience of Covid related deaths has impacted all areas of our super-diverse population. For example, our airport (itself a site of heritage) has seen limited activity during the pandemic, preventing people overseas from travelling to honour deceased loved ones, which has been particularly painful for Luton's highly transient population.

Our heritage consultation identified how residents from all communities and backgrounds experienced losing loved ones and the loss of cultural and intangible heritages associated with funeral rites and bereavement customs. We heard this from our African-Caribbean, Irish, South-Asian and Roma communities and various religious groups, particularly our Islamic population. To mark this significant moment in history, a new heritage memorial: Our River - a town centre monument, embracing digital innovation, is being created. This will offer communities a space to reflect upon local lives impacted by Covid; a space for remembrance, and a space for inspiring hopes for the future.

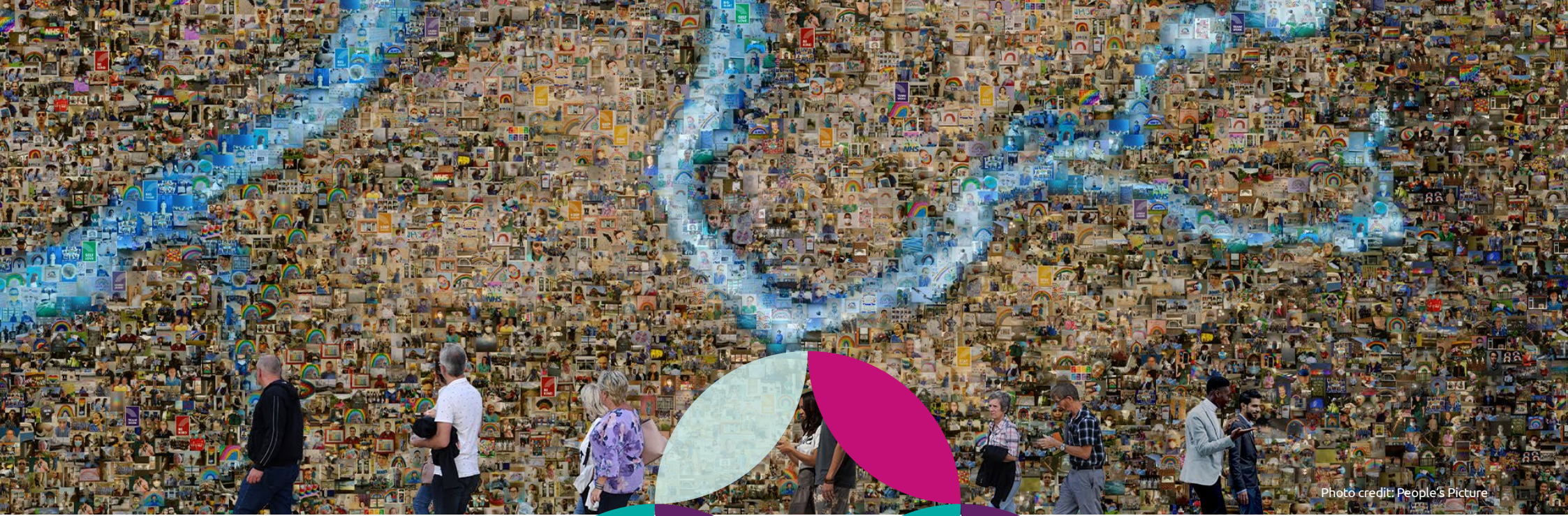


Photo credit: People's Picture



Part 1

Strategic Priorities

Luton's sense of place is anchored through its heritage; wellbeing, civic pride and our identity as a proud industrious working-class town can be celebrated and sustained.



Our strategic priorities

These strategic priorities have emerged through research, community and stakeholder consultation. We will embed them across all areas of our heritage decision-making. Allegiance through values shared by all key delivery partners, and driven by wider participation, will help us secure a strong economic and social post-Covid recovery.

These strategic priorities align with those within the Luton 2040 vision and our Inclusive Economy and Population Wellbeing Strategies. They are also aligned to the aims and outcomes of our partners, including the National Heritage Lottery Fund, The Culture Trust, Luton, The University of Bedfordshire, The Wildlife Trust, Chiltern Conservation Trust and the corporate values of London Luton Airport.

Place-making



Embedding diaspora and diversity into heritage interpretation narratives



Embracing digital innovation



Conservation, preservation and valuation



Improving prospects for young people



Future proofing - beyond sustainability



Strategic priority: Place-making

“Over the long term, places with strong, distinctive identities are more likely to prosper than places without them”.

(Nobel Prize winning economist, Robert Merton Solow)

There are two grounded reasons for investing in place-making and place-activation:

- Civic pride and wellbeing – making Luton a better place to live, work and visit.
- Economic regeneration – growing our local economy through tourism and inward investment.

This strategy will endeavour to unwrap Luton and identify its tangible and intangible characteristics. One shared characteristic of Lutonians can be summed up by the word ‘diaspora’: the movement and (re-)settlement of people.

Our heritage implementation plan will include a joint arts and culture place-activation plan to support further aspirational community-led visions like the Hat District Future Scope and the Creative Bury Park Manifesto; those that protect and engage us with our natural environment, like the Luton Lea Catchment Partnership; and those that help redress our hidden cultural histories, like The Luton Windrush Partnership Programme (LWPP).

We will also invite artists, individuals, and community groups to initiate innovative heritage-led place activation projects by developing a heritage engagement project fund.



Target outcomes:

- We will work in partnership to develop and deliver ‘Place-making’: our heritage implementation plan, including the use of community charrette style, civic decision making and workshops to develop design codes within our heritage conservation areas.
- We will develop a Heritage Fund to support artists, individuals and community groups to initiate innovative heritage-led place activation projects.



photo credit: Fahim Qureshi

Strategic priority: Embedding diaspora narratives and diversity into heritage interpretation

Our public consultation identified the cultural contribution of LGBTQ+ communities and the role of women's equality in our industrial past, but we discovered one defining characteristic encapsulated by the single word 'diaspora': defining Luton as a place of (re-)settlement.

Luton has been shaped by two centuries of diasporic waves: becoming a destination home for people from every continent, making it one of only four super-diverse towns in the UK.

From the first migrations of agricultural workers and Scottish straw plaiters arriving in the eighteenth century, the fabric of Luton is woven through economic migration and political displacement. For example, Luton's Irish population grew rapidly between 1951 and 1961, reaching a peak of 5.8 per cent of the population by 1971; along with the Windrush generation, people arriving from the Caribbean between 1948 and 1971, both helped to develop the Luton and Dunstable Hospital. In more recent decades, Luton has seen the growth of both African-Caribbean and Asian populations, with Luton's Bury Park emerging as a British-Asian success story.

Despite the impact of these diaspora in shaping Luton's heritage, our public consultation highlighted barriers to engagement and the responsibility that lies with everyone to curate our rich diasporic history. Heritage is the physical embodiment of story; and Luton has an overflowing cornucopia of stories. Re-addressing history and heritage narratives is currently a nationwide discourse ignited by international movements like Black Lives Matter. The Culture Trust Luton has taken a lead in addressing issues around representation by working with a curatorial specialist.



Target outcomes:

- We will work in partnership to widen participation and break down barriers to heritage involvement.
- We will work in partnership to embed diaspora and diversity narratives into all parts of our heritage implementation plan.
- We will make best use of the 2021 demographic census results for Luton to further shape these narratives.





Strategic priority: Embracing digital innovation

Digital innovation in place-making

There is a clear opportunity to embed innovative digital technologies within infrastructure to support physical regeneration; and to learn from several best practice models that have used augmented reality (AR) to anchor heritage as a key driver in 'place-making', inward investment, destination tourism and community engagement.

Taking inspiration from sound generator artists and consortiums developed to deliver Historic England's High Street Heritage Action Zones (HSHAZ), we can work with creative partners and community groups to create immersive heritage story worlds. We can build upon local pilot community, student-led and research projects, for example the University of Bedfordshire's in-situ cross-media storytelling initiatives, led by the Research Institute for Media Art and Performance (RIMAP), and the Arts and Culture Projects team, based within the Faculty of Creative Arts, Technologies and Science, work as active partners to HSHAZ consortiums in other areas of Bedfordshire. This regional activity and learnings can be harnessed for the transactional benefit of Luton. We can also harness Luton's home-grown augmented reality and artificial intelligence skills-base and business enterprises.

Digital innovation in conservation and preservation of heritage assets



We will embrace the use of GPS technology in the dynamic process of updating, recording and reviewing our built-heritage assets, and support the use of shared digital technologies by partner organisations, such as the Luton Heritage Forum, in activities developing heritage trails and our local list. Our consultation also highlighted the need for coordinated, collective digital archive management, to preserve Luton's oral history and digital collections.

Digital innovation for sustainability and future-proofing

Stakeholder and delivery partner focus groups identified the urgent need for coordinated real-time dynamic natural heritage bio-diversity data collection. Aligned with our 'Future-proofing: Beyond Sustainability' priority, embracing digital innovation identifies the need for local research programmes, including from within the University of Bedfordshire's School of Computer Science and Technology, to develop engineering solutions. It signifies commitment to embrace digital innovations in all areas.

Target outcomes:

- We will work in partnership to harness our digital and artificial intelligence skills base locally, building on pilot projects, to embed heritage as a key-driver in place-making.
- We will work in partnership to develop the use of GPS technology to record and review our heritage assets and develop our local list.
- We will work in partnership to establish a co-ordinated dynamic approach to data collection.
- We will work in partnership to use best practice digital archive management.



Strategic priority: Conservation, preservation and valuation

The art of curation is the act of selecting, organising and exhibiting collective heritage. This strategic priority addresses how we engage community in making decisions about what we choose to preserve, the policies, mechanisms and resources we use to protect our chosen heritage assets, and the methodologies we will use to value them.

How we choose what to collect and curate (ensuring co-creation):

- We asked: ‘How do you define ‘heritage?’ This was to ensure that we embed a collective voice in our understanding.
- We asked: ‘Which category of heritage is most important to you?’ We will include all areas of heritage in this strategy. The answers to this question help us prioritise implementation timelines, shape milestones and resource capacities.
- We asked: ‘What is your favourite building and why?’ This is so that we can include what is valued in our local list review and so that we can deep-dive into the stories of individuals and communities who have used the buildings.
- We asked: ‘Who is your favourite Lutonian and why?’ This is so we can appreciate people within our heritage trails, for example, through a local Blue Plaque Scheme.
- We asked: ‘What is your favourite heritage feature?’ and ‘What do you think is Luton’s best-kept heritage secret?’ This helped us to reveal the hidden, overlooked or privately owned collections.
- We asked, ‘What is a Lutonian?’ This help us understand connectivity.



- We asked: ‘What is most synonymous with Luton?’ Revealing the town’s distinctive sense of self helps us make inclusive decisions based on collective narratives.

Answers, which will inform our local list, evidenced the need for development of new heritage interpretation activity zones. Through public consultation we also learned that place and street naming is an important mechanism for acknowledging history and representing, protecting and preserving our heritage narratives.

How we protect our heritage assets

Preserving our physical assets relates both to conservation, generally associated with protecting natural resources, and preservation usually referring to the protection of buildings, objects and landscapes. All assets, including cultural and industrial heritage, are a part of telling the story of Luton and its people and define the character and identity of the town. The strategy therefore brings these together to be managed holistically, regardless of which legal or policy regime guides conservation, restoration, enhancement or other management activity.

Frameworks already exist to protect tangible built and natural environments. These include:

- [the National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#), which sets out core land-use planning principles; taking account of the character of areas; encouraging re-use of existing buildings; and conserving heritage assets “in a manner appropriate to their significance so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations”.
- [the Planning \(Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas\) Act 1990](#), which providing protection for nationally listed buildings and built heritage features within heritage conservation areas (designated heritage assets); and
- selection guidelines for the designation of natural **heritage County and District Wildlife Sites (CWS and DWS)**.

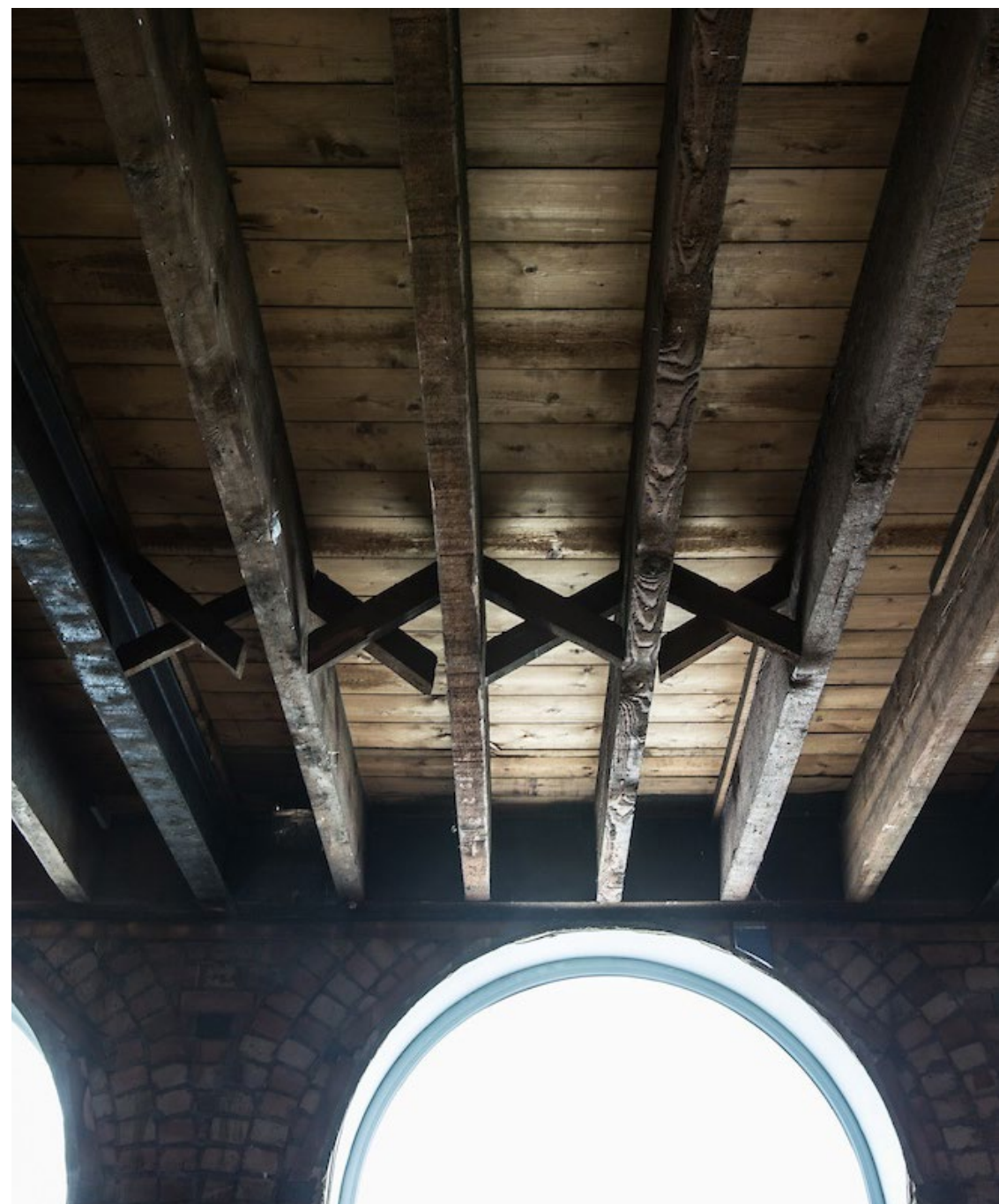


The creation of national Nature Recovery Networks is a major government '[25 year Environment Plan](#)' commitment. There are no plans to upgrade CWS to an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) status, which suggests that protection may be increased through future changes in national planning laws. The Chiltern Conservation Board are conducting a [boundary review](#) to consider the possibility of extending and designating additional land around the Chilterns as an AONB.

This strategy supports the extension of the AONB, even though the possibility of extending into Luton itself is quite limited. This is because, although most of the designated AONB lies outside of the borough boundary, the nearest urban population, the 'audience' that benefits most from this landscape comes from Luton. England's chalk streams are globally unique. It is the surrounding Chilterns chalk-streams that give rise to the source of the River Lea: the very reason Luton exists in the first place. [The Chilterns Conservation Board](#), a statutory public body established to promote the conservation, enhancement, understanding and enjoyment of the Chilterns AONB, are a key partner in many of the projects outlined and this strategy supports their management plan objectives.

Our consultation revealed the importance of local characteristics, such as Victorian architectural features in the High Town area, ensembles that create sense of place and individual connection. This highlights the need to adjust appraisal frameworks, scoping mechanisms and selection criteria to establish a dynamic local list incorporating a range of physical heritage assets, including earthworks, natural and architectural features and public art, as well as whole buildings. The list will inform the development of heritage interpretation zones which can be enhanced through community development of design codes. Our consultation also highlighted the importance of place and street naming as a mechanism for acknowledging, preserving and remembering our heritage narratives.

Luton's museum collections include over two million artefacts of tangible heritage objects that also need to be preserved. These collections include artefacts relating to our natural history, archaeology, textiles, fine art, industrial and military collections, archives, records and examples of our social history.





The Culture Trust, Luton is a curatorial specialist for Wardown House Museum and Gallery and Stockwood Discovery Centre; and leads on public access, collections management and museum accreditation. These collections are protected by being maintained within our accredited museums.

There are also many tangible heritage items held in private or community collections, including large paintings, hat-making machinery, and significant local artefacts like the Vauxhall Car Collection. These private collections are vulnerable and in danger of being lost to Luton.

Our intangible heritage assets include a range of hidden community oral histories, archives, languages, faiths, customs and traditions: arguably the most difficult to protect and most at risk of being lost over time. Our consultation revealed a diverse range of digital heritage projects across the town, including Hatters Heritage (150 years of Luton Town Football Club social history), Kadam Dance (Asian dance and music), and Luton Heritage Forum (collective memories); the best protection going forward will be robust digital archive management.

Valuation methodologies

The government, via Natural England, has established a Natural Capital Approach to valuing natural heritage. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is developing a framework for valuing heritage, using social cost-benefit analysis principles, published in HM Treasury's Green Book: establishing an asset-based approach to support decision-making.

We will need to collaborate to collect and collate a range of quantitative and qualitative information to create robust evidence, not just of our built heritage assets but also across the natural, cultural and industrial. This strategy prioritises a partnership approach to investigating opportunities for intersectional asset audit, data monitoring and research analysis; and recommends the use of the DCMS Heritage Capital Framework to value our assets and support future proofing through attracting inward heritage implementation investment.

Target outcomes:

- We will diversify collections at Wardown House Museum and Gallery, the study centre and young people's programme in order to widen community audience and engagement in museum events, exhibitions and programmes.
- We will work in partnership to co-produce and update dynamic local lists and heritage at risk registers and will identify heritage management and heritage implementation plans to prioritise protection and care for assets identified.
- We will develop a steering group to lead on the review of conservation, collections policies, protection frameworks and valuation methodologies.
- We will support Museum Makers and other volunteer and community-led activities that widen engagement and awareness in heritage assets.
- We will develop community stakeholder groups to help collect and collate socio-economic and cultural evidence supporting major heritage projects and protect our heritage assets.
- We will prioritise a partnership approach to the audit and valuation of heritage assets, using the Heritage Capital Framework.



Strategic priority: Improving prospects for young people

Children and young people across the country have been disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Luton has one of the youngest populations in the country. A fifth of our population are under 16 and we have felt the negative impacts on education, employment, social opportunities and emotional wellbeing more than most places. Accelerated decline of historic high streets and impacts on retail and hospitality have disproportionately affected incomes and opportunities of many young adults who were working in these sectors. Shifts to remote working and learning have disrupted work placement and educational opportunities for young people.

Two actions can help support positive mental health outcomes:

Giving young people a voice about Luton's heritage - Our ability to engage young people in the co-creation of this strategy during consecutive pandemic lockdowns was difficult because schools and youth organisations had to work remotely and prioritise other challenges. We have engaged some young people through inter-generational workshops and through youth heritage ambassadors. As part of our commitment to being a child-friendly town we will ensure further contribution by children and young people in developing our Heritage Implementation Plan and in the future strategy review.


Maximising opportunities for young people - Improving prospects also means nurturing skills development through heritage engagement. Luton has been a site of engineering excellence through motor and aviation industries, and has an even longer history and global reputation for design and innovation through hat-making. Investment in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and growing digital and creative industries present clear educational opportunities to position a range of skills training, from school to higher education levels, within our heritage action zones.

This strategy seeks to address how meaningful heritage engagement might improve prospects for our young people by embracing:

- Luton as a site of engineering excellence in motor and aviation industries, supporting historical equality in STEM.
- The global reputation of our eco-system of hat-makers, devastatingly impacted by Covid-19, as creative designers and international trend-setters.
- Innovative opportunities in cultural, creative and augmented realities industries.
- Educational opportunities in sustainable science and biodiversity monitoring.



photo credit: Paul Grundy



We ask: 'What might a heritage apprenticeship look like in Luton?' and 'How might our heritage action zones and conservation areas be developed to support skills training from school through to post-graduate level?'

The answer might lie in growing young people's engagement with heritage and creative enterprise and interconnectivity between the Hat District and formal education into start-up enterprise for young people at Hat Works, the oldest former hat factory in Luton; and developing apprenticeship modules supporting transferable skills. For example:

- Built heritage conservation modules – combining elements such as work experience with local heritage construction specialists, academic study of heritage science, and Historic England Conservation Accreditation.
- Natural heritage conservation modules – combining qualifications and skills relating to power tools and plant machinery with biodiversity monitoring and engineering studies.
- Hat-making and block-making modules – combining creative and STEM design disciplines, skills training, and business entrepreneurial support.
- Aviation and motor engineering modules – including heritage aviation and vintage car mechanics, and engineering innovation research and development.



Target outcomes:

- We will work in partnership to involve children and young people in the review of the heritage strategy and develop the heritage implementation plan.
- We will work in partnership to develop formal apprenticeships, accreditation and qualification opportunities to help children and young people address local heritage needs.
- We will work in partnership with educational organisations in Luton and beyond to develop Ofsted accredited local heritage education resource packs.





Strategic priority: Future proofing – beyond sustainability

Future-proofing our heritage is central to achieving our overall vision to curate Luton as well as our wider vision for Luton in 2040. In terms of heritage we need to achieve a number of things, from meaningful intergenerational engagement, to preserve collective memory and pass down skills, knowledge and intangible culture, as well as ensuring community development, financial and environmental sustainability.

To effectively future-proof heritage, it is important to maintain an understanding of changes to legislation and national planning frameworks, including the government's intentions regarding design codes and selection criteria which will impact on the integrity, authenticity and characteristics of our conservation areas, as well as influence how we can map collective memories across non-designated heritage zones.

It is also essential for us to develop sufficient infrastructure, governance, resources and capacity within our communities to deliver our Heritage Implementation Plan in partnership, supporting a net gain approach to creating 'heritage capital' in all areas.

Target outcomes:

- We will work in partnership to embed measures to future-proof our heritage through all aspects of our heritage implementation plan.
- We will work in partnership to promote intergenerational engagement, including skills, knowledge and collective memory in heritage activity.
- We will develop greater infrastructure, governance, resources and heritage capital within our communities.



Part 2

Strategy Framework

It began over 3,000 years ago with a natural spring emerging from ancient chalk downland. The spring created a marsh: and waters trickled and played. The chalk stream etched out a nourishing valley: and people came. The river supported animals and agriculture: a market town was born, and people came. From golden crops of hops and wheat: a brewing industry was born, and people came. Straw plait and lace went to market: a millinery and hat industry emerged, and people came: dexterous people. Transport and train lines connected the town into the tendrils of London, and national markets developed. The dexterous people upskilled: Luton developed as a centre of engineering excellence: aviation and motor innovation. At the invitation of the Luton Corporation, Vauxhall Motors re-located; an airport emerged: and people came, from all over the country, from all over the world. From these waves of diaspora, a diverse demographic developed. This is Luton.

**"We are an island. We are quite an irreverent, rebellious people.
We should become: The People's Republic of Luton"**

(Ed Smith – Lutonian- from public consultation heritage workshop March 2021)



Mapping our assets

This section addresses the whole range of our heritages: natural, built, industrial, cultural and intangible. The [full Heritage Strategy document](#) identifies some assets, case studies, protective frameworks, heritage at risk, and implementation plan action points in each area.

Natural heritage

National Context

The government's 25-year Environment Plan, [* HM Government - A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), has six key policy areas. This strategy supports two of them: 'Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes' and 'Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing'.

Our local heritage assets and significance

Our 2021 online heritage consultation survey asked:

- 'What is your favourite heritage feature in Luton?' Pride in our parks and natural environment came out top.
- 'What is Luton's best-kept heritage secret?' Along with strong evidence in built and industrial heritage areas an abundance of parks, gardens, bluebell woods, and other natural heritages were mentioned. In particular, the need to de-culvert the River Lea.

Despite urbanisation and stretch to fill borough boundaries, Luton is rich in green spaces. Six parks (Brantwood, Leagrave, Memorial, Peoples, Stockwood and Wardown) successfully retained their internationally recognised 'Green Flag' status (October 2020). We are extremely proud of our green spaces and set out to protect them in various ways.

Nationally designated parkland

Luton Hoo, Putteridge Bury, Wardown Park, and The Ian Finlay and Ian Hamilton Improvement Garden (in Stockwood Park) are nationally designated on Historic England's 'Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England'. Registration is a 'material consideration' meaning that planning authorities must consider the impact of any proposed development.



Photo credit: Culture Trust



Waulud's bank and Legrave Marsh

Both the historic farmhouse Marsh House and the World War Two Nissan hut, sited inside Waulud's Bank Ancient Monument, are locally listed non-designated local heritage assets.

The River Lea

At Legrave Marsh, and Lewsey Brook, the River Lea emerges from surrounding Chiltern's chalk streams. Chalk streams are a globally unique: there are only 210 recorded in the world, and 160 of them are in South East England. Our consultation evidenced The River Lea as Luton's most valued natural heritage asset: a source of pride for Lutonians.

Natural heritage - strategy area of focus

Major project emerging

- The River Lea. This strategy recognises de-culverting of the river and Wardown Lake management as two of the first major capital natural heritage projects.

Heritage implementation action plan

- We will identify natural heritage at risk and prioritise recovery in our heritage implementation plan.
- We will add 'green' and 'archaeological' assets identified by local people to our local list for example pocket parks and medieval earthworks in People's Park.



Old postcard children by the River Lea



- We will review and include all new DWS and CWS sites in our local plan to increase protection.
- We will develop a conservation management plan for the Stockwood Discovery Centre gardens, including the Ian Hamilton Finlay Improvement Garden, recently designated by Historic England for its heritage importance, public art and heritage structures.
- We will ensure that development of a Stockwood Parkland Masterplan considers historic orientation, its former use and a future plan for public engagement, Farley fish pond and landscape design, historic interpretation, sympathetic new developments, and the potential expansion of Stockwood Discovery Centre to widen its museum offer and public facilities to enable sustainability.
- We will work in partnership to co-ordinate dynamic biodiversity data collection by environmental and social scientists, and offer community and volunteer training.

Call for research: engineering research to develop real-time dynamic natural heritage biodiversity analysis.

Built heritage

National context

This heritage strategy is being co-created against a complex backdrop of UK government post-Brexit and post-Covid initiatives. Some, for example High Street Heritage Action Zones (delivered through English Heritage), Levelling Up and Welcome Back funds, show a commitment to support historic high streets, town centres, and cultural and heritage assets. Others, for example new planning bills, will see increased permitted development rights, putting our non-designated heritage assets at risk. This highlights the urgent need to identify and value our built heritage assets; and preserve, enhance, promote, and utilise them for the town's prosperity.



Blockers' seaside bronze sculptures by Isobella Lockett, photo credit: Culture Trust



Local achievements to date

Luton has five designated conservation areas and 116 nationally listed buildings, four scheduled ancient monuments, and four sites nationally listed as historic parks and garden parks (as detailed in the natural heritage section above). Since the council's draft 'Foundation for Luton Built heritage Strategy', produced in 2019 we have:

- had three new inclusions on the Historic England national registry
- engaged with a wider range of people to identify what is valued locally and why
- adopted a robust scoping methodology and appraisal framework to establish, review and expand our local list
- supported the development of the Luton Heritage Forum and its' role in reviewing and developing a detailed directory, including photographic records, of local heritage assets
- reviewed the historic environment section within the Luton Local Plan
- developed a local 'heritage at risk' register
- developed partnership infrastructure to support the vision, and co-create management plans and design guides for designated conservation areas

We have also prioritised place-making: positioning heritage interpretation at the heart of a new Town Centre Masterplan; and supported The Culture Trust Luton's best practice in developing the Plaiter's Lea Hat District Conservation Area and the University of Bedfordshire's role in widening access and participation into higher education and supporting place-making initiatives.

Our local heritage assets and significance

Our 2021 online heritage consultation survey asked: 'What is your favourite building, and why?' There was a whole range of answers, including several addresses that were or had once been called 'home'.



First place: top of the poll, with 16% of the total vote, was Grade Two listed Wardown House Museum and Gallery



in second place, with 15% of the vote, our Grade One listed parish church St Mary's



in third place, with 10% of votes, our Grade Two listed town hall



equal favourites in fourth place, with 6% of the vote each, were The Hat District buildings, and the former ABC Cinema in George Street.



Eight of people's favourites were nationally listed:

- Hart Lane and Bailey Hill Water Towers.
- St Mary's Hospital (former workhouse).
- Two pubs (The Painters Arms, High Town and The Moat House, a late fourteenth century manor with moat).
- Two buildings statemented for their interiors (the former Odeon cinema, now a church and Hart House - the former director's offices of Vauxhall Motors).
- Georgian registrar office in George Street West.

Thirteen of the public's 'favourite' buildings are neither currently within designated conservation areas, or mentioned on the original draft local list, but many are significant because of their continued historic use value, these include: Denbigh High School; UK Centre for Carnival Arts; Marsh House; the former Masonic Lodge (currently Pizza Express) in Church Street, admired (like Hart House) for its' interior; 116 Bury Park Road (currently an Islamic Centre, formerly Synagogue, cinema, and aviation factory); London Luton Airport (itself a site of heritage); and the football ground (Kenilworth Road).

Only two were on the pre-existing draft local list: 27 George Street and 28 King Street. Two were twentieth century: St George's Library and The Mall; and two twenty-first century: Inspire Luton Sports Village and the University of Bedfordshire's £46m seven storey Library building. Two 'favourite buildings' were lamentations because they no longer exist: 33 Arts Centre and the Starlight Club; and one has yet to be built: 'the new football stadium at Power Court'.

A local list for Luton

Our public consultation provided strong evidence that the heritage significance of local historic buildings is based upon a different set of values to that of nationally listed buildings. Buildings of all ages are valued not just for their age or architecture but primarily their use value. We now have a clear strategic approach, scoping methodology, audit process, and understanding of the purpose of developing a dynamic local list as a focus for place-making.

We recognise the work of the Luton Heritage Forum in building a new website to archive photographic records, and make public, information about Luton's built heritage (based on engagements of 'Collective Memory'); and the work of Cultural Histories CIC connecting communities to the story of historic buildings.



WW2 Nissan Hut photo credit: Culture Trust



Case studies

Bute Mills

In 2013, Youthscape, a Luton based charity working to support young people, initiated a community-led campaign approach to purchasing and refurbishing the Grade Two listed Bute Mills building, which sits within the Plaiter's Lea Hat District Conservation Area.



Bailey Hill Water Tower

Bailey Hill Water Tower is one of two water towers built, in bold 'Arts and Crafts' architectural design, to supply water to Luton following a drought in 1898. The Grade Two listed Bailey Hill Water Tower overlooks Luton Hoo Memorial Park and is an exemplar model of commercial property development.





St Mary's Church

St Mary's Church (an Anglican Church of St Albans Diocese) stands on a site of local worship spanning 1,000 years. Luton's only Grade One listed building is rich in architectural detail evidencing, deep and meaningful heritage significance, only because it has been consistently maintained and refurbished.



St Mary's Church photo credit: Peter Adams

The Town Hall

Luton's town hall was registered with Historic England as a Grade Two listed building in 1988 because of its' interior and exterior neo-classical and Art Deco architectural features. The 144ft. clock tower, incorporating the town's Coat of Arms and distinctive clock bell, has undergone recent structural repairs coinciding with the launch of this strategy (September 2021).

Art Deco influence

The town hall and Luton War Memorial (also Grade Two listed), erected in 1922, heralded a period of new Art Deco influenced builds, interspersed with Victoriana, throughout George Street. Our 2021 public survey highlighted several art deco styled buildings and features. Together they create an important townscape and 'mise-en-scene' for heritage interpretation.





The former ABC cinema site

Over 150 people booked to participate in an online public meeting, hosted by Luton Heritage Forum in 2021, to discuss the future of the former ABC Cinema site.

The 1,892 seat Savoy Cinema opened in 1938, one of three Associated British Cinemas (ABC) in Luton at the time, was designed by in-house architect William R Glen renowned for his interior design. In 1971 triple screen refurbishment destroyed much of the original leaving it unsuitable for national listing.

Empty since 2000, it has suffered dilapidation, however its' townscape heritage significance as a key feature central to a nationally designated heritage conservation area, and importance to Lutonians, should not be under-estimated. The preservation of 'Modernist' 'Art Deco' exterior 'façade' and collective memory of the site as a historic cinema is highly valued.

National Lottery Heritage Fund has supported community engagement; and with a sympathetic developer and high public engagement, we are using award-winning community-led design charrette model [LOOK! St Albans](#) as inspiration to develop best practice collaborative solutions to produce design codes within our designated heritage conservation areas.



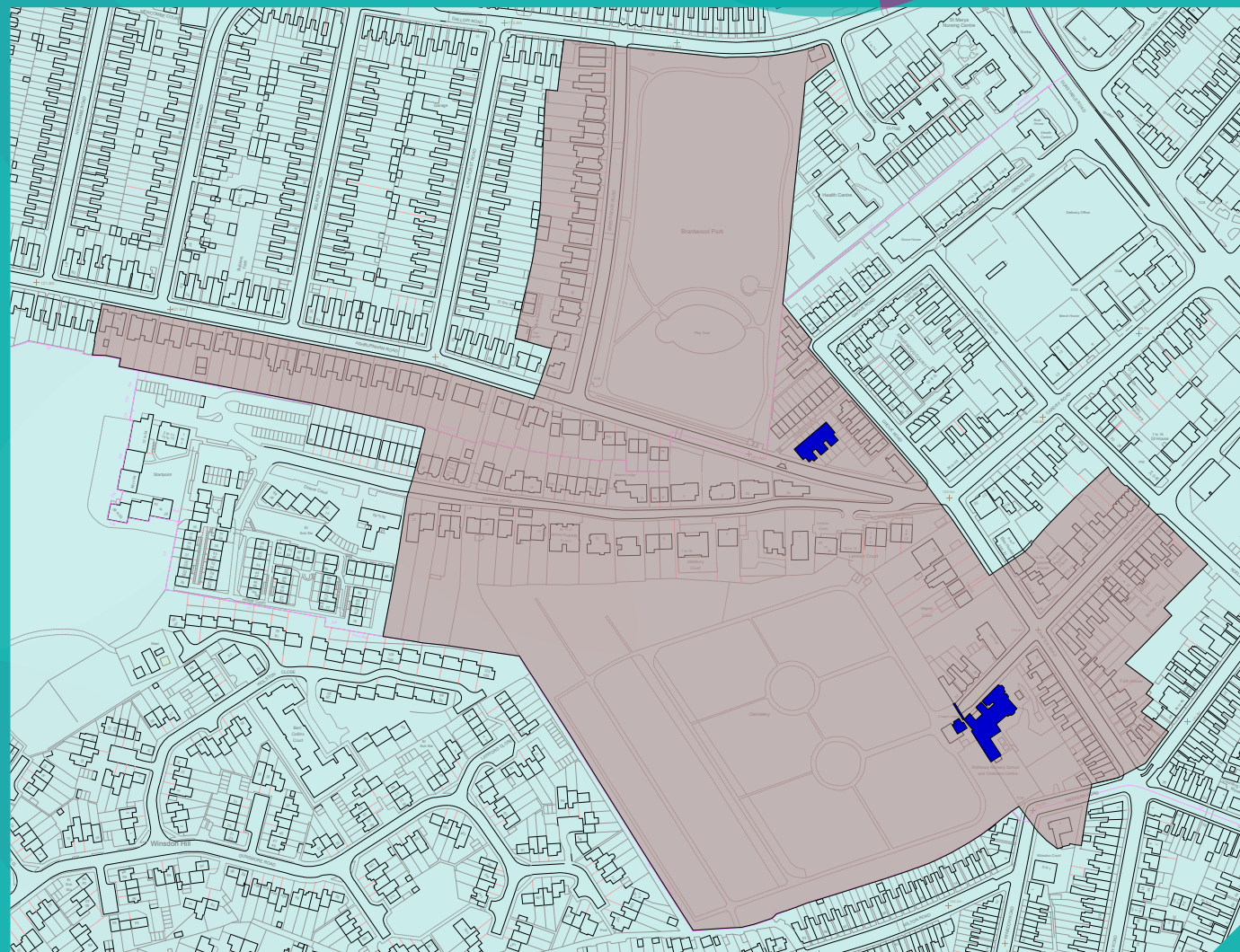
Luton's Designated Conservation Areas

In addition to 101 listed buildings and historic features, Luton has five designated conservation areas, registered with Historic England. Heritage assets within conservation areas, and symbiotically conservation areas based upon high numbers of heritage assets, have more protection.

Rothesay Road conservation area

A residential area containing no statutory listed buildings but several significant landmarks:

- Rothesay Road Cemetery, the first graveyard in Luton for non-conformists as well as Anglicans, opened in 1854. It affords a magnificent view over Luton and includes the listed gravestone of Captain Charles Becroft.
- Many homes on Napier Road as well as the even-numbered houses on Grove Road are considered to be of architectural interest.
- Opposite Brantwood Park, but lying just outside the conservation area on Dallow Rd, is a historic building with both architectural and use value significance. A former school converted into The Guru Nanak Gurdwara Luton, it is now a site of a new Sikh Temple.

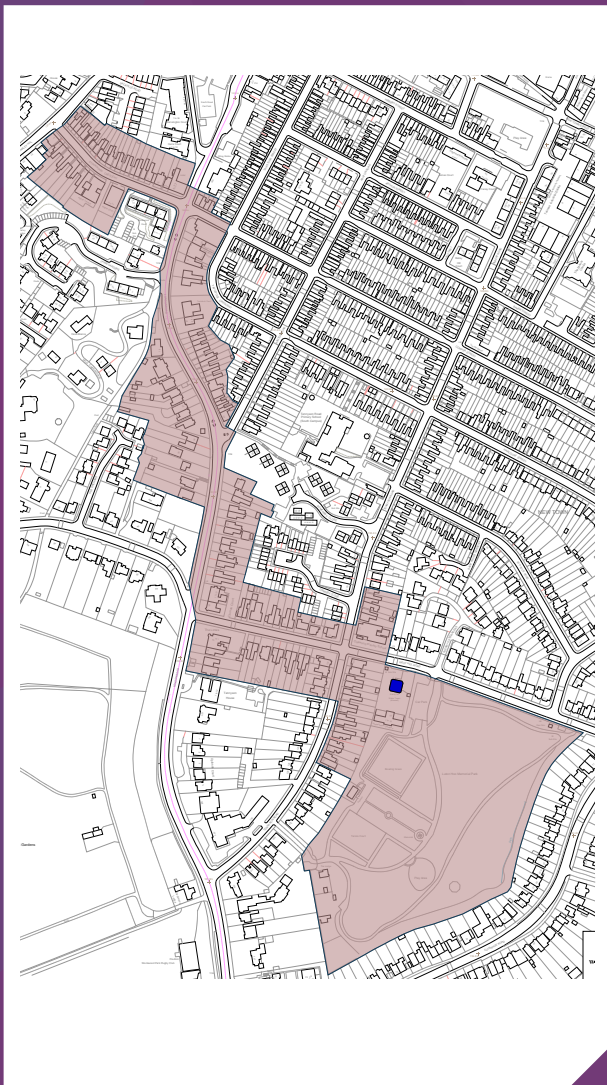




Luton South conservation area

Largely linear and characterised by the London Road 'spine', containing the largest detached residential dwellings rich in historic quality and distinctive architectural detailing, this area contains:

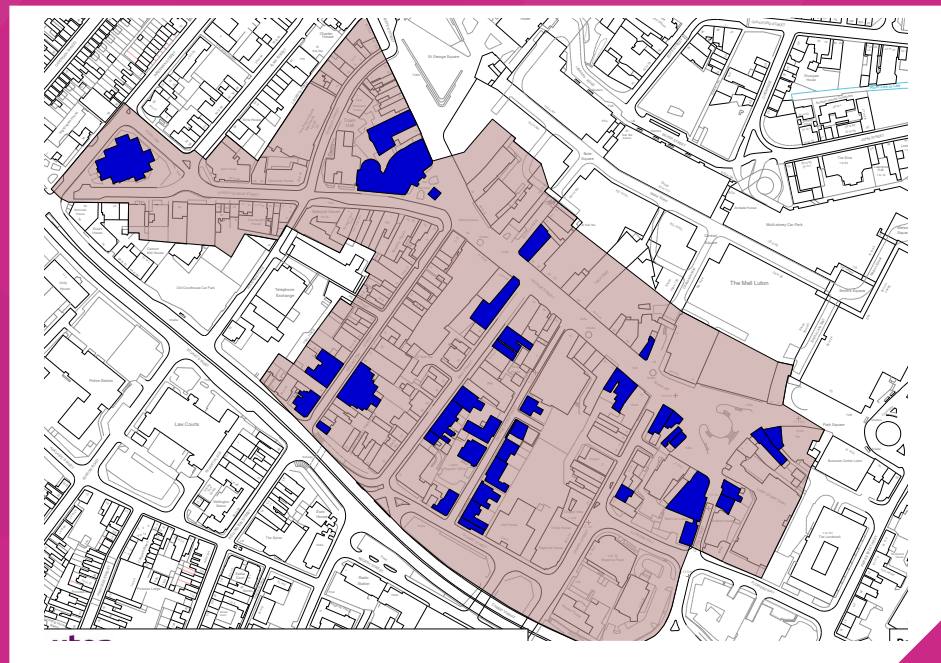
- One listed building – the West Hill Rd Bailey Hill Water Tower (one of a pair donated to the town by Luton Hoo).
- One listed war memorial in Luton Hoo Memorial Park.
- Several non-listed heritage assets including the Bowls Pavilion, the electric substation, and several mature historic trees in Luton Hoo Memorial Park.



George Street conservation area

Nationally designated in 1998, it encompasses Upper George Street, George Street and George Street West: for this reason, and to prevent confusion with the new Town Centre Masterplan boundary; this strategy recommends changing the name of this designated conservation area.

Within this area are 24 Grade Two listed buildings. The two most significant in stature are Christchurch House (former church) and the town hall. The town hall and war memorial together remain a symbol of the town's resilience, hope and civic pride. In Luton's Pilot Year of Culture, 2019, the building became the focal point for heritage led place activation inspired by the 1919 Luton Peace Day riots. Creative heritage led place activation continues to be a significant part of Luton's place-making initiatives.



Plaiters' Lea (Hat District) conservation area

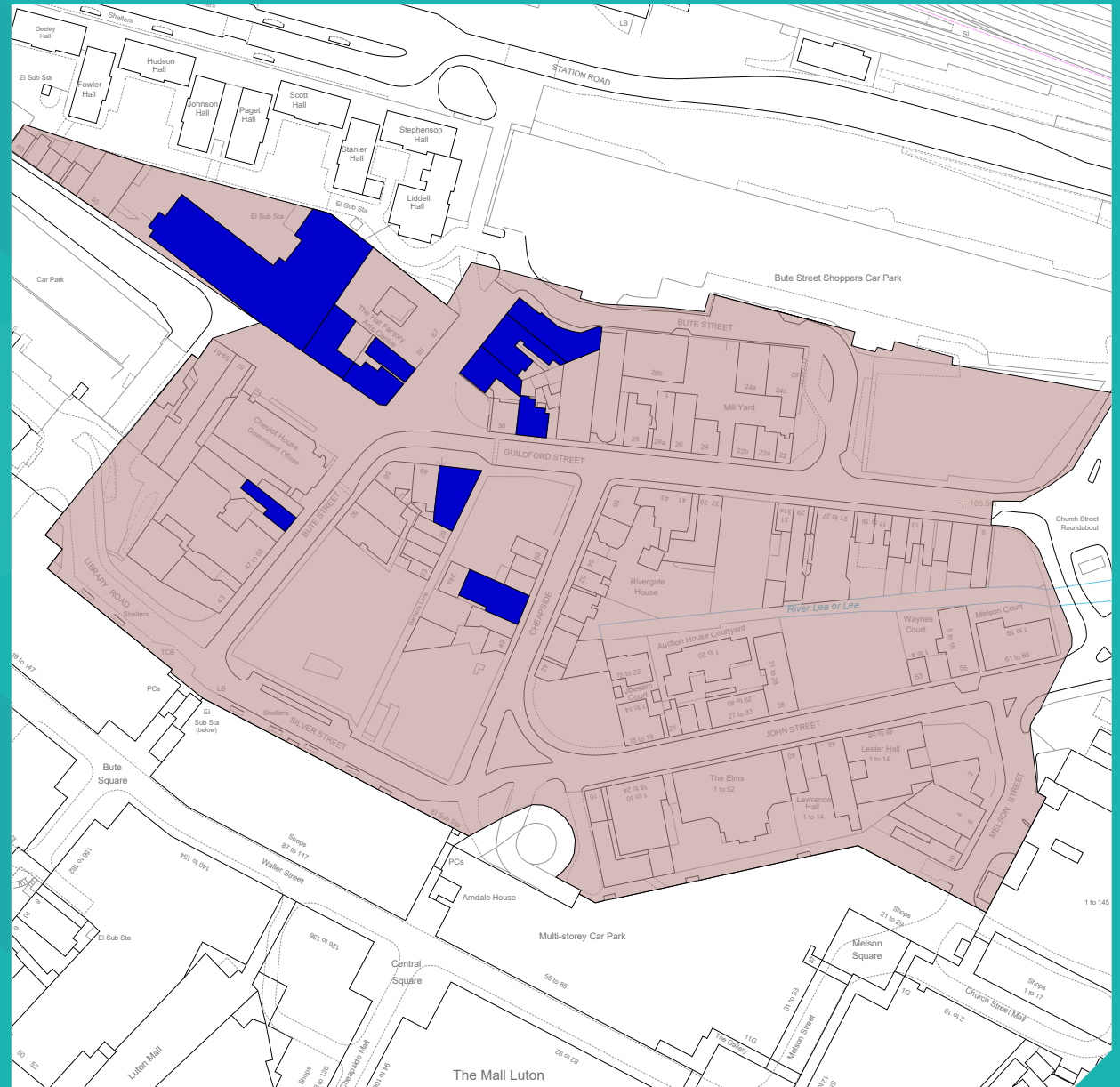
Plaiters' Lea Hat District Conservation Area, home to seven nationally listed buildings, connects, through Luton Central railway station gateway, to both High Town and the new St Mary's Quarter/Power Court development. It also connects to George Street, via The Mall.

Once a densely packed hive of hat factories, showrooms and warehouses, the areas varied architectural styles include Victorian polychromy (the art of painting in several colours), Queen Anne Revival and Neo-Jacobean. The adoption of pier and panel design, reflecting advanced cast-iron construction, create an industrial aesthetic contrasting with neighbouring public houses and retail ghost signs.

Largely due to the inspirational Hat District Future-scape 2020, led by a small group of cultural entrepreneurs, The Plaiters' Lea Hat District is our most established designated heritage conservation area. The council have developed a management plan along with capital works to de-culvert the river and develop a new 'pocket park'.

“There is a strong economic case for regenerating historic buildings. The benefits relate not only to the individual building but also to the wider area and community. The impact of successful schemes can be felt beyond the boundaries of the heritage asset itself and can boost the economy of the whole town...”

- Deloitte for the British Property Federation (BPF) 2017.





Hat District case study

Built originally as a domestic dwelling, circa 1840, Hat Works, the oldest former hat factory in Luton, is Grade Two listed. It has a distinct façade of Luton grey bricks, stucco dressings and a Welsh slate roof and is located in the Plaiters Lea conservation area.

Last used as a factory in 2006, The Culture Trust, Luton charity purchased the derelict building in 2017 and, with funding from South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) and National Lottery Heritage Fund have transformed it into 2,400 sq. ft. of new creative and digital workspace for entrepreneurs, innovators and micro-businesses. One of four buildings in the growing Hat District ecology of cultural creative workspaces, arts venues, and galleries.

Working closely with The Culture Trust, Luton, Historic England, Luton Council and EBS Ltd, design team Fleet Architects, 'You&Me', and Luton based Neville Special Projects Construction Ltd recycled, reused and refit materials found in the building; and sourced, reclaimed or matched replacement materials with the original local equivalents.

Build finish playfully combines modern and heritage narratives, for example the contemporary stairwell slicing diagonally through three floors reveals historic features and scarred walls: signifying stories of 150 years of former use.

(Taken from notes by Guy Smith, The Culture Trust, Luton)

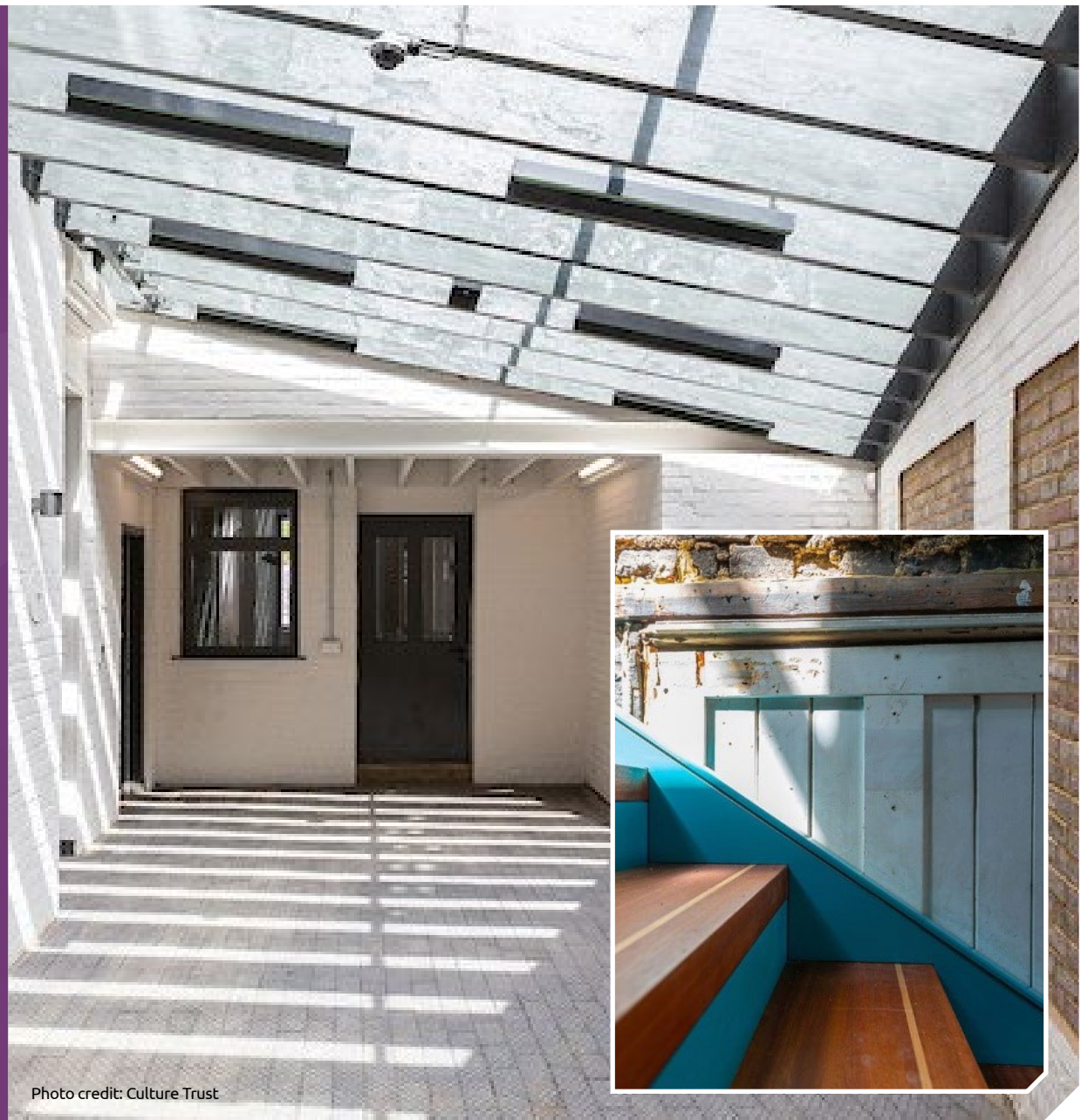


Photo credit: Culture Trust



Built heritage - strategy areas of focus

Major projects emerging

- A new Hat Industry Heritage Zone will be created to combine Plaiters' Lea Conservation area, High Town Conservation Area and the wider High Town hat industry heritage as identified by English Heritage: to include strategic support for hat-maker owned historic hat factories in High Town (to make them post Covid safe and publicly accessible destinations). Sited within this wider Hat Industry Heritage Zone:
 - Substantial national internet evidences potential for a capital project to develop access to the town's most structurally sound underground war tunnel as a visitor attraction.
 - The Plaiters' Lea Hat District will be supported and developed by continuing heritage care and conservation projects that address historic hat industry buildings most in need and which can be adapted into new use that aligns with the Hat District Creative District not-for profit ecology and completion of the Hat District 'Hat Studios' project.

Heritage Implementation action plan

- We will provide clear local list scoping and appraisal criteria framework to be issued as guidance.
- We will develop a dynamic local list review methodology that includes micro-architectural and historical features (eg street furniture and ghost signs) to strengthen the position of our conservation areas and heritage zones.
- We will establish partnership infrastructure for developing vision, management plans, and design statements for all of our conservation areas.
- We will support professional and trained community volunteer capacity, including the appointment of a conservation officer, to deliver dynamic conservation area appraisal.

- We will adopt blanket group value statements, within our local list framework, to inform simple design code recommendations, eg:
 - 'all commercial and residential flat-roofed art deco buildings, to be automatically locally listed, and to remain white with flat roofs; all green-tiled art deco residential buildings to be automatically locally listed, and to remain white with green-tiled roofs'
- We will adopt the, Social Return On Investment, valuation methodology '[Valuing culture and heritage capital: a framework towards inspiring decision making' DCMS 2021](#).
- We will rename the 'Town Centre' Conservation Area, 'George Street Conservation Area,' to avoid confusion with the Town Centre Masterplan boundary; to acknowledge other town centre designated conservation areas; and because this area embraces George Street, Upper George Street and George Street West.

Call for research: built heritage valuation case studies using the DCMS's framework.





Luton's industrial heritage

Luton town's motto, 'Scientiae et labori detur', roughly translating as 'by science and industry' and the symbols on the borough Coat of Arms (officially granted in 1876) signify our heritage as an innovative and industrious town. Luton's built environment has simultaneously shaped and been shaped by its' history as a proud industrial and industrious town. Major historic industries have included:

- brewing
- hat industry
- aviation and motor engineering

All of which are investigated in more detail in the [full strategy document](#)

Made in Luton - Our Industrial heritage assets and significance

Brewing and pubs

At one time Luton had 10 breweries: the most recent in living memory being Whitbread, who acquired the Flowers Brewery (in 1961) closed and subsequently demolished it (in 1972) when they moved to a modern plant in Oakley Road (itself closed in 1984). At one time Luton had 226 Inns. Ten of our Grade Two listed buildings are, or once were, public houses.

Luton's hat industry

Luton's hat industry brought the first diaspora of economic migrants to Luton in the seventeenth century: Scottish straw plaiters. The industry grew exponentially for 250 years. Growth facilitated by the first railway station in Luton, Luton Bute Street (1858, extension from Welwyn), and Luton Midland Road (1868, extension from St Pancras). The engineering skillset of hat makers, aviation and motor innovators together played a major role in the town's trade and resilience to 1930s economic depression.

In our 2020 public consultation survey, we asked people what they thought most represents 'the Luton brand'. The highest response (24.34%) said hat-making.

Following the closure of Olney Headwear, makers of the famous Luton Boater, in December 2020, there were only 14 local hat industry companies remaining. The international importance of our remaining delicate eco-system should not be underestimated. Dependent on socio-cultural events such as weddings and Royal Ascot, Covid impact on Luton's hat eco-system reduced turnover of our seven 'heritage' hat companies by 50%.

Our hat-makers hold a globally unique skillset, underpinning supply to international film and UK theatre and fashion industries; and remain primary private custodians of historic industrial heritage collections, including tooling, machinery, prototypes, and block and hat examples. While larger hat factory buildings have been restored and repurposed, it is behind smaller closed doors that our living artisan heritage craft sector survives. In 2021, the UNESCO accredited Heritage Craft Association, in accordance with Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) safeguarding, added block-making and hat-making to millinery on the UK Red list of endangered crafts.



“Luton is the hat centre of the world”

(Philip Treacy OBE, January 2021)

Luton as a site of engineering innovation and excellence (motor and aviation)

Acknowledging historic contributions from Laporte, Hayward Tyler, George Kent Ltd, SkefKo, and Electrolux amongst others, this strategy focusses on the airport and Vauxhall as the largest and most significant sites of engineering heritage in the town.

Case study - the airport as a site of heritage

The following taken from notes written by Peter Simpkins, from the London Luton Airport 75 year anniversary book, and notes from The Culture Trust, Luton.

The council as pioneering early adopters

In the 1930s, when the aviation industry was in its infancy, Luton Council took a brave decision to invest in an airfield. The airport officially opened in 1938; and the following year one of the earliest charter flights from Luton Flying Club carried six hat industry salesmen, with 80 straw and felt samples, to Manchester to publicise the innovation of Luton industry and help increase sales.

War time engineering excellence

Amongst other WW2 engineering innovations: Percival Aircraft manufactured the Mosquito, and the Percival Proctor radio trainer and communications aircraft; and D. Napier and Son developed two experimental aircraft including the 2,200 horse power 24 cylinder Sabre engine, and related air filter and oil coolant systems, for the Hawker Typhoon. In 1938, the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (No. 29 Elementary and Reserve Flight Training School) opened on site; and in 1941, the Air Training Corps (ATC) had trained and passed nearly 700 men through these squadrons. No. 10 (F) remains to this day with headquarters in Proctor Way.

Continuing innovation

Since 1952 Luton's aviation industry and airport has undergone redevelopment evidencing continual state of the art architectural and engineering innovations including: an all-weather concrete runway with night-lighting, built in 1961, helping to kick-start the lucrative package tour era and bringing rapid

year-on-year increases in passenger numbers and profitability.

Expansion continued through the 1990s, when the airport was re-named London Luton Airport to reflect its proximity to the capital. In 1995 the airport boasted the tallest control tower in the UK; and by 1998 it was the fastest growing airport in the country, with 4.4 million passengers per year. In 1999 another new terminal was opened by The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh along with London Luton Airport Parkway station, enabling travel to London by rail in less than 30 minutes. Aviation innovation continues.

A people's airport

The airport's public ownership was noted by Prince Charles in 1983. It is still owned by London Luton Airport Ltd. (LLAL), a company wholly owned by Luton Council and therefore by the residents of Luton. It is the UK's fifth largest airport. Central to the local economy it employs over 8,500 staff and support many more jobs indirectly. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, it received 18 million passengers per year travelling to 135 destinations across Europe, the Middle East and North Africa; and provided around £19 million per year to the council for local services, plus almost £10 million in donations to local charities and community groups.

For decades, London Luton Airport has served as a gateway for economic migrants arriving in the UK. As such it symbolises the diasporic characteristic of Luton and remains a key asset in Luton's cultural as well as industrial heritage.



“The airport as a site of heritage is not just about continuing engineering innovation and excellence; it’s a symbol of hope... it’s like Luton’s very own Ellis Island”

(Jakub – Lutonian from heritage focus group workshop May 2021).



Photo credit: Culture Trust/Luton News



Case Study - the significance of Vauxhall Motors

The following notes are taken from Dr Len Holden's significance statement.

National context

The importance of the motor vehicle industry to Britain in the twentieth century cannot be overemphasised. During the war production of Bedford Trucks for the armed forces became a priority. Vauxhall produced over 250,000 trucks, 5,640 Churchill tanks (made in 'Y' block – Gipsy Lane retail park and tested in the grounds of Luton Hoo), and over two million helmets. In the 1940s and 1950s, Luton exported hundreds of thousands of vehicles to support UK export drive. By the 1960s, the car and commercial vehicle industry in terms of employment, production, profitability and export sales had challenged the old staple 'industrial revolution' industries; and Vauxhall Motors was one of three large scale British vehicle manufacturers.

Local context

At the turn of the twentieth century, Luton Council, concerned about economic reliance on one trade (the hat industry) sought to attract industries to the town to diversify employment opportunities. The town council's 'New Industries Committee' successfully attracted a number of engineering firms with cheap land and low commercial rates. In 1905, Vauxhall was invited to move from London to Luton. The Vauxhall Griffin originates from the coat of arms of Sir Falkes de Breaute, who King John awarded the Manor of Luton in the thirteenth century. Taken over by General Motors in 1925, Vauxhall underwent huge growth. In 1905 it had 200 employees...by 1934...6,000, by 1950...12,000 (accounting for nearly 20% of all employment in Luton). By 1963 that figure had risen to 30,000, and by 1971 employment peaked at 37,256.... larger than some towns, and the main company site had its own shops, cafes and canteens and even its own bank.

"By the 1960s, the money that men and women could make at Vauxhall became a byword for affluence. Sociologists and industrial journalists conducted surveys and research into this phenomenon. It was noted that Vauxhall employees were buying cars and houses; filling their homes with fridges, washing machines, televisions and other domestic appliances; they even had their own Griffin Golf Club (an unusual perk). Academics strived to explain this new trend and came up with the phrase 'embourgeoisement', which became a subject of much debate among intellectuals. Vauxhall employees also took part in the community providing local councillors, volunteers for charities and communal activities. They had their own football, cricket and other sports teams competing locally and nationally; and their own drama group (The Griffin Players). The influence on Luton life was deep and wide-ranging."

An oft-quoted local saying was that 'when Vauxhall sneezes, Luton catches a cold.' (meaning if Vauxhall entered a downturn, its economic effects would clearly be felt).

From the 1930s, Vauxhall attracted labour from all over Britain, and consequently from all over the world. As well as the town's economic backbone, Vauxhall's social and cultural influence cannot be underestimated: the mass economic immigration it created between the 1930s and 1970s has left its mark in the super-diverse demographic we have today.

“the town was deserted in Vauxhall shut down week.... Because we’d all ‘gone home”

(taken from public consultation heritage workshop Luton Irish Forum, March 2021).

“It was great in the 1970s...walking into A/C block felt like being back home in the Caribbean.”

(Lutonian – from public consultation heritage workshop March 2021).



Photo credit: Culture Trust

Our industrial heritage assets include:

Transport and motor trade

- Vauxhall War Memorial, Kimpton Road
- Vauxhall headquarters – Hart House, Kimpton Road
- Vauxhall, Commer Cars, Bedford Trucks – including the 2012 Stories of the World decorated truck
- Mossman and museum collection of horse drawn vehicles
- Vauxhall chassis number 45 from that first year of production and maintained in correct running condition

Hats and hat industry

- Boon and Lane - blocks and Gilman & Son repeating lathe
- Philip Wright Hats - the only spindles and spares for working the 17 Guinea stitching machine (patented 1830)
- Luton Museum’s Hat industry and headwear significance collection



Photo credit: Culture Trust



Photo credit: Culture Trust



Photo credit: Culture Trust



Photo credit: Culture Trust



Photo credit: Culture Trust



Industrial heritage - strategy areas of focus

Emerging Major project

'Made in Luton', positioning Luton internationally as the home of the Vauxhall Heritage Collection and as a historic site of engineering innovation and excellence.

Additional industrial heritage area of urgent focus

- Hat Industry related heritage craft, design, technology and engineering skills associated with hat manufacturer (block-making and hat-making) became nationally recognised (in May 2021) along with millinery as skills at risk of extinction and were added to the national Heritage Craft Association 'red list'. Boon & Lane are the only blockers in the world offering skilled craftsmanship in both wooden and metal hat block-making.
- Social history, collective and individual memories.



Photo credit: Alan Davies

Heritage Implementation action plan

- We will review the Museums' Collections Policy and Collections Development Plan review to ensure adequate representation of Luton's Industrial Heritage:
 - addressing risks posed by changes in ownership and disposal of facilities in Luton of Vauxhall headquarters; strengthening our transport significance collection; supporting the Industrial Heritage major project emerging
 - supporting the development of the Culture Trust's Hat and headwear Museum collection significance seeking designation by Arts Council England
- We will recognise the airport as a site of heritage.
- We will record industrial heritage social history living memories.
- We will audit surviving pub buildings within our conservation areas with particular reference to our local list 'group' and 'townscape' criteria; and engage pub landlords and pub communities in future review of this heritage strategy.
- We will engage surviving hat-makers in the development of our Heritage Implementation plan, embracing their efforts to develop upon pre-Covid visitor numbers (300 per year).



Batman hat block photo credit: Alan Davies



Luton's cultural and community heritage – the heart of the matter

“I’ve not been to many places that have such an established sense of self”

(Rae Leaver – Lutonian – from public consultation heritage workshop March 2021)

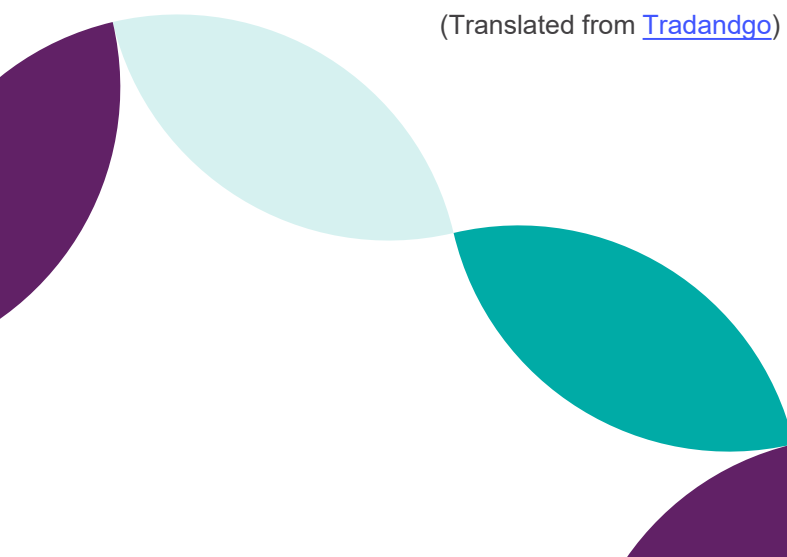
National and local context

UNESCO defines cultural heritage as tangible moveable and immovable objects and intangible oral traditions, languages, music, performing arts, customs, traditions and rituals. It is the way we pass on meaningful collections, artistic expressions, beliefs and values from one generation to the next.

122 different languages are spoken here

“An inorganic and spontaneous babel tower has materialised in its shops, bars & schools, and for the time-being this tower does not seem to succumb to instabilities of the financial crisis or social lack of cohesion”

(Translated from [Tradandgo](#))



In our April 2021 public consultation survey, we asked ‘What is heritage?’, ‘What does the term mean to you?’ Over 90% of respondents wrote about the lineage of their own cultural identity and the town’s collective shared memories:



(townscape buildings and collective memories)

This informs the heart of our developing ‘Curating Luton’: Place-making and Built Heritage Implementation Plan. Tangible evidence of our cultural heritage can be found in Luton’s historic public art, an audit of which is currently being undertaken.



Community and anchor institutions form the backbone of our cultural heritage assets

Luton has a diverse range, including but not limited to:

- Luton Town Football Club.
- Luton and Dunstable Hospital.
- Luton Central Mosque.
- Marsh House.
- The UK Centre for Carnival Arts.
- The Culture Trust, Luton.
 - Arts and cultural charity custodians and curators of the town's museum collections [The Culture Trust, Luton](#) showcases high-quality arts and cultural activity and deliver community-focused public realm art engagement and management in the Hat District and across four inspiring sites of heritage: Stockwood Discovery Centre, Wardown House Museum and Gallery, the Hat Factory Arts Centre and Luton Library Theatre. Wardown House Museum and Gallery includes the significant Headwear and Hat Industry Collection; and Stockwood Discovery Centre displays the significant Mossman Collection of Horse Drawn Vehicles Collection (the largest of its kind in Europe).
- The University of Bedfordshire
 - When we asked 'What is your favourite building?' the university's £46 million library, opened in 2015, was mentioned as a 'magnificent landmark building'. Over the past decade the University has invested significant capital development of its estate and educates over 24,000 students from over 100 countries. An important historic site, it champions local community cultural and heritage development. In partnership with the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the University's Arts and Culture Projects team runs the [Heritage Impact Accelerator and the Heritage Hub programmes](#)

offering cross-sector partnership projects and resources to support local cultural and heritage practitioners and engage young people in local schools. This aligns with the team's wider outreach and regional delivery including within the two place-based cross sector [Local Cultural Education Partnership consortiums](#).

Political activism

Luton also has a proud history of democracy facilitated by protest and social action. Acknowledging this as a cultural characteristic, the Pilot Year of Culture 2019 explored themes of 'People, Power, Passion' to mark 100 years since Lutonians burnt down the town hall in protest against poor treatment of local veterans returning from WW1. The five-month programme followed the chronology of the 1919 Peace Day riots through six diverse and inclusive place-activation events, and evidenced improvements for participants in confidence and skills development; audience connectivity to the town centre, civic pride, community cohesion; inward investment and economic benefits for the town (66% of the project budget was spent locally and 64% of the audience said they came to town specifically for the events). Heritage led place activation will continue to be a significant part of Luton's place-making initiatives.



Music and dance

The 19 July performance by post punk Lutonian band UK Decay reminded us of their protesting of the Falkland's War in 1982 and how hidden histories, youth movements and emergent music genres have formed the backbone of twentieth and twenty-first century multi-racial grassroots, social and political activities across town. Luton has a rich cultural history of alternative 'tribes', clubs and music scenes, including some more political than others: South Asian Bhangra, African-Caribbean house parties, LGBTQI+ communities, punks and the Exodus (Rave) Collective. All of which deserves further heritage-led research.

Our 2021 public consultation workshops lead to lamentations of community-led centres such as the Starlight Club and 33 Community Arts Centre, without which we would not have had 33 music studio or the record label 33 jazz, the legacy of which lives on within our Plaiters' Lea Hat District at The Bear Club. This forms one strand of a continuum including Luton Music Club, Luton Girls Choir and a (South of England) award winning Brass Band. Luton has also developed a wide range of culturally diverse dance including Kadam South Asian Dance, Bollywood dancers and world-champion Irish dancers.

This strategy supports further audit and research to develop a demographically representative retrospective cultural collections for Luton; and acknowledges the need to capture contemporary community archive material and support our annual festival programme.



Amongst themes from the 2019 Pilot Year of Culture, notions of 'home-town' emerged again in our 2021 heritage consultation workshops. Cultural Histories CIC, who won two awards for their work in exposing the history of the Peace Day riots, continue this crucial need to investigate inter-generational connectivity through using community history and inter-generational memories to connect primary school children with their local historic buildings. Their work reveals the need for deeper research to explore how young people connect or don't connect to the town in which they live. Understanding connectivity will be the strategic point of departure for our heritage implementation plan.

The biggest heritage assets in Luton are its people

“What you have to understand is that, for many young people in the town...heritage is pain”

(Lutonian – from public consultation heritage workshop March 2021).

Diaspora

The key cultural heritage characteristic of Luton can be summed up through the single word 'diaspora' (the dispersion and resettlement of any people from their original homeland). Created by a rich history of inward economic migration, Luton has an ethnically and culturally diverse population. Identities and representation are complex and intersectional. One of our heritage strengths is our 'super-diverse' population.

Engaging a wider range of people and involving international working is vital for a strong heritage sector. We can learn from home grown international models of connectivity such as The Culture Trust, Luton's 'Truck Art project, 2012; and Luton Irish Forum's strong working relationship with the Irish Embassy in London, who help fund the community they serve.

Luton has experienced mass migration since the turn of the twentieth century, first of Scottish and Irish people, followed chronologically by people of African-Caribbean and Asian descent. More recently, immigrants from the European Union have made Luton their home. Luton is one of only three towns in the UK with a White British population of less than 50%.



In the last census, 81% of the population defined themselves as British. Of those who answered the question in our 2021 heritage survey, 69% of respondents viewed themselves as Lutonian. In further public consultation workshops, we investigated common characteristics through discussing what it means and feels like 'to be Lutonian'. All immigrant communities, have at different times experienced both discrimination and hospitality. Luton has developed resilience and hope in equal measure. We will have figures from the 2021 national census later in 2022 and will review this strategy, heritage interpretation and collections policies accordingly.

Luton's South-Asian community

Around 30% of Luton's population are peoples of South-Asian, including Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistan-Kashmiri and Sri Lankan, descent. This has shaped the cultural and physical heritage of the town. The Bury Park area of Luton is home to the highest number of South Asians in the town: 62.75% of residents in the Dallow and Biscot Wards are from Pakistan or Bangladesh descent. (April 2019). It is an area with a high number of listed and non-listed heritage and faith buildings, including the purpose-built Luton Central Mosque. Heritage consultation has informed the need to develop the Bury Park area as a site of British Asian Heritage.

Luton's Irish community

Around 20,000 people of Irish origin live in Luton, a population growing from 1,000 people, before WW2 to more than 7,000 by 1966, with many Irish men working for the Vauxhall motor company and many Irish women working as NHS nurses. As a percentage of all residents, Luton has the largest Irish community in England, outside of London. Around a quarter of Luton's Irish residents lived in Limbury and Warden Hill areas between 1961 and 1982; most likely due to close proximity to St. Joseph's and Cardinal Newman Catholic Schools. In terms of built heritage, the Irish community has shaped Luton through development of a number of pubs, social clubs, and Catholic churches. In terms of cultural heritage the Irish Forum traditionally kick off Luton's annual festival programme with St. Patrick's Day celebrations.

Luton's African and Caribbean communities, and the Windrush generation

According to the 2011 census, about 10% of Luton's population were of African and Caribbean descent. The Culture Trust, Luton, custodians of the town's museum's collections, have a curatorial partnership with The Luton Windrush Partnership Programme (LWPP). This strategy recognises that Windrush is just one small part of the African Diaspora story and recognises the need for inter-generational research and development investigating personal impacts of bonds, disconnects and cultural fusions resulting from African and Caribbean Diasporas. The 'Curating Luton: Place-making and Heritage Implementation Plan' will support the work of youth ambassadors from the Heritage Alliance and from heritage creatives to research and collate a range of hidden histories throughout the town, including those connected to carnival; and seek to re-dress historical narratives and programme activities not just during national Black History month in October.





European and Eastern European

Between the 2001 and 2011 census, Luton witnessed a steady increase of European and East European migrants. In 2011 there was a high density of people of Polish origin in the High Town and New Town areas of Luton, and a high density of Turkish people in Farley Hill. Luton is also the home of Luton Roma Trust. Once we receive data from the 2021 census, we will be able to assess the effects of Brexit referendum on the demographics of Luton's European and East European populations. This will inform community engagement during our heritage interpretation and implementation stages.

Mixed Race

Mixed race is the fastest-growing ethnic minority in the UK. More than any, this change evidences that defining the cultural heritage of Luton will be a dynamic process. Therefore, our strategic approach must involve frameworks for dynamic engagement and evolution of criteria for auditing heritage assets, developing collections and making curatorial decisions.

Cultural heritage – strategy areas of focus

Major project emerging

- 'Curating Luton': five year heritage led place-making (Heritage Interpretation and Implementation Plan).

Cultural Heritage identified as at risk

- **The UK Centre for Carnival Arts building**
This purpose built building is significant because of its' high score on the local list appraisal framework, its' local social and cultural heritage value, and its position within the emergent St Mary's Heritage Zone.
- **Our programme of Cultural Festivals**
Luton's previously vibrant ten month multi-cultural festival programme offer has been impacted by Covid and lockdown restrictions.

- **Collective and individual memories**

The urgent need to record, collate and preserve stories from our elderly Lutonian's was continually raised through public consultation. Community groups representing people of Irish, African and Caribbean, and Bangladesh descent all mentioned this. It was also raised in reference to economic migrations connected with our NHS hospital, our Windrush generation and Vauxhall.

Heritage Implementation plan

- We will develop the Bury Park area as a non-designated heritage interpretation zone.
- We will develop Bangladeshi a legacy from this year's 'Freedom 50' activities.
- We will include continuity and connectivity with our industrial (Vauxhall) heritage; Luton's new (2021) Bollywood production studio (Bunny and Divi Entertainment Ltd); and national South Asian Heritage Month (SAHM), annual programmes, Southasianheritage.org and national Black History Month, www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk
- We will use heritage to anchor 'place-making' within our five statutory designated heritage conservation areas and five emergent Heritage Interpretation Zones.
- We will use innovative (AI, GIS and public art) approaches to embed collected memories in heritage interpretation, re-addressing our stories of diaspora and cultural diversity into early stages of capital developments.
- We will maintain a dynamic local list to include public art.

Calls for research: expanding the cultural and heritage valuation framework to include intangible cultural heritage; the lineage and evolution of Luton produced music genres; impacts of anchoring heritage in place-making on health and wellness.



Our intangible heritage

For more detailed information about Luton’s intangible heritage assets, please refer to the [full heritage strategy document](#).

Intangible heritage - making our invisible visible

Context, assets and heritage at risk

Digital and oral archives

Intangible heritage includes music, dance, language, knowledge, and skills transmitted through stories, repetition of traditions and customs. Dynamic and evolving, new behaviours and beliefs contribute to a community’s sense of identity and continuity.

Digital collections currently being created include those at Cultural Histories CIC, Luton Heritage Forum, Luton Irish Forum, UK Centre for Carnival Arts, Mary Seacole Housing Association and The Culture Trust, Luton. Existing community archives include Hatters Heritage and Kadam Dance. Some of Luton’s digital and oral archives are held elsewhere (eg University of Hertfordshire, Imperial War Museum and National Archives). Many more remain hidden in personal collections, on outdated formats, and vulnerable to loss; and there are retrospective gaps in our collections.

The best frameworks we have for preserving intangible heritage are robust community engagement; innovative applied curation of oral history collections; and centralised digital archiving, preservation and access.

Heritage craft skills

According to Historic England, £140 mill GVA was lost due to skills shortages in the heritage sector in 2016. We are at risk of losing valuable local skillsets and practitioners across all sectors (Natural, built, industrial, cultural and intangible heritages). Our point of departure for skills audit began with evidence of need. For a full list please refer to the full heritage strategy document.

Our protective frameworks will include future skills audit and dynamic mechanisms for knowledge share, research dissemination and intergenerational skills development. Training opportunities for young people are addressed by strategic priority.

Intangible heritage – strategy areas of focus

Major projects emerging

- **Luton Community Archive**
- **A Heritage Apprenticeship for Luton**

Heritage Implementation plan

- We will undertake a feasibility study to develop a best practice comprehensive digital archive including centralised preservation and access; review of collections policies; innovatively applied ‘place-making’ curation; and a programme of oral history projects to support:
 - intergenerational public health and wellbeing
 - tourism and inward investment
- We will develop needs (data) driven modular heritage apprenticeship skills training and education (levels 3 to 5); and Ofsted accredited local history education packs.
- We will review and strengthen long term management and storage agreements to protect physical museum collections following digitisation.

Research opportunities

- Supporting digital archive feasibility: the role of emergent app-based GIS, AI and NFT (Non Fungible Token) technologies in the creation and value of digital heritage archives; and public health impact assessments of intergenerational oral history.
- Needs driven, place-based heritage craft skills SROI analysis.



Part 3

Emergent Non-designated Heritage Zones

“Every place must identify its strongest, most distinctive features and develop them or run the risk of being all things to all persons and nothing special to any”

(Licciardi et al. 2012).



Reforms announced by UK Government 'Planning for the Future' consultation (August 2020 updated February 2021), and informed by the 'Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission' proposes a new planning system with an emphasis on 'place-making' and connectivity through 'inheritance' and 'sense of place'. This notion, addressing connectivity's within our physical townscape by developing legally binding planning design codes informed by the heritage of an area, is a powerful opportunity for us to 'Curate Luton'.

Developing non-designated heritage zones, based not on the number of tangible listed heritage assets within an area, but honouring socio-economic, cultural, and community heritage allows us to embrace change, recover, regenerate, re-connect and re-imagine.

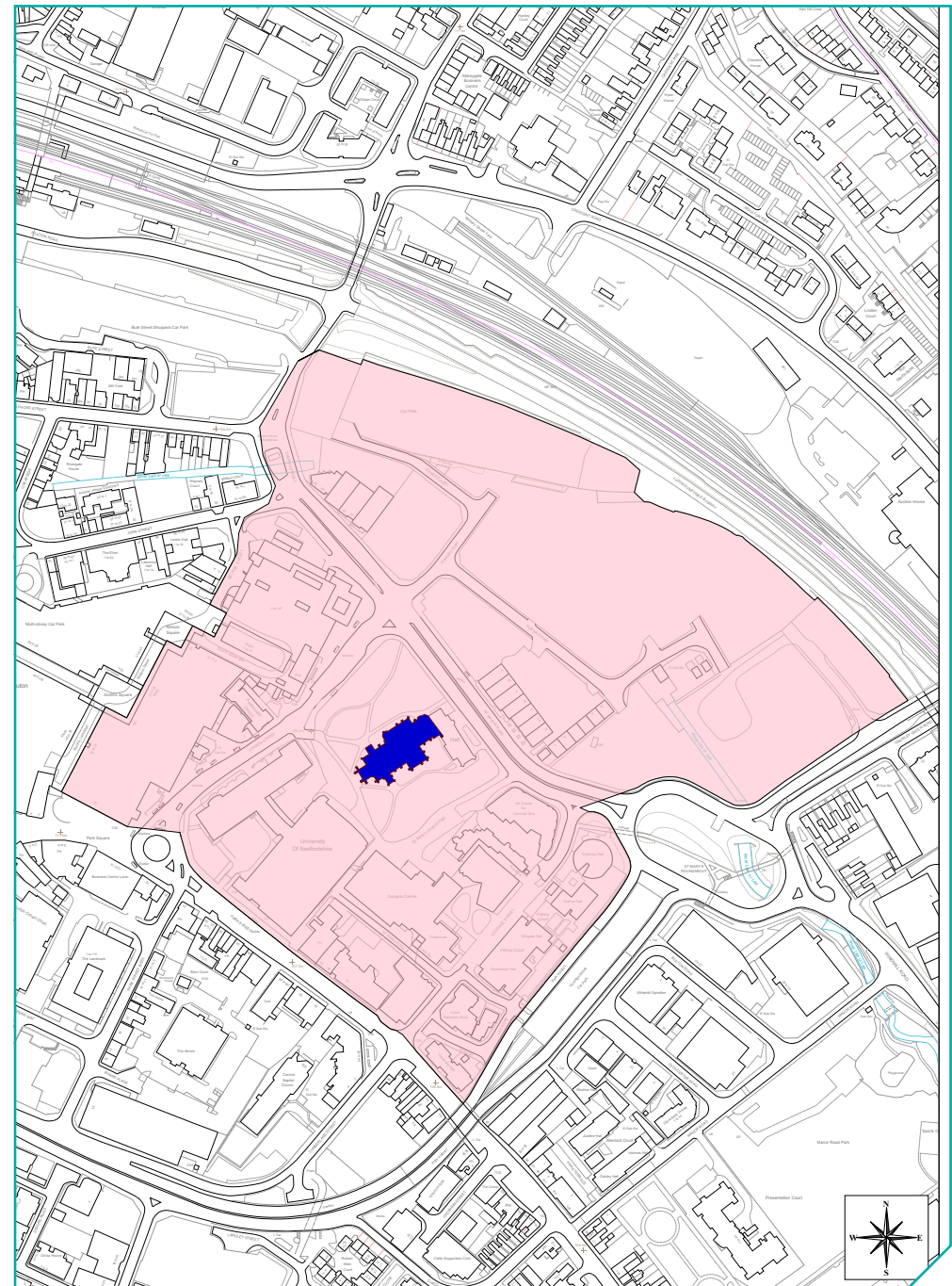
Through public consultation, we have identified five non-designated heritage interpretation zones to support the connectivity between people and place.



St Mary's heritage zone: a significant social history quarter

There is risk in enveloping Luton's only Grade One listed building within a skyline of high density, residential and leisure developments. As positioned in our new Town Centre Masterplan, there is also opportunity. This Heritage Strategy supports the development of a new stadium at Power Court recognising that repositioning Luton Town Football Club (LTFC) into the town centre creates a powerful new emergent social history heritage zone placing St Mary's Church at its' heart.

Luton 2020 Developments Ltd received planning permission to re-locate the football stadium, a community anchor at Power Court, build residential apartments and other facilities. 150 years of football history are represented through both Hatters Heritage and LTFC archive collections.





Power Court, itself a site of heritage, represents the visionary leadership of the Luton Corporation, who developed a power station harnessing the river (a natural heritage asset) at the cusp of the twentieth century, producing local energy that powered Luton Corporation tramways until 1938. Acknowledging St Mary's as an emergent non-designated heritage zone offers us the opportunity to pay homage to this historical strength of leadership and vision.

The Church, evidencing 850 years of social history through multi-faith community and inter-denominational activities at St Mary's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, is enveloped to its' south and west by The University of Bedfordshire, another anchor institution.

As a social, cultural and educational heritage site, through metamorphosis from its roots as a nineteenth century teacher training college, Luton Modern School, Luton Technical Institute, College of Technology and the University of Luton, the University opened a stunning £46 million library in 2015.

Adjacent to the medieval church sits the UK Centre for Carnival Arts, signifying our towns' diverse cultural heritage. Scoring highly on the local list appraisal framework, and with national significance, it was built on the much-lamented Youth House site. A tenth century graveyard was discovered during pre-build archaeological excavations.

The Mall, to the north of Church Street represents Luton as a market town. The heritage narrative here is one of changing retail habits: from shopping as a social activity through contemporary consumer behaviours; and also our ever-changing internal motivations, such as our love of God, our love of football or our love of shopping.

Connecting St Mary's non-designated heritage zone with neighbouring Plaiters' Lea Hat District is our major natural heritage asset: the River Lea, itself embodying 1,000 years of social history. Our ambitious challenge now is to pay homage to the visionary courage of the Luton Corporation and work with professional creatives to interpret the area's social history, embedding heritage narratives at every stage of re-development.




Hat Industry heritage zone: reconnecting High Town and Plaiters' Lea Hat District

The need to re-connect the High Town with Plaiters' Lea Hat District via the station gateway is informed by:

- a shared history of hat industry heritage
- the national, cultural and creative significance of Luton's hat designers
- the **'bold and unashamedly utopian'** vision ([Hat District Future-scape 2020](#)) developing The Hat District as a creative quarter and cultural destination
- the existing (international) visitors attracted by the last remaining Lutonian hat makers
- Historic England's research and designation of both Plaiters' Lea and High Town as nationally significant 'heritage at risk'
- the artisan skills of block-making and hat-making, joining millinery, in the Heritage Craft Associations 'Red List of endangered crafts. (updated May 2021)
- historic architecture (industrial and residential) uniquely built to support Luton's hat industry boom

Together this wider non-designated Hat Industry Heritage Zone will leverage, sustain and strengthen relationships to develop an economically robust area, inspired by the proven success of best practice models like the Birmingham Jewellery District.

The Plaiters' Lea Hat District is detailed in the built heritage section of this strategy.

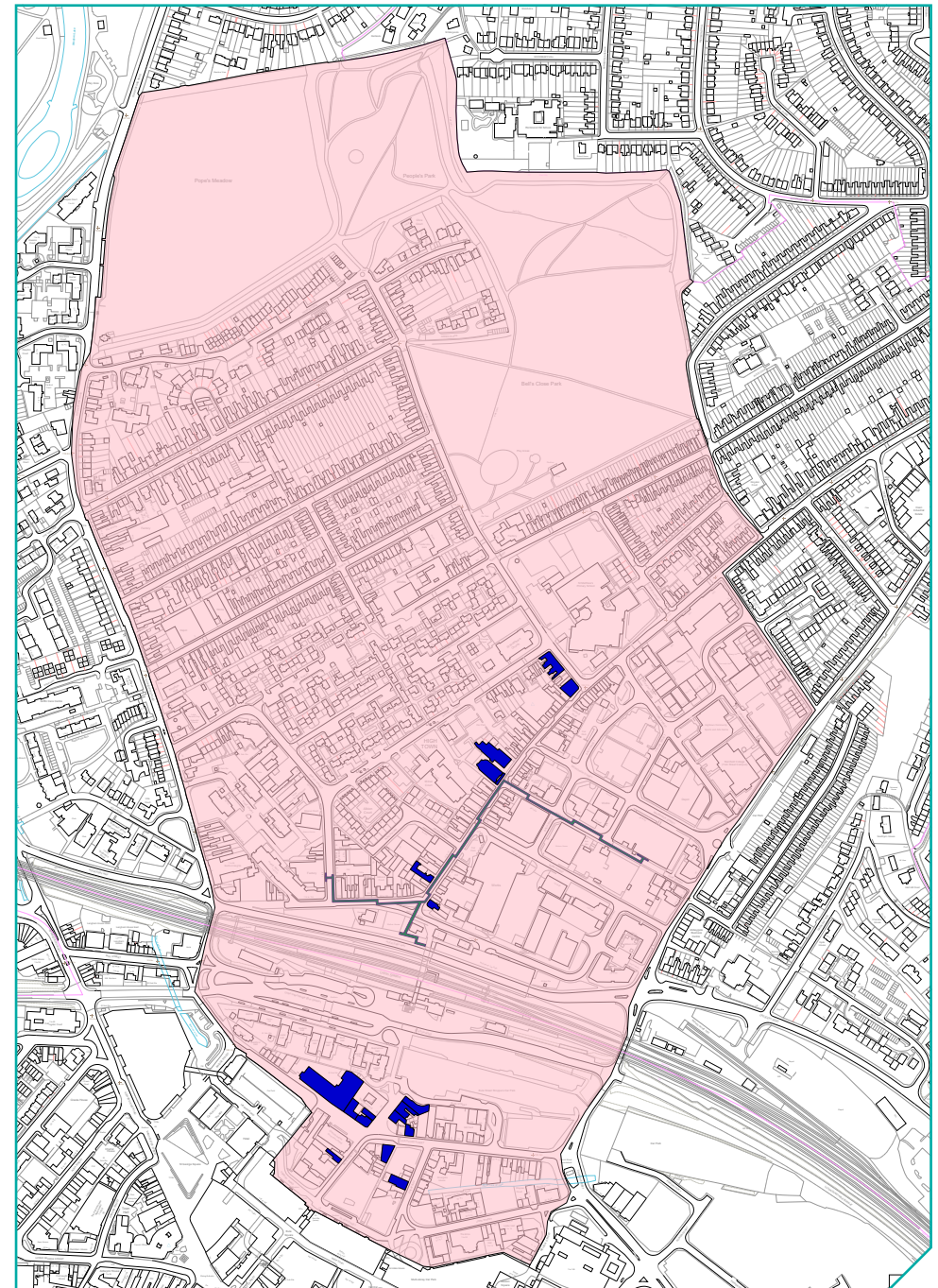


More than just a Victorian high street, High Town recalls two hundred years of both brewing and hat industry narratives. Rich in significant hat history, including:

- Boon and Lane, the only block-makers, in the world, engineering both wooden and metal hat blocks and the last remaining blockers in Europe, hidden in an industrial unit holding the only urban furnace license in the UK.
- Tom Llewelyn (hat-maker to the Queen and Vivienne Westwood).
- Philip Wright, continuing 300 years of hat design and manufacture in the purpose-built (1889) Walter Wright Hat Factory.

Once the home of 10 public houses, only seven buildings remain. Three are still operating: The Painter's Arms, The Well and The Bricklayers Arms (dating back to 1834) of contemporary historic note for the first meeting of Luton Town Football Supporters Trust.

Through public consultation and focus group workshops, we discovered hidden histories themes, including ghost signs, architectural features, trade secrets and the potential to investigate Luton's underground war tunnels, in time for the hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of World War Two.

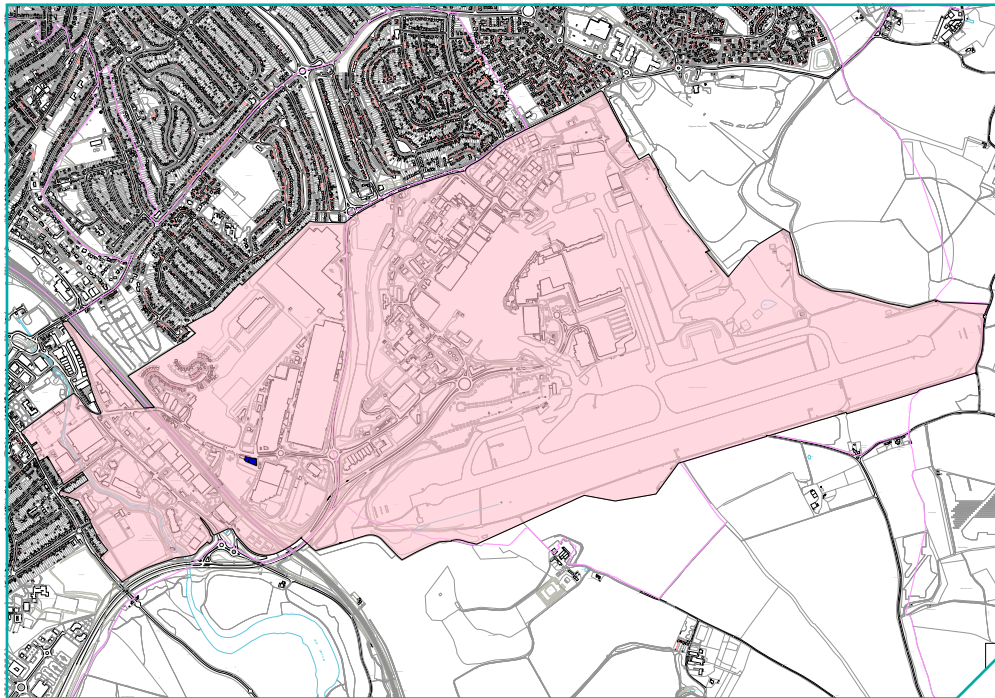




Engineering heritage zone: Luton as a site of engineering innovation and excellence (Luton Airport and Vauxhall Motors)

Geographically the wards of Crawley, South and Wigmore are most associated with the aviation and motor industries, in particular the historic sites of London Luton Airport and Vauxhall Motors. Although this area is rich in social and industrial heritage assets dating back to the Neolithic period, and history of engineering innovation and manufacturing in Luton is not limited to this area.

The combination of the airport as a site of heritage and the significant commercial and social history of Vauxhall within the town form a strong alliance as a combined area for heritage interpretation, supporting the continuing story of Luton as a site of engineering innovation and excellence and the major industrial project emerging.

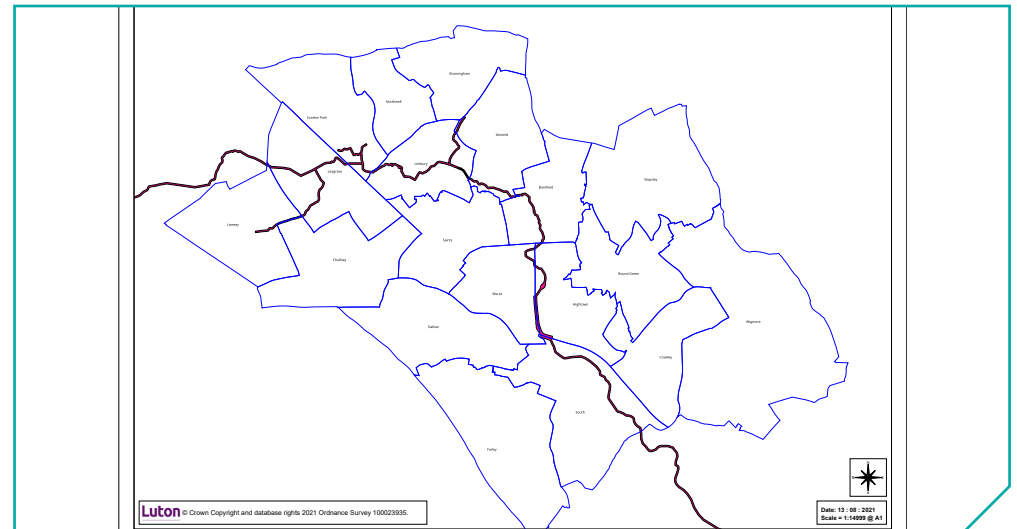


River Lea Linear Park heritage zone

The idea of creating a connected linear park following the River Lea as it makes its way through Luton, from sources and convergences at Lewsey Farm and Legrave Marsh, through Wardown Park and the town centre is not a new one. Ongoing community engagement and river maintenance has been delivered through the Luton Lea Catchment Partnership; and plans to de-culvert the River and create public access points have been developed.

This strategy recognises the importance of Wardown Lake as a historical heritage asset and also recognises the importance of Legrave Marsh, Waulud's Bank and Marsh House as important intersectional sites of heritage.

The development of a River Lea Linear Park as a heritage interpretation zone, connecting people and place through industrial, cultural, community, social and economic histories, supports The River Lea as the major natural heritage project emerging.





Bury Park British-Asian heritage zone

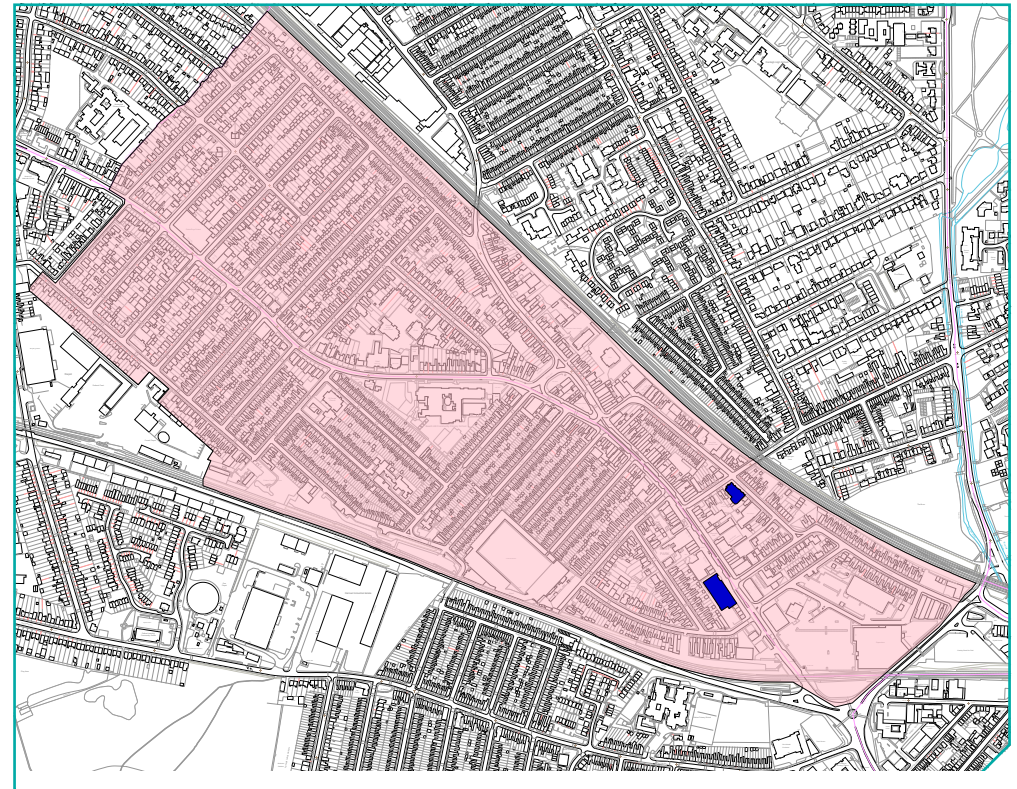
While acknowledging a wealth of social history spanning centuries, it is the last 50 years that have shaped Bury Park into a 'British-Asian' success story.

Acknowledging also, that although more than 30% of Luton's population originates from South Asian ethnicities, not all Asian Lutonian's live in the Bury Park area. Sited across two district wards, Biscot and Dallow, which according to the 2011 census together house an Asian population density above 67%.

It is an area with a high number of listed and non-listed heritage and faith buildings, and was the setting for the 2019 British film 'Blinded by the Light': a drama-comedy investigating intergenerational intersectional complexities of being a British born adolescent of Pakistani descent while navigating Luton's socio-cultural landscape during Thatcher's England.

Our strategic approach to developing Bury Park as a non-designated heritage interpretation zone includes:

- developing Bangladeshi legacy from 2021 'Freedom 50' activities
- a deep-dive into the complex and intersectional cultural heritages, investigating both connectivity's between people and place, personal impacts of bonds and disconnects in family heritage, and cultural heritage fusions as a result of Asian diaspora
- continuity and connectivity with evolving places of worship; our industrial (Vauxhall) heritage; Luton's new (2021) Bollywood production studio (Bunny and Divi Entertainment Ltd); Revoluton Arts' continued creative residency; and national South Asian Heritage Month (SAHM), annual programmes, Southasianheritage.org





Part 4

Responsibility for Delivery

It takes people and activity to create a sense of place

“We need communities to take responsibility for their towns ... experiences in towns based on heritage activities and events are not wishy-washy ... it creates footfall and, as a consequence, you get commerce around it, so it does work.”

(Bill Grimsey, previous CEO of companies such as Wickes, Iceland, and Focus Do It All; the Grimsey Review November 2020).

“We can’t afford to work in silos anymore”

Norma – from public consultation heritage workshop March 2021



Partnership Infrastructure

A Heritage Steering Group, including local, national, regional and major funding organisations, will be formed to ensure strategic alliance, identify and prioritise intersectional 'heritage at risk' and develop a dynamic draft local list framework.

An eco-system of community and stakeholder group representatives and heritage ambassadors will be developed to deliver 'Place-making': our Heritage Implementation Plan.

Our strategic delivery partners are:

- National Lottery Heritage Fund
- Luton Council
- The Culture Trust, Luton
- The University of Bedfordshire
- The Chilterns Conservation Board
- The Wildlife Trust for Beds, Cambs and Northants
- Luton Heritage Forum

Delivering in partnership

The community and voluntary sector can contribute by:

- advocating for heritage to be used to anchor the town's recovery and regeneration;
- championing and seeking opportunities to resource local community heritage projects;
- actively promoting heritage events and activities to users, members and participants.

The education sector can contribute by:

- becoming champions of heritage and nurturing young heritage ambassadors
- supporting the work of Luton Cultural Education Partnership to maximise heritage engagement opportunities for all children and young people
- developing and making use of local heritage education packs

Businesses can contribute by:

- developing heritage led research and development
- championing heritage led capital regeneration
- advocating for heritage by sponsoring heritage projects

How you can contribute

Everybody in Luton is invited to engage in the conservation, preservation and interpretation of heritage and the delivery of this strategic vision:

- get involved with the University of Bedfordshire's Arts and Culture Projects teams' activity, including the Heritage Impact Accelerator and the [Heritage Enterprise Hub](#)
- get involved with [The Wildlife Trust's 'Wilder Futures Project'](#) at Bradgers Hill
- get involved with The Chiltern Conservation Board ['Chalkscapes project'](#)
- get involved with The Culture Trust, Luton's [Museum Makers](#)
- get involved with [Luton Heritage Forum](#), design code 'Charettes', local list review, public meetings, and collective memories project

Or contact our Heritage Enabler at: heritage@luton.gov.uk

Luton 2040

Transforming lives through
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Next steps

This strategy document spans 10 years 2021 to 2031. We will:

- revisit and review this strategy within two years
- develop 'Place-making': our Heritage Implementation Plan
- develop a delivery eco-system, and develop a network of heritage ambassadors

To find out more please contact:

heritage@luton.gov.uk

www.luton.gov.uk/heritage