
Transforming Places through Heritage programme Interim Report — Year 1

February 2021



Department for
Digital, Culture,
Media & Sport

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Executive Summary

This report provides an initial evaluation of the Architectural Heritage Fund's *Transforming Places through Heritage* programme following its first full year of grant-making. The programme is funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and opened for grant applications on 1st July 2019 with the first batch of award approved by AHF's Grants Panel on 24th September 2019. This report covers the period to 30th September 2020, during which a total of 107 grant offers were made, amounting to almost £5.5 million.

Year 1 also saw the launch of the pilot Heritage Development Trusts initiative, with four organisations awarded bespoke capacity building support, including core revenue funding over three years. Additionally, the programme's capacity building events series, *Open High Streets*, was launched as a series of online webinars targeting groups developing new heritage regeneration projects in town centres across England.

Projects funded during Transforming Place's first year demonstrate diverse potential new uses for historic buildings on the high street. Among them are youth centres and hubs to support young people; cultural venues and visitor attractions that

drive footfall and tourism; co-working spaces and studios that foster creative industries and SME start-ups; social enterprise retail and hospitality that combine skills training and economic impact; and much-needed housing that brings communities back to the heart of our towns. Many projects seek to combine a number of these uses within one building, illustrating that many applicants see mixed-use schemes as more likely to be sustainable in the long term.

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the high street is well known, and Transforming Places projects are not immune to its effects. All projects have been forced to review business plans and assumptions, and to consider how adaptable and flexible their reuse proposals will be in a post-COVID environment. Yet despite the significant challenges, Transforming Places through Heritage has enjoyed a tremendously successful first year, offering further evidence for the value of early-stage investment in projects. As towns across England seek to re-establish viable and vibrant centres from redundant retail sites, the programme's role as a critical first partner will only increase.



Sowerby Bridge, West Yorkshire, before works. [Fire and Water](#)

Transforming Places through Heritage

Programme Overview

The **Transforming Places through Heritage** (TPtH) programme supports projects led by charities and social enterprises that have the potential to contribute to the transformation of high streets and town centres in England. It is funded by a grant from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and is part of a wider initiative to revive heritage high streets in England, alongside Historic England's *High Streets Heritage Action Zones*. Together, these programmes form part of the Future High Streets Fund, administered by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Further information on priorities and eligibility, including the Programme Guide, is provided on the AHF [website](#).

Grants offered through the programme are summarised as follows:

Grant type	Purpose
Project Viability Grants	To explore options and test whether potential uses will be viable, including assessment of building condition and repair needs, community consultation, fundraising strategy.
Project Development Grants	Once viability broadly established, development of business case for preferred option and detailed technical designs.
Transformational Project Grants	Capital grants to cover the cost of building acquisition, repair and conservation work and associated fees as well as work required to enable 'meanwhile' use or change of use, including services and fit-out.
Crowdfunding Challenge Grants	For development or capital costs or both, matching the amount raised through a crowdfunding campaign.
Community Shares Booster	Grants to develop community share offers and equity investments to match the amount raised in Community Shares.

In addition to the grants listed above, the TPtH programme includes revenue funding for organisational capacity building for a select group of pilot 'Heritage Development Trusts', an events programme (*Open High Streets*) led by the Heritage Trust Network and expert advice and mentoring support for projects delivered through a national framework of consultant Project Advisers.

TPtH differs from the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) and High Streets Heritage Action Zones (HSHAZ) programmes in that **TPtH is targeted primarily at individual historic buildings in, or transferring to, community ownership**. It aims to support projects led by charities and social enterprises; local authorities are not eligible to apply for funding. In contrast, FHSF and HSHAZ are place-based regeneration initiatives targeted at local authorities (all except two HSHAZs are local authority-led).

The programme aims to deliver against five 'Critical Success Factors', which guide all grant-making activity and other initiatives being delivered through the programme (see Appendix 1). Given the lengthy period necessary to fully develop and execute a complex heritage regeneration project, unsurprisingly only a very small number of grant activities funded through the programme have been fully completed at this stage. While further evaluation will be possible in future years, the focus on this report is on the grant offers made and the launch of the various strands of the programme.



Clockwise from top left: Stretford Public Hall, Manchester Friends of Stretford Public Hall; inside Liskeard Library, Cornwall Real Ideas Organisation; meanwhile use concert at 170-5 High Street West, Sunderland Tyne and Wear Building Preservation Trust

Transforming Places through Heritage

Year 1 Performance

This section outlines the performance of each of the grant-making strands of the programme, in terms of the number and amount planned. It also covers progress made with the sector capacity building elements of the programme, i.e. the Heritage Development Trusts initiative and the *Open High Streets* events series.

The second half of the period covered by this report was marked by the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions. The long-term economic and social consequences of the pandemic will emerge over time but it is clear that during the year of the pandemic trends and behaviours that were already challenging the vitality and viability of high streets and town centres significantly accelerated and deepened. Despite this, the TPTH programme delivery remained largely on track with activity outlined in the business case: demand for grants weakened slightly from July to September 2020 and the volume of applications was lower than

anticipated but grant-making targets were still met.

Although COVID-19 did not significantly impact on the programme's grant-making performance, it has limited the progress of projects benefiting from the funding. In most cases, the viability testing or development work funded by the grants was stalled and assumptions have required additional scrutiny in light of the pandemic. Major funders such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund closed their main grant programmes, which added to the uncertainty around project funding strategies.

The combined challenges of COVID-19 and its knock-on effects mean that only 7 grants awarded in the first year of TPTH had been fully completed by the end of September 2020. The vast majority of projects stalled rather than were discontinued, and it is anticipated that this will be reflected in an increase in applications in 2021 as projects progress through development.

Summary of planned vs actual grant offers, by number and value

Grant type	No. of grants		Amounts offered
	Planned	Actual	
Project Viability Grants	55	49	£649,183
Project Development Grants	30	34	£1,481,375
Capital Grants	8	9	£2,545,195
Crowdfunding Challenge Grants	11	8	£177,480
Community Shares Booster	3	3	£66,650

The table above summarises the grant-making performance of the programme during the period covered by this report. An additional table in Appendix 2 gives more information on the funding available at each project stage, and the average grant size.

Demand for **Project Viability Grants** (PVGs) has remained strong and fairly constant since the launch of the programme. While the volume of applications and enquiries has been high, the disbursement of funds to grantees has been slower than usual, with more than half of grantees reporting that work had to be suspended or progress was delayed due to the impact of COVID-19. Increasing uncertainty over the likely viability of proposed uses led to the need to review and revise assumptions made pre-COVID and take stock. This need to reconsider assumptions has affected demand for Project Development Grants: it was anticipated that a large proportion of projects receiving PVGs would, after six to nine months, have identified a viable reuse scheme and be ready to progress to

project development stage. Only two projects awarded PVGs during Year 1 of TPtH also applied for a Project Development Grant during that year. Reports from grantees indicate that these delays are a direct result of the pandemic.

Demand for **Project Development Grants** (PDGs) was strong in the first half of the year covered by this report but declined in the last quarter, from June to September. This reduced demand can largely be explained by the impact of COVID, as described above. It is challenging for projects to plan in the midst of a pandemic, when questions remain about how spaces within buildings can be used and how many people can be accommodated, which means income projections are risky. To mitigate the risk of potential underspend on Project Development Grants and to provide additional help to projects, some of the budget was reallocated to Emergency Support Grants for existing grantees, to cover core operational costs and to revise existing business plans.



Restored street frontage nearly complete 170-5 High Street West, Sunderland [Tyne and Wear Building Preservation Trust](#)

There has been a good level of interest in the **Crowdfunding Challenge Grants** element of the programme, a new grant type for the AHF. Two of the grants offered to date were for projects in economically deprived towns in the North West (Morecambe Winter Gardens, Burnley Empire Theatre) but this did not limit their achievements, with fundraising targets achieved.

The **Community Shares Booster programme** invests equity to match community shares in community benefit societies that can demonstrate higher than average levels of community impact, innovation and engagement. In partnership with Co-operatives UK, which manages the programme, TPtH will provide an additional £600,000 investment for projects involving historic buildings in town centres. This programme includes Booster Development grants up to £10,000, which can assist societies to develop community share offers, as well as community share equity investments of up to £50,000 that can be made to match investment raised locally. AHF's first equity investment, of £6,650, was made to Marsden Grocery Community Benefit Society in the central Conservation Area of Marsden, West Yorkshire, where 396 people purchased shares to set up a co-operative grocery store following the closure of the local greengrocers.

There were two rounds of **Transformational Project Grants** (capital redevelopment grants) in the first year of the TPtH programme, with grant offers between £100,000 and £350,000



2-3 High Street, High Wycombe, before works. [Buckinghamshire Historic Buildings Trust](#)

made to nine projects (four awards in December 2019 and five in June 2020, see Appendix 1). A good geographical distribution was achieved, with at least one project in eight of the nine English regions (all except the East Midlands). Four of the beneficiaries were organisations that have been supported to develop as Heritage Development Trusts (see section below).

The projects listed in the table at Appendix 1 represent a diverse range of vacant buildings, including disused shops, two former banks, a pub, a library and a disused hat factory. Five are located in Heritage Action Zones. Capital repair and adaptation works were underway at three of the sites by the end of September 2020. The National Lottery Heritage Fund is the major funder for the Hat Works and Peterson's Smokehouse projects.

The pilot **Heritage Development Trust** (HDT) initiative aims to enable existing building preservation trusts or similar charities to make a step-change in their operations and support their long-term sustainability, creating a meaningful legacy in their area of operation. These grants provide funding to assist organisations taking a multi-project approach to restoring and managing historic building assets, in securing new forms of social investment and developing new ownership models. Organisations were invited to apply for revenue funding of up to £50,000 per year for new staff or other revenue costs that would support their growth with a view to achieving organisational sustainability by the end of the grant period.

Beneficiary organisation	Grant	Main Purpose
<u>Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust</u>	£147,643	New 3-year staff posts: Project Officer & Heritage Assistant
<u>Historic Coventry Trust</u>	£150,000	Contributions to existing Exec Director and Assistant Director posts; 2 new part-time posts.
<u>Tyne & Wear Building Preservation Trust</u>	£150,000	New 3-year staff post: Project Officer; communications, training, consultants.
<u>Valley Heritage CIO</u> (operating in Rossendale, Lancashire).	£90,000	New 3-year staff post: Project Officer

In order to support capacity building across the sector, TPtH supported a national event programme. Working with the Heritage Trust Network, Locality and Stir to Action, **Open High Streets**, was intended to launch at the Grade I-listed Piece Hall in Halifax, West Yorkshire on 26th March but had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The programme was devised as a series of monthly online webinars, with the first three delivered over the summer on the topics below. The key target audience for the webinars is charities and social enterprises undertaking, or planning to undertake, historic building regeneration projects in high streets and town centres, with participants benefiting from the learning of others who have delivered or who are delivering such projects.

24 July: *Finding New Uses for Historic Buildings*. Speakers included Stephen Anderson (Valley Heritage CIO) and Mike Scott (Indycube) discussing their collaborative project at the former Lancashire & Yorkshire Bank building in Bacup, Lancashire. 135 people viewed the live webinar.

12 August: *Community Spaces in High Street Buildings*. Including Martin Prince-Parrot (Black Swan Property) and Catherine Gladwell, CEO of Refugee Support Network, which has acquired a former HSBC Bank building in Harlesden High Street, London. 55 attendees.

4 September: *What I Wish I Knew When I Started my First Project* – Darren Barker (Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust) and Carol Pyrah (Historic Coventry Trust). 52 attendees.

Transforming Places through Heritage

Additional Evaluation in Year 2

During the first year of the TPtH programme, the AHF developed a new Evaluation Strategy that will gather new data on TPtH projects. By Autumn 2021, many more grants funded through the programme will also have been completed. Together, our new Evaluation Framework and data on additional completed projects will enable our Year 2 report to provide the following indicators for the TPtH programme:

- % of projects in receipt of Project Viability Grants progressing to applications for Project Development Grants
- People and organisations enabled to take ownership of historic assets or acquire long-term rights
- Number of projects supported through stages of AHF investment and support system
- Number of organisations that are financially resilient and sustainable

Our Year 2 Report will also be able to highlight areas of collaboration with localities funded through Future High Streets Fund and Towns Deal, which had not yet been announced by September 2020.



From left: Paignton Picture House, Torbay, before works, Paignton Picture House Trust; Youth theatre in the undercroft at Greyfriars, Lincoln Heritage Lincolnshire

Transforming Places through Heritage

Lessons from Year 1

1. Opportunities for acquisition require further support

The TPtH programme works with heritage regeneration projects at an earlier stage than any other major funder, and we therefore gain exceptional insight into the challenges that face projects in getting started. A common difficulty projects report is a struggle to identify the owners of vacant or neglected historic buildings, and to agree a realistic sale price. Some private owners expect excessive sums not supported by independent market valuations; yet examples of local authorities taking action leading to compulsory purchases are rare. Local authorities and other public sector bodies are also themselves often owners of heritage assets in unsustainable use, or long vacant but disposal strategies generally favour sale on the open market rather than transfer to community ownership.

A different model has led to some successes in Scotland, where the Scottish Land Reform Act 2003 and the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 has engendered a more favourable environment for community acquisition of land and buildings. Crucially, this legislation has been supported by the establishment of the Scottish Land Fund, which helps local groups meet the costs of purchase. Projects such as the [Dumfries Midsteeple Quarter](#), where a community benefit society aims to revitalise the high street by redeveloping empty historic buildings, provide replicable exemplars that would empower local communities to revitalise their own town centres.

Local authorities in England should be encouraged to make greater use of existing policies to tackle disused and neglected historic buildings in their town centres - including the Local Government Act 2000 (grants local authorities power to promote economic, social and environmental well-being) and the Localism Act 2011 (devolves power to communities in the form of community rights). The proposed 'Right to Regenerate' legislation announced in January 2021, which will give communities first right of refusal to purchase underused publicly owned land and assets, may further support third-sector organisation to acquire buildings. How this legislation may also support organisations to purchase buildings neglected by private or absentee landlords should be addressed.



Restoration team at Priory Row Cottages, Coventry [Historic Coventry Trust](#)

The establishment of the manifesto promised **Community Ownership Fund** would provide critical funding to enable communities to purchase and take on responsibility for their local heritage assets.

2. Local partnerships are essential to success

Charities and social enterprises have plenty of ideas for how high streets could be revitalised through the reuse of historic buildings and are often well placed to respond to local needs that will form sustainable new uses for buildings. They may, however, lack the specialist skills required for complex restoration projects and in some cases fall into conflict with neglectful owners or local authorities. **Partnerships that bring together local authorities seeking to regenerate an area with specialists in adapting historic buildings and third-sector groups that will use the restored space offer a strong model for success.** An example may be found in Sunderland, where a pilot Heritage Development Trust supported through the TPtH programme is considered by the City Council and Historic England to be a key partner in, and critical to the successful delivery of, the Heritage Action Zone. The Trust specialises in the repair and adaptation of vacant buildings and identifies end users to fit out and occupy the restored properties including local cultural organisations and housing providers.

Regeneration programmes are not enough on their own, but require this partnership and the existence of local expertise. **Our Heritage Development Trust model supports the development of a national network of specialists in adapting historic buildings, providing the key missing partner to unlocking local regeneration.**

3. Long-term projects will require ongoing funding, especially after COVID-19

Efforts to rejuvenate high streets across England were already complex, and the COVID-19 crisis has not created the problems faced by high streets, but it has exacerbated the core challenges. Revitalising England's town centres in the wake of this crisis - crafting sustainable and socially cohesive local economies from boarded up streets that no longer cater for communities shopping online - will not be a three-year project. Charities and social enterprises, being locally rooted, have the potential to create alternative uses for our historic town centres that will avoid high vacancy rates and the detrimental cycle of neglect that drives away commercial investment. These groups will be important partners in post-COVID recovery that helps level up regions, revives social infrastructure and promotes environmental sustainability. But they will need ongoing support.



Former Yorkshire & Lancashire Bank, Bacup, Lancashire [Valley Heritage](#)

Additional funding will be needed in future years to safeguard the investment in projects already supported through TPtH and other regeneration programmes, and to foster the next generation of projects.

Appendices

Appendix 1

1 Critical Success Factors

CSF1: To maximise regeneration benefits of local areas and high streets, assisting in making high streets and town centres fit for the future;

CSF2: To protect, enhance and safeguard historic buildings across England, offering viable new uses for disused and underutilised high street properties;

CSF3: To build capacity within local community groups, social enterprise, and charities;

CSF4: Piloting innovative, alternative uses, ownership structures and investment models to facilitate long term regeneration;

CSF5: To maximise the positive social impacts around restoring historic buildings.

2 Grant-making in Year 1

In total, 107 grant offers, amounting to £5,457,546, were made in the period to 30 September 2020. A breakdown by grant type is provided in the table below. This includes three-year revenue funding awarded to 4 pilot Heritage Development Trusts for organisational capacity building.

Table 2.1: Summary of offers made by grant type in Year 1.

Grant type	Maximum amount	Total no. Y1 grants	Total Y1 amount	Average Y1 award
Project Viability Grant	£15,000	49	£649,183	£13,249
Project Development Grant	£100,000	34	£1,481,375	£43,570
Crowdfunding Challenge Grant	£25,000	8	£177,480	£22,185
Community Shares Booster	£50,000	3	£66,650	£22,217
Capital (Transformational & HDTs)	£350,000	9	£2,545,195	£282,799
Pilot Heritage Development Trusts	£150,000	4	£537,643	£134,411
TOTALS		107	£5,457,526	

Table 2.2: Grants awarded, ranked by region

Region	No	Region	No.
South West	22	West Midlands	9
South East	17	North East	8
North West	14	East Midlands	6
Yorks. & Humber	14	London	5
East	12	TOTAL	107

Table 2.3: Summary of capital grant awards to date.

Beneficiary organisation	Project	Grant
Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust	160 King Street, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk	£350,000
<i>Comprehensive conservation of Grade II listed, 16th century timber-framed building to provide low-cost quality residential accommodation above and ground-floor restaurant.</i>		
Historic Coventry Trust	Lychgate Cottages, 3-5 Priory Row, Coventry	£350,000
<i>Conservation of three Grade II* listed, timber-framed, 15th century houses in Coventry city centre to create four high-quality short-stay accommodation units, ready for City of Culture 2021.</i>		
Tyne & Wear Building Pres. Trust	170-5 High Street West, Sunderland	£348,350
<i>Conversion of three 18th century terraced properties (two of which Grade II listed) into a community cultural venue in partnership with Pop Recs music shop/venue and others.</i>		
Real Ideas Organisation CIC	Liskeard Library, Liskeard, Cornwall	£150,000
<i>Grade II listed Victorian public library, in process of community asset transfer from Cornwall Council. To be developed as a multi-purpose venue, including co-working spaces.</i>		
Valley Heritage CIO	18-20 Market Street, Bacup, Lancashire	£311,271
<i>Conversion of Grade II listed, 19th century former bank to create co-working spaces, in partnership with Indycube, and residential units for young people at risk of homelessness.</i>		
Luton Cultural Services Trust	Hat Works, 47 Guildford Street, Luton, Beds.	£280,000
<i>Conversion of the oldest remaining hat factory in Luton, Grade II listed, empty since 2006, into flexible workspace for creative entrepreneurs and micro businesses.</i>		
Buckinghamshire Historic Buildings Trust	2-3 High Street, High Wycombe, Bucks.	£350,000
<i>Grade II listed, 14th century, timber-framed former inn, the oldest building in High Wycombe other than the church. Vacant for 20 years, conversion to ground floor bar, community space above.</i>		
Great Grimsby Ice Factory Trust	Peterson's Smokehouse, Grimsby, NE Lincs.	£300,000
<i>Grade II listed, 19th century fish smoking factory to be brought back into use as a traditional smokehouse, alongside a mixed-use space in the adjacent building, including café and offices.</i>		
Refugee Support Network	60-62 High Street, Harlesden, London	£105,574
<i>Disused Victorian bank building to become national charity headquarters, to include a community base for partner organisations and flexible space for other local charities and social enterprises.</i>		

Appendix 2

Location of funded projects by grant type

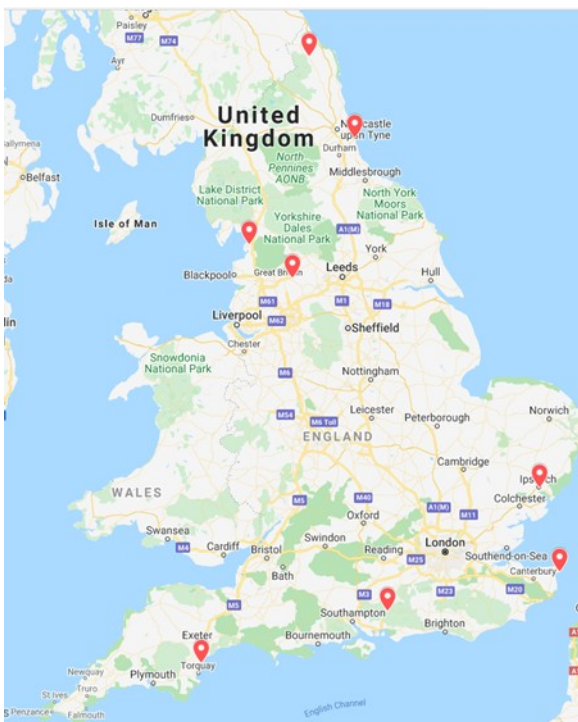
Project Viability Grants



Project Development Grants



Crowdfunding Challenge Grants



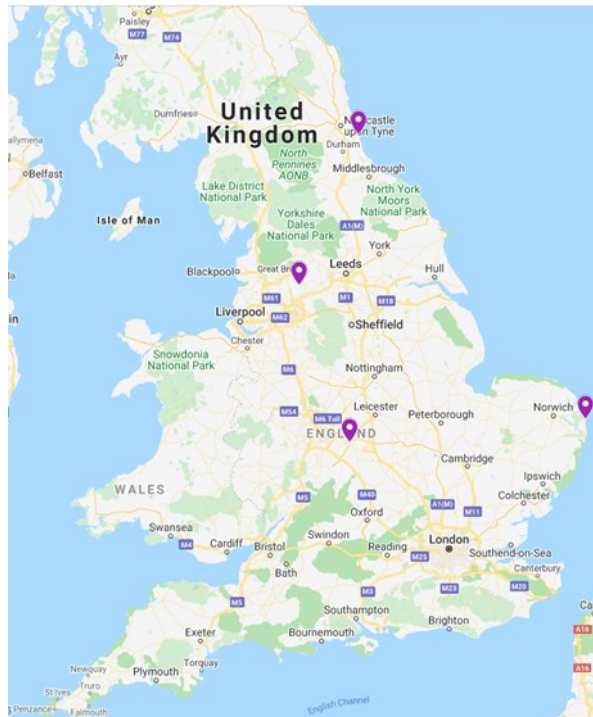
Capital Grants



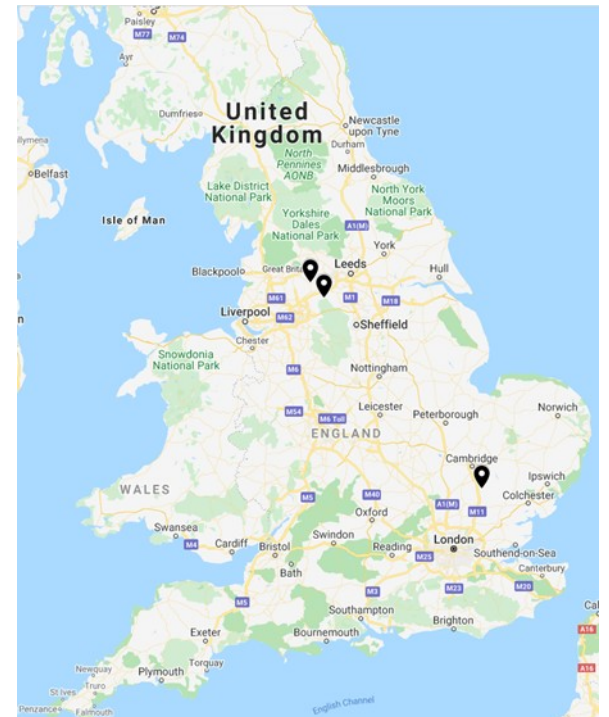
Appendix 2

Location of funded projects by grant type

Pilot Heritage Development Trusts



Community Shares Booster Grants



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The Architectural Heritage Fund
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Charity Number: 266780
Scottish Charity Number: SC043840
Financial Services Register number: 707421