



**‘There’s a lot of
history here’**

Local history, local heritage and local pride,
in Coventry and across the UK

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across the political spectrum, policymakers are grappling with questions about optimism and decline, community cohesion and disconnectedness. What helps people feel pride in place, in the particular towns and cities they live in, and in the nation as a whole? How can we support the civic and national pride in place that everyone agrees is critical to identity and life satisfaction?

This report aims to make a contribution to answering some of those questions, focusing in particular on how the stories we tell about ourselves and the historic buildings and landscapes we see around us – our local and national history and heritage – play a role in shaping how people feel about themselves and their communities. Using nationally representative polling as well as a local poll combined with an “immersive” qualitative study of a particular case study, the city of Coventry in the West Midlands, we set out to ask what people know about their local area’s history and heritage, how much they care about it, and how far that is connected to local pride.

Our research uncovered the following **key findings**:

KEY FINDINGS

1) People associate local history and heritage with place – when asked what comes to mind when thinking about the history and heritage of their area, people rank physical sites above stories, traditions and a local area’s contributions to history.

2) Local history and heritage makes places better to live in – it is valued by three quarters of people as a factor that contributes to making their local area a good place to live.

3) Protecting and caring for national and local history and heritage matters to people – for its own sake, and for the sake of educating future generations, more than for the sake of economic benefits. In our national poll, the public chose “history and heritage” as the aspect of UK culture that is most important to them.

4) Local heritage has a tangible financial value to people – four out of five people in Coventry would rather forgo £10,000 than accept the loss of Coventry Cathedral, and on average the British public say they would pay £75 to save a local listed building – our modelling suggests this amounts to £4.1 billion at a national level.

5) Awareness of local history is intimately linked to pride in place – with those who say they have a strong awareness of local history and heritage significantly more likely to say they are proud of their local area than those who say they have none.

6) Industrial heritage is key to understanding local pride, but also to understanding a sense of decline – linked in part to people’s knowledge of family connections to place, and to pride in work, but also to visible examples of deterioration, speaking to the importance of heritage-led regeneration and the celebration of local industries.

7) Connection with heritage is linked to optimism, pride and protectiveness – people who feel connected with their local heritage are more likely to say they feel pride in their local area, that they are optimistic about its future, and that if someone they knew criticised it they would defend it.

8) Active experiences are crucial to learning about local history and heritage – this includes visiting heritage sites, museums and events, and conducting personal research; and many people are very enthusiastic about doing this.

9) People are willing to make an effort to visit local heritage sites – going out of their way to spend time at sites they do not consider easy to get to.

10) Newcomers to an area have more pride in it than longer-term residents – those who have lived in an area for less than two years are the most likely to say that they are “very proud” to live there, perhaps reflecting that they have made an active recent choice to live in a place that suits their needs.

11) The public overwhelmingly believe that young people should learn about both UK and local heritage – and older people are especially likely to think this.

12) Younger people visit heritage sites more than older generations – this is true across all categories, although the disparity is smaller for outdoor spaces, which older cohorts are significantly more likely to have visited in the last year than historic and cultural attractions.

That suggests that we should not understate the importance of local history and heritage in thinking about place and people's relationship to it, or about planning and regeneration, or about education and intergenerational connection. If making people feel positive and optimistic about where they live, and countering sentiment about local and national decline, is an important goal of public policy, then we should think about policies that do more to celebrate and protect heritage.

This report sets out the following **recommendations**:

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Give heritage more weight in policies around planning, regeneration and local economic growth – recognising both the economic value, and the broader benefits in creating places that people can take pleasure and pride in, of encouraging heritage-led regeneration projects as well as the potential for historic buildings to contribute to housing supply.

2) Ensure dedicated, increased and sustainable funding for built heritage, framed around place – including place-based funding schemes such as Heritage Action Zones and a Culture Growth Fund, and including resource as well as capital funding to ensure long-term sustainability.

3) Support strategic approaches to investing in and supporting heritage by combined and mayoral authorities – potentially including local culture and heritage strategies across combined authority areas rather than single local authorities.

4) Introduce a Safe Harbour Scheme to protect heritage assets at

risk of disposal and degradation – providing time and space for potential new owners to develop and prove a case for publicly beneficial use of the building.

5) Address skills shortages for maintaining and restoring heritage assets – including through widening apprenticeships, adding heritage and retrofit onto existing trade apprenticeships and supporting training providers to increase heritage skills training provision.

6) Maintain local history in the National Curriculum – and ensure that the public have confidence that our children are being taught about their local history in a way that most people want to see.



INTRODUCTION



I'm born and bred in Coventry, so it's my place, you know?



Man, 65+, City Centre

The places we live in all have histories. The buildings and streets and landscapes that surround us tell us stories about where we came from, about the people who lived here before us, about what has changed and what has stayed the same, about why things are the way they are. They provide continuity and connection, remind us of things we want to remember, and tell us things we didn't know. The shared spaces we inhabit are sources of national, regional and local identity, and of pride in place.

But many of the UK's heritage assets – a clumsy term for the historic buildings, monuments and memorials, parks and gardens and other sites of historical importance that exist all over the country – are under threat, faced with severe cost pressures, difficulty in the recruitment and retention of both paid staff and volunteers, and cuts in funding allocations in the face of competing demands on both national and local government budgets.¹

While efforts have been made to channel funding towards supporting local cultural and heritage organisations, from Levelling Up funding and the Cultural Recovery Fund in response to Covid under the previous government, to the Arts Everywhere Fund announced earlier this year,² the level of funding is down not up, and the threat to Britain's heritage – much of which can never be replaced once it is lost – is real.

The value of heritage to the UK economy, in generating jobs and economic activity (Historic England found that the heritage sector generated nearly £45 billion in GVA in 2022 and employed more than 520,000 people),³ in driving both international and domestic tourism (£12.5 billion in spend from international visitors in 2023 along with £11.4 billion from domestic visits),⁴ in promoting wellbeing and volunteering (over half a million people volunteered in the heritage sector in 2022)⁵ is well-rehearsed.

But the value of civic pride, and pride in place, in strengthening communities, even if it is sincerely recognised by politicians of all parties, is harder to measure and harder to see. By definition, it is specific to each particular place, and so it is important that, wherever they live, local people can identify specific, local things to be proud of. That

¹ The Heritage Alliance, [On the Brink: Heritage in the Cost of Living Crisis](#), May 2024

² [Major investment to boost growth and cement Britain's place as cultural powerhouse](#), 20 February 2025

³ Historic England, [Cultural Heritage, Creativity and the Creative Economy](#), 19 August 2024

⁴ Historic England, [The Contribution of the Heritage Sector to the Visitor Economy](#), 11 November 2024

⁵ Historic England, [The Benefits of Heritage Volunteering](#), 29 November 2023

doesn't always happen. As Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy said in the Jennie Lee lecture in February 2025, "too many people have been written off and written out of our national story". She went on to talk about her own home town, Wigan, and its particular local story.

“ In my town of Wigan we have the fantastic Museum of Wigan Life and it tells the story of the contribution that the ordinary, extraordinary people in Wigan made to our country, powering us through the last century through dangerous, difficult, dirty work in the coal mines. That story, that understanding of the contribution that Wigan made, I consider to be a part of the birthright and inheritance of my little boy growing up in that town today and we want every child growing up in a community to understand the history and heritage and contribution that their parents and grandparents made to this country and a belief that that future stretches ahead of them as well. Not to reopen the coal mines, but to make a contribution to this country and to see themselves reflected in our story.⁶ ”

This report takes that demand for every child to see the history and heritage and contribution of their community seriously, whether their family has been there for generations or has arrived more recently, enriching places with new cultures and new stories – and it takes the specificity of place seriously too. We wanted to look at both the national and the local, to help us understand how people think about their shared history and heritage, at the multiple histories each place has for the different individuals and communities who live together in it, what they know about it, how they learn about it and interact with it and share it with each other, how it affects their broader attitudes to the place they live in, and how they value it. So a major part of this report is an in-depth case study, using both quantitative and qualitative research, exploring the views on local history and heritage of the people of one particular place.

Every place has its own local, different and specific history, and its own collection of stories and meanings for the people who live there, whether their families can trace themselves back in the same area for generations or they are newcomers. But the particular histories of particular places, and how people relate to them and use them to understand themselves and where they fit into a wider national and local story, and what they take pride and purpose in, have lessons for national policymakers too: about what people want and care about and value. History is not an afterthought: it was there before you were.

Our case study could have been of any town or city in the UK, but we chose Coventry. Coventry is a city with a rich history. A medieval city of wealth and guilds and monasteries and pilgrimages and parliaments, with some of its most ancient buildings still standing. An industrial city of innovation and technology, from ribbons to textiles to watches to bicycles to motorcycles to cars to jet engines. A war-torn city of destruction, in the Blitz, and rebirth, in its rebuilt Cathedral. A modern city of brutalism and, to many, ugliness – and yet a showcase for the best of post-war architecture. A diverse

⁶ Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP, [Jennie Lee lecture - Arts for Everyone](#), 20 February 2025

city of peace and reconciliation, of multiculturalism and integration. An artistic city of culture and creativity, of 2-Tone and Ghost Town. A green city of parks and open spaces, but with a centre encircled by the concrete barrier of its ring road.

What does all of this mean to the people who live in Coventry? Which of these stories resonate with them, which are they proud of, which have they forgotten? Do they care about Coventry's history at all?

When we spoke to people who have roles that are directly linked to the culture and heritage of Coventry, we found a passion and excitement about Coventry's history, and a pride in place, that are perhaps not surprising in people who have chosen careers that involve protecting, promoting and celebrating it. They pointed to a succession of financial challenges, from the industrial decline and mass unemployment of the 1980s to post-2010 austerity, which have made it difficult to focus on protecting and promoting Coventry's history and heritage.

But they also highlighted key decisions, including handing a portfolio of historic buildings to organisations that are willing to develop them with an eye to their commercial viability as heritage sites, described by one stakeholder interviewee as "the biggest transfer of heritage assets in the country", and successfully bidding to be the UK's City of Culture for 2021. We were told that this provided an opportunity for the city to showcase its cultural heritage, to boost visitor profile and tourism, to focus more on promoting Coventry and to secure additional investment in the cultural and heritage sectors. Coventry's City of Culture tenure, delayed and disrupted by Covid lockdowns, and followed by the Coventry City of Culture Trust going into administration in 2023 with the loss of the planned three-year legacy programme, was not an unambiguous success. This report is not the place to litigate that;⁷ We heard mixed feelings from both stakeholder interviewees and members of the public.

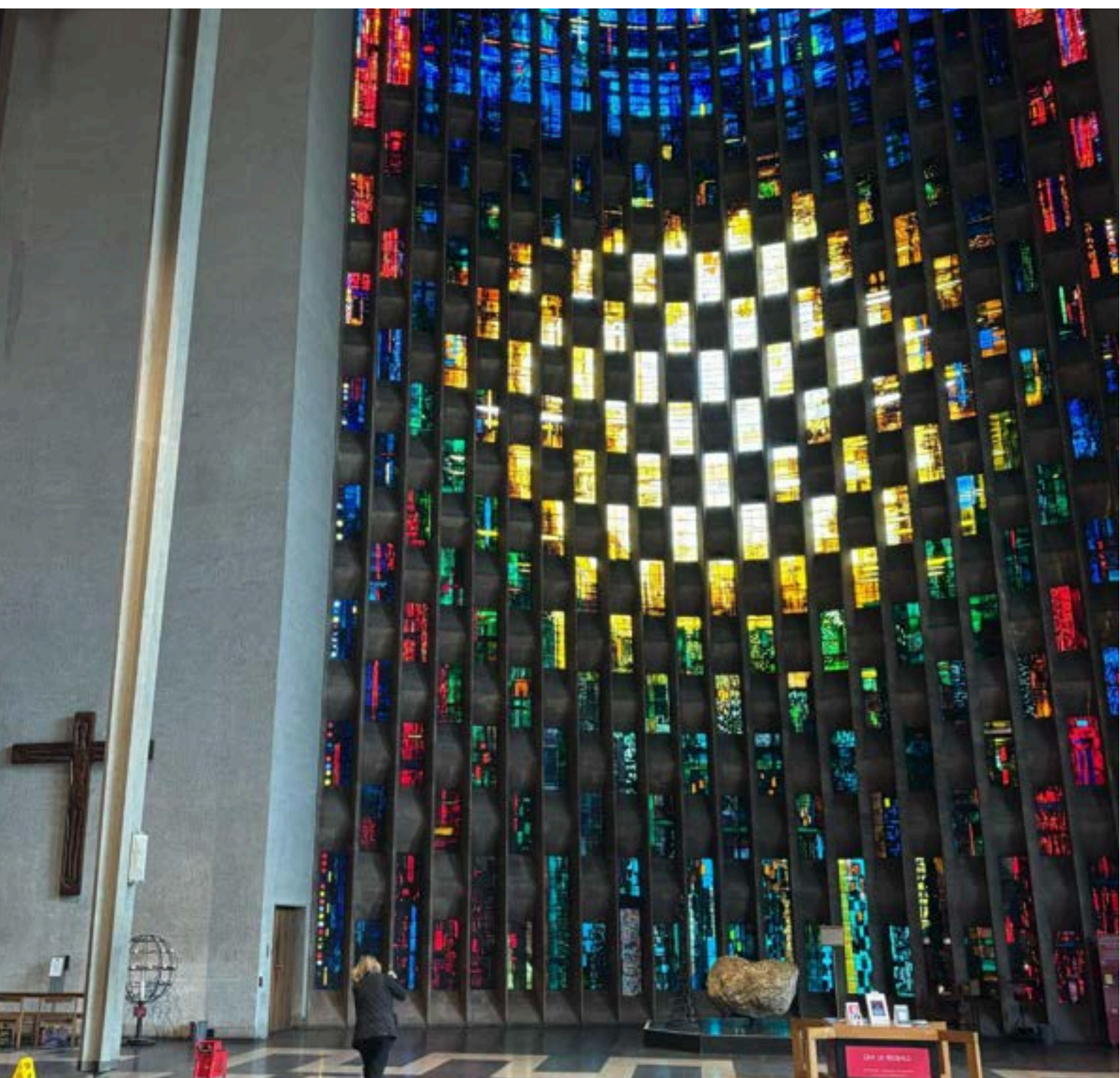
To explore the views of Coventry residents about their city's history and heritage, we conducted a local poll, stakeholder interviews, a focus group and two days of immersive research, having conversations with local people as they went about their daily lives: in the street and in parks and playgrounds, in shops and cafes and pubs and workplaces. We also conducted a nationally representative poll of 2,000 people in order to explore more broadly what the UK public think about national and local history and heritage, and how it connects to feelings of national and local pride.

We found – both nationally, and in Coventry – a deep sense that local history and heritage are part of what makes places better to live in, and part of what makes people proud of their local area. We found that physical sites are central – more so than stories and traditions – to how people think about their local area's history and heritage, and that while the public does recognise economic benefits from protecting these sites, they want them protected for their own sake and the sake of future generations. And we found a strong enthusiasm, especially among younger people, for learning about local history and heritage, particularly through active experiences like visiting places

⁷ See Coventry City of Culture 2021 [Final Evaluation Report](#), 2023

and conducting personal research – and strong support from all generations for young people to be taught about it.

Heritage is quite literally something that connects different generations, and gives people a sense of meaning and belonging. It is what enables people to situate themselves as members of a longer continuous community over time, in which their own contribution, and that of people they know now and people decades and centuries ago who walked the same streets as them and loved the same places as them, is part of a larger and longer story. It is something worth caring for because it is something, as our research shows, that people care about and value deeply, and that makes them feel better about – and prouder of – the places they live in. Protecting it is an investment in the future, not just the past.



KEY FINDINGS

- 1) **People associate local history and heritage with place** – when asked what comes to mind when thinking about the history and heritage of their area, people rank physical sites above stories, traditions and a local area’s contributions to history.
- 2) **Local history and heritage makes places better to live in** – it is valued by three quarters of people as a factor that contributes to making their local area a good place to live.
- 3) **The public cares deeply about protecting local history and heritage** – for its own sake, and for the sake of educating future generations, more than for the sake of economic benefits. In our national poll, the public chose “history and heritage” as the aspect of UK culture that is most important to them.
- 4) **Local heritage has a tangible financial value to people** – four out of five people in Coventry would rather forgo £10,000 than accept the loss of Coventry Cathedral, and on average the British public say they would pay £75 to save a local listed building – our modelling suggests this amounts to £4.1 billion at a national level.

Finding 1: People associate heritage and history with places

“The Cathedral is something I think that is ingrained in all of us as Coventrians. It’s pretty much one of the first things I can remember knowing about Coventry, was the Cathedral.” Sitting inside the Cathedral on a quiet January weekday, one of the staff

there tells us how important the building is to her, and in her opinion to the people of Coventry in general. “I think it symbolises a lot for our city in terms of resilience and resurgence from disaster and that kind of thing. So for us, it’s very, very much in our DNA, to be honest.”⁸

One of the things we wanted to find out, when we spoke to Coventry people across the city, was their awareness of local history and heritage, and the extent to which they connected this with the physical buildings, ancient and modern, that they saw around them.

Coventry Cathedral – only its shell left standing after the bombing of Coventry on the night of 14th-15th November 1940, rebuilt after the war, the roofless ruins left as a garden of remembrance next to a new, modernist structure designed by Basil Spence – is perhaps the city’s single best-known landmark, and the first thing to come to mind for many of those we spoke to when we asked about Coventry’s history and heritage.

The Cathedral, and crucially also the Coventry Blitz which contextualises it, comes up quickly and frequently when we ask people to talk about Coventry’s history. “Tragic”, says one young woman in the city centre, when we ask her the first thing that comes to mind. “Because of the Cathedral and the Blitz.”⁹ A man in the market, asked the same question, laughs: “Being bombed. It’s all really positive stuff, isn’t it?”¹⁰

“ “ *The Blitz, the Second World War. We were bombed, very badly. A lot had to be rebuilt. The Cathedral was ruined, was totally destroyed, but they still got the shell of it and obviously the new one was built.* ” ”

Woman, 55-64, Coventry Market

“ “ *The first thing that comes to my mind is the church, the Cathedral where it got destroyed in the second world war. That’s it.* ” ”

Man, 25-34, City Centre

“ “ *The war, the Cathedral, the car factories - growing up in Coventry it’s part of your history and sense of identity.* ” ”

Woman, 35-44, War Memorial Park

The Cathedral has a special status, we discover, even for those who have few positive things to say about Coventry. A middle-aged man, working in his shop, is unsparing in his dislike of the city (though he does acknowledge that “fishing wise, it’s the centre of the universe... there is more controlled fishing of well-known venues within 10 miles of where we stand than probably anywhere else in the country”) but his adamant refusal

⁸ Woman, 35-44, Cathedral

⁹ Woman, 18-24, City Centre

¹⁰ Man, 55-64, Coventry Market

to admit to pride in Coventry has an exception. “I mean, look around, what, apart from the Cathedral, what is there to be proud of?”¹¹

The Blitz is the historical event that comes up most often in our conversations with Coventrians, and the destruction and rebuilding of Coventry is visible all over the city, part of the memory and identity of the older generation in particular.

“ *My father used to work as a builder. Coventry was flattened in the war so there was plenty of work on buildings... and he did point to some places he'd worked on.* ”

Man, 65+, near Charterhouse

If the Cathedral is a symbol of Coventry, so is the semi-mythical figure of Lady Godiva, whose life-sized bronze equestrian statue stands on Broadgate in the city centre, close to the Peeping Tom clock. We sit on a bench close to the statue with an elderly woman. “It has got a lot of history, but probably a lot of it isn’t visible”. She points to the statue. “I mean, that’s visible obviously, people probably don’t know what it stands for or anything”. We ask what she thinks it stands for. “Well, she was for the people weren’t she and she rode round naked on a horse so that they didn’t have to pay more taxes”. She shares other examples of Coventry’s history with us: “There’s like, Philip Larkin, the bloke that did the airplanes down by Sainsbury’s down there [the statue of Frank Whittle, inventor of the jet engine]. You know, there’s a lot of good history”.¹²

Peeping Tom himself, who watched Lady Godiva’s naked ride through Coventry and was struck blind, may be a less wholesome figure but, as one man laughs, pointing his clock out to us, “He’s a part of Coventry!”¹³. The negative connotations do not necessarily prevent him being a source of pride.

“ *You know Peeping Tom? Now, how many times you ever heard that on TV and that? But do they know where it came from? It come from Coventry, like I say. They got rid of all these wonderful names here, Mercia, things like that. And I was saying, why is Coventry never involved in, you know, major films?* ”

Man, 45-54, Coventry Market

History is not just about stories; it is about places. Places are what come to mind first for people when asked about their local area’s heritage and history. In fact, the top five answers to this question are all place-based, relating to both historic buildings and landscapes. More intangible elements of an area’s history and heritage, such as customs, crafts, folklore and myths, and contributions to global history and science and innovation, are less popular answers.

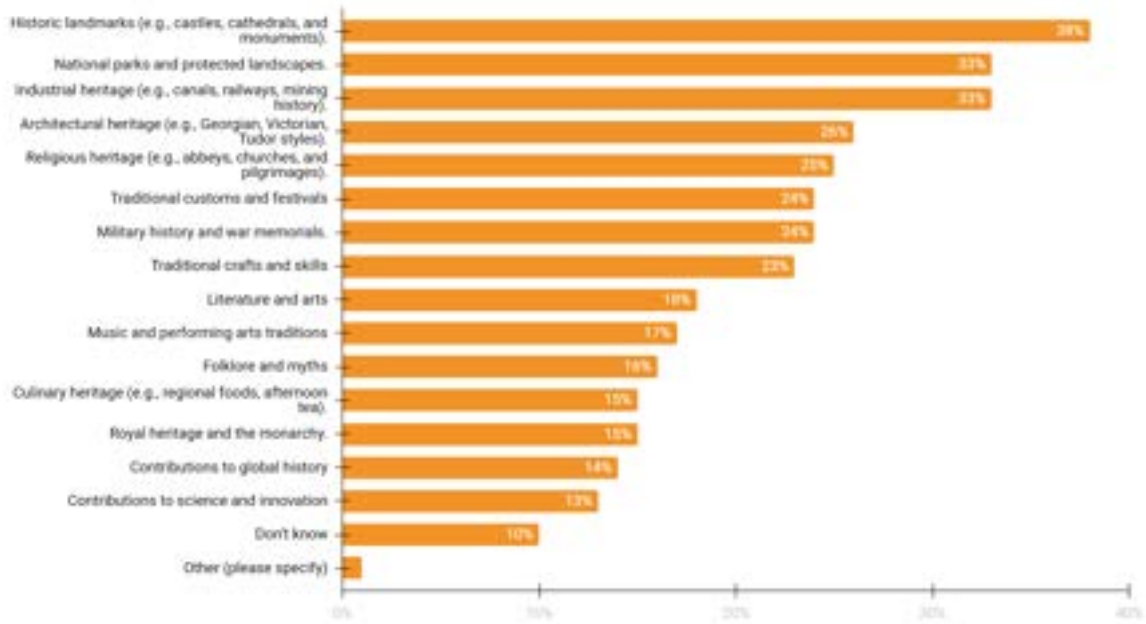
¹¹ Man, 55-64, near Charterhouse

¹² Woman, 65+, City Centre

¹³ Man, 45-54, City Centre

When you think about your local area's heritage and history, what comes to mind? Select all that apply

Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,011 respondents | Fieldwork: 21st Feb - 27th Feb 2025

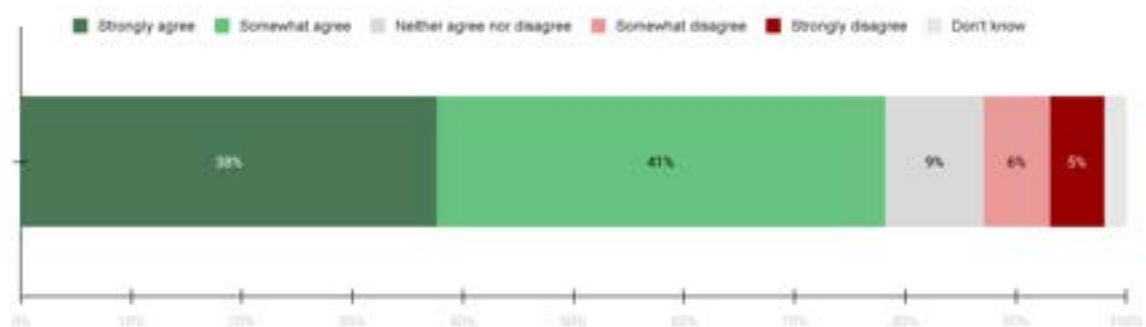


These are all things people can see around them, that make their local area's history visible and tangible, that they can visit – unlike their area's contributions to global history or science and innovation, real and important though these may be. Those contributions can, of course, be embodied in and represented and brought to life by the places people visit: but it is the places that people think about first. Previous research by Public First found that letting historic buildings, including industrial buildings, fall into disrepair contributes to a decline in civic pride, and that restoring and renewing these buildings – something that has happened in Coventry through, for example, the work of Historic Coventry Trust – can play a role in the broader rejuvenation of an area.¹⁴

That is reflected in our Coventry poll. People in Coventry overwhelmingly agree, by 79% to 11%, that “There are places in my local area that make me appreciate our history”.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? : There are places in my local area that make me appreciate our history

Public First | Coventry Residents | Sample Size: 300 respondents | Fieldwork: 20th Feb - 6th Mar 2025



¹⁴ Public First, [Heritage and civic pride: voices from levelling up country](#), May 2022

Finding 2: Local history and heritage makes places better to live in

Lady Godiva and Peeping Tom aside, pre-Blitz history rarely comes up in our conversations about heritage with Coventry residents. Coventry's more recent industrial history (see Chapter Two, below) has, we discover, far more resonance with people, particularly through family connections. But there is some affection for the city's oldest buildings, beyond the Cathedral.

“ We liked it when we were growing up here. The old cobbled streets are mainly back over in the centre... You've got the car museum, and all the factories, the watchmakers, bikes... There's a lot of history here. ”

Man, 65+, City Centre

In Drapers Field, two young men working in a letting agency tell us about the combination of modern multicultural nightlife and medieval architecture on Spon Street.

“ You've got all the clubs there, you've got the restaurants there, but the buildings are still the way they were from back in the days. They obviously kept that condition. But I think anywhere else in the city, there's nothing else... I used to go to the shisha lounges there, I used to go to the restaurants and stuff like that. ”

Man, 25-34, Drapers Field

“ Now I think of it, it's weird that they turned all of the Spon Gate area into bars and stuff like that. But it's still good that they've still got the old wooden beams and everything outside the building, you don't see that anywhere now. ”

Man, 18-24, Drapers Field

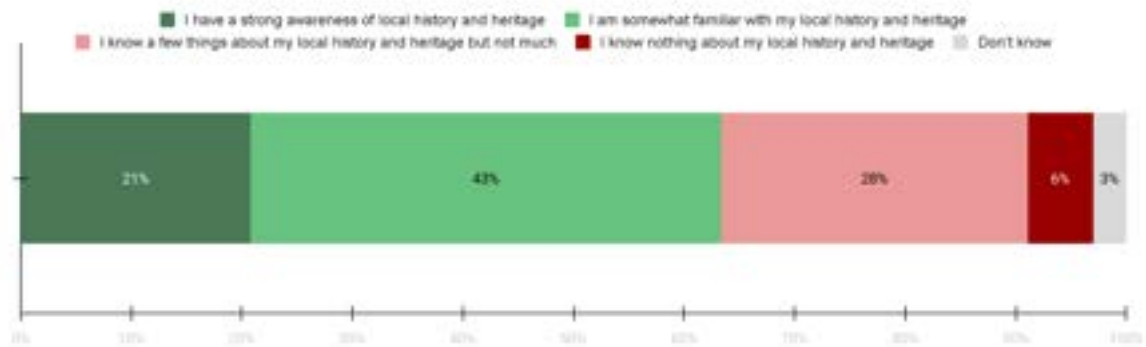
One mentions the historic buildings, including Coventry's medieval gatehouses, recently restored and turned into Airbnbs: he stayed in one with his girlfriend a while ago. As one of our stakeholder interviewees put it, “The way the city is structured gives you the automatic connection with history. If you go to the city centre... some of the way the buildings have been maintained feels like you're still in that time”.

Our polling shows that most people know at least a bit about the history of the area they live in, and it matters to them. The depth of people's knowledge varies – on a self-assessment, about one in five people say they have a “strong awareness” of their local area's history, with 70% saying that they are “somewhat familiar” or “know a few

things but not much". But complete ignorance of the local history and heritage of the place they live in is unusual: just 6% of people admit to this.

How aware are you, if at all, of the history and heritage of the local area you live in now?

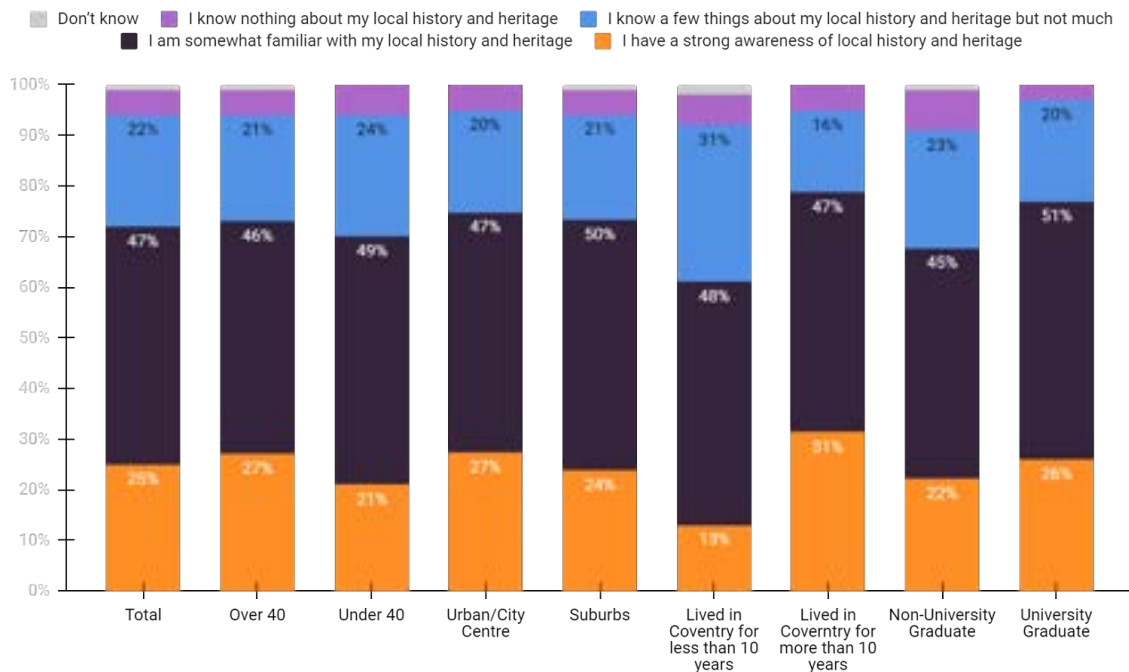
Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,022 respondents | Fieldwork: 21st Feb - 27th Feb 2025



The figures for Coventry are broadly similar to the national figure, with a quarter of those we surveyed saying they have a “strong awareness” of local history and heritage, and 5% saying they know nothing about it. These figures are broadly consistent across age, education, income, and pride levels. Most residents (69%) describe themselves as somewhat familiar or knowing a few things about Coventry’s history, aligning closely with the national trend. Awareness is slightly higher among long-term residents (10+ years in Coventry), with 31% reporting a strong awareness of local history compared to 13% among those who have lived in Coventry for less than ten years.

How aware are you, if at all, of the history and heritage of the local area you live in now?

Public First | Coventry Adults | Sample Size: 300 | Fieldwork: 20th Feb - 6th Mar 2025

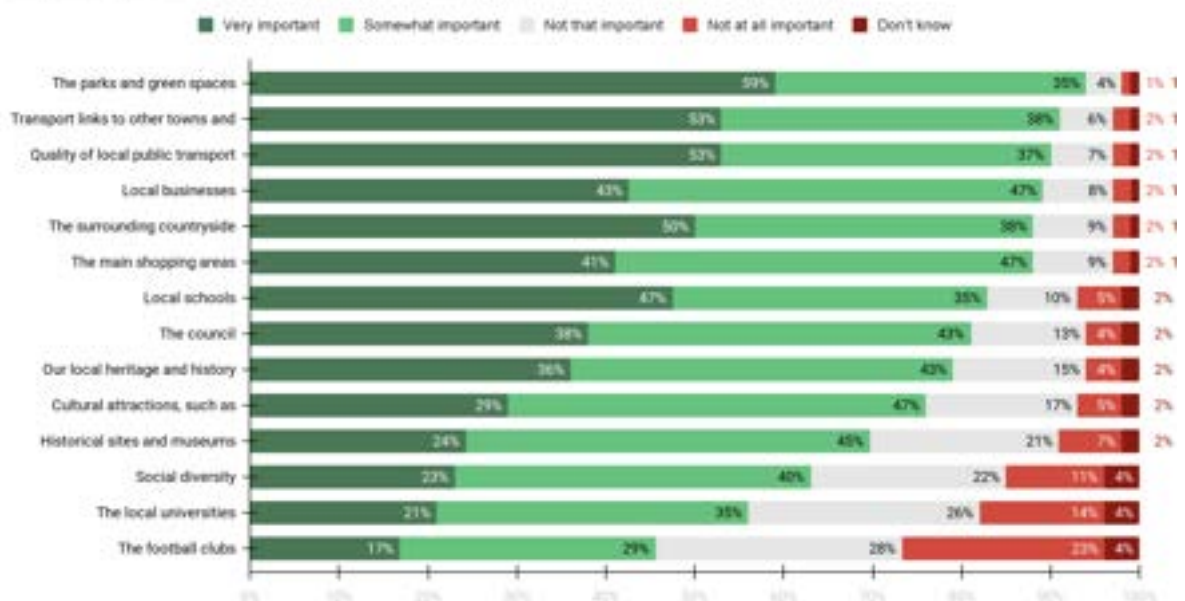


This isn't just about people's abstract knowledge. Local history and heritage are considered important by the vast majority of people in the UK as something that makes

their local area a good place to live. It is not the most important factor – parks and green spaces, transport links to other places and local public transport, all of which have a clear and obvious impact on day-to-day quality of life, rank top on this measure – but it matters. 79% consider local heritage and history a factor that makes their local area a good place to live, and nearly 70% identify historical sites and museums. Only 4% say that local heritage and history are not at all important in making their local area a good place to live, and only 7% say this of historical sites and museums. So far as the vast majority of people are concerned, they make a real difference.

How important, if at all, do you think the following are to make your local area a good place to live?

Public First (UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,011 respondents | Fieldwork: 21st Feb - 27th Feb 2023)



For comparison, football clubs – which really do matter hugely to many people, and which are rightly considered a crucial part of the local identity of many places – are considered “very important” or “somewhat important” to making their local area a good place to live by 46% of people, placing them well below local heritage and history, and historical sites and museums, in importance to local quality of life.

Finding 3: Protecting and caring for both national and local history and heritage matters to people

Coventry is famous – infamous, in some eyes – for its brutalist concrete post-war architecture (not in fact all concrete, one stakeholder interviewee insists to us, but “fine travertine marble, really nicely detailed simple Scandinavian architecture from the 1950s”) and for its ring road that tightly encircles the city centre. One interviewee

describes the road as forming “a kind of physical barrier, it’s like a mental barrier for people”, and another makes a distinction between inside and outside “the ring”.

But the modern built environment is Coventry’s history and heritage too. An older woman in the city centre, talking about her favourite parts of Coventry, mentions the Locarno – built in the late 1950s as a dance hall, converted to become Coventry Central Library in the 1980s – in the same breath as the restored medieval buildings on Spon Street.¹⁵ It is not only the medieval buildings that are spoken about with affection.

““ *When I see people my age, we always talk about growing up and the Locarno and the old Co-op. You could go in there and buy anything.* ””

Man, 65+, City Centre

““ *The city is getting bigger but I don’t want us to lose the interesting stuff. The thing that makes me sad is when they get rid of the cool buildings.* ””

Woman, 25-34, near Charterhouse

““ *A lot of it is post-war, even though it’s ugly, it means a lot. It’s like the brutalist architecture.* ””

Woman, 25-34, Drapers Field

For its residents, Coventry is not a tourist destination – it is where they live. We talk to a group of three young women inside the Cathedral: they have arranged to meet here before going out for the afternoon. They laugh that the worst thing about Coventry is that it is “the furthest place from the sea”, but they find positives from this.

““ *That’s why the culture is good. I always say, like, if you lived by the sea, you wouldn’t create everything we do here, because we just are trapped, gridlocked, so you have to be more creative. So we create the beach with our mind.* ””

Woman, 35-44, Cathedral

They mention the Cathedral as a building that makes Coventry special to them – they are standing in it, after all – but also the “iconic” post-war Round Cafe in the Lower Precinct (“My mom mentioned it the other day, and I was like ‘You mean Caffè Nero?’ And she was like, ‘Yeah, but it’s famous’”) and the Britannia Hotel, next to the Cathedral. “That one is dire inside” says one. Her friend doesn’t disagree, “But there’s people who are like, ‘That’s what Coventry looks like, because we rebuilt it after the war’... the Bull Yard, that’s all going to get bulldozed. And a lot of people do not agree with that, because, even if it’s ugly it’s like, ‘It’s how we bounced back after the war, so it should be

¹⁵ Woman, 65+, City Centre

celebrated”¹⁶. Some of the changes they have seen are for the better. They mention the redeveloped Upper Precinct, with its new water fountains and statues.

“ I actually really like that space. In summer sometimes you can hang out there when it's just starting to get dark and feel safe. There's kids playing in the water and stuff, and they have actually created something there which is lovely for families. ”

Woman, 25-34, Cathedral

We ask if they are proud of living in Coventry. They all tell us they are.

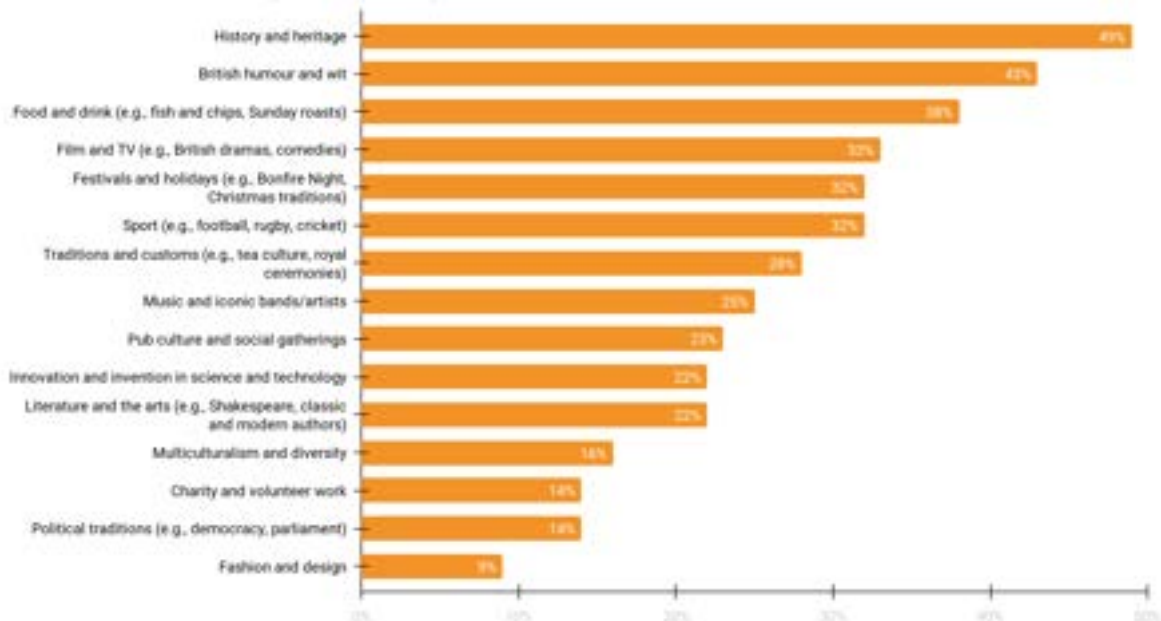
“ I've definitely got prouder, because I wanted to leave and move away after uni, but that's the thing, I came back. And I was like, I'm actually really proud. ”

Woman, 35-44, Cathedral

British people care about the UK's history and heritage. In our national poll, history and heritage ranks top of a long list of aspects of UK culture that are important to people, above British humour, British food (high on the list, despite national stereotypes), British film and TV, British music, our sport, music and literature, our festivals, our political traditions, and more.

Which aspects of the UK's culture are important to you? Select up to five.

Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,022 respondents | Fieldwork: 21st Feb - 27th Feb 2025



Local history and heritage matters to people too. They want to protect it, and they want to pass it on to future generations. The benefits they identify as most important are not

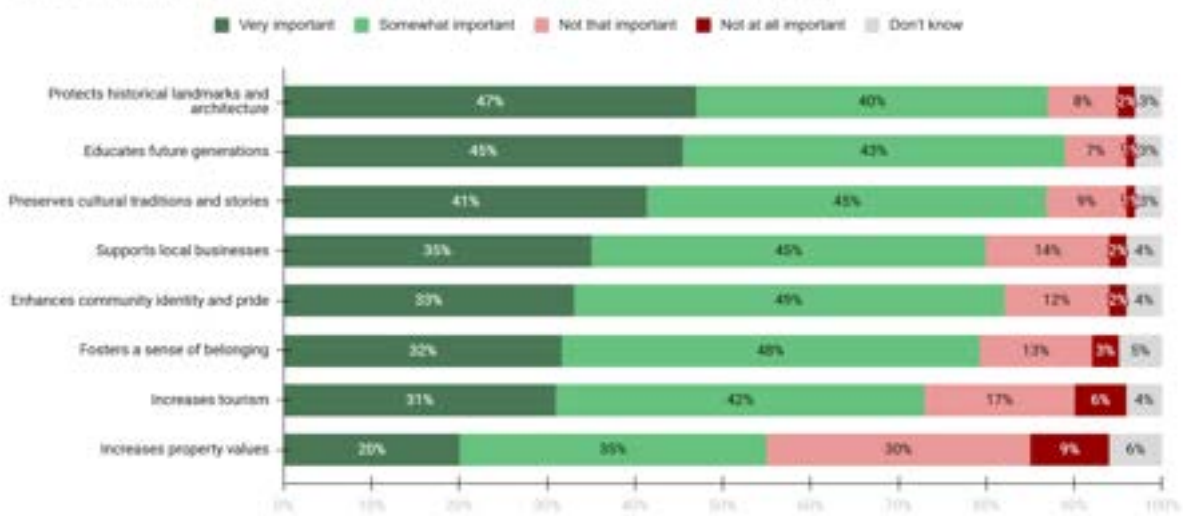
¹⁶ Woman, 35-44, Cathedral

just economic – in fact, while economic benefits such as impacts on tourism, on local businesses and on property values are taken seriously, they rank relatively low compared to less tangible benefits such as preserving cultural traditions and stories, and educating future generations.

There is overwhelming support for the idea that protecting historic landmarks and architecture is valuable in itself. And more than four out of five people agree that enhancing community identity and pride is an important benefit of preserving their local area’s history and heritage, with a similar proportion agreeing that it fosters a sense of belonging. These are important things for any community to want to protect – and dangerous things to lose.

How important are the following benefits of preserving your local area’s history and heritage, if at all?

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The findings of our national poll and our Coventry poll are broadly similar on this question, and we find attitudes broadly similar across demographic groups: again, a clear majority agree that all the suggested benefits are very or somewhat important, but the benefits to tourism and property values rank lowest.



CASE STUDY:

HISTORIC COVENTRY TRUST

Historic Coventry Trust is a social enterprise which was set up in 2011 to own and restore Coventry's heritage buildings. It has worked with Coventry City Council in particular to develop and regenerate a portfolio of buildings with an eye on their commercial viability as heritage sites.

These include the Charterhouse – founded as a Carthusian monastery in 1381, later a private house owned by, among others, Elizabeth I's favourite Robert Dudley, and, as recently as this century, a squat – whose management has recently been taken on by the National Trust, and the neoclassical Drapers' Hall, now used as an events venue, as well as a number of medieval cottages and gatehouses which have been converted into holiday accommodation. Historic Coventry Trust also delivered the regeneration of the Burges and Hales Street, a historic area of Coventry which survived the Blitz but subsequently declined and was identified as "at risk", as the programme demonstrator for Historic England's High Street Heritage Action Zones.¹⁷

Ian Harrabin, born and brought up in Coventry and now chairman of Historic Coventry Trust, has been involved in a range of other local regeneration projects, including the Telegraph Hotel, a modernist 1958 building in the centre of the city which was the home of the Coventry Telegraph for 50 years and is now a boutique hotel.

Finding 4: Heritage has an economic value

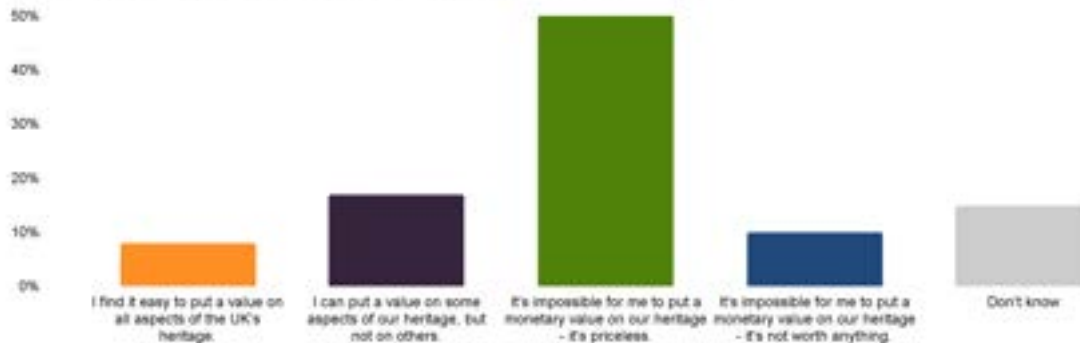
It is not easy to put a value on something that is not, and will never be, for sale. In our poll, we asked people if they could put a value on the UK's history and heritage. Half said that they could not put a value on this, because "it's priceless" – compared to 10% who said that they could not put a value on it because "it's not worth anything", 8% who said they "find it easy to put a value on all aspects of the UK's heritage" and 17% who

¹⁷ Historic England, [Coventry High Street Heritage Action Zone Evaluation](#), November 2023

said they “find it easy to put a value on some aspects of the UK’s heritage but not on others”.

When thinking about the value of the UK's history and heritage, which of these statements best represents your view?

Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,022 respondents | Fieldwork: 21st Feb – 27th Feb 2025



But we can still find ways to ask people what they think some elements of history and heritage are worth – or at least, what they would need to be paid in order to lose them.

In our Coventry poll, we asked people to imagine that they could choose between Coventry Cathedral staying as it is, or it being removed in return for a one-off amount of money paid to them personally. Perhaps unsurprisingly, very few people in Coventry would accept Coventry Cathedral being removed in return for £20, or £50. These are not life-changing sums of money. But in fact, the overwhelming majority of Coventry people – 78% of them, or almost four out of five – say they would not accept £10,000 in return for the removal of their Cathedral.

We asked the same question about Coventry’s historic buildings in general, and got a similar answer. Most people would not accept £10,000 in exchange for the loss of their city’s buildings of historical significance. And in our national poll, we asked the public if they would prefer that everything in their area stayed the same or that their area lost all buildings of historic significance but they were paid a one-off amount of money. 13% would accept £1,000 in return for the loss of all of their area’s historic buildings, 18% would accept £50,000 and 22% would accept £100,000 – with 65% saying they would rather their area stayed the same than accept £100,000. In all cases, even when considering an extremely large payment, the overwhelming majority of people would prefer to retain their area’s historically significant buildings.

78%

of people in Coventry would forgo **£10,000** rather than accept the loss of Coventry Cathedral

65%

of people in the UK would forgo **£100,000** rather than accept the loss of all buildings of historic significance in their area

We also asked people in our national poll how much they would be prepared to pay to save a listed building – not a specific listed building – from being knocked down by a developer and replaced with a building that fulfils the same function. Many, of course, said they would not be prepared to contribute anything to this. But the average sum people were prepared to contribute, to save a historic building they have been asked to imagine, is £75. Our modelling (based on a consumer surplus calculation – see Appendix) implies a collective willingness, on the part of the British public, to stump up £4.1 billion to save a building they think has some kind of historic significance.

Finally, we asked people in our national poll to take part in an admittedly far-fetched thought experiment: “Imagine that all key records of UK history are stored in an archive. They are the only original records that exist. If there is a fire all records will be destroyed. Installing a sprinkler system reduces the likelihood of all records being destroyed by 50%. How much would you personally be willing to pay towards the sprinkler system?” Our modelling implies the UK public are willing to pay £25.7 billion to protect these imaginary historical records.

£4.1bn

The public collectively say they would pay this amount to save a listed building that was under threat

£25.7bn

The public collectively say they would pay this amount to protect all key records of UK history



KEY FINDINGS

- 5) **Awareness of local history is intimately linked to pride in place** – with those who say they have a strong awareness of local history and heritage significantly more likely to say they are proud of their local area than those who say they have none.

- 6) **Industrial heritage is key to understanding local pride, but also to understanding a sense of decline** – linked in part to people’s knowledge of family connections to place, and to pride in work, but also to visible examples of deterioration, speaking to the importance of heritage-led regeneration and the celebration of local industries.

- 7) **Connection with heritage is linked to optimism, pride and protectiveness** – people who feel connected with their local heritage are more likely to say they feel pride in their local area, that they are optimistic about its future, and that if someone they knew criticised it they would defend it.

Finding 5: Awareness of local history is intimately tied to local pride

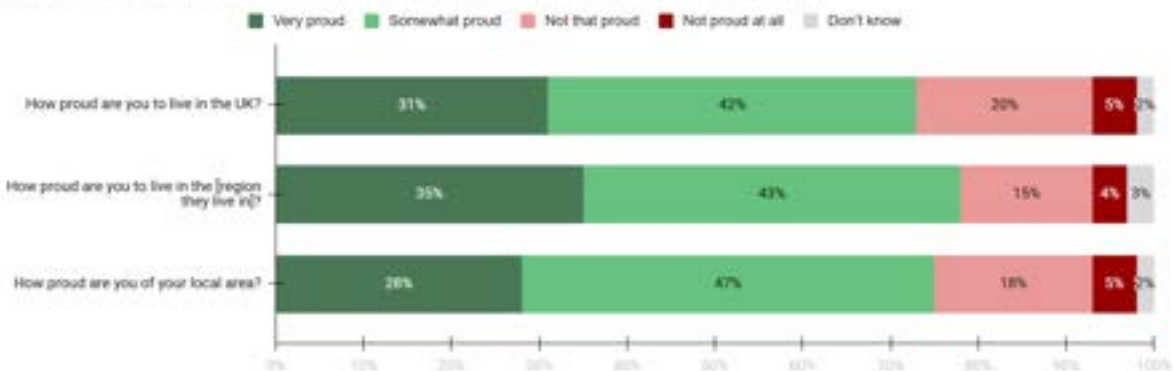
In a cafe in Coventry’s canal basin, two women tell us reasons to be proud of Coventry. The list goes on and on. Lady Godiva. Philip Larkin. Clive Owen. The Belgrade Theatre. The nightlife, back when they were teenagers. The motor industry. London’s black cabs, built by a Coventry company. Coventry’s “absolutely amazing hospital”, where the world’s first Covid vaccine was delivered. The Blitz. “Coventry won this country the war because of the resistance of its people”, says one, adding that her granddad worked on

Lancaster bombers at a local factory. But the enthusiasm for sharing Coventry's history, and Coventry's achievements, and the genuine pride, since childhood – “When I was at school they made us fiercely proud of Coventry” – is tempered by a sense of something that has been lost. “I’m proud because it was amazing, but then sad because it’s all gone, but it was our parents’ generation. We’re the last generation with a strong work ethic”. “As soon as I’m retired I’m out the place, there’s no reason to go back.”¹⁸

Most people in the UK are proud of where they live. Only about one in 20 people say they are “not proud at all” to live in the UK, in their region or nation, or in their local area. Around a third say that they are “very proud” of each of these, with fairly similar levels of pride expressed in each overall.

How proud are you of your local area?

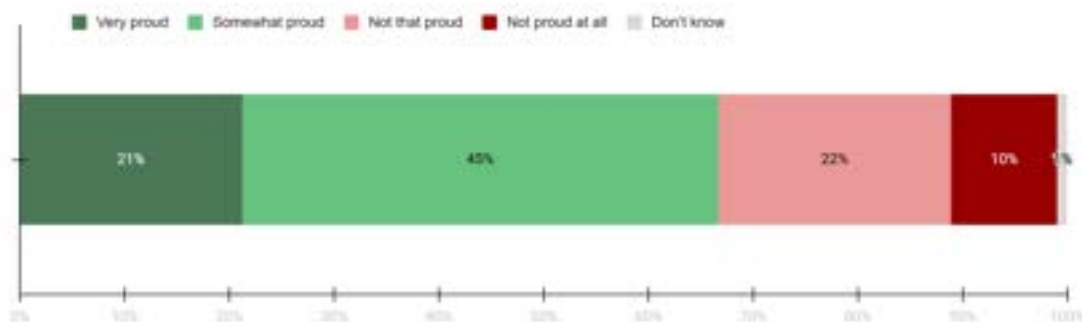
Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,011 respondents | Fieldwork: 21st Feb - 27th Feb 2025



In Coventry, pride in the local area is weaker than the national average and lack of pride stronger, although Coventry does outperform the rest of the West Midlands for pride. One in 10 Coventry residents say they are “not proud at all” to live in Coventry, and around twice as many say they are “very proud”.

How proud are you of living in and around Coventry?

Public First | Coventry Residents | Sample Size: 300 respondents | Fieldwork: 20th Feb - 6th Mar 2025

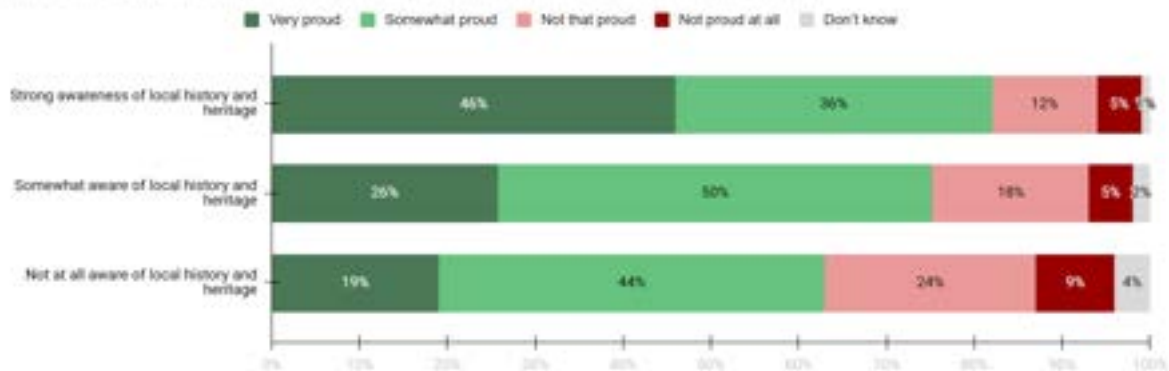


There is a direct relationship between pride in a local area and awareness of that area's history and heritage. Nationally, people who say they have a strong awareness of local history and heritage are significantly more likely to say they are proud of their local area than people who say they have none.

¹⁸ Two women, both 45-54, Drapers Field

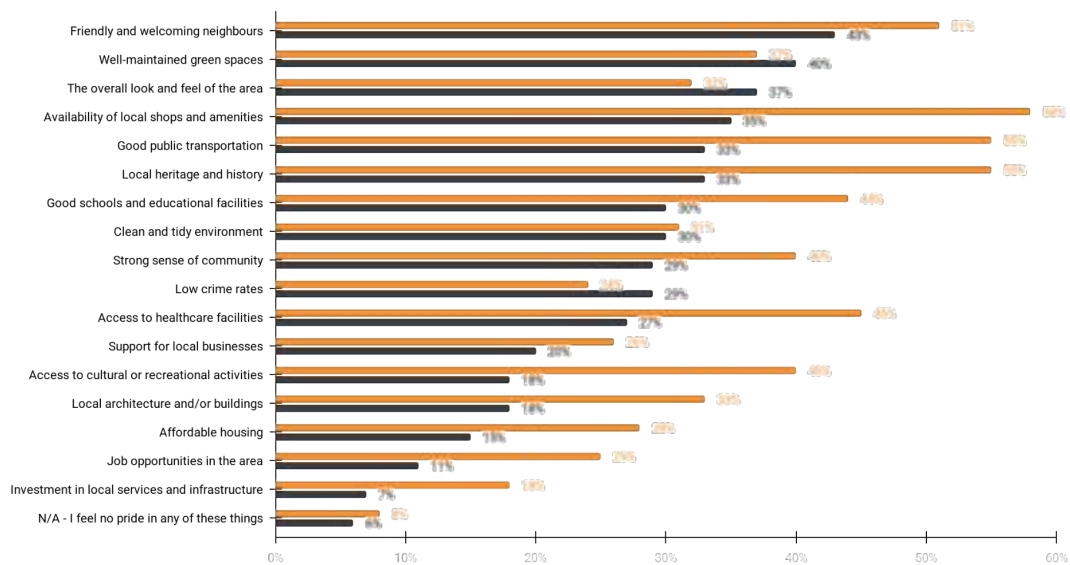
How proud are you of your local area?

Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,011 respondents | Fieldwork: 21st Feb - 27th Feb 2025



Around a third of people identify “local heritage and history” as something that makes them feel proud to live in their local area. This is less than some other factors which make an immediate difference to quality of life, such as “friendly and welcoming neighbours”, “well-maintained green spaces” and “availability of local shops and amenities”. But local heritage and history ranks higher as a source of pride than public services: schools, healthcare facilities and low crime rates. This may of course reflect local public services not being in a state people can feel proud of.

- Which of the following, if any, makes you feel proud to live in and around Coventry? Select all that apply. [BASE: Coventry Residents]
- Which of the following, if any, makes you feel proud to live in your local area? Select all that apply. [BASE: UK Residents]



The people of Coventry are substantially more likely than the national average to say that local heritage and history makes them feel proud to live in their area. Several different question options get a higher score in the Coventry poll than the national poll, but local heritage and history is second on the list, with 55% saying this makes them proud to live where they do.

One thing that came out strongly in our conversations with Coventry residents was a sincere belief that Coventry has a national reputation for being a high-crime city, which

may be reflected in the low number of people – lower than in the national poll – saying they see low crime rates as being a reason to feel proud of living in Coventry.

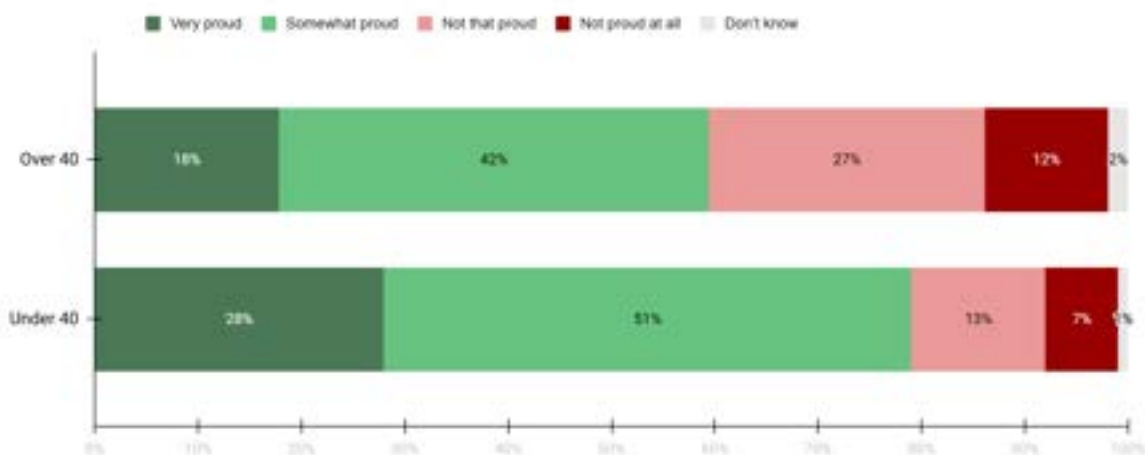
“ I had an employee at my place who’s been offered a relocation to Coventry. He lives a few hours away. The first thing he did is jump online, the internet presence of Coventry is negative. He showed us a list, and Coventry is one of the worst places, apparently, in the UK... So the first thing he did, obviously, he’s moving his family down here. As soon as he’s seen that list, he said, no chance, and I don’t blame him. ”

Man, 26, focus group

Interestingly, our Coventry poll found that under-40s were significantly more likely than over-40s to say that they are “very proud” or “somewhat proud” to live in Coventry (79% versus 60%) – a finding not reflected in our national poll on younger versus older people’s pride in living in the UK, their region or nation, or their local area.

How proud are you of living in and around Coventry?

Public First | Coventry Residents | Sample Size: 300 respondents | Fieldwork: 20th Feb - 6th Mar 2025



Finding 6: Industrial heritage is key to understanding local pride, but also to understanding a sense of decline

While, as we saw in Chapter One, the Blitz and the Cathedral are often the first things to come up when people are asked to think about Coventry’s history, it is Coventry’s industrial heritage that prompts the deepest engagement and the deepest sense of nostalgic pride. For many of the people we speak to, there are direct family connections with Coventry’s motor industry in particular.

“ My dad worked for Peugeot in the factories, yeah, my granddad was in the factories. ”

Man, 35-44, City Centre

“ What do you think are the three most used modes of transport in the world? The bicycle, made in Coventry, cars, first mass-produced in Coventry and aeroplanes, the jet engine was invented in Coventry. ”

Man, 55-64, City Centre

“ He's [my husband] just very proud, no matter what anybody says he's just very proud to be from Coventry, and the history, and his family all lived in Coventry for quite a long time, you know his mum and his granddad, and they had factories, and there's a lot of history there. But I don't because I wasn't born in Coventry. ”

Woman, 65+, War Memorial Park

For some, the family connection to Coventry's industrial past is a story about immigration, or internal migration, too, and this is a clear source of pride in both family and place: for example, the two young men in the letting agency we met in Chapter One both have family stories to tell, and both tell them proudly.

“ I'm proud to be from Coventry, because obviously my parents lived here for all their lives. My nan and granddad, they came over from Ireland, and they just worked, they worked so hard. I didn't realise this until I actually spoke to my dad about it. I mean, my granddad, my dad barely saw him because of how much he worked, and they came over and they built a family, built a life for themselves. ”

Man, 18-24, Drapers Field

“ Coventry was the hub for work, back in the day, my father, my granddad, he came looking for work, from Bradford, in 1950 I'd say, and worked his way down to Coventry and there were many, many other people who followed him on that same journey. So I think, history wise, Coventry's got a very, very strong history for the industry, you know, factories and things like that. There used to be a train station going from Foleshill all the way up into town and things like that, commuting and things... I don't think there's much history left anymore, we've got the Cathedral, that was bombed. ”

Man, 25-34, Drapers Field

Knowledge of a place's history is, as we have seen, a prompt for pride. But that pride can sometimes be linked to a nostalgic narrative of decline, a sense that things were better in the past. So thinking about local history, about what we have to be proud of, can be a prompt for negativity too.

Coventry's industry has changed in recent decades, and many of the car factories have gone, and while new industries and new jobs have emerged in their place, that did not happen immediately. One of our stakeholder interviewees talks about the period of rapid deindustrialisation in Coventry in the 1980s, and links that to another iconic piece of Coventry's cultural heritage: "Some parts of the city experienced unemployment rates in the mid-80s of around 20%. So the only thing we had going for us was Ghost Town, The Specials... when all these people who came there to work were put on the dole in the 80s it was devastating psychologically". In our focus group of younger Coventry residents, one woman laughs that "My dad still refuses to drive Peugeot from when they pulled the factories out of Coventry in the 80s, whereas I don't think our generation particularly cares. But there is a one man protest against Peugeot".¹⁹

Many of the people we speak to refer to a sense of decline that is linked in part to changes in industry and employment patterns, and to the idea that Coventry used to be a place that made things and isn't any more. But this is deeply tied to place, too: to specific places and buildings that – at least in people's minds and memories – used to be hives of activity and work and life, and are now a shadow of their former selves.

“ *It's because the work, where we used to have skilled labourers in Coventry making tools in the car industry, now they're stacking shelves for Amazon. Nobody learns a trade.* ”

Man, 45-54, City Centre

“ *When I first came here, it was a lovely place to be. You know, you could leave a job tonight and get another one in the morning. It was a lovely place. But we've got the knife gangs and we've got the drug gangs and everything now.* ”

Woman, 65+, City Centre

“ *I mean, we were known for the car factories, and they've all gone now, there were a lot of people lost jobs, and so had to change trade. That's more or less gone completely now, so that's changed.* ”

Woman, 65+, War Memorial Park

¹⁹ Woman, 31, focus group

“

If you ask if I feel a sense of pride in the city, I don't. It's turned into a dump really... it's definitely changed a lot since I was a kid.

”

Man, 55-64, Coventry Market

“

I'm not sure that there's the interest to celebrate its heritage anymore. There may have been 30 years ago, but what is there to celebrate nowadays? We don't make anything.

”

Man, 55-64, near Charterhouse

This speaks to the importance of regeneration: of making sure that when industrial and other buildings pass out of their initial use, they can be given new uses, not just as empty reminders of a better past but as living buildings with a continuing value, where both their history and their present can act as prompts for local pride.

We find plenty of people who are more than willing to talk about Coventry's negatives, including run-down parts of the city centre, economic inequality (“the distribution of wealth in Coventry is mental”),²⁰ and a sincere perception that it has both a high crime rate and a wider national reputation for having a high crime rate. Much – though not all – of the negativity we encounter, especially from older people, is linked explicitly to a sense that things were better in the past.

“

I don't like living in Coventry at the moment... it's not like it used to be. There's no neighbours, no nothing like that... nobody speaks to anybody... There's very little community left.

”

Man, 65+, near Charterhouse

“

This seems to be becoming a dead city, a lot of it, especially the city centre... It is becoming more of an eating place than a shopping place... I mean, the market as well, that used to be like a thriving thing, and it's not the same any more.

”

Woman, 65+, City Centre

“

I wouldn't say I was proud. No, I wouldn't, only because when you go to places and you say you're from Coventry, people have an image that's portrayed from the media... and I think our centre at the moment isn't a place to visit. I know they've got plans for it, it will be, but at the moment, everybody says, 'Oh, where do you go though? What do you do? There's nothing there.'

”

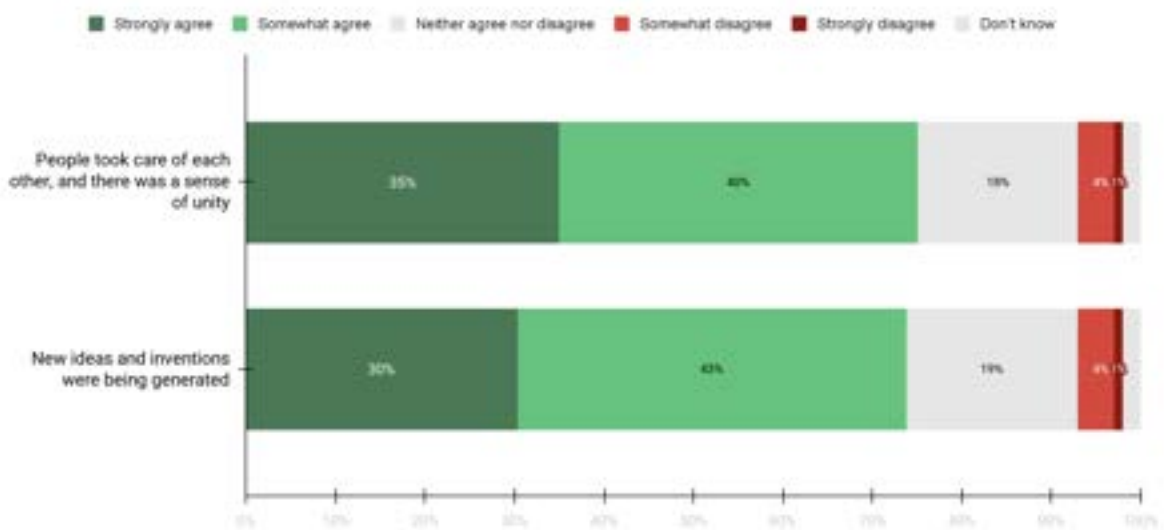
Woman, 65+, War Memorial Park

²⁰ Man, 18, focus group

And yet, there's another side to these nostalgic feelings. Nostalgia is prompted by dissatisfaction with the present, and we look to the past for reassurance that things were not always this way. While many expressions of nostalgia can sound like a profound sense of loss, this perspective can actually spark something constructive. For instance, feeling frustrated by the loss of community or industrial productivity and innovation can prompt a curiosity or longing to remember an era when that was not the case. In our polling, we measured this kind of curiosity for specific aspects of UK history and found that a strong majority of people are interested in learning about times when "people took care of each other, and there was a sense of unity" or when "new ideas and inventions were being generated". Three quarters of the public say they like learning about these times in UK history, compared to only 5% who disagree.

I like learning about times in the UK's history when...

Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,011 respondents | Fieldwork: 23rd Feb - 27th Feb 2025



Finding 7: Connection to heritage is linked with pride, optimism and protectiveness

The willingness we find in some of the people we meet to talk Coventry down is matched by a defiance, a resentment that Coventry is not given the credit it deserves, that it lives in the shadow of Birmingham in particular – sometimes accompanied by an acknowledgement that the people of Coventry could stick up for themselves a bit more.

“ We’ve got more history than Birmingham and yet we’re always placed as second fiddle! ”

Man, 55-64, City Centre

“ We're not like Liverpool or Birmingham in terms of having a strong accent but there is a strong sense of community here – we're just a bit quieter about it. ”

Man, 45-54, Coventry Market

“ If you go off on holiday and that, and people ask where you're from, if you say Coventry, no one knows anything, you have to say Birmingham. ”

Man, 26, focus group

“ When I went to university, I'd tell people I was from Coventry, just down the road from Birmingham, and that was the way we introduced ourselves, in proximity to Birmingham... And people looked at it as somewhere that was quite dead. Not a lot going on. And I think Coventrians are probably hardest on it than anyone else actually, we're really self deprecating, but if anyone likes to moan about it, then we'll be the first to defend it as well. ”

Woman, 25-34, Cathedral

As one of the women in the canal basin cafe says, with a knowing laugh, “You can tell people are from Coventry because they're all miserable”.²¹

Despite this, we find optimism for Coventry's future in many of those we speak to, and this is often linked to a recognition of the importance of local heritage and history.

“ I think they've started promoting its history more. Once the new developments are done they'll do a lot better, and people will say 'Go to Coventry' more. What they need is more shops, like Birmingham. ”

Woman, 65+, City Centre

“ I think they've got plans, and if they follow through, they're on about opening it up, the river, and making it a more pleasant place, there's hope. It just seems to be taking a long time. ”

Woman, 65+, War Memorial Park

“ Well, isn't that just the story of this city, phoenix from the ashes, like it's on our football emblem and it's on everything... the phoenix from the ashes is the story of Coventry to be, apparently, repeated forever. ”

Woman, 31, focus group

²¹ Woman, 45-54, Drapers Field

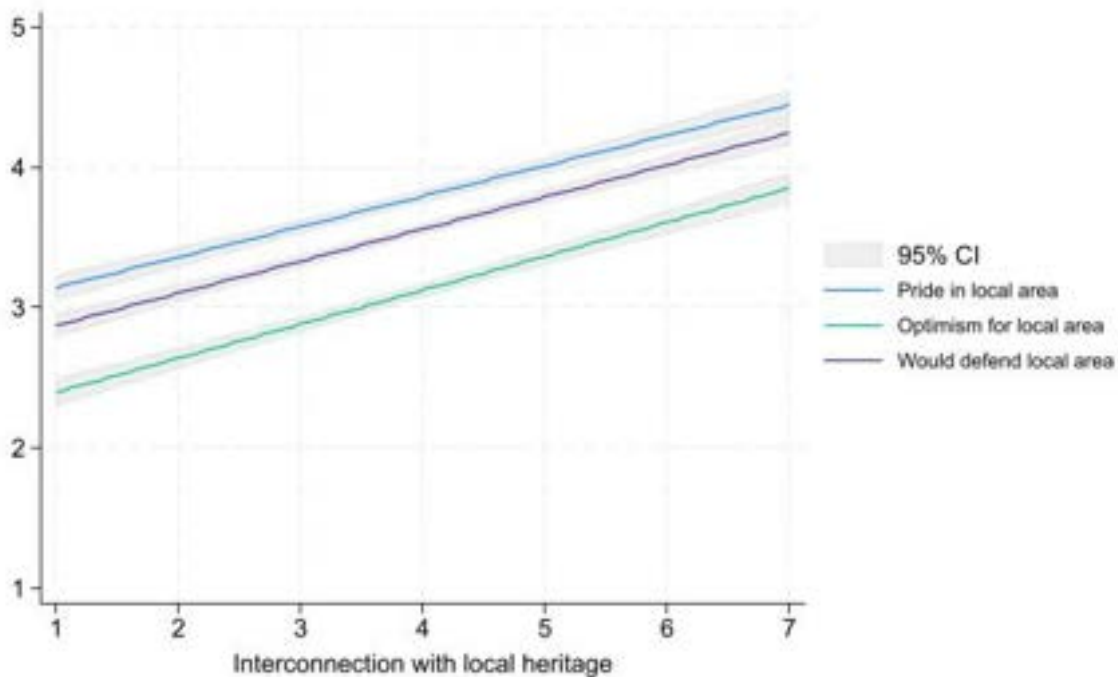
We see this relationship in our national polling as well. People who highly value local history and heritage are much more likely to feel pride in their local area, to be optimistic about its future, and also defend it or feel protective of their local area in the face of criticism.

When we look at this connection another way, we find the same thing. People who feel more interconnected with their local heritage are also more likely to feel higher levels of pride, optimism, and protectiveness.

We measured this by asking respondents how interconnected they are with their local heritage, and presented them with a series of Venn diagrams as shown below. Respondents were asked “Please select the Venn diagram below which best describes your relationship with your local heritage. The further apart the circles are, the less interconnected the relationship. The greater the overlap of the circles, the more interconnected the relationship.”



This kind of method allows us to assess how connected someone feels their own identity is with their local heritage. We found that those who said they feel more connected with their local heritage (by identifying with the higher numbered diagrams, above) are more likely to say they feel pride in their local area, that they are optimistic about its future, and that if someone they knew criticised it they would defend it.



KEY FINDINGS

- 8) **Active experiences are crucial to learning about local history and heritage** – this includes visiting heritage sites, museums and events, and conducting personal research; and many people are very enthusiastic about doing this.
- 9) **People are willing to make an effort to visit local heritage sites** – they are more likely to have visited a wide range of sites in the last year than to say that this is easy to do.
- 10) **Newcomers to an area have more pride in it than longer-term residents** – those who have lived in an area for less than two years are the most likely to say that they are “very proud” to live there.

Finding 8: Active experiences are crucial to learning about local history and heritage

A man walks his dog in Charterhouse Heritage Park, a green space surrounding the medieval Charterhouse. One of Coventry’s most important historic buildings, the Charterhouse was founded as a Carthusian monastery in 1381 and was later a private house, before falling into disrepair and, much more recently, being saved from demolition, restored by Coventry Historic Trust and opened to the public. Its management has now been taken over by the National Trust. The dog-walking man tells us he is 70 years old and has lived in Coventry all his life. He points at the

beautifully restored Charterhouse building. “I’ll tell you about this here”, he says. “I’ve never been in.”²²

Our visit to Coventry is within a week of the public announcement that the National Trust is going to take the Charterhouse on, and we find some awareness of this among the people we speak to. In our focus group, one woman talks about her keenness to go, and also about the difficulty of accessing some of the other historic sites around the area.

“ I had considered going to the Charterhouse about 18 months ago, and I looked how much it costs, and I thought, absolutely not, but now it’s going to be National Trust, I’ll go. But then also, we’ve got the Lunt Roman fort just outside of Coventry. That’s a huge piece of local history, it’s a Roman fort. It’s only open for like, three days a year. Why? Let’s make these things so that people can go to them and that they’re affordable. Because that’s the way you preserve history, isn’t it, getting people interested in it. People buy tickets, people buy coffee when they’re there. Or a scone, if you’re at the National Trust. ”

Woman, 31, focus group

Other focus group participants are less interested in visiting local heritage sites, although when asked where they would suggest people visit they mention War Memorial Park, the Cathedral and the cobbled streets around it and the Herbert Art Gallery, as well as noting that the city centre is improving and getting better shops. One identifies the canal basin from a photo, but says there’s nothing there. Some think that history and culture are the wrong things to focus on to attract their generation.

“ Coventry-wise, they’ve spent so long, just looking in the past and that whole thing is, we got smashed by bombs in the 60s... what is it, 60s? ”

Man, 24, focus group

Another cannot see himself actually visiting the Cathedral, but is glad it’s there.

“ It’s not something I’m particularly interested in but it’s not something that should be forgotten either. I mean over wars you start repeating the same mistakes, on Ukraine and all. Like I say it’s not something I’m majorly thinking, ‘Oh, I’m gonna go and look at Cov Cathedral this weekend’ but, yeah, it shouldn’t be forgotten about. ”

Man, 26, focus group

²² Man, 65+, near Charterhouse

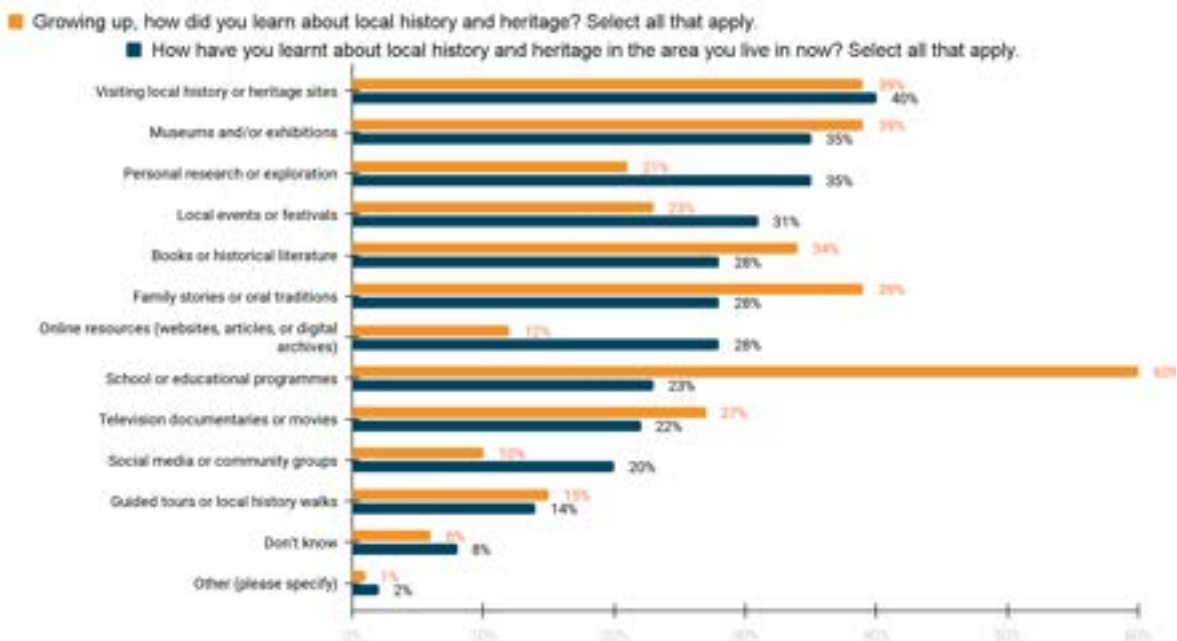
Across the city, though, we speak to proud Coventrians who see the city's heritage as a core part of their identity and engage with it proactively, including through online community organising groups.

“ So there's like a whole Facebook group called Sitting Rooms of Culture, and that's got like 30,000 people during COVID, and I just feel like that's so many people being invested in it, and a lot of them would be really passionate about these buildings and culture... it's actually off the back of the City of Culture, wasn't it? So it's almost like the alternative to raise up the voice of local people. ”

Woman, 25-34, Drapers Field

Just as people associate local heritage with physical, tangible places over stories, so they learn about it by visiting it, interacting with it, experiencing it. Once they have left school – which is where people are most likely to say they learned about local history and heritage growing up – people pick up knowledge of the history and heritage of the place they live by visiting local sites, museums and exhibitions, and events and festivals, as well as through carrying out personal research and exploration. In many cases, of course, people do not live in the place they grew up, which means they have already missed the opportunity to learn about its history and heritage at school – but they still have plenty of ways to find out about it.

Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,011 respondents | Fieldwork: 21st Feb - 27th Feb 2025

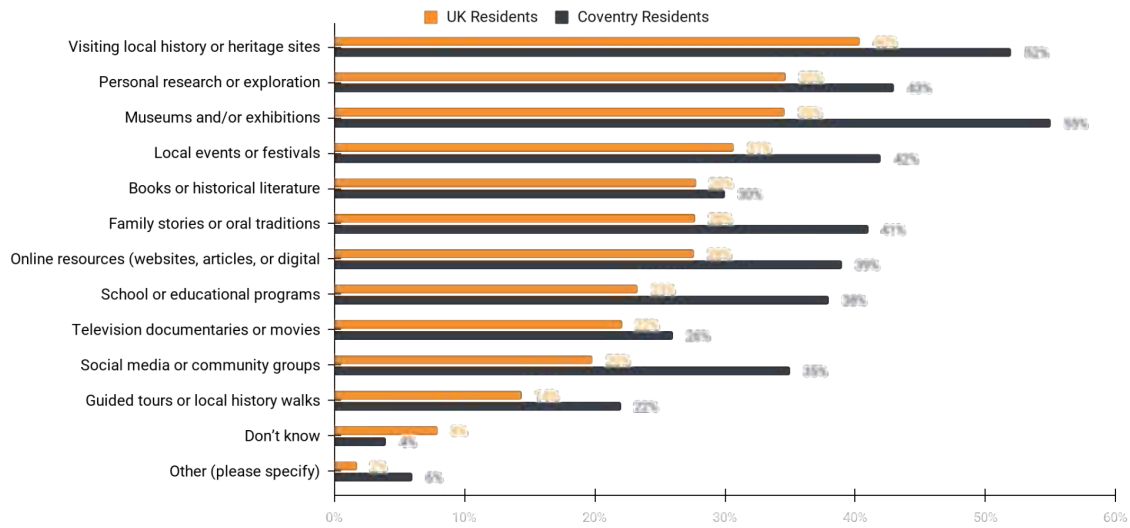


Once people have finished school, learning about local history and heritage is voluntary – and many actively choose to do it, in all sorts of ways.

Our Coventry poll gave similar results, but with Coventry residents being even more likely than the UK population to have learned about their local history and heritage through active choices to visit places and conduct their own research.

How have you learnt about local history and heritage? Select all that apply.

Public First | Coventry Adults | Sample Size: 300 | Fieldwork 20th Feb - 6th Mar 2025

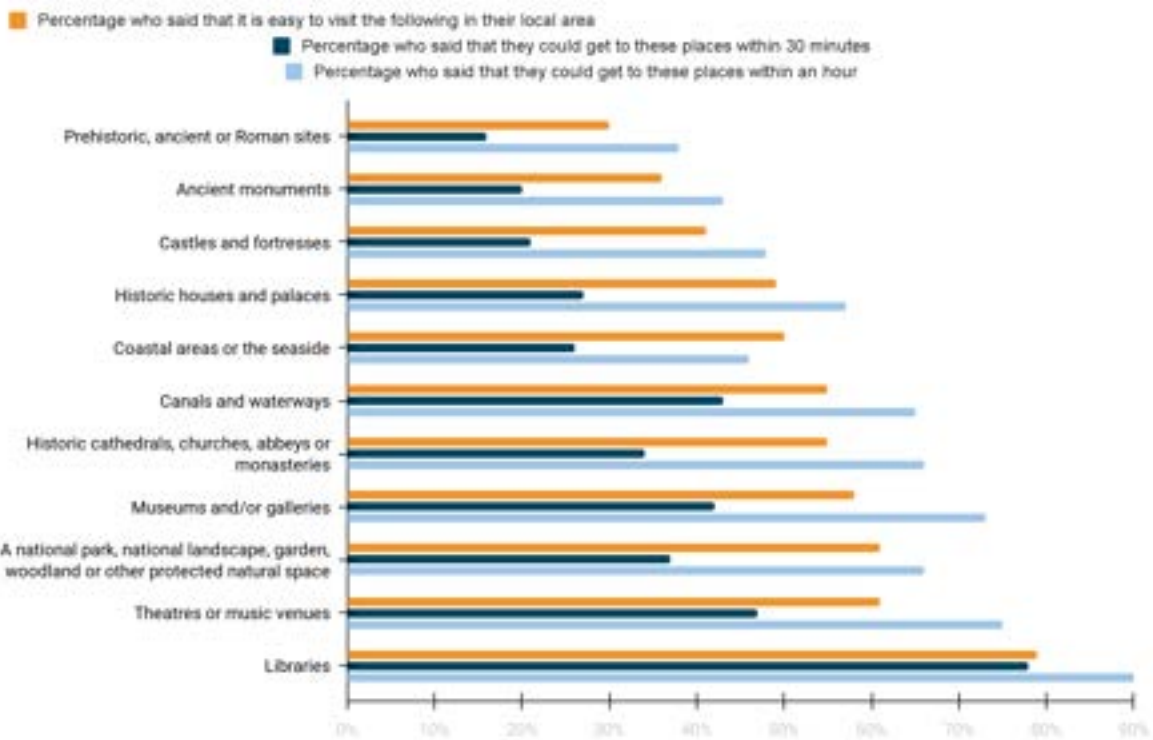


Coventry residents tend to show slightly higher engagement across most learning methods compared to national trends, particularly through museums and exhibitions, and visiting local history and heritage.

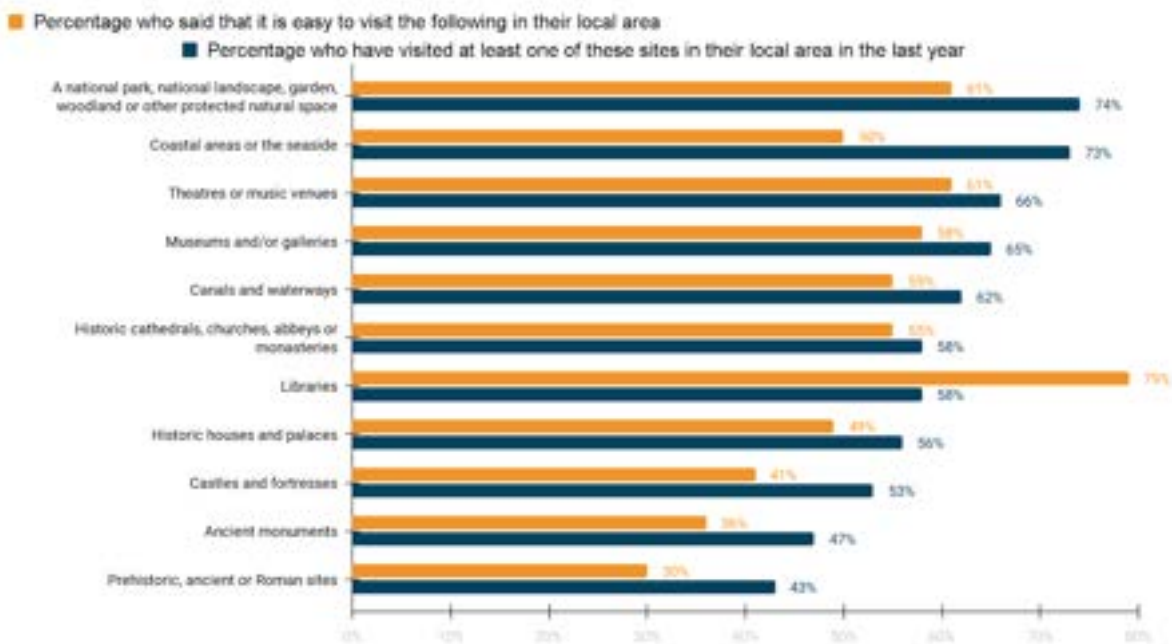
Finding 9: People are willing to make an effort to visit local heritage sites

We looked at people’s perceptions of how easy it is to get to a range of attractions by asking if they thought it was easy to visit them in their local area, and then how long it would take them to get there. In most cases, being unable to reach somewhere in half an hour does not make people think it is difficult to visit a place, whereas being unable to reach somewhere in an hour does. The exception is coastal areas and the seaside: people say that this is easy to get to even if it takes more than an hour.

Being easy to get to is a relative, not an absolute judgement: some places are sufficiently worth visiting that they can be considered within easy reach despite being further away.



However, in all categories – with the exception of libraries, which people say are easy to visit but choose not to – people are more likely to say that they have visited at least one of these sites in the last year than to say that it is easy to visit them.



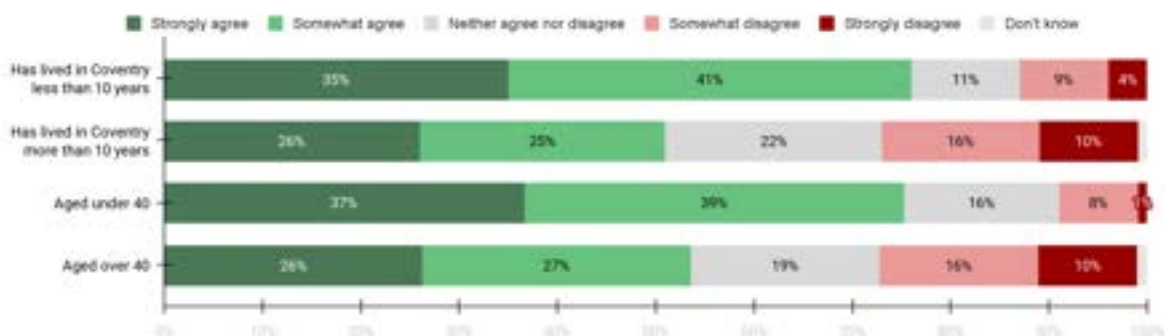
In other words, people are willing to go out of their way, to make an effort, to visit sites in their local area (with “local area” defined in whatever way they see fit) that have

significance to them. People are most likely to visit outdoor spaces such as landscapes, gardens, woodlands and the seaside – with coastal areas and seashores the places people are most willing to make an effort to visit. But castles and fortresses, ancient monuments and prehistoric, ancient or Roman sites all show a significant gap, where far more people have visited them in the last year than say they are easy to get to.

In Coventry, we found a strong appetite to see local heritage sites more: 60% of people say they wish they visited local heritage sites more often, rising to 75% of under-40s and 76% of those who have lived in Coventry for less than 10 years.

I wish that I visited local heritage sites more often

Public First | Coventry Residents | Sample Size: 300 respondents | Fieldwork: 20th Feb - 5th Mar 2025

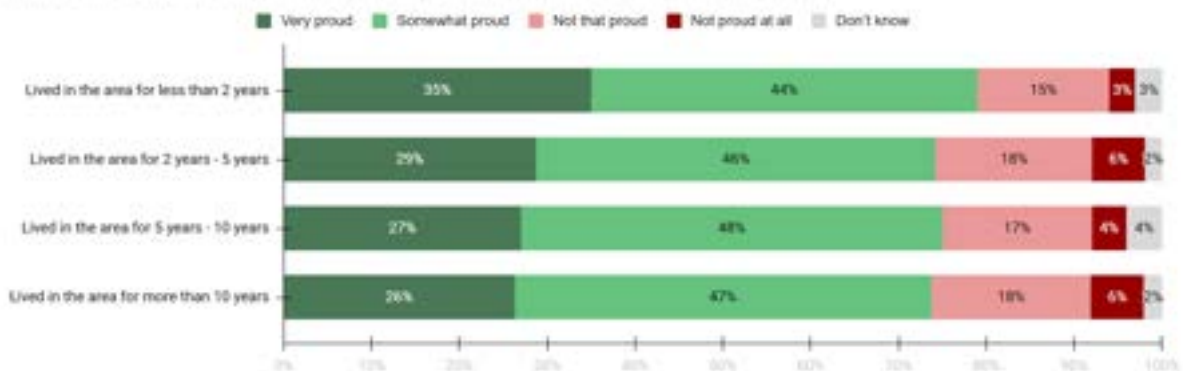


Finding 10: Newcomers to an area have more pride in it than long-term residents

A consistent finding across our national and Coventry polling is that people who are newer to an area tend to have more pride in it than those who have lived in a place for a long time. Those who have lived in an area for less than two years are the most likely to say that they are “very proud” to live there (35%) and those who have lived there for more than ten years are least likely (26%).

How proud are you of your local area?

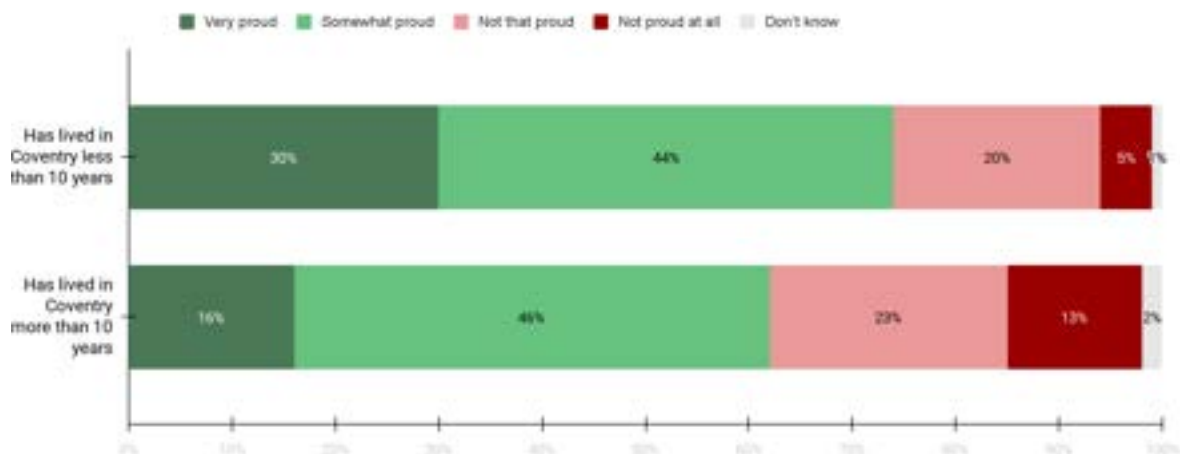
Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,011 respondents | Fieldwork: 21st Feb - 27th Feb 2025



This was even clearer in our Coventry poll. Those who have lived in Coventry for less than 10 years are almost twice as likely to say that they are “very proud” to live in Coventry than those who have lived there for more than 10 years. And those who have lived in Coventry for more than 10 years are almost three times as likely to say that they are “not proud at all” to live there than relative newcomers.

How proud are you of living in and around Coventry?

Public First | Coventry Residents | Sample Size: 300 respondents | Fieldwork: 20th Feb - 6th Mar 2025



There are several reasons why this might be the case. Those who have lived in a place for a long time may be more likely to be nostalgic about its past - particularly if they spent their childhoods there - and to perceive that it has declined. And those who have

arrived in a place more recently are more likely to have made an active choice to live there, meaning that as a cohort they are more likely to view it positively.



KEY FINDINGS

- 11) **The public overwhelmingly believe that young people should learn about both UK and local heritage** – and older people are especially likely to think this.
- 12) **Younger people visit heritage sites more than older generations** – this is true across all categories, although the disparity is smaller for outdoor spaces, which older cohorts are significantly more likely to have visited in the last year than historic and cultural attractions.

Finding 11: The public overwhelmingly believe that young people should learn about both UK and local heritage

Many of the people we speak to in Coventry, particularly but not exclusively those from older generations, want Coventry's history to be taught more in schools and, crucially, assume that this is not happening: one woman tells us that "We were brought up to be proud of our city. We were brought up to appreciate what we had" and complains that "They are not doing that sort of thing in the education any more".²³ Learning about local history in school is tied directly by many of those we meet to local pride – and we find a perception that both have declined.

²³ Woman, 35-44, Drapers Field

“ Probably the schools, I think because of the curriculum now, they probably don't concentrate on Coventry such a lot. I'd say we were probably taught more about it than they are now, I think that's probably because the curriculum has changed, hasn't it, what they have to teach now. ”

Woman, 65+, War Memorial Park

“ You go to school and they teach you about cowboys and indians when they should be teaching local history. ”

Woman, 45-54, Drapers Field

“ Why are they teaching Seamus Heaney poems... when we've got Philip Larkin? ”

Woman, 45-54, Drapers Field

In the market, a stallholder reflects on the importance of encouraging an early interest in local history. “It's important for schools to teach them. If you get to our age, if you don't know you're probably not bothered.”²⁴ In a pub near the centre of town, the landlord tells us that “If you can teach local history in schools, the children will educate the parents, and the parents will then get educated, and then children will educate the grandparents, but it has to be locally led, and it has to be part of the curriculum”. He makes a direct connection between knowledge of local history and civic pride.

“ They need educating, because it's all about how you feel about your city. And I have this theory that if you love your city, you ain't gonna drop litter, you ain't gonna graffiti... you're actually going to take pride in your city and show it off to people and educate people about it. ”

Man, 65+, City Centre

A young woman in War Memorial Park is embarrassed by her lack of detailed knowledge of Coventry's history – we reassure her that it is not a quiz – but it is clear that the issue is not that she was never taught about it: “We learned about it in school, and they told us all about how the city was flattened and then they had to rebuild it quickly... I'm trying to remember what we learned at school. I'm sure there was something to do with, something was built here originally, was it cars?”²⁵

There does not seem to be a significant age divide, in fact, in knowledge and interest in Coventry's history: across all age groups, there is a spectrum among the people we

²⁴ Man, 45-54, Coventry Market

²⁵ Woman, 25-34, War Memorial Park

speak to. School is far from being the only factor, and a perception among some older people that schools are bad at this seems to reflect how education used to be, not how it is now. One of our stakeholder interviewees, who grew up in Coventry, whose current professional role immerses her in the life of the city and who now has a good knowledge of its history, does not remember being taught anything about it at all when she was at school here in the 1980s. Another reflects on a similar experience, and speculates that the lack of discussion of Coventry's history when he was at school might be "largely linked to the fact that heritage was undervalued and perhaps is economically driven as well because of the effects of the recessions of the late 80s, 90s and change that came with it".

In a cafe in War Memorial Park, a retiree tells us about how much she learned relatively recently, through attending civic events with friends – which also gave her a greater awareness of school activities.

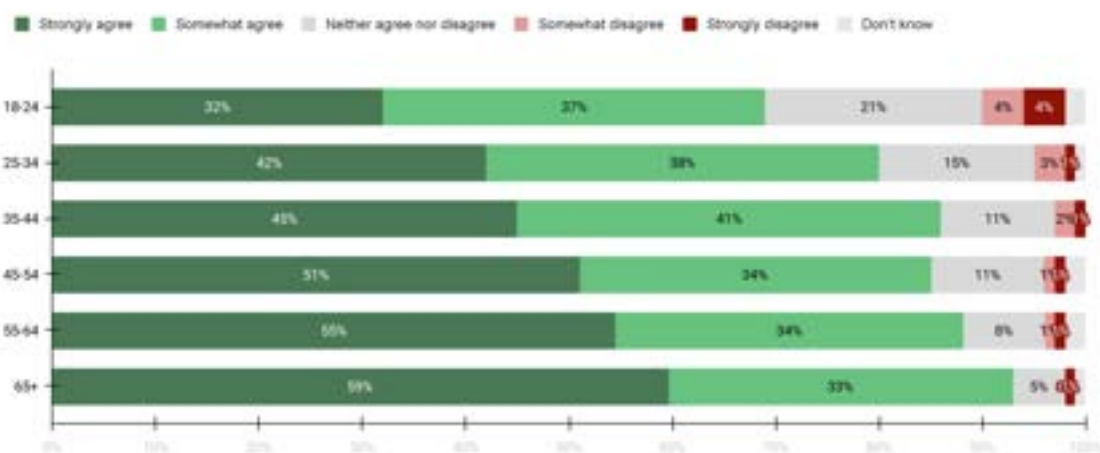
“ My friends were Lord and Lady Mayoress, three or four years ago, I went to some of their things, I learned a lot more about Coventry and the fact that they were twinned with other countries and they were off to all the different schools to see what different things were celebrated, I think if you know people there are lots of things going on we just don't really know about.

Woman, 65+, War Memorial Park

In our national poll, there is very strong support for the idea that young people should learn about both national and local heritage. 84% of the public agree that “young people should learn about the UK’s heritage”, and 80% agree that “young people should learn about our local heritage”. In both cases, agreement with the proposition increases by age cohort: older people are the most keen that young people learn about national and local history.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? : Young people should learn about our local heritage

Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,022 respondents | Fieldwork: 21st Feb - 27th Feb 2025

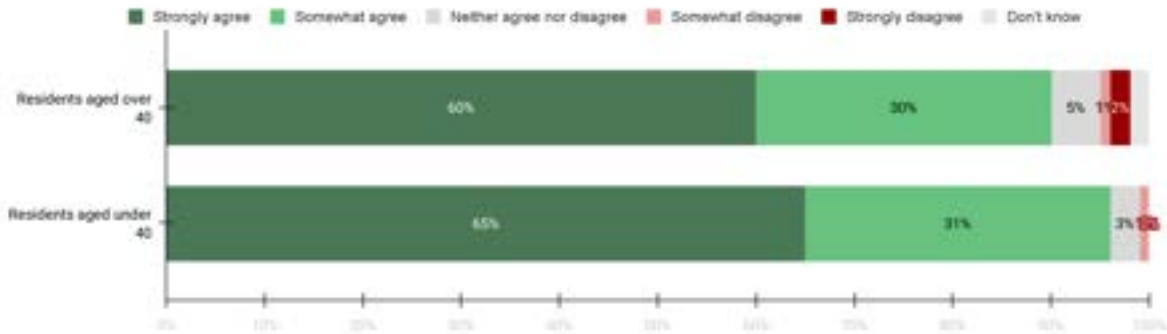


In Coventry, there is even wider agreement that young people should learn about local

heritage: 92% agree, including 61% who strongly agree. Here, the age effect is slightly different from the national picture, although agreement with the proposition is overwhelming across the board: 96% of Coventrians under 40 agree, compared to 90% of those over 40.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? : Young people should learn about our local heritage

Public First | Coventry Residents | Sample Size: 300 respondents | Fieldwork: 20th Feb - 6th Mar 2023



Finding 12: Younger people visit heritage sites more than older generations

The perception we find in Coventry, especially among older people we speak to, that young people are not being taught about local history in schools is not reflected in what younger adults, both in Coventry and in our national poll, tell us about their own experience. And recognising that young people are interested in and engaged with local history – that they are at least as interested and engaged as older generations – is important, because the myth that they are not gets in the way of a deeper shared civic pride.

In Broadgate, a father in his 30s sits on a bench with his young daughter and remembers being taken to the Coventry Transport Museum by his school, something he thinks is standard practice for Coventry children: “You go there twice during school, right? It’s good. You go there when you’re quite young, and then you go there when you’re a little bit older, and get a little more understanding. I like that.”²⁶ The young men in the letting agency both reminisce about school visits to Coventry’s historic sites and museums – which, again, they think are common experiences for local children.

““ When we were younger I remember we used to get taken to the canal basin quite a lot, and that was looking at statues, the memorial statue and then obviously learning about it, there used to be tours when we were young so... [Was that with school?] Most schools used to do that didn't they? I thought that was quite cool. ””

Man, 25-34, Drapers Field

““ And the museum, I would always go there when I was younger. I used to love it because it's got all that stuff about World War Two and everything, the Blitz. I've not been for a long time now, I still remember the smell of the place though. I used to love going there with school, I think we went three times or something, because you used to be able to go and slide in, when they had the makeshift bunkers and stuff that they used to have in the back garden. ””

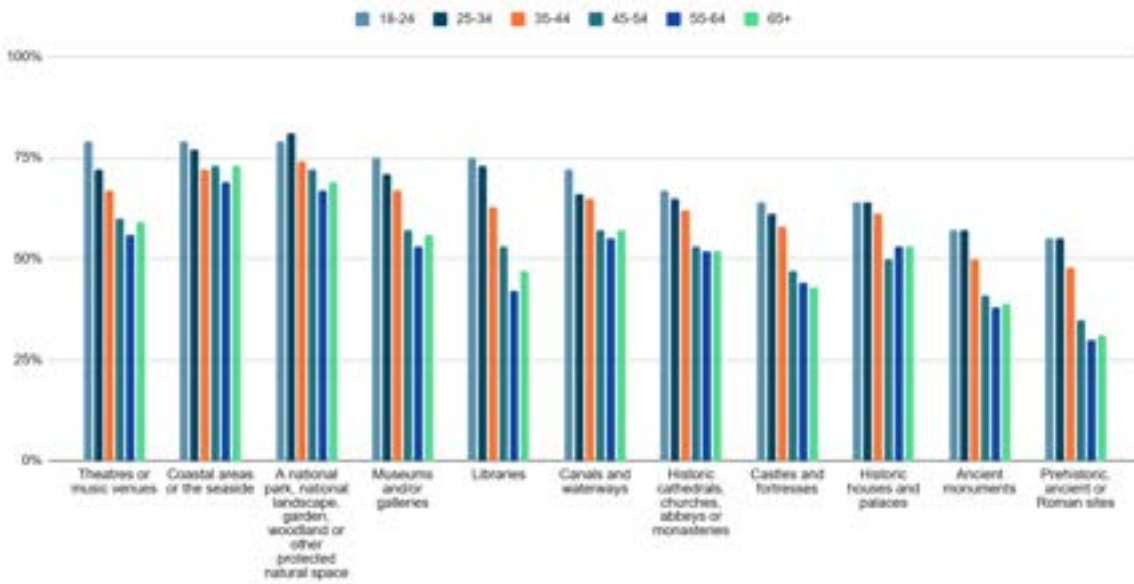
Man, 18-24, Drapers Field

Across the UK, younger people (those aged 18-44) are more likely than older ones (aged 45 or over) to have visited sites associated with history and heritage, landscape and culture in the last year. This is true across all categories, although the disparity is smaller for outdoor spaces, which older cohorts are significantly more likely to have visited than historic and cultural attractions.

²⁶ Male, 35-44, White British, City centre (Area A)

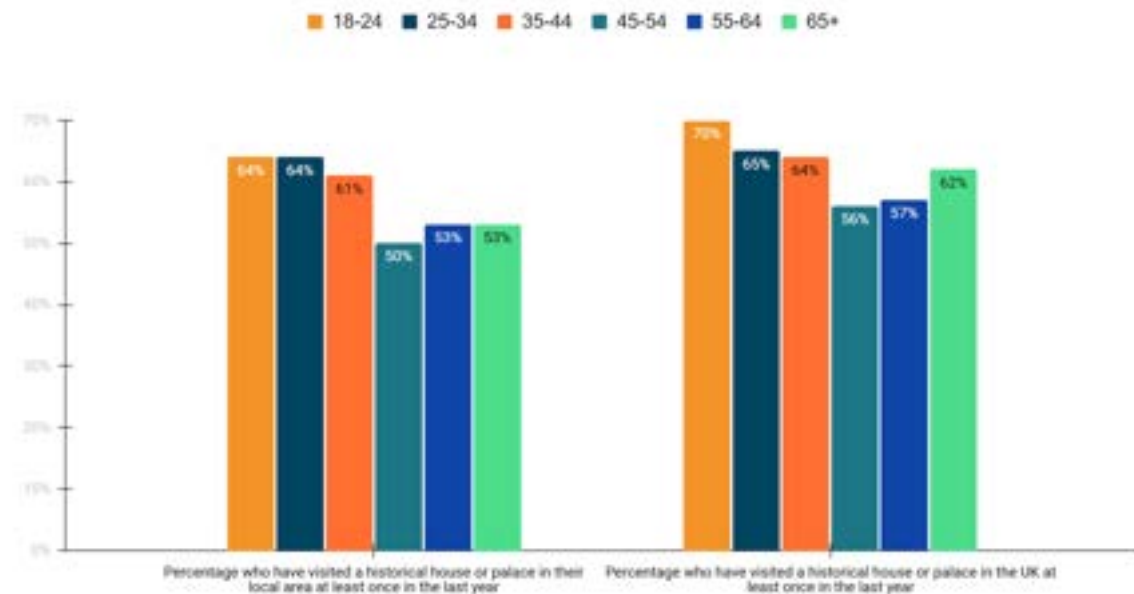
And, how often have you visited these sites in your local area in the last year, if at all?

Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,011 respondents | Fieldwork: 21st Feb - 27th Feb 2025



For historic houses and palaces, for example, all of the three younger cohorts (18-24, 25-34 and 35-44) are more likely than the older cohorts (45-54, 55-64 and 65+) to have visited one either in their local area or somewhere in the UK in the last year.

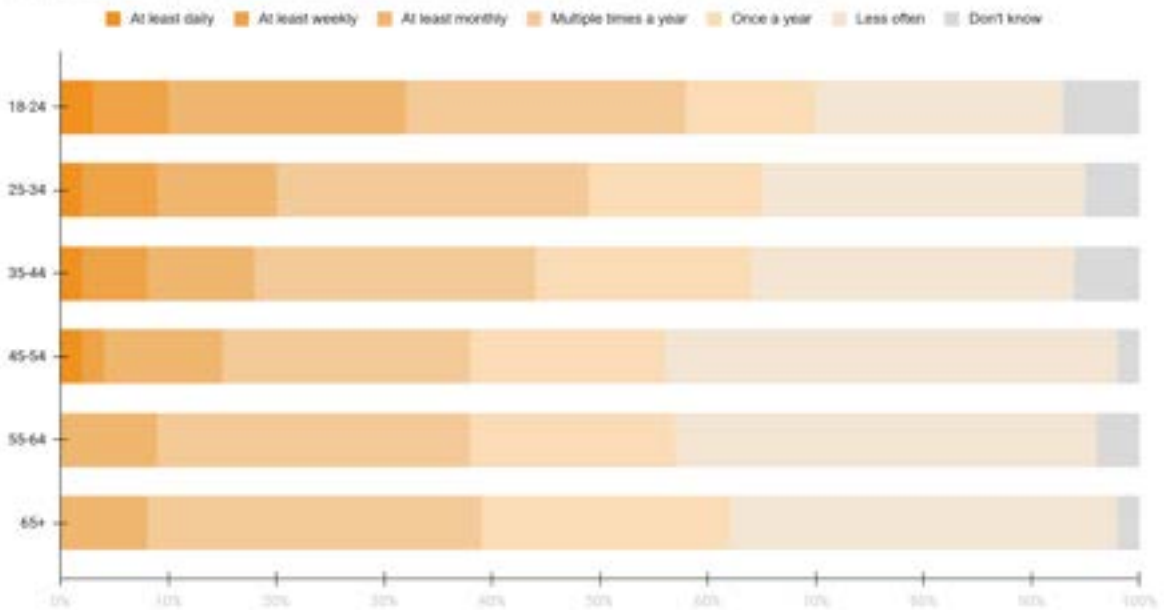
Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,011 respondents | Fieldwork: 21st Feb - 27th Feb 2025



And this isn't just about one-off visits: younger cohorts are more likely to be frequent visitors to historic houses and palaces than older cohorts are.

How often have you visited any of these sites across the UK in the last year, if at all?: Historic houses and palaces

Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 3,011 respondents | Fieldwork: 21st Feb - 27th Feb 2025



In Coventry, under-40s are more likely than over-40s to agree that “there are lots of interesting things about my local area’s history” (80% versus 66%), that “I enjoy showing my friends/family around my local area” (67% versus 44%) and that “I would recommend visiting my local area to others” (70% versus 52%).



CHAPTER FIVE:

RECOMMENDATIONS

People care about their local history and heritage: they value it, they take pride in it (and those who know about their local history and heritage are more proud of where they live than those who do not), they think it makes places better to live in, and they want to protect it and share it with future generations. They see protecting it as a moral imperative – and they feel a loss of local history and heritage in a profound and personal way. And this is at least as true of younger people as it is for older ones: in fact, heritage and history are a crucial part of connecting old and young in a shared story about place and time. Heritage is not a “nice to have”; it is something places already have, and that they must not be allowed to lose.

For policymakers, this speaks to some critically important questions. How do we address a sense of local and national decline? How do we encourage civic pride and optimism, and make people feel more positive about the places they live in? How do we foster connection and solidarity between communities and between generations? Local heritage, and local history, are part of the answer.

Physical sites, and the historic buildings people see around them, are the first things people think about when they think about local history and heritage, and so caring for and protecting, or restoring and renovating, these buildings and landmarks is key to fostering civic pride.

But this is difficult, and in many cases impossible, to achieve without public funding being part – not all – of the mix. That means allocating more money for the heritage sector, which should include exploring new options for raising revenue, and allocating it better and in more strategic and efficient ways.

Making sure people can still see and, where appropriate, use the heritage buildings around them helps build local identity and civic pride, is a crucial part of facilitating the active engagement with history and heritage which our research shows people want, and is important for educating the next generation about the places they live. That means putting mechanisms in place to ensure that these buildings are not lost against the wishes of local communities because of short-term financial concerns, and that the heritage and construction sectors have the skills they need to maintain and restore buildings people care about.

While our research did not identify significant problems with the way local history is currently taught in schools, it did find a very strong desire that children and young

people learn about the history of the place they live. The current Curriculum Review presents an opportunity to reaffirm current good practice and publicise a commitment to local history teaching – and must not downgrade the prominence of local history in the broader history curriculum.

Recommendation 1: Give heritage more weight in policies around planning, regeneration and local economic growth

This report shows that heritage and history, and the particularity of the local built environment and the things it represents to people, is at the heart of what people value in their local communities, and of local confidence and pride in place. Policymakers who want to do more to foster civic pride and confidence, and to address a broader sense of decline and lack of social solidarity, should take seriously the role of heritage in the regeneration and development of existing and new housing and civic spaces. This includes recognising both the economic value, and the broader benefits in creating places that people can take pleasure and pride in, of encouraging heritage-led regeneration projects as well as the potential for historic buildings to contribute to housing supply.²⁷

Recommendation 2: Ensure dedicated, increased and sustainable funding for built heritage, framed around place

Given the challenges facing heritage assets, in terms of funding, staffing, conservation and restoration expertise, and more, built heritage does need more money. There is no easy answer to this, at a time of severe fiscal constraints across all areas of public spending. But recognising the deep emotional importance to the public of the local built environment and historic buildings, and the sense of pride and belonging that it helps to bring, points to a need to ensure that heritage is not an afterthought when thinking about local regeneration and economic growth: it is at the heart of what people want to see in their local communities.

Place-based funding schemes such as Heritage Action Zones, and in particular High Streets Heritage Action Zones, which have delivered heritage-led regeneration of historic places aimed at bringing them back into use and restoring and enhancing local historic character, are a

²⁷ Historic England, [Heritage Works for Housing](#), August 2024

potential model for using heritage to improve the local built environment, foster civic pride and drive local economic growth.²⁸

There is a severe need not just for capital funding, for restoring and regenerating cultural heritage, but for resource funding aimed at long-term sustainability, to cover the ongoing costs of maintenance, staffing and more. Grant funding is often project-specific and largely capital, which makes it harder to ensure the sustainability of any benefits to the local community, as well as reducing job security for employees on fixed-term contracts, and making retention of skills, expertise and knowledge more difficult.

Separately, the National Trust has proposed establishing a Culture Growth Fund to build on the success of the Heritage Stimulus Fund; using development funding to support heritage by allowing heritage organisations to bid into the Community Infrastructure Levy or Section 106 funding; and ensuring that the funding mix includes revenue as well as capital funding so that heritage-based regeneration projects are sustainable and beneficial to communities in the long term.

Recommendation 3: Support strategic approaches to investing in and supporting heritage by combined and mayoral authorities

Devolution to more, and more empowered, combined and mayoral authorities across England creates opportunities for local and regional leaders to take a more strategic and ambitious approach to thinking about heritage, recognising the economic and social benefits of investing in heritage assets as part of wider regeneration and infrastructure schemes. This could include creating local culture and heritage strategies across combined authority areas rather than single local authorities, and building stronger local partnerships and networks between organisations to deliver larger projects.

Recommendation 4: Introduce a Safe Harbour Scheme to protect heritage assets at risk of disposal and degradation

Organisations that care for heritage assets, such as local authorities and charities, frequently find themselves in a position where they have to

²⁸ Historic England, [High Street Heritage Action Zones Programme Evaluation: Final Report](#), March 2025

seek to dispose of them for the sake of financial sustainability. This can create a significant risk that architecturally and historically important buildings, that hold significance and value to the communities in which they stand, can end up being sold at auction to speculative buyers who are not able to develop them, not being used or maintained, and deteriorating to a point where they cease to be usable, or viable, at all – and where nobody can realistically take them on.

Under a Safe Harbour Scheme, heritage assets meeting certain criteria, such as being open to the public or offering other forms of public benefit, would transfer into the hands of a national public body for a specified maximum period – perhaps 10 years. The body would be responsible for minimal maintenance and preventing degradation, with a view to allowing other organisations to lease the building and develop a longer-term viable financial model for using it for public benefit, after which it can be transferred to permanent new ownership for a nominal sum. This provides time and space for potential new owners to develop and prove a case for publicly beneficial use of the building.

Recommendation 5: Address skills shortages for maintaining and restoring heritage assets

Coventry has been particularly successful in restoring and redeveloping historic buildings in ways that combine commercial viability with heritage protection. But restoring and maintaining heritage assets requires both construction skills and in many cases more specialist skills in traditional crafts. Given the need for more skilled tradespeople in general to deliver on the Government's housing and net zero targets, and Historic England's Skills Needs Analysis²⁹ finding concerns about demand for traditional building skills exceeding supply in the coming years, it is important to address skills issues affecting the maintenance, conservation and restoration of heritage buildings.

This could include better promotion of construction as a career, and of heritage skills training schemes in particular, as well as widening apprenticeships, adding heritage and retrofit onto existing trade apprenticeships and supporting training providers to increase heritage skills training provision.

²⁹ Historic England, [Skills Needs Analysis for the Repair, Maintenance and Retrofit of Traditional \(Pre-1919\) Buildings in England, 2024](#), 13 September 2024

Recommendation 6: Maintain local history in the National Curriculum

Our research found very broad agreement that young people should be taught about local history, and a perception – especially among older generations, and perhaps influenced more by a lack of focus on local history in their own schooldays than by strong insight into what schools do now – that this does not happen as much as it should. That points to two things.

First, it is vital that the ongoing Curriculum and Assessment Review maintains at least as much focus on local history, at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, as the current National Curriculum. The commitment of the Review's Interim Report to “ensure that the curriculum (and related material) is inclusive so that all young people can see themselves represented in their learning”³⁰ is right, and one way to make this happen is with an appropriate emphasis on local history and on the things that make their local area unique.

Second, as the National Curriculum is refreshed through the Review and its recommendations are published and implemented, significant prominence should be given to this focus on local history so that those who do not have direct contact with the education system can have confidence that our children are being taught about their local history in a way that most people want to see.

³⁰ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: interim report](#), March 2025

APPENDIX:

METHODOLOGY

The National Trust commissioned Public First to carry out qualitative and quantitative research, and economic modelling, exploring public attitudes to local history, heritage and culture, and pride in place, and the extent to which history and heritage are valued.

At Public First, we increasingly turn to immersive research as a key approach for qualitative studies. Unlike traditional focus groups, which typically last an evening, immersive research involves sending researchers into specific locations for extended periods – often several days – to gain deeper, more authentic insights. They also allow us to access people who would otherwise be very difficult to reach. None of these conversations are pre-arranged, as we find that engaging with people in their natural environments leads to more authentic discussions and allows us to reach individuals who might never participate in focus groups or online surveys.

For this study, Public First conducted 70 in-depth interviews with Coventry residents. Over two days, 14th and 15th January 2025, we spoke with people in their local environments – in high streets and side streets, in shops, in cafes, in pubs, in parks and even in the Cathedral – allowing us to engage with a diverse range of individuals. The people we met reflected a broadly representative demographic mix, planned in advance, relative to the population. To maintain consistency and comparability, all interviews followed a shared discussion guide but we encouraged free-flowing conversations to bring out deeper, more spontaneous insights than structured research methods typically allow. We asked participants about their awareness of and connection to local history and culture, their sense of pride in Coventry and how the former may impact the latter. We also carried out a focus group of younger working-age people, aged 18-35, to gather insights from people who are not usually as available or accessible during the day.

In addition to the qualitative research, we conducted two anonymous online surveys, one national and one local. The national poll surveyed 2,022 adults across the UK between 21st and 27th February 2025, The local poll surveyed 300 Coventry adults between 20th February and 6th March 2025. In both cases, results were weighted to be representative of the UK population on interlocked age, gender, socio-economic grade and region.

As part of the polling exercise, in both the national and the Coventry poll we asked a series of economic trade-off questions to enable us to put a value on local heritage, based on the value residents themselves placed on it. The methodology for this makes

use of consumer surplus calculations, a tool often employed in the field of welfare economics, to ask people to say how much they would be prepared to pay, or to forgo, in return for retaining or losing particular local heritage assets.

Map of immersive research locations based on mapping analysis of Census data



- A: Coventry City Centre – mixed deprivation, high ethnic diversity
- B: Coventry University – low deprivation, high ethnic diversity
- C: Barkers Butts Lane – high deprivation, low ethnic diversity
- D: Swanswell Park, Hillfields – low deprivation, high ethnic diversity
- E: Near Charterhouse – low deprivation, low ethnic diversity
- F: War Memorial Park, Stivichall – low deprivation, low ethnic diversity



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