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Heritage and civic pride: voices from levelling up country

"I'd just say personally [industrial heritage] is part of the culture of this area. And I relate to that as part of my identity, because that's where I'm from. So to me, the history feeds into the culture and the culture feeds into identity. So for me, I can see it all linked in. Home – it's part of my identity."
Warehouse worker, Stoke-on-Trent.

About Public First

This project was undertaken by Public First, a global strategic consultancy that works to help organisations better understand public opinion, analyse economic trends and craft new policy proposals. Public First have worked directly with some of the world's biggest companies and government departments to produce bespoke, original policy proposals and reports derived from an evidence base of economic analysis and public opinion research.

Public First are a company partner of the Market Research Society and members of the British Polling Council.

Authors: Ed Dorrell, Mike Crowhurst and Tom Waterhouse.

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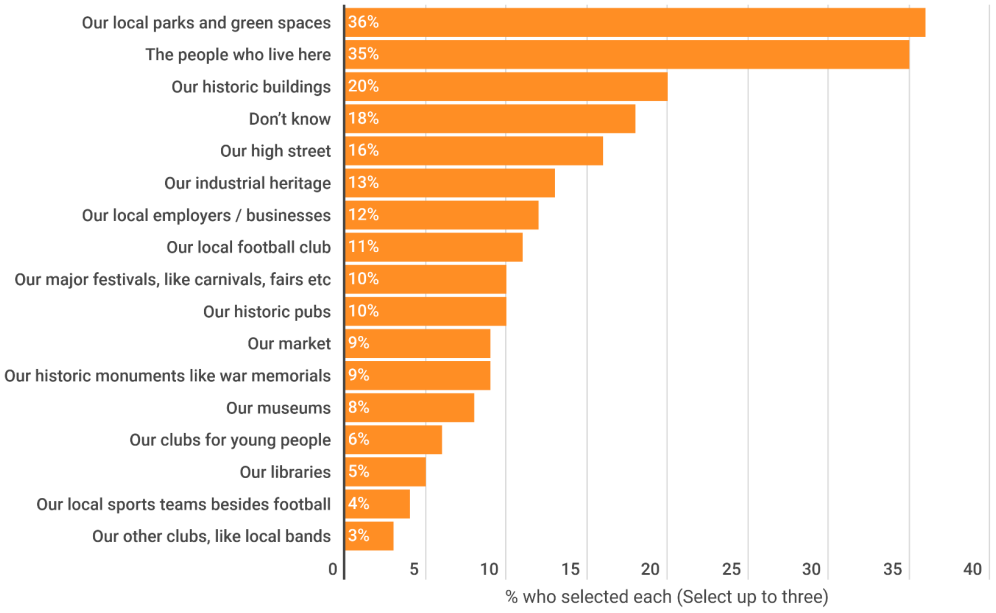
Introduction and context

Historic England commissioned Public First to carry out a qualitative research exercise to test public opinion in areas of the country associated with "Levelling Up", exploring the role of historic buildings, industrial heritage and historic parks in fostering civic pride.

Our earliest conversations were brought about by findings from our Levelling Up poll in Autumn 2021, which found that people believed historic buildings and industrial heritage were central to their sense of place and their sense of civic pride.

As can be seen in Figure 1, built heritage in its broadest sense would appear to be of significant importance to the public in these areas.

Figure 1: "What things do you think most help foster pride in your local town, city or village? Please select up to three."



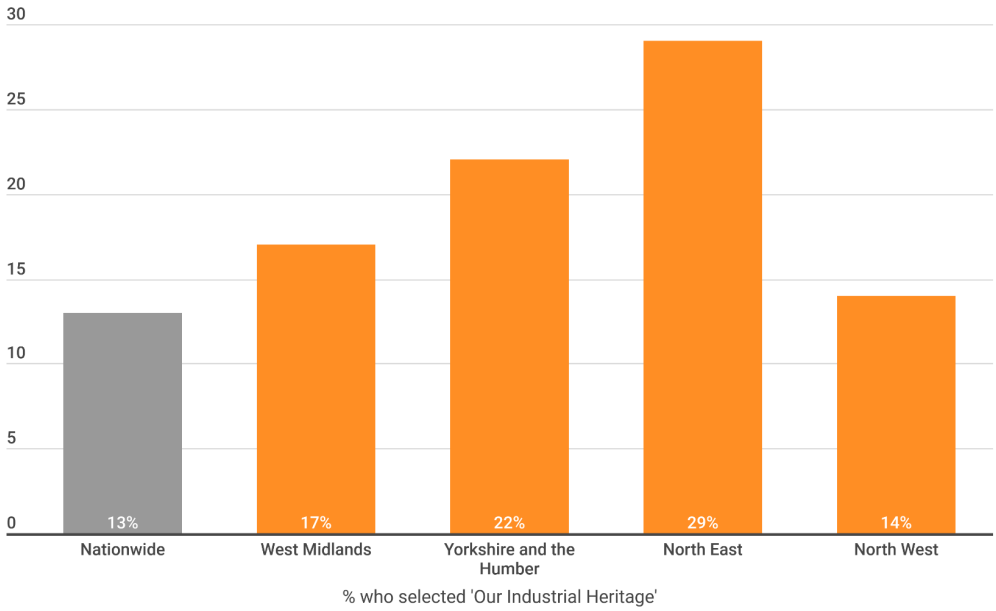
While it is clear that the findings from our poll indicate that historic buildings are important to fostering a sense of civic pride, it is worth highlighting that this answer came third – behind only local parks and local people.

Given the national conversation about "levelling up", we concluded it would be valuable to probe the role of these buildings, and of industrial heritage, in the way that normal people think about civic pride and pride of place.

Industrial heritage is a hard concept to explain and test but also to articulate: it may be buildings, but it might also be something a great deal more intangible. Local stories, local

memory and family folklore play a big role. Certainly, there would appear to be a degree of support for the idea that industrial heritage is part of local identity and pride.

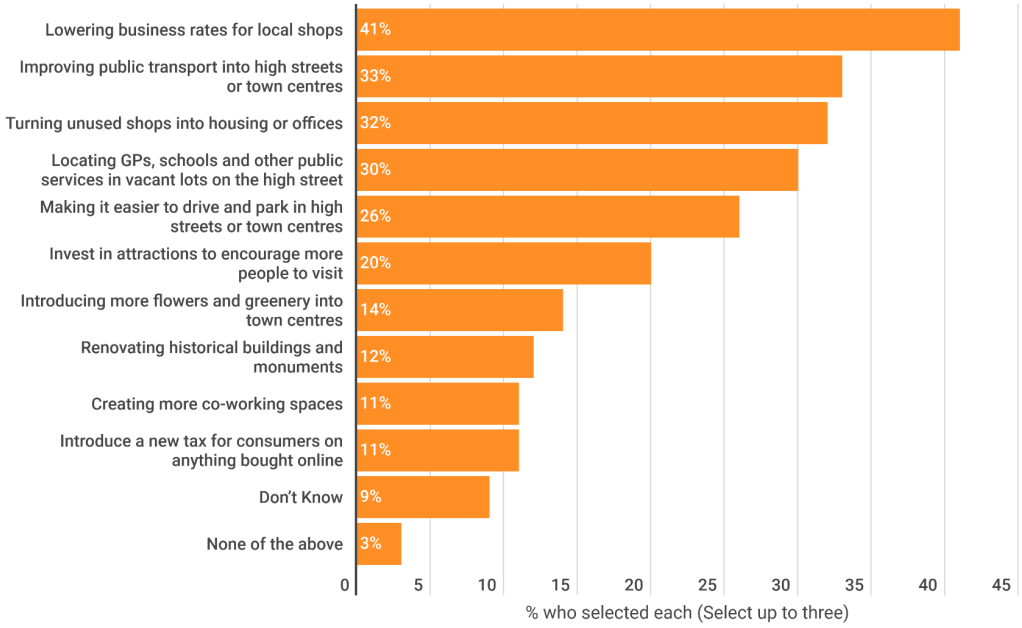
Figure 2: "What things do you think most help foster pride in your local town, city or village? 'Our industrial heritage'."



As such, we designed a programme of focus group research that would take us to many of the towns and small cities of "levelling up country", places that have both distinct historic centres and a distinct industrial heritage.

It is worth noting too that our polling also found – perhaps counterintuitively – that the same people who believed that historic buildings were central to civic pride appeared unconvinced that renovating them should be prioritised as part of the process of levelling up.

Figure 3: "Looking at the following options for policies to 'level up' local areas by improving the high street, which would you be most supportive of the Government implementing? Please select up to three of the following."



This apparent contradiction is another area that we looked to understand through our focus groups – and to explore whether the first could be used to encourage a change in attitudes to the second.

In short, we hoped that our work would go some way to locating both built and industrial heritage in the national conversation about civic pride and levelling up. It is the conclusions from this work that this report draws together, but even more importantly it extensively quotes the people we spoke to. These voices are the authentic insight - and these are the voices readers should listen to most.

Methodology

Public First carried out six focus groups over an eight-week period in January, February and March 2022 in a spread of the towns and smaller cities associated with areas the government has targeted for levelling up.

The groups were recruited to reflect the socio-economic reality of the areas that we were investigating. We spoke to working class and lower middle class voters in the following areas, filtering out any participants who were members of any national or local heritage groups.

- Darlington
- Bury
- Sheffield
- Wolverhampton
- Ashington
- Stoke-on-Trent

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Headline Findings

Town centres and landmark historic buildings make people's sense of civic identity tangible. While many struggle to articulate what they like about older buildings (for example, architectural merit warranted only rare mentions through the entire project), they value their consistency, their landmark place in their towns and cities, and their connection with their civic, community and family histories.

This can relate to churches, banks and other building types, but especially those that had a connection with everyday life: department stores and stadiums are totemic. While buildings such as the great municipal and banking architecture of the 19th Century did make an appearance, it was every-day buildings which normal people used that were of greatest significance to participants – reminding them of their communal past.

When these buildings are allowed to fall into disrepair – and the feeling is that many have – it is synonymous with their dented civic pride. Town centre decay has long been associated with a decline in civic optimism, with many participants struggling to think of reasons to "go into town". People in our groups often articulated that this was tied up with much loved historic buildings which have been falling into neglect or are even being demolished.

There is a very strong desire to protect town/city-centre historic buildings – especially familiar streetscapes – and an instinctive understanding that their rejuvenation could play a big part in the rejuvenation of their towns. If historic buildings could be brought back to life – and put to use – then they could be central to drawing people back from outskirts, suburbs and out of town shopping centres.

Pragmatism wins out: conservation must not be at the expense of the local economy. While there was almost universal support for protecting facades – a construction technology that had a surprisingly high degree of awareness – there was a willingness to see the interiors completely rebuilt in favour of usage with greater economic potential. The key was protecting the streetscape.

Industrial heritage is central to civic pride and is heavily associated with specific local identity. Participants in our groups talked proudly about their town or city's industrial past. Be it steel in Sheffield, the potteries in Stoke or the railways in Darlington, this history was intimately tied to their sense of place and sense of civic identity – not least of all because of family connections.

Buildings themselves are only part of the story. The way that industrial heritage connects to civic pride is also about local story-telling and family history and folklore; connecting with the work that their children's grandparents and great grandparents did. On the actual built fabric – for example the car factories of Wolverhampton – participants were often pragmatic about the aesthetical merits of conserving it.

Time and again participants suggested that there is a generational divide over attitudes to local history and industrial heritage. "The older generation" felt a connection with historic

buildings of all kinds, but this was not something shared by those who were younger. Both those younger participants who associated themselves with the trait and those who identified it in others were saddened by it, and hoped it could be overcome through encouragement and education.

As such, education was considered central to connecting industrial buildings with civic pride. Preservation and conservation of industrial heritage was welcomed, but as part of a wider desire to see the local past explored and explained. They wanted to have historic buildings explained to them in terms of how they were used by the people who worked or lived in them – often who they assumed would be their relatives. Participants were keen to talk about how industrial buildings can involve an emotional connection with place and rootedness, but they were also clear that this connection would only be maintained through a programme of education and explanation.

Historic industrial housing stock is seen through a prism of an idealised notion of communities of the past and of a time when there was a greater sense of belonging, but terraces have often been allowed to fall into a state of disrepair such that they are not something to aspire to. They were viewed as an almost perfect way for communities to organise themselves – but not one that could be imagined in practice today – in contrast with the modern houses and estates that most participants lived in.

Parks are a tremendous source of civic pride but not of collective historic identity. People love them as they are now – as shared space – but they have almost no sense of local history invested in them. They are a modern amenity that has come of age because of Covid.

In depth

Town centres and landmark historic buildings are physical embodiments of people's sense of civic identity - they make it tangible.

While many participants struggled to articulate what they like about older buildings, there can be little doubt that they are widely valued as a link to the past and a reminder of where towns and cities have come from.

> *"I try to instil it into my younger two and my grandkids that if we go downtown, I say to them "look up". When you're walking around town, just get your kids to look up every now and again. And you'll be surprised no matter whether it's in Wolverhampton or whatever town you're in, if you look up, sometimes you see some absolutely fantastic buildings, like where the Lloyds Bank is, where Barclays Bank is."*
> **Wolverhampton, postman, male, fifties.**

> *"Although there's obviously a lot of regeneration going on in the city centre there, they do seem to keep hold of the older buildings. And I think that is important, especially if they can keep the original structures."*
> **Sheffield, mature student, male, twenties.**

> *"I think for all towns you're going to want to keep a bit of the identity. You're going to want to keep some parts of it that kind of keep Bury Bury, you know?"*
> **Bury, restaurant worker, female, fifties.**

Many participants did not easily talk about specifics. In fact, being asked directly often made them nervous like it was an academic test paper.

> *"If you asked me what building sticks out for me, I wouldn't be able to necessarily say a particular one. However, I think the whole feel of it gives it the atmosphere and what it actually is, if you like."*
> **Stoke, warehouse worker, male, thirties.**

This support for historic buildings can relate to churches, banks and other building types, but especially those that had a connection with everyday life: department stores and other "normal buildings" were cited often.

It was everyday buildings which normal people used that were of greatest significance to participants, reminding them of their communal past. These were the buildings that they most wanted to talk about.

> *"When I was really young, I remember going to the Co-Op with my mum. And it was such a beautiful, beautiful building with the most amazing staircase....the grandeur of this room [ballroom] was just amazing. And then when the Co-Op moved out of it they moved Nisa in. That could have been an amazing wedding venue...the potential for it was amazing. But they just moved a Nisa in and nobody gets to experience that anymore."*
> **Ashington, third sector manager, female, thirties.**

> *"I mean, I remember going into Beattie's [a local department store] when I was little and the town was just so lovely."*
> **Wolverhampton, bank worker, female, forties.**

> *"We've had a lot of closures. Obviously John Lewis closed down, that was a massive thing for our city because we don't really have any department stores now, no Debenhams there, no John Lewis so you know, it's quite a struggle now to go into town for those."*
> **Wolverhampton, security industry worker, female, thirties.**

> *"So it depends what the historic building is [whether to tear it down], for me. If it's something like a church or somewhere, that has got a meaning."*
> **Sheffield, retail assistant, female, twenties.**

> *"But like if you were to come into town you no longer have Don Valley Stadium, which I think is a real shame. That's just more university buildings now. If you weren't from Sheffield you obviously wouldn't want to know – that's the only thing that springs to mind."*
> **Sheffield, credit union worker, female, fifties.**

> *"In Ashton town centre, their market used to be probably one of the best markets in the country and it would draw people in from all over the place and now they've just ruined it."*
> **Bury, driving instructor, male, fifties.**

> *"We've got [a listed building] literally on our doorstep, it's called Heath Town Baths. And it's an old wash house, where obviously people used to go for a wash. And that stood empty and derelict – when I say derelict, I mean it. And yet it needs investment. I think*

the right investment would attract the right people. It's absolutely stunning. And it stood empty for 20 years plus."
Wolverhampton, transport manager, male, forties.

When historic buildings are allowed to fall into disrepair – and the feeling is that many have – this is synonymous with participants' dented civic pride.

Town centre decay has long been associated with a decline in civic pride, and many participants struggled to think of reasons to "go into town". People in our groups often articulated that this was tied up with much loved historic buildings being allowed to fall into disrepair.

"I can't remember that one that was in the middle of the city centre that they're redoing up but that was in dire straits. It's just a shame because that's heritage that grandparents and other people have been a part of, and it just doesn't exist now. It's just knocked down rubble."
Wolverhampton, works in security, female, thirties.

"[I'm not as proud to come from Ashington] as I used to be, I'll be honest. The past I would say…it's become a forgotten land…they've knocked down loads of buildings in the middle…and it's just, it's a mess, to be honest with you."
Ashington, Royal Mail manager, thirties.

"We're just watching them [historic buildings] deteriorate in front of our eyes, and nobody's keeping on top of them."
Stoke, hairdresser, female, thirties.

"I think [Sheffield has] changed quite a lot if I'm honest. And in the city centre, I would say it's horrendous now"
Sheffield, credit union worker, female, fifties.

"If I talk about the town centre, for example, and you're talking about the history, and sort of its legacy…well, if that's just going to remain empty, then the legacy of the town centre is not going to be a positive one."
Darlington, office manager, female, fifties.

"Are some of these [historic] buildings empty and in disrepair because there's no money full stop? So it's not that they're not repairable, it's just that there is no money to demolish it and start again."
Sheffield, hospital worker, female, forties.

"The town hall, which was a fine old building, is just being left to rack and ruin."
Bury, driving instructor, male, fifties.

With shopping, for example, most don't see an alternative to out-of-town. This came up time and time again.

"We need more stuff going on in the city centre. Like, it's driving people away the way it is, people would rather go shopping in Birmingham or Merry Hill, or Telford, than go to our own actual city centre. Because there's nothing there. There's nothing to go there for."
Wolverhampton, bank worker, female, forties.

"I would say things have been allowed to decline on the whole. They decline for so many years, and then they get knocked down. And it feels like the nice buildings that we did have and the few that we still do have, you're already seeing them kind of just letting it go to rack and ruin, instead of investing money and making them a nice place to be."
Ashington, third sector manager, female, thirties.

There is a very strong desire to protect town and city centre historic buildings – especially familiar streetscapes – and an instinctive understanding that their rejuvenation could play a big part in the rejuvenation of their towns more broadly.

"I perceive the [historic buildings] as important. I think that I'd be upset if they were gone."
Stoke, warehouse worker, male, thirties.

Participants across our groups firmly believed that if historic buildings could be brought back to life – to be put to use – then they could be central to drawing people back from outskirts, suburbs and out of town shopping centres.

"I'm not saying that the buildings should be put back to their original thing because you know, nobody wants to go and do what we used to do as kids. But it's the building itself. You know, it's literally sat there, derelict. It could be used as like you say, we could have fantastic little golf courses with dinosaurs and 3D. We could use it, but it's not. It's sacrilege to knock the building down - use it for the kids that are going to want to use it."
Wolverhampton, transport manager, male, forties.

"I don't really mind [what the historic buildings are used for] as long as it's something that would attract people into the city."
Sheffield, admin officer, male, thirties.

"I just think that other cities have been doing it for decades. They've been modernising and, you know, these old buildings, they've been changing them into something that's a bit more worthwhile. It could be crazy golf…or whatever you want to do. It could be absolutely anything, it doesn't always have to be a shop. You know, stuff to live, a lot of leisure. Yeah, something that's going to draw people in to think 'oh, this is a nice place and I can do something fun as well'."
Wolverhampton, office worker, male, thirties.

"Do you know even if a Wetherspoons had gone into the old Co-Op building, they could have done something with it. We've got a new-build Wetherspoons and it's probably the nastiest, horriblest Wetherspoons I've ever seen in my life. And they're normally a company that would preserve older buildings and keep them going. And it's, I don't know, I just feel sometimes like Ashington is a little bit of a forgotten land."
Ashington, third sector manager, female, thirties.

"Yeah definitely, I would like to see them actually do something important with the buildings that we have. They just get wrecked, they get ruined. You look at some of the buildings and you think wow, that must have been something really important back in the day. But now, it's just a charity shop. I would like to see more things done with the buildings in the town."
Ashington, Royal Mail manager, male, thirties.

Pragmatism wins out: conservation must not be at the expense of the local economy.

While there was almost universal support for protecting facades, there was a willingness to see the interiors completely rebuilt in favour of something with greater economic potential. The key for most participants was protecting the streetscape - although this was not how it was articulated.

"To me, you've got to keep the facade of all of these buildings. Do what you want inside but keep the front."
Darlington, office manager, female, fifties.

"You know, you can keep the shell of a building – that can be listed. But the inside can be altered."
Darlington, delivery driver, male, forties.

"I'd say put them to use. That's my personal opinion, is put to use, and I'm not saying every single one of them but I think whilst you leave it as a building to just go into a state of disrepair, it doesn't look nice, you're going to get squatters, it's going to look a mess."
Stoke, supermarket worker, female, forties.

For many participants, deciding what proportion of historic buildings to conserve was very much about drawing a balance between local history and economic necessity. This is very much a decision wrapped up in pragmatism.

"But if there's a way that we can keep or maintain its history in some way, but actually make it purposeful, then I'm sure sort of the rest of the community is going to be happy to support it, as long as you can see the positives and see the benefit of bringing it back to life a little bit, whilst remembering its history."
Darlington, office manager, female, fifties.

"Maybe the rules need to be changed slightly. Not so that you change the building so drastically that you know, the historical value is lost. But yeah, keep it looking old from the outside and, you know, sparkling on the inside. Something really modern."
Wolverhampton, office worker, male, thirties.

"And I think for me, if a building's being used....even if it's not for its original purpose, but can you imagine if you had quite a historic building in the area, that got converted into a shop, or a restaurant or a pub or you know, whatever it might be, something that's going to bring people into that venue, and then start conversations about what it used to be and, and what's that over there all about, you know, just having small parts of it preserved would start those conversations. But I just don't know if we've got any of those buildings like that left in Ashington. And I think a lot of the really stunning buildings that we did have are either demolished, or they're heading that way because they have been left to go to rack and ruin."
Ashington, third sector manager, female, thirties.

And for some – a minority – the pragmatism goes as far as demolition: if a use can't be found for a historic building and it has been allowed to fall into rack and ruin, then perhaps it is time to say goodbye.

"Some things don't need preserving. If they're run down, they've not been looked after, they can't be restored. I think it's pointless to keep them for the sake of keeping them when you can develop an area and make more use out of it. You know, there's no point sticking in the past if something can be developed into something more modern and purposeful. But I like the idea that you can renovate and restore buildings and things like that."
Sheffield, mature student, male, twenties.

Industrial heritage is central to civic pride – and is heavily associated with specific local identity.

Participants talked proudly about their town or city's industrial past. Be it steel in Sheffield, the potteries in Stoke or the railways in Darlington, this history was intimately tied to their sense of place and sense of civic identity – not least of all because of family connections.

"Yeah, I think it is just listening to everybody talking about all the different places that you kind of forget about and it makes you feel quite nostalgic and quite proud to be from Wolverhampton. And just thinking back to the smell in the air and it's just nostalgic, isn't it? It's a part of Wolverhampton and what it's known for."
Wolverhampton, bank worker, female, forties.

"I think they'll always want it to be remembered. At the end of the day, it was a big part of our history, the potteries. So a lot of people are going to want it to be remembered and not just everyone forget about it in 20 years, 30 years, and it's like 'Oh, I didn't even know that they'd done this here'."
Stoke, warehouse worker, male, thirties.

"I think the pottery is a big thing, it's known for its pottery. And obviously it's not common now is it? Like it was previously but historically, pottery was, you know, a really big thing. Like for me personally, for my great grandma and my older generation, pottery was a big thing. And that's what Stoke has kind of got stuck with. I think it's nice that there's something different. Like for example, Liverpool might be party central - we've got something nice to go with it, you know, Stoke's got the pottery. I think it's nice that it's something different."
Stoke, office worker, female, twenties.

Participants often struggled to articulate what they thought industrial heritage meant, but once they had zeroed in on the concept, it was the issue that most animated them.

"The steel that got made…the steel factories and everything and, you know, having knives and forks that say 'Made in Sheffield', things like that. And, you know, I think, yeah, we should, we should keep hold of what's going on in the past."
Sheffield, credit union officer, female, fifties.

"It's really important what everyone's done before to get to this point. Like the miners and stuff, when you go to the Woodhorn Museum, you see what these people went through and it's absolutely horrific. The things they did. And we have a good life compared to what they went through. We need to remind everybody about it and the kids need to learn about it. I definitely agree. There's a lot of kids around here who don't know anything about where they live, or any of their history. They're not being taught in school."
Ashington, Royal Mail manager, male, thirties.

But buildings themselves are only part of the way that participants viewed industrial heritage.

The way that industrial heritage connects to civic pride is as much about local story-telling and family history/folklore as it is about buildings. It is about having a connection with the past – to the work that their children's grandparents and great grandparents did.

On the actual built fabric – for example the car factories of Wolverhampton – participants were often pragmatic about the aesthetic merits of conserving them.

"It's not just 'oh, look at that building'… It's got a reason to be there… Your history and heritage is more about what people have done for the town, how they progressed with the town and stuff like that. And that gives you more knowledge about where your industry comes from and everything else and what you give to the rest of the country."
Darlington, delivery driver, male, forties.

"The first thing that pops in my mind when you say that is probably like Neachells Lane, where there used to be lots of factories and foundries. When my granddad came over in the 60s he worked in a foundry on Neachells Lane. Industrial heritage to me, it's probably Neachells Lane, because it's all I heard when I was younger, because there's so many factories and that type of thing around there at that time."
Wolverhampton, office worker, male, thirties.

"I know more things from speaking to my grandma and stories from the elders. That's how I keep up with things. It's just whether people will carry on telling the children things like that in times to come. It depends on how important it is to that family; if their family speaks about the stories and the heritage, that's how I've always learnt things about my past: learning things off my family. It just depends how people keep it going, I don't know how they'd do that."
Stoke, warehouse worker, male, thirties.

"I'll sum it up with taking my daughter over to Bentley bridge, to go to Cosmo [World Buffet] to eat food from all over the world. Walking along the canal over the steel bridge that has got the original rope marks from when the barges are drawn by horses. So I can introduce my daughter to the heritage of the families that used to live on barges whilst we go in to eat food from all around the world. That's, you know, so old and modern mixed in one sentence, basically."
Wolverhampton, transport manager, male, forties.

"I'd just say personally it is part of the culture of that area. And I relate to that as part of my identity, because that's where I'm from. So to me, the history feeds into the culture and the culture feeds into identity. So for me, I can see it all linked in. Home, it's part of my identity."
Stoke, warehouse worker, male, thirties.

"My family were always miners. My dad didn't mine in Ashington, it was Whittle, Lynemouth and then Ellerton. Because it just slowly started closing. I sit in the pub with him sometimes…and there are a lot of the old guys that talk about the good old days and stuff like that."
Ashington, Royal Mail manager, thirties

"When we had Jackie Charlton's funeral, and literally everybody turned out. I mean, my brother had told us he looked out his window, and the Australian news were pitching up to report and it was just unbelievable. So things like that. You know, the community spirit comes out, and everyone kind of pulls together"
Ashington, third sector manager, female, thirties.

Time and again participants worried that there is a generational divide over attitudes to historic buildings.

Participants often referred to the "the older generation" feeling a connection with historic buildings of all kinds, but this was not something shared by those who were younger.

"I've got my 10-year-old daughter. Yes, she's interested, well she pretends she is just to make me happy - but she's not."
Wolverhampton, transport manager, male, forties

"I don't think the younger generation are as bothered about buildings that might have been here, you know, 200-300 years. For me personally, it's not something that would be of interest to me."

Stoke, supermarket worker, female, forties

"I personally think you need to move with the times and modernise everything to attract people back into the city. And unfortunately, the new generations aren't interested in buildings anymore. They're interested in their phones and technology. So if you were to bump it up and modernise everywhere, you'd attract a lot of people. People don't want to go and look at old buildings anymore. It's just the way the times have moved on."
Wolverhampton, security industry worker, female, thirties

As such, participants were almost unanimous that education should be central to connecting industrial buildings with civic pride.

Preservation and conservation of industrial heritage is welcomed, but as part of a wider desire to see the local past explored and explained.

"I think it is important. It's nice to have history because if you've got a history, it adds to the culture itself. And culture is part of the people's identity. So it kind of all links in really. How to remember it, I don't know - perhaps maybe do like some sort of heritage centre. I've certainly seen that in other places. When I visited Cornwall many years ago they've got mining heritage-type places. And that's symbolic for that area. I thought that was really cool."
Stoke, gardener, male, fifties.

"They [young people] could probably tell us everything about Hitler. They could tell us everything about the Egyptians. But they couldn't tell us anything that happens [in the area]... When I was at school, we used to go on trips to Woodhorn Colliery, Beamish Museum, stuff like that. My son's 16, our daughter's 14, one who is eight and one who is six. And they haven't even been to a museum if you want the honest answer. Yeah, they don't go to them."
Ashington, Royal Mail manager, male, thirties.

Historic buildings should be explained in terms of how they were used by the people who worked or lived in them – often who participants assumed would be their relatives. Participants were keen to talk about how industrial buildings can involve an emotional connection with place and rootedness, but they were also clear that this connection would only be maintained through a programme of education.

"If you go to London and there's plaques up about different buildings and everything - I think that should be in every town... Have a row of houses with a plaque saying, 'here stands the houses that used to be the houses for the railway workers', it's got a bit more sort of oomph to it."
Darlington, childminder, female, forties.

"You know, maybe, somewhere on High Street, there should be like a blue plaque somewhere, or something that explains something about the interesting history of the Battle of Wednesfield as well, that might kind of stop people and make them wonder."

Wolverhampton, office worker, male, thirties.

"Obviously being from here, you know that the steel that got made in the steel factories and everything and having knives and forks that say: 'Made in Sheffield'. And I think, yeah, we should keep hold of what's going on in the past. And, you know, like my kids growing up, hopefully at school, might, you know, learn about the city that they come from."
Sheffield, admin officer, male, thirties.

Historic industrial housing stock is seen as an almost idealised form of communal living from a bygone age. However, terraced housing has often been allowed to fall into a state of disrepair such that they are not something to aspire to.

"But I think the big shame with the Colliery Rows is you've got some really rundown houses and then some beautiful houses and it kind of depends who the houses fell into the hands of as to how well they're looked after. You know, so the Colliery Rows could be something to be really proud of. There are some absolutely beautiful houses there. And then there's some that have been snapped up really cheaply by landlords or whatever, and haven't really been looked after. And I think that's a shame."
Ashington, third sector manager, female, thirties.

"[The terraced houses] have just been run down to the ground so it won't be too long 'til I guess they're knocked down and bigger places with smaller rooms are built. We will lose all of that heritage."
Wolverhampton, security industry worker, female, thirties.

"I look at those terraced houses near the railway station and I think maybe these people are walking past and not looking at it. But I look at those bricks and I just think - History."
Darlington, office manager, female, fifties.

Many participants viewed historic industrial housing stock as an almost ideal way of living – but not one that could be imagined today – not least in contrast with the modern houses and estates where most people live in the 21st Century.

"When you look at the heritage of the terraced houses, you think of those old photos and you see old film footage. There are families out there, cleaning the steps and, you know, cleaning the rugs on the wall. And it was a community. And like I said, when I was on the council, I managed all of these areas for the street-cleaning services and it was just an absolute nightmare."
Wolverhampton, transport manager, male, forties.

"I didn't like the little terraced houses because there's no real gardens or anything, they're just backyards and it was a real struggle trying to find a house that was a house in my opinion. So they're really small houses and they were perfect for what

they were built for all those years ago. But for me with a family I felt like we needed more space and definitely more outdoor space."
Ashington, retail worker, female, thirties.

"I prefer the new style houses over the old ones. Especially the terraces. Parking is the main thing for me. I've got a van and I've got a car as well. So yeah, I'd prefer the newer houses compared to the older ones."
Stoke, gardener, male, fifties.

Parks are a tremendous source of civic pride but not of collective historic identity.

People love parks as they are now – as shared space – but they have almost no sense of local history invested in them. Even when prompted about their history, they are discussed as contemporary amenities and are not seen as local heritage. This was a belief also evidenced in our polling (see figure 4).

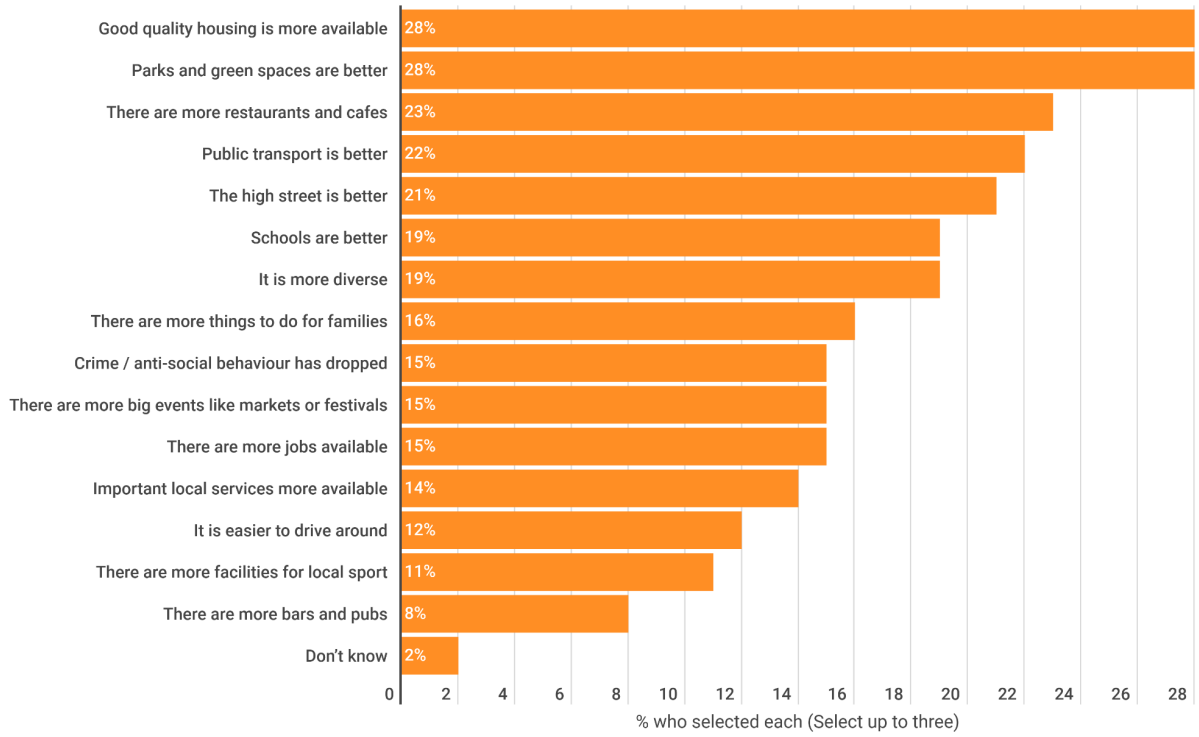
"And it's so nice to have this green space right in the middle of the city right where you have all those places to eat and drink and shop. And then you can walk around this gorgeous park and woods that makes you feel like you are completely in the middle of the countryside."
Sheffield, retail assistant, female, twenties.

"People in Wolverhampton do love their parks, and they've got plenty of them. And that's one of the real positives I think about this city - the parks."
Wolverhampton, postman, male, fifties.

Several participants talked about how parks had come into their own during Covid, and it is possible that this could be something that an education campaign by heritage groups could lean into.

"I think if anything, the pandemic, one of the things it's taught us is, you know, getting Woodhorn museum out and having a walk and just appreciating these parks. It has now become quite a fundamental part of everybody's life."
Bury, driving instructor, fifties, male.

Figure 4: "You said that you thought your town, city or village was a better place to live compared to ten years before. Which of the following best explains why? Please select up to three."



In summary

Taken as a piece, there are two main themes that run through the findings from this exercise.

The **first** is about the kind of historic buildings that most normal people associate with listing: landmark buildings. People like these buildings and they do want to see them conserved and – to a point – they want to see them protected.

But there is a balance. In the towns and cities of the areas identified as in need of "levelling up", there is a deep pragmatism too - they are keen to see their historic buildings protected, but not at the cost of something that might look or feel like economic regeneration or even just job creation. This is a line our participants were prepared to walk.

The **second** is about industrial heritage. More than landmark historic buildings - churches, town halls, town centre department stores – industrial heritage is tied to civic pride and sense of place. People feel, sense and remember their industrial heritage in an intangible way.

But they worry that because it is so often intangible, it is not a legacy that they can be sure will be passed on to their children and their children's children. And while industrial heritage may be intangible right now, the possibility of education and information programmes about physical buildings is something that could, in a very real way, go some way to addressing this.

What does this mean for policy making?

The findings of this research are relevant to anyone considering the role of heritage in communities around the country. In particular, we believe those thinking about heritage and policy should consider further:

1. How historic buildings interact with the preservation of intangible heritage

Many of those who participated in this research saw historic buildings as just one part of the broader industrial heritage of their area. In this sense, buildings were simply the most visible aspect of local history, which was also made up of stories, customs and traditions which people felt were also important to preserve.

Those managing historic buildings should therefore consider how they can most effectively be used to support and maintain this intangible heritage, as well as preserving the fabric of the buildings themselves. Historic England's new 'Everyday Heritage' grant scheme provides one model for how buildings can be used in projects which link local people to their past.

2. How to better recognise the relationship between local people's experience of a building and its historic significance

Much of what we found people valued about historic buildings centred on the way they, or people they knew, had interacted with them. For most, the experiences that a building had enabled mattered just as much as its particular architectural merits, or its links to historic events or broader issues of historic interest.

Those involved in decisions about historic buildings should therefore consider how the local community's experience of them can be taken into account, alongside those considerations about historic significance which typically drive policy making. This could have a range of implications for issues such as how investment is allocated or decisions around local listing.

3. How to help young people and families interact with and learn from historic buildings

Our research found a clear generational divide in awareness and engagement with historic buildings, as well as a shared desire to overcome this with better education for young people.

Understanding local heritage was seen as an important part of building young people's connection to the areas they came from. But there was a sense that some of the opportunities

which had existed to do this – whether through family visits or work with local schools - had been lost.

Those involved in heritage and education should therefore consider how these links might be revived. This could mean fostering closer partnerships between schools and heritage assets, such as those supported by the DfE's Schools and Museums Programme, boosting Historic England's existing Heritage Schools programme, or finding other ways to make it easier for families to understand the buildings around them.

4. How to strike the right balance between new development and the restoration and use of existing buildings

Whilst people were pragmatic about the extent to which historic buildings should be preserved in their full original form (which is in line with Historic England's Constructive Conservation doctrine), there was a strong desire to see them being used and a clear preference for this over new development where possible. Historic buildings were seen as a force that could help keep people in town and city centres, in contrast to developments on the outskirts that were drawing visitors and residents away.

Those involved in urban planning should therefore consider carefully how these preferences can be properly reflected – whether in the incentive frameworks for different kinds of development overall or in the individual decisions made at a local level.

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