

Case study for Heritage Counts 2015

Theme demonstrated by case study:	A local authority caring for heritage
Name of project/group:	Leicester Heritage Action Plan and Heritage Partnership
Location:	City of Leicester
Duration (if applicable):	Since 2011

Short description of project:

Leicester City Council has prepared a Heritage Action Plan which sets out the way forward for the historic environment over the next five years, and convened a Heritage Partnership which includes key organisations interested in the city's historic environment. Details are available from: <http://www.leicester.gov.uk/planning-and-building/conservation/heritage-conservation>.

The Heritage Partnership was established by Sir Peter Soulsby, Leicester's first directly-elected City Mayor, in 2011. Its creation was one of the high-profile '100 day commitments' which he announced soon after taking office. The aim was 'to engage organisations and individuals from across the city, and working with the Council to promote the preservation, use and interpretation of Leicester's historic built environment'.

The Council worked with the partnership to develop the city's first Heritage Action Plan, which the Council published later that year. The partnership continues to support and guide the Council, bringing together a diverse range of partners with shared interest in the future of the historic environment. It comprises 13 amenity groups, learned societies, professional associations and university representatives, statutory organisations and Council members and staff.

What would have happened without this project/group?

Leicester's diverse heritage includes one of the largest pieces of standing Roman masonry in the country (the Jewry Wall), a surviving medieval street pattern, a wealth of Victorian architecture, and acclaimed 20th century University buildings by James Stirling and Denis Lasdun.



Jewry Wall (Historic England).



The Magazine Gateway in Leicester (Historic England).

The Action Plan grew from a recognition that protection of this resource for the city's future requires more than the reactive tools provided by legislation. The Plan enables the Council to prioritise 'the most urgent and vulnerable assets, without losing sight of long-term issues, incremental loss of heritage or opportunities for major improvement projects'.

The Action Plan highlights in particular the role heritage can play in its cultural and economic life.

People from many different cultures have made Leicester their home – for instance Diwali celebrations on Belgrave Road have become an attraction for visitors from well beyond the city, and new communities are adapting historic buildings to new uses. The Action Plan has helped Leicester to both celebrate its historic roots and to sustain and develop its identity for the future so that all sections of the community can call Leicester ‘home’.

Economically, the Action Plan ensures that the city’s historic character is recognised as contributing to its prosperity, while also receiving protection. It has helped to define the city’s Cultural Quarter and distinctive boutique shopping areas in the Lanes and St Martin’s Square. The bones of King Richard III were reinterred in the Cathedral in 2015, following their discovery nearby in 2012, and a visitor centre opened in July 2014. These attractions and the historic character of the city combine to create a significant destination for visitors.

How did the project achieve its objectives?

The Action Plan sets out a rolling programme of action across five themes, each of which supports a range activities, including the examples highlighted below:

- **heritage at risk**, for instance engaging with owners and occupiers of buildings on the heritage at risk registers
- **heritage protection**, including a programme of reappraisal of conservation areas, updating and improving the local heritage asset register and reviewing the article 4 directions in conservation areas
- **proactive projects**, such as purchase and repair of Friars’ Mill, an early spinning mill which suffered a disastrous fire after being empty for several years, and is now being redeveloped for employment
- **promotion and participation**, for instance publication of an updated edition of *The Quality of Leicester* on the city’s character and heritage
- **on-going conservation work** by the local authority to manage change to its historic places.

Each year, progress is reported and a programme set for the following year, together with an agenda set for the years ahead. In this comprehensive programme the Council is supported and advised by the Heritage Partnership.

What difference has it made? Main outcomes and outputs.

The Action Plan has enabled the city to take a strategic approach to managing its heritage, and informed a number of other important initiatives, for instance:

- Connecting Leicester, an ambitious capital programme integrating aspects of the city’s life and reducing the dominance of road traffic, which delivered public realm

improvements and regeneration of the city's market

- a Townscape Heritage Initiative area which is drawing in £1.5m of funding from Heritage Lottery Fund and others to regenerate the Greyfriars area.
- helping the city takes full advantage of the unprecedented attention which the city attracted following the discovery in 2013 of the remains of King Richard III.
- The annual reports and future programmes reflect achievements and progress over time.

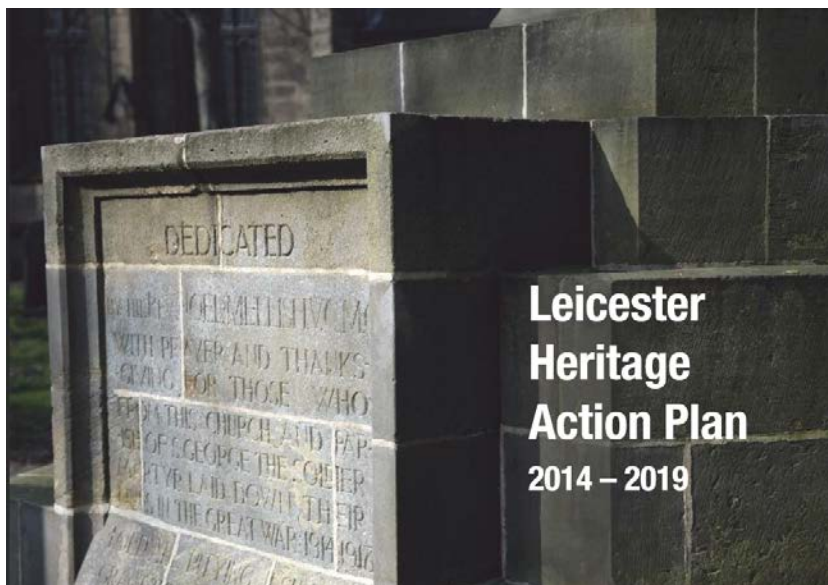
What were the main lessons learnt or challenges would anything be done differently?

The action plan provides a mechanism to take account of changes in the council's priorities and changes in legislation, policy and economic conditions. There have been a number of unforeseen changes and opportunities, including the discovery of Richard III, that necessitated changes in direction.

What is the future for the case study?

The latest iteration of the Heritage Action Plan sets an agenda to 2019, which includes:

- integrating the register of Grade II buildings at risk, which the council undertook of its own initiative, with the national register to be developed by Historic England
- continuing to implement the six-year Townscape Heritage Initiative
- embedding protection of the historic environment in the new local plan, preparation of which has just begun
- Promoting Leicester as a tourism destination through its association with Richard III and through the heritage which the Action Plan and partnership are helping to reveal, conserve and cherish.



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