

Sunderland Heritage Action Zone Conservation Area

The Sunderland Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) encompasses two conservation areas: the Old Sunderland conservation area (designated 1969) and the Old Sunderland Riverside conservation area (designated 1994). Both of these conservation areas are on Historic England's Heritage at Risk register.

Parts of the Sunnyside conservation area (designated in 1969 and extended in 1989) are also included in the Heritage Action Zone. The HAZ also contains 28 listed buildings, two of which are Grade I listed, two Grade II* and the remainder Grade II. In addition to this, there are dozens of unlisted buildings of heritage value.

Sunderland's Heritage Action Zone spans a substantial length of Sunderland's riverfront and extends south, covering some of the most historically significant parts of Sunderland's Old Town. These include: Sunderland's historic high streets (East and West) plus Fawcett Street, the town centre's principal shopping street during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Sunderland's Old Town grew rapidly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the expansion of coal mining and shipbuilding industries. The development of the port from the 1850s led to a huge increase in trade in the latter half of the century.



The Eagle Building, Sunderland. © Historic England

The decline of Sunderland's industries throughout the twentieth century led to the decline of Old Sunderland and the western migration of the commercial heart of the town. Redevelopment radically changed the character of the area in the post-war period with terraced housing replaced, first by courtyard developments and later by blocks of flats.

Old Sunderland comprises of two clusters of important historic buildings, one centred on the Town Moor; the second focussed on the historic High Street area and Quays below. The group around the Moor includes the landmark Grade I listed Holy Trinity Church, the Orphanage Asylum, Donnison School and Trafalgar Almshouses. Most of the original street pattern here is lost; nonetheless it is remarkably evocative of the Town's heyday.

The riverside area encompasses the south shore of the river from Panns Bank to Noble Quay and includes many historic wharfs and docks. The quayside was once densely populated with industry but today, Wylam Wharf and the Bonded Warehouse are the only historic industrial buildings that remain.

The area is one of the most deprived areas in the country with one in two households living in poverty. The area suffers from levels of unemployment that are significantly higher than average (21% compared with a Sunderland average of 10.4% and a national average of 7.6%). It also has a range of other social issues including low levels of literacy plus high suicide and crime rates.

The area has a close-knit community and a thriving voluntary sector. There are a large number of groups (232 in the East Sunderland area and 9 in the HAZ area specifically) who operate within the community and promote social inclusion through the events and activities that are organised.

The HAZ area suffers from a mix of social and economic issues affecting its historic environment. There is a significant amount of Heritage at Risk in the area, worsened by a lack of maintenance and / or unauthorised works. There are several buildings along Fawcett Street and High Street West that are in particularly poor condition.

Transient retail operators, poor quality workmanship and visually obtrusive shop fronts have combined to undermine the quality of the historic environment in the area. Together with a lack of management information about the area's heritage, this means there is a real risk of losing key local heritage features forever.

Fortunately, there are a number of opportunities within the HAZ area that have the potential to promote good growth. For example, the area provides the most direct link to the waterfront along its historic high streets. The route runs straight from the city centre to the waterfront and then the port.

The area is therefore strategically positioned to extend the economic progress of the city centre towards the waterfront by re-using historic buildings along this route, establishing new businesses, securing inward investment and creating jobs. Events such as the Tall Ships Races 2018, Sunderland's Great Places project and the City of Culture 2021 bid will further strengthen support for the area's wider revitalisation.

In addition, there are a number of successful heritage groups within the area; however the collaboration and co-ordination of activities could be improved. Working alongside local heritage groups, through the HAZ programme, would provide the opportunity to enhance

the accessibility of the area's heritage, as well as reconnecting the local community with the historic environment in which they live.

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