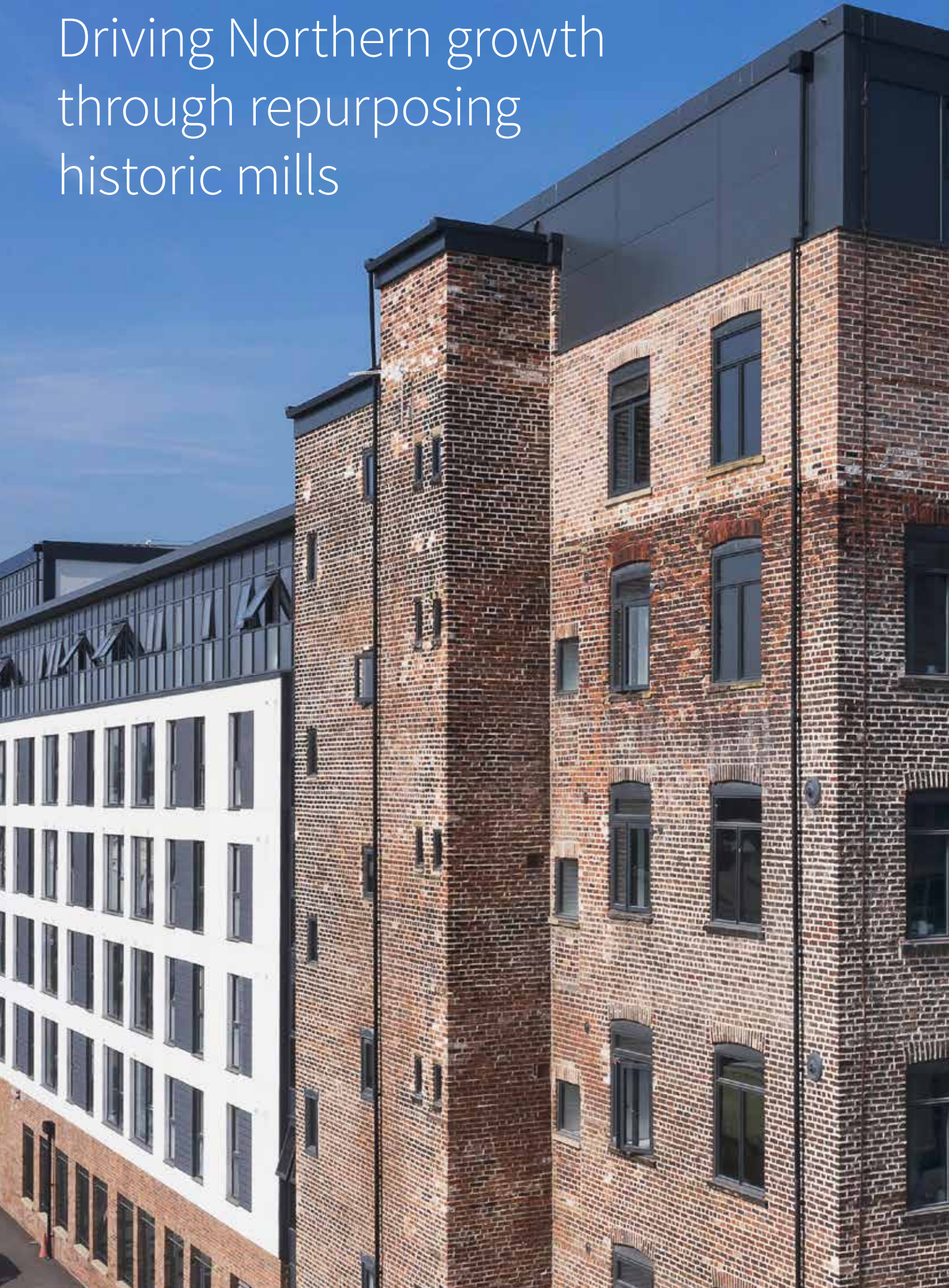


Driving Northern growth  
through repurposing  
historic mills





Textile mills are fundamental to the history, culture and landscape of northern England. These distinctive, character-filled places can accommodate wonderful homes, workplaces and cultural spaces. Our historic mill buildings offer a tangible link to the past and deserve a future at the centre of local communities.

These key pieces of northern culture should not only be celebrated but also used to power economic and social growth. Heritage and culture can transform places for the better, driving up business confidence and civic pride, attracting visitors to strengthen economic growth, and providing positive reasons for businesses and workers to locate in an area.

Since Historic England published its reports for Yorkshire and the North West in 2016 and 2017, *Engines of Prosperity New Uses for Old Mills*, [historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/engines-of-prosperity-new-uses-old-mills/](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/engines-of-prosperity-new-uses-old-mills/), there has been significant uptake in the repurposing of textile mills for residential and commercial use.

However, there remains a considerable pipeline of opportunity which can help to support the Government's objectives for both rebalancing the economy and promoting sustainable economic growth.

Historic England has recently recommissioned Cushman and Wakefield to produce an updated assessment of the potential benefits arising from vacant and underutilised textile mills across the North of England. This paper outlines the headline findings and articulates the contribution that repurposed textile mills can make to this evolving agenda.

**688**  
**MILLS**

## Scale of opportunity

The scale of potential repurposed textile mills is vast. Cushman and Wakefield reviewed research produced on behalf of Historic England in Greater Manchester, Yorkshire (predominantly West Yorkshire) and Pennine Lancashire and identified:

- **688 mills** that are vacant or underutilised that offer repurposing potential. These include 293 in Greater Manchester, 237 in Yorkshire, and 158 in Pennine Lancashire<sup>1</sup>
- Cumulatively, these mills offer circa **2.3 million sqm of vacant floor space**; over 1.1 million sqm in Greater Manchester, 750,000 sqm in Yorkshire, and 400,000 sqm in Pennine Lancashire

The Engines of Prosperity: New Uses for Old Mills studies demonstrated the potential for repurposing vacant and underutilised textile mills for residential and commercial uses, underlining the attributes of mills for both occupiers and investors.

If all of the vacant mills across the North were to be brought forward for residential use, it is estimated they could accommodate in the order of **42,000 homes**; over 13,000 apartments in Greater Manchester, almost 9,000 in Yorkshire and nearly 5,000 in Pennine Lancashire, and a further 15,400 homes on surplus land.<sup>2</sup> This represents a considerable scale of residential re use potential which could accommodate a significant proportion of local areas' housing needs.

Mills are also proven to be capable of being repurposed for commercial uses, with office occupiers being attracted to the distinctive and quirky environments, as well as light industrial uses such as workshops and studios. If all of the vacant mill floor space were to be repurposed for an equal mix of office and light industrial use, it could accommodate in the order of **84,000 jobs**; 41,500 in Greater Manchester, 27,600 in Yorkshire, and 14,500 in Pennine Lancashire.

The scale of the repurposing opportunity is therefore considerable.

**2.3 million**  
**SQM OF VACANT FLOOR SPACE**

## A viable solution for rebalancing the country's economy

Repurposed textile mills offer a viable option for rebalancing the country's economy. The 2016 and 2017 Engines of Prosperity studies underlined the regenerative benefits of repurposed textile mills, not only in terms of localised physical and environmental renewal, but in acting as catalysts for regenerating communities and reinvigorating local economies.

The reuse of these assets can drive wider place-based regeneration efforts in villages, towns and cities of all sizes across the North, providing distinctive anchors that are embedded in the history of a place that can also help to drive its future success.

Cushman and Wakefield's study established the considerable potential for vacant textile mills to release social and financial value for local communities. If all the mills were repurposed for commercial uses, the 84,000 jobs accommodated could generate in the order of **£3bn of gross value added** – a measure of economic output – to the local economy.

Mills are also proven to be attractive to private sector investment, with many mill investments having yielded substantial returns for investors as well as financial value for local areas. Cushman and Wakefield's study underlined the potential for private **capital values of circa £8.3bn** if all the mills were brought forward for use as market homes.

The reuse of mills also generates significant fiscal benefits for local areas. Returning a mill to active commercial use brings financial benefit through business rates and, in residential use, through council tax and New Homes Bonus.

## A Sustainable option

The reuse of mills also aligns with national and local ambitions for improving environmental sustainability, and in particular decarbonisation targets. Mills offer a sustainable alternative to urban extensions through reusing brownfield sites, easing pressure on greenfield land and limiting encroachment. Their often-central locations also minimise the need for travel as a result of proximity to jobs, services and amenities. Given this potential, Historic England is working collaboratively with Oldham Council to develop a proactive mill strategy for the borough, an approach that has value across the region. A key aim of this work is to facilitate the effective and efficient focus on brownfield land in delivering against local housing need.

Evidence shows that mills can be successfully renovated to meet energy conservation requirements and explore renewable energy generating opportunities. Research produced for Historic England underlines that refurbishing or retrofitting a historic building can generate a lower level of carbon than an equivalent new build property over a period of 60 years when accounting for whole life carbon impacts. [historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2019/hc2019-re-use-recycle-to-reduce-carbon/](https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2019/hc2019-re-use-recycle-to-reduce-carbon/)

This has also been articulated through a number of research articles on the 'Circular Economy' in which there is recognition that the adaptive reuse of buildings stimulates economic growth, and reduces material usage and energy consumption.

1 Based on Building at Risk Surveys commissioned by Historic England for Pennine Lancashire (published 2012, collated 2018), Greater Manchester (published 2017), and West Yorkshire (published 2019).

2 Surplus land relates to land in Yorkshire only due to limitations to available data on sites in the North West.

42,000  
HOMES

84,000  
JOBS

## Evidence of success

There have been multiple exemplars across the north which have showcased the potential for repurposed mills since the 2016 and 2017 Engines of Prosperity studies, examples of which are provided here.



Crusader Mill  
images © Historic  
England Archive

Conditioning House  
images © Priestley  
Group



### **Crusader Mill, Piccadilly East, Manchester City Centre**

Repurposed mill building of 8454 sqm for 123 apartments. Built in around 1830 and repurposed by developer Capital & Centric completing in 2021. The scheme includes communal green spaces whilst some of the penthouse apartments have private roof terraces. Some of the homes are only available for first time buyers, helping to address affordable housing requirements.



### **Conditioning House, Bradford City Centre**

Conditioning House, a Grade II listed building in Bradford city centre, was built in 1902 to monitor textile quality in the wool industry.

The mills fell into a state of disrepair and neglect for a period of 30 years until developer, Priestley Homes, part of the Priestley Group, carried out the £18 million renovation, completing in 2021.

The building now houses 153 apartments with a meticulously refurbished glass atrium and workspace at ground-floor level. Planning is also submitted to create 13 more apartments in the lower ground floor.





### Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings, Shrewsbury

A major mill complex built in 1797 and housing the world's first iron framed building. The buildings had become vacant and were at risk and, exceptionally, Historic England stepped in to acquire the building and execute a phased restoration programme. The mill complex includes proposals for 28,000 sqft of renovated office space, 120 new homes and other uses. The initial phase comprising visitor facilities and commercial workspace is to be completed in 2022. The scheme is also a demonstrator for how adaptive reuse can accommodate environmental sustainability principles, with a ground source heat pump accounting for an estimated 69% of the heating and hot water requirements of the Main Mill and Kiln, innovative insulation retrofit systems to minimise heat loss, as well as electric vehicle charging points.

### Rutland Mills, Wakefield

Rutland Mills are a key part of a mixed-use, arts-led, regeneration scheme by City and Provincial Properties. Intended to transform the waterfront and diversify the offer of the city, the scheme has been called a 'game-changer' for Wakefield, and includes the repurposing and restoration of the Grade II listed mill complex, opposite the Hepworth Wakefield, delivering 8,450 sqm of new commercial floor space, a diverse food market as well as spaces for education, music and hotel accommodation.

Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings images © Historic England Archive

Rutland Mills images © Stuart Pennycock, Opera



Beehive Mill:  
 Top image © Tom Bird, Urban Splash  
 Bottom image © Historic England Archive



Brierfield Mill  
 images © Barnfield Construction



### **Beehive Mill, Manchester**

Beehive Mill is a Grade II\* listed former cotton mill in the district of Ancoats in Manchester. It has recently been re-purposed by Urban Splash, offering 40,633 sqm of private office space, co-working facilities and a coffee shop. The space attracts smaller businesses, alongside anchor tenants such as Beehive Lofts and the Prince's Trust.

### **Brierfield Mill, Pendle, Lancashire**

The former cotton mill was built in 1832 and acquired by Pendle Council in 2012 using Government funding. The mill complex is being repurposed through Northlight, a joint venture partnership between Pendle Council and Barnfield Investment Properties, and will deliver a mix of workspace, leisure and residential developments. The workspace and leisure elements have been completed and the residential is under construction. In total the development will include 35,000 sqm of commercial, residential and retail/leisure space, including 170 apartments.





Hunslet Mill images  
© Historic England  
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Woodhill Mill  
images © Specialist  
Property Solutions

**Hunslet Mill, Leeds**

The Hunslet and Victoria flax spinning mills in Leeds were originally earmarked for demolition, but the 1.25 ha site has been given a new lease of life as Victoria Riverside. The collection of Grade II and II\* mill buildings are being renovated by developer JM Construction to create 350 homes. The initial phases comprising the first four mills have completed with the remaining phases due to complete in 2023.

**Woodhill Mill, Bury**

Originally converted in 2009, Woodhill Mill has been updated by Specialist Property Solutions to create Wharfside, a stylish collection of 51 apartments and duplexes within walking distance of Bury's town centre. The scheme includes a significant affordable housing element, opening up mill living to a broad community of occupants.

## The future opportunity

There is a considerable pipeline of mills coming forward for repurposing, driven by the growing appetite from occupiers and investors for differentiated, quality environments. However there remains a number of properties that require targeted investment in order to secure new futures. These assets, with their potential to release economic, social, environmental and financial values for local communities, can be a cornerstone of strategies for rebalancing the country through regenerating our towns and cities across the North, whilst contributing to the transition to a green economy.

In delivering this, the lessons from the Engines of Prosperity New Uses for Old Mills studies remain highly valid: public and private sector partners need to work creatively and collaboratively to release the potential that exists across the North.

Front cover:  
Hunslet Mill, Leeds  
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### Historic England

Contact: Lianna Francis-Kelly  
T: 01904 601862  
E: [lianna.francis-kelly@historicengland.org.uk](mailto:lianna.francis-kelly@historicengland.org.uk)

Contact: Antony Lowe  
T: 01904 601869  
E: [antony.lowe@historicengland.org.uk](mailto:antony.lowe@historicengland.org.uk)



### Cushman & Wakefield

Contact: Stephen Miles  
T: +44 (0) 113 233 7471  
E: [stephen.miles@cushwake.com](mailto:stephen.miles@cushwake.com)



### Latham's

Contact: Jon Phipps  
T: +44 (0) 115 648 5012  
E: [j.phipps@lathamarchitects.co.uk](mailto:j.phipps@lathamarchitects.co.uk)