



Historic England

Heritage and Social Prescribing

Dr Desi Gradinarova

Evidence and case studies for social prescribing delivery through heritage



SUMMARY

Evidence and case studies for social prescribing delivery through heritage

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Introduction

Wellbeing and public health have become strategic priorities for many government policies and organisational programmes in the last decade. After years focusing on economic growth and GDP, the shift towards community and individual wellbeing as markers of development has become increasingly significant. The events and challenges of the last three years, including during the Covid-19 pandemic, only made this tendency stronger and demonstrated the need to address the worsening health inequalities in the country and around the world.¹

There is a general consensus that all sectors and institutions need to come together to help even up the distribution of opportunities for people, so that everyone can have the best start in life and enjoy a fulfilling life.² At the beginning of 2022, the then Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Sajid Javid, announced his support for a reform in the health system, which will make personalised care central to its new agenda – something that social prescribing has been advocating for from the very beginning. What matters most to the individual is at the core of social prescribing. It helps address both individual and community wellbeing and directly targets health inequalities.³

Social Prescribing has the potential to be that missing link in public health provision that will enable us all to co-design our personal health plans and, as a result, achieve improved physical and mental health. The local voluntary and community groups play a vital role in facilitating this – something especially well demonstrated during the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, the local “recovery” could have never happened without the efforts of the voluntary sector.

Another powerful lesson from the last two years of restrictions and hardship is that we are surrounded by a wealth of positive potential support for our wellbeing. Local green spaces and sport facilities have suddenly attracted much more attention, as people appreciated the availability of places to exercise and relax in proximity of their homes. Local heritage sites experienced the same increased levels of interest and public engagement.⁴ Tapping into the wellbeing power of heritage and the historic environment around us was one of the unexpected revelations of the lockdowns experienced across the country. People started to visit and value their local history and heritage more than ever, and the positive effects of that interaction are something to build upon in future.

¹ Marmot, M., Allen, J., Boyce, T., Goldblatt, P., Morrison, J. (2020) *Health equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 years on*. London: Institute of Health Equity; Marmot, M., Allen, J., Goldblatt, P., Herd, E., Morrison, J. (2020). *Build Back Fairer: The COVID-19 Marmot Review. The Pandemic, Socioeconomic and Health Inequalities in England*. London: Institute of Health Equity

² *Levelling Up the United Kingdom*, Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities by Command of Her Majesty, 2 February 2022, accessed Aug 2022 - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1054770/Levelling_Up_the_United_Kingdom_large_print_version_.pdf

³ NHS England, Social prescribing, accessed May 2022 - <https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/>

⁴ Heritage and Society 2020, Heritage Counts, accessed May 2022 - <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2020/heritage-and-society-2020/>

We already know that there are many ways to improve individual and community wellbeing through heritage- from volunteering and visiting sites, to sharing stories and memories of a place and connecting with others.⁵ To access the multiple benefits of such interactions with our past, we can utilise a number of mechanisms – and social prescribing is one of the best suited for addressing community needs and health inequalities.

Social prescribing and similar approaches have been practised in the NHS for many years, with schemes dating back to the 1990s and earlier, but in the past few years national NHS bodies have embraced social prescribing and committed resource to rolling it out across England. The *NHS long-term plan*⁶ (2019) incorporated social prescribing into its comprehensive model of personalised care⁷. Composed of six programmes including personalised care planning and personal health budgets, the model aims to enable people (especially those with more complex needs), to take greater control of their health and care.

In order to achieve this, the NHS Long-Term Plan commits funding to the specially employed social prescribing “link workers” who connect people to the range of support and social activities to help address their health needs. Those activities and support are mainly provided by charity and voluntary organisations in local areas. The Long-Term Plan set a target that by 2023/24 every GP practice in England will have access to a social prescribing link worker and 900,000 people will be referred by then⁸. The social prescribing targets within the NHS Long-Term Plan have already been exceeded, and there is good progress towards recruiting 4,500 Link Workers in England by 2023/4. Based on the growing demand for social prescribing and the evidence to date, there is an ongoing need to increase recruitment and support for Link Workers beyond the scope of the Long-Term Plan.

Alongside funding link workers, national NHS bodies are seeking to grow the infrastructure that supports social prescribing. In 2019, the Department of Health and Social Care made £5 million available to establish a National Academy of Social Prescribing (NASP)⁹. It is working to raise the profile of social prescribing, build the evidence base for its efficiency and share good practice. It also seeks to support voluntary organisations involved in social prescribing and explore funding partnerships.

Other government departments have also shown a growing interest in the potential of non-clinical interventions for improving public health. In 2018, the government’s

⁵ Reilly, S., Nolan, C., Monckton, L., *Wellbeing and the Historic Environment*, Historic England, 2018, accessed Feb 2022 - <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/wellbeing-and-the-historic-environment/>

⁶ The NHS long-term plan explained, The Kings Fund, accessed Feb 2022 - <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/nhs-long-term-plan-explained>

⁷ Comprehensive model of personalised care, NHS, accessed Feb 2022 - <https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/comprehensive-model-of-personalised-care/>

⁸ What is social prescribing - The Kings Fund (02 February 2017, updated 2020) – accessed Aug 2022 - <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/social-prescribing>

⁹ *Social prescribing: new national academy set up*, Gov.Uk, Oct 2019 – accessed Feb 2022 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/social-prescribing-new-national-academy-set-up>

strategy to tackle loneliness¹⁰ backed the roll-out of social prescribing, and in 2020 the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs announced funding for a two-year trial of ‘green social prescribing’¹¹ – initiatives intended to help people engage with the natural world.

Historic England commissioned a report on the organisation’s potential to deliver social prescribing in 2020¹², and in response to some of the report’s recommendations, HE formed a partnership with NASP in December 2020¹³ by establishing the post of Historic Environment Lead, seconded to the Academy, and by becoming a partner to the pilot Thriving Communities Fund.¹⁴

In parallel with the publication of the Wellbeing & Heritage Strategy¹⁵, Historic England is working towards gathering further evidence for the wellbeing impact of heritage and facilitating the development of national and regional social prescribing infrastructure in the heritage sector.

¹⁰ *A connected society: a strategy for tackling loneliness*, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, October 2018, accessed Feb 2022 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness>

¹¹ George Eustice speech on environmental recovery: 20 July 2020, Gov.uk, accessed Feb 2022 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/george-eustice-speech-on-environmental-recovery-20-july-2020>

¹² Roberts, I., Waddell, H., *Social Prescribing and the potential of Historic England’s local delivery*, An SQW report to Historic England, October 2020, accessed Feb 2022 - <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/social-prescribing-potential-historic-england-local-delivery/>

¹³ Wellbeing and Social Prescribing, Historic England, accessed June 2022 - <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/current/social-and-economic-research/wellbeing/wellbeing-and-social-prescribing/>

¹⁴ Thriving Communities Fun, NASP, accessed Feb 2022 - <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/thriving-communities/thriving-communities-fund/>

¹⁵ Wellbeing and Heritage Strategy, Historic England, 2022

1. What is social prescribing

1.1. *Definition and purpose*

Evidence demonstrates that around one in five GP appointments are for non-medical reasons,¹⁶ such as loneliness, social isolation, housing issues and debt – in other words, issues caused by the wider social determinants of health. These problems can have a devastating impact on our mental and physical health but cannot be fixed by doctors and medicine alone.

Social prescribing connects people to social activities and opportunities that can address these issues and benefit our wellbeing more generally. These include activities related to physical exercise, arts, heritage, creativity or nature, as well as groups or services providing practical advice.

The NHS definition¹⁷ adds that social prescribing works for a wide range of people, but especially for those:

- with one or more long-term conditions
- who need support with their mental health
- who are lonely or isolated
- who have complex social needs which affect their wellbeing.

¹⁶ *Making time in general practice*, Primary Care Foundation & NHS Alliance, October 2015, accessed 6/08/2022 -

https://www.primarycarefoundation.co.uk/images/PrimaryCareFoundation/Downloading_Report_s/PCF_Press_Releases/Making-Time-in_General_Practice_FULL_REPORT_28_10_15.pdf

¹⁷ Social Prescribing, NHS website – accessed 5 Aug 2022 -

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/>



Figure 1. Social prescribing: Applying All Our Health, Public Health England

The most crucial element of social prescribing is that it is person-centred and with social justice at heart. It can support both individual and community wellbeing.

The main idea is that if somebody contacts their GP about an issue that could be better addressed through community support and social activities, they will be referred to a social prescribing link worker. The link workers should have the capacity to focus on what matters to the individual and help them co-create their own wellbeing plan, based on their views, needs and interests.

Hard to reach groups can be specifically targeted by policy makers and social prescribing commissioners and offered tailored social prescribing as a means to support their particular needs with the aim of fighting health inequalities in certain areas. With so many GP appointments being about wider social needs rather than medical issues, social prescribing can play an important role in integrated care, supporting people waiting for elective care, reducing overprescribing and tackling loneliness¹⁸.

¹⁸ N. Gitsham, *Harnessing social prescribing to support integrated care*, Feb 2022, accessed on 14 March 22 <https://www.nhsconfed.org/articles/harnessing-social-prescribing-support-integrated-care>

1.2. How does Social Prescribing work?

Social prescribing is a key component of Universal Personalised Care. Personalised Care means people have choice and control over the way their care is planned and delivered, based on ‘what matters’ to them and their individual strengths and needs¹⁹.

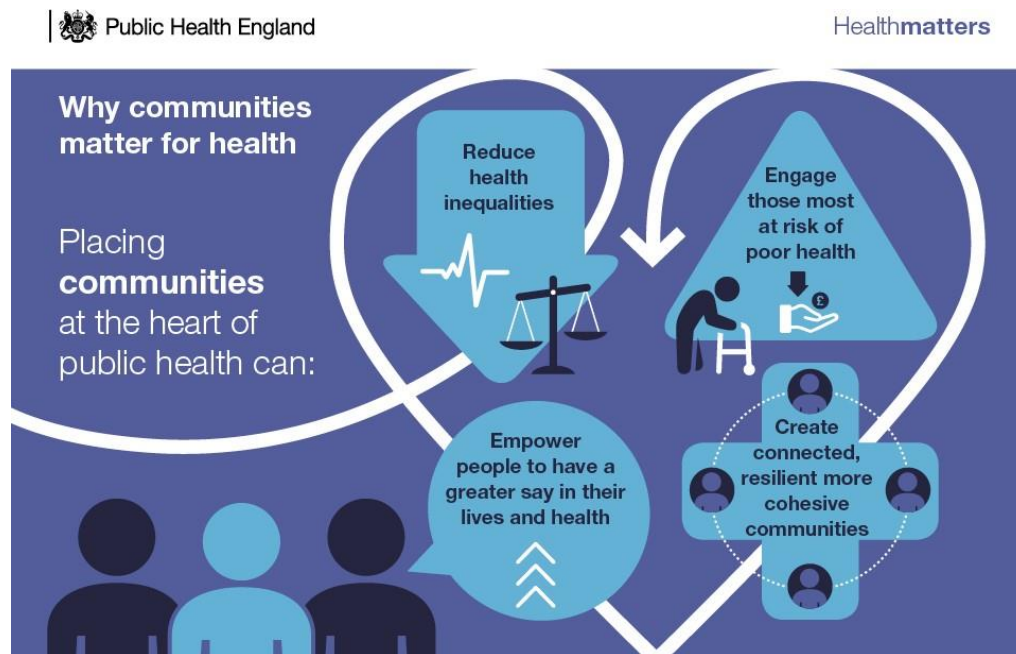


Figure 2. Social prescribing: Why Communities Matter for Health, Public Health England

When social prescribing works well, people can be easily referred to local social prescribing link workers from a wide range of local agencies, including general practice, local authorities, pharmacies, multi-disciplinary teams, hospital discharge teams, allied health professionals, fire service, police, job centres, social care services, housing associations and voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations. Self-referral is also encouraged.

Social prescriptions can run for a set length of time (usually around eight to twelve weeks), after which there is a structured follow up, or can be open ended; the evidence indicates that in many cases patients end up keeping up their new activity once the prescription is complete.

Other related mechanisms such as active signposting involve a less intense approach whereby existing staff in local agencies provide information to signpost people to

¹⁹ *Personalised care. Social prescribing and community-based support*, Summary guide (Updated: June 2020, NHS England and NHS Improvement), last accessed 23 August <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/social-prescribing-summary-guide-updated-june-20.pdf>

services, using local knowledge and databases.²⁰ This is typically best suited to those people who need less support and have the confidence to approach services independently.

Social Prescribing delivers a variety of benefits – physical, psychological, spiritual and social – from improved quality of life and social connectedness, through increased feelings of belonging and identity and reduced loneliness and social isolation²¹. It can also support the acquisition of new skills, reduce anti-social behaviour and facilitate links to services and advice.

Though there is a need for more robust and systematic evidence on the effectiveness of social prescribing, social prescribing schemes may lead to a reduction in the use of NHS services, including GP attendance²² and offer a favourable social return on investment (SROI)²³. In general, studies of social prescribing schemes demonstrate high levels of satisfaction from participants, primary care professionals and commissioners.²⁴

²⁰ NHS England, Social prescribing, accessed May 2022 -

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/>

²¹ Friedli, L., with Jackson, C., Abernethy, H., Stansfield, J., *Social prescribing for mental health – a guide to commissioning and delivery*, CSIP North West Social Prescribing Development Project, accessed 23 August 2021 -

<https://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/uploads/attachment/339/social-prescribing-for-mental-health.pdf>

²² Personalised care, NHS, accessed May 2022 - <https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/> ; The economic impact of social prescribing, NASP, accessed 14.03.2022

<https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/NASP-briefing-economic-impact.pdf>

²³ The economic impact..., NASP, *ibid*.

²⁴ £5 million for social prescribing to tackle the impact of COVID-19, Gov.UK, 16 Aug 2020, accessed Aug 2022- <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/5-million-for-social-prescribing-to-tackle-the-impact-of-covid-19>



Figure 3. NHS Model for social prescribing, copyright NHSE

The NHS uses the model above to describe how social prescribing works and what key elements need to be in place for effective social prescribing, such as easy referrals, collaborative commissioning and partnership and support for the community groups. (fig. 3)

More recently, the National Academy for Social Prescribing started advocating for the adoption of a “*whole community approach*” to social prescribing, in which all sectors and stakeholders contribute to the implementation of social prescribing locally. The idea is based on the fact that there are a wide range of social activities, services and opportunities that can benefit our health and wellbeing – and people connect to those in different ways, depending on their needs and personal circumstances²⁵.

These different forms of connection all form part of the *social prescribing ecosystem*. For social prescribing to be effective, there needs to be appropriate assets and services

²⁵ The social prescribing ecosystem, What is Social Prescribing, NASP, last accessed 6 Aug 2022 - <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/about-us/what-is-social-prescribing/the-social-prescribing-ecosystem/>

available in communities and across the country – including a sustainable voluntary sector, relevant advice and information services, and spaces where people can access nature, take part in physical activity and movement, and engage with heritage, arts and culture.

Together, the model envisages provision of support that should encompass all levels of needs and bring together the potential of all sectors and societal groups in supporting those needs. This “*social prescribing eco system*” is based on collaboration and partnership (especially with local institutions and communities) and is aiming to address existing gaps in social prescribing provision and the main issues in supporting the evolving social prescribing infrastructure, which already shows capacity and resource demands higher than anticipated.

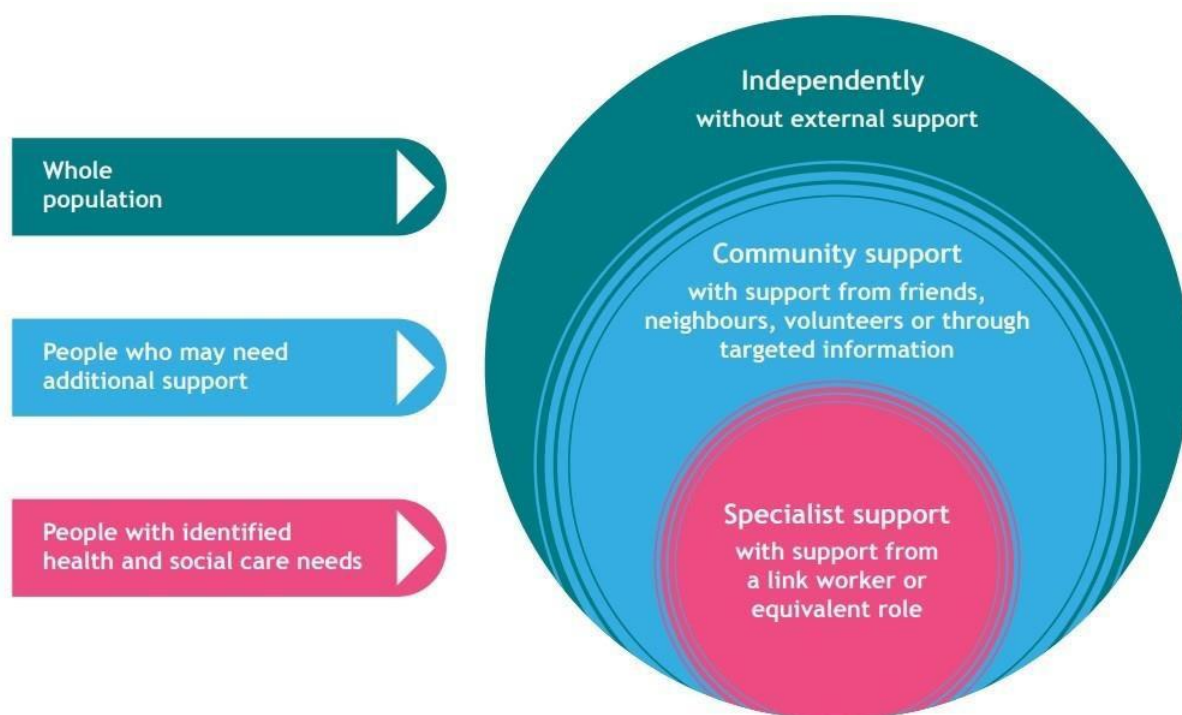


Figure 4. The social prescribing ecosystem - the ways that people connect to activities and opportunities that benefit health and wellbeing, copyright NASP

Key features of both NASP’s social prescribing ecosystem (fig. 4) and the NHS Social Prescribing model (fig. 3) are collaboration and partnership. The NHS Implementation checklist for local partners and commissioners²⁶ highlights the significance of working with all partners, including VCSE sector leaders, local infrastructure organisations, local authority commissioners and others. It is particularly important to build strong local relationships with VCSE sector

²⁶ Personalised care. *Social prescribing and community-based support*, Summary guide (Updated: June 2020, NHS England and NHS Improvement), last accessed 23 August <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/social-prescribing-summary-guide-updated-june-20.pdf> Annex C

organisations and community groups, whose leaders should be involved in the process of designing social prescribing project or programme as trusted partners. Equally, the contacts with the local Primary Care Networks and their social prescribing link worker are crucial for commissioning link worker support from existing social prescribing schemes.

1.3. *NASP and the Thriving Community Programme*

The National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP) was established in 2019 to create partnerships across the arts, health, sports, leisure, and the natural environment and to promote health, wellbeing and social prescribing at a national and local level²⁷.

NASP delivers its work through several programmes and initiatives, focused on creating and supporting a community of practice around accelerating innovation²⁸ in social prescribing, collating and delivering evidence²⁹ for the benefits of social prescribing, advocating for the social impact of social prescribing through the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Health and the Natural Environment³⁰, sharing good practice and lived experience³¹ and supporting the regional and local delivery of social prescribing through cross sector collaboration via the Thriving Communities Programme.

NASP's Thriving Communities programme³² is a national support programme for voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise groups, supporting communities (especially the ones most impacted by COVID-19 in the period 2020-2021) in England, working alongside social prescribing link workers. Thriving Communities helps to share learning, gain new ideas, access funding and develop partnerships across sectors.

It has seven regional teams³³, made of the local Thriving Communities leads and cross-sector partners, which offer support and guidance to VCSE and other organisations interested in social prescribing in the area. This is delivered via the Learning Together programmes, consisting of webinars and workshops addressing a

²⁷ National Academy for Social Prescribing – accessed 6 Aug 2022 - <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/>

²⁸ Accelerating Innovation Programme, NASP – accessed 6 Aug 2022 - <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/accelerating-innovation/>

²⁹ Evidencing Social Prescribing, NASP, accessed 6 Aug 2022 - <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/our-work/evidencing-social-prescribing/>

³⁰ APPG for Health and the Natural Environment, NASP , accessed 6 Aug 2022 - <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/our-work/all-party-parliamentary-group-on-health-and-the-natural-environment/>

³¹ Making some noise, NASP, accessed 6 Aug 2022 - <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/our-work/making-some-noise/>

³² Thriving Communities Programme, NASP , accessed 6 Aug 2022 - <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/thrivingcommunities/>

³³ The Regions, NASP, accessed 6 Aug 2022 - <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/thriving-communities/thriving-communities-regions/>

variety of issues and subthemes within social prescribing, together with opportunities for establishing contacts and developing networks in this emerging field. Part of the Thriving Communities Programme is the Thriving Communities Fund, which was created in 2020 to support the development of local pioneering cross-sector social prescribing partnership projects, specifically looking to help communities most affected by Covid-19 pandemic.

Historic England started a partnership with NASP in December 2020 and established the post of Historic Environment Lead, which works to promote the inclusion of heritage in the developing social prescribing infrastructure and to demonstrate the wellbeing benefits of engaging with the historic environment. Historic England also became a funding partner to the Thriving Communities Fund³⁴, which saw the inclusion of heritage activities in some of the 37 awarded partnerships projects, announced in March 2021. Historic England and NASP continue to collaborate to further the embedding of wellbeing and social prescribing in heritage, and to encourage the creation of new pilots and strategic development on social prescribing within the work of Historic England and the wider heritage sector.

³⁴ Historic England Supports National Social Prescribing Initiative, Historic England, 2021, accessed 6 Aug 2022 - <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/historic-england-supports-social-prescribing-initiative/>

2. How can heritage help – the evidence

2.1. Heritage and Wellbeing

There is a growing body of research demonstrating that heritage benefits people's wellbeing. *Heritage and Society*, produced by Historic England in 2016 as part of the *Heritage Counts* series, found that people who visit heritage sites are happier than those who do not – between 2010 and 2013, on average, those who had visited a heritage site in the previous 12 months, reported happiness scores 1.6% greater than those who had not³⁵. Similar analysis of data from the *Understanding Society* survey has shown that visiting heritage sites – particularly historic towns and buildings – increases life satisfaction.

The economic impact of the wellbeing power of heritage is also emerging, especially in connection with its role for supporting the health sector. In his 2014-2015 studies, Daniel Fujiwara estimated that visiting heritage sites saves the NHS over £193.2 million through reductions in GP and psychotherapy appointments, with a further contribution of £105.1 million from museums³⁶, while the financial equivalent of this gain was calculated at £1,646 per person per year³⁷.

In 2019, 'Heritage and Society' summarised the available evidence for the positive impact of engaging with heritage and the historic environment, which stretches from improved life satisfaction and quality of life to increased feelings of purpose, belonging and pride of place³⁸. Variety of studies highlight the therapeutic effects of

³⁵ *Heritage and Society* 2016, Heritage Counts, Historic England, accessed March 2022 <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2016/heritage-and-place-branding-pdf/>

³⁶ Fujiwara, D., and MacKerron, G., *Cultural Activities, art forms and wellbeing*, Arts Council England, 2015, accessed Aug 2021 https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Cultural_activities_artforms_and_wellbeing.pdf

³⁷ Fujiwara, D., Cornwall, T. & Dolan, P. (2014). *Heritage and Wellbeing*. Swindon: English Heritage, accessed Feb 2022 - <https://www.artshealthresources.org.uk/docs/heritage-and-wellbeing/>

³⁸ *Heritage and Society*, Historic England, 2019, accessed 20 May 2022 - <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2019/heritage-and-society-2019/#:~:text=Heritage%20and%20Society%20presents%20evidence,studie%20and%20public%20opinion%20surveys.>

historic landscapes³⁹, ‘blue’ spaces (such as canals, rivers)⁴⁰ and ‘green’ spaces (such as historic parks⁴¹), and the importance of shared identity and connection⁴².

In 2020, ‘Heritage and Society’ presented evidence about how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our social lives including our engagement with heritage. There is a clear indication that local heritage forms an important part of our local neighbourhoods. The 2020 data suggests that the appreciation of the contribution of local heritage to wellbeing has significantly increased as a result of lockdown limitations on our movements. This evidence demonstrates that historic places convey a sense of uniqueness and are sources of strength and confirmation of shared community values. These are all important factors for maintaining and improving community cohesion, increasing feelings of belonging and supporting individual and community wellbeing⁴³.

Heritage also contributes to the wellbeing benefits of engaging with nature – adding a human, cultural layer of community belonging and ownership, derived by the aesthetic and emotional connection with a shared environment. The National Trust’s *Places that make us* report⁴⁴ showed that the amygdala (an area in the brain which processes emotion) was activated by any place deemed special by an individual; their subsequent report, *Why places matter to people*⁴⁵, found ‘a link between having a deep-rooted emotional connection to a place and having a better sense of wellbeing’⁴⁶. Of people surveyed in the report, 58% were connected to aspects of natural heritage such as coastlines, farmland, and woodland, 36% to urban locations, towns, and villages, and 15% to a specific historic building or grounds. Over two thirds of the total said they would be negatively affected if their special place disappeared, which is higher (74%) among those connected to a historic site⁴⁷.

The health sector’s recognition of this is growing, as shown by the Halton Clinical Commissioning describing heritage as a ‘*crucial context in which people live their lives*’ and recognising that it supports a ‘*powerful sense of place, of being and*

³⁹ Neal, C., *Know your place? Evaluating the therapeutic benefits of engagement with historic landscapes*, *Cultural Trends*, 2015, 24:2, 133-142, accessed 14 March 2022 - <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/09548963.2015.1031479?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

⁴⁰ *Assessing the wellbeing impacts of waterways usage in England and Wales*, Simetrica, 2018, accessed 6 Aug 2022 - <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/refresh/media/thumbnail/38060-simetrica-report.pdf>

⁴¹ White MP, Alcock I, Wheeler BW, Depledge MH. *Would You Be Happier Living in a Greener Urban Area? A Fixed-Effects Analysis of Panel Data*. *Psychological Science*. 2013; accessed 14 March 2022 - <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0956797612464659>

⁴² Johnston, R., Marwood, K., *Action heritage: research, communities, social justice*, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 2017, accessed 6 Aug 2022 - <https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/117419/7/Action%20heritage%20research%20communities%20social%20justice.pdf>

⁴³ Heritage and Society 2020...

⁴⁴ *Places that Make Us*, National Trust, 2017, accessed Feb 2022 - <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/places-that-make-us-research-report.pdf>

⁴⁵ *Why Places matter to people*, National Trust, 2019, accessed Feb 2022 - <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/places-matter-research-report.pdf>

⁴⁶ *Places That Make us... and Why Places matter...*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

purpose'. As a result, the group recommends heritage-based activities for social prescribing⁴⁸.

Experiences in historic places or archival collections can also support people living with dementia. Places have the power to evoke memories and experiences⁴⁹. Emotional (affective) and cognitive associations with places support memory sustenance (positive functioning). Heritage and creative activities have a role to play in increasing creativity and stimulating imagination, which supports healthy brain function and self-expression. Fancourt and Steptoe proved that more frequent cultural engagement is linked to better memory and ability to perform cognitive tasks⁵⁰.

More recent studies have looked into culture-based social prescribing activities, including heritage ones, adding to the emerging evidence that they benefit specific groups such as older people⁵¹ or ethnic minorities⁵², by providing distraction, refuge, self-growth and feeling of purpose and belonging, together with celebrating their own heritage, staying active and developing a sense of pride in their neighbourhoods.

2.2. Six ways into wellbeing through heritage – Historic England framework

The range of wellbeing opportunities provided by the heritage sector is demonstrated in Historic England's *Wellbeing & Historic Environment* assessment from 2018⁵³, in which a framework of six routes to wellbeing through heritage was first introduced.

⁴⁸ Heritage and Society 2019...

⁴⁹ Why Places Matter...

⁵⁰ Fancourt, D., Steptoe, A., *Cultural engagement predicts changes in cognitive function in older adults over a 10 year period: Findings from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing*, 2018, accessed Aug 2022 -

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326209591_Cultural_engagement_predicts_changes_in_cognitive_function_in_older_adults_over_a_10_year_period_Findings_from_the_English_Longitudinal_Study_of_Ageing

⁵¹ *Culture-based social prescribing for older people in the time of COVID - A project to understand the role of the cultural sector for older people in the Covid-19 pandemic* – Oxford project, accessed June 2022 - <https://www.glam.ox.ac.uk/culture-based-social-prescribing-older-people-covid>

⁵² Social Prescribing, Black Heritage Walks Network -

<https://www.blackheritagewalksnetwork.com/birmingham/projects/social-prescribing>

⁵³ Reilly, S., Monckton, L., Nolan, C., *Wellbeing and the Historic Environment...*

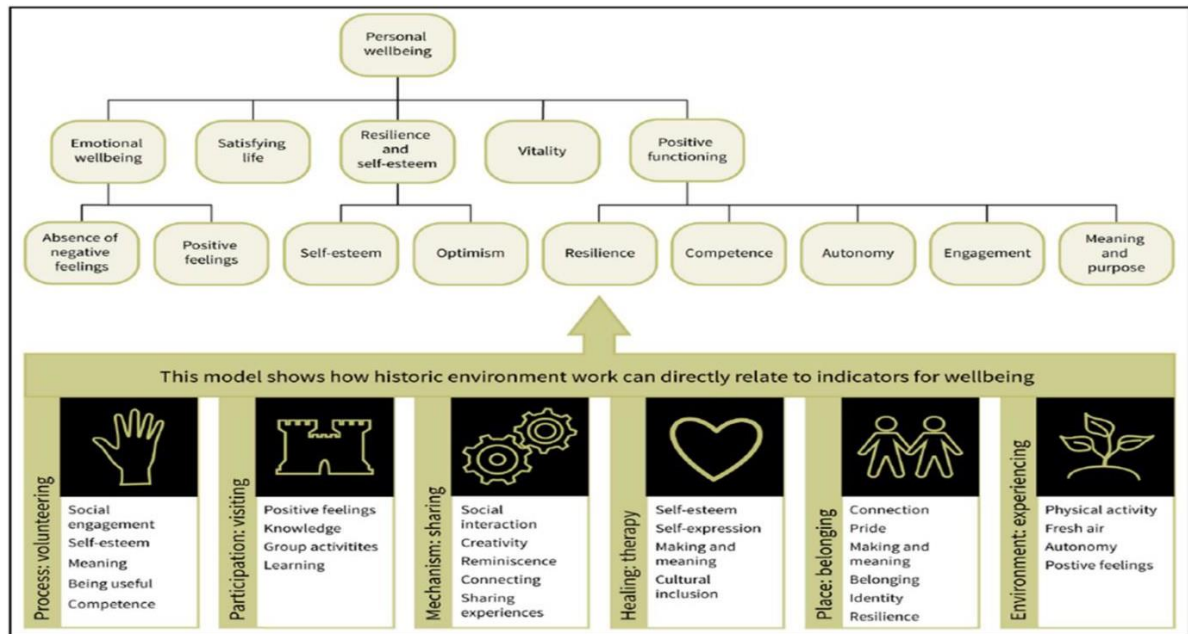


Figure 5. Six routes into wellbeing through heritage, copyright Historic England

The examples for the wellbeing benefits of accessing heritage activities through each of these six routes are plenty, ranging from increased social engagement and improved self – esteem in heritage volunteering work, through inspiring positive feelings of belonging and shared identity when visiting heritage sites, to improved mental health, resilience and autonomy by participating in therapeutic heritage interventions and sharing memories and experiences living in historic places and historic environment.

2.2.1. Process: Volunteering



Volunteering is one of the main ways to deliver wellbeing in a variety of sectors – and heritage is not an exception.

The Heritage Volunteering group report for DCMS on *Rebuilding Volunteering Capacity in the Heritage Sector*⁵⁴ showed that “participating in heritage volunteering activity brings a wide range of social benefits to the individuals involved, with 75% claiming a significant increase in their wellbeing after a year, 60% reporting sustained wellbeing benefits over 2-3 years, and 30% finding employment as a result of their

⁵⁴ *Rebuilding Volunteering Capacity in the Heritage Sector*, DCMS, 2020, accessed 9 Feb 2022 <http://www.heritagevolunteeringgroup.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Volunteering-paper-for-DCMS-from-Heritage-Sector.pdf>

volunteering experience”⁵⁵. This confirmed previously collated data by the Manchester Museum in 2017⁵⁶. In economic terms, the contribution of heritage volunteers is equally impressive. The Centre for Economics and Business Research conservatively estimates the economic value of heritage volunteers to be about £520m a year, based on the national minimum wage in England, according to the same report⁵⁷.

Similarly, the *Assessment of the social impact of volunteering in Heritage Lottery-funded projects: Yr 3* confirms many of the community wellbeing benefits derived by volunteering, such as improved sense of belonging, connectedness, and community cohesion. Although an interesting point is that many heritage volunteers go beyond their immediate locality to volunteer, showing higher interest in finding people with similar interests, than necessarily connecting to local community. This makes the case for the value of a variety of community types for our individual wellbeing – not only place-based, but also those connecting people sharing values, interests and ideas. HLF volunteers continue to report levels of mental health and well-being that are far higher than for the general population, or for the general volunteering population, particularly with regard to their ability to ‘play a useful part in things’ – an indicator that combines a measure of self-worth and purpose with social connectedness⁵⁸.

Prior to the COVID 19 outbreak, heritage volunteering numbers increased significantly over the past decade. The number of English Heritage volunteers increased remarkably from 650 in 2010/11 to 3,562 in 2018/19⁵⁹. In 2018, 49,000 people volunteered for the *Heritage Open Days* – an annual heritage festival occurring every September⁶⁰.

In 2020, Historic England commissioned the University of Lincoln to undertake the Heritage at Risk and Wellbeing (HARAW) project to explore the relationship between wellbeing and volunteering in activities dealing with assets on the Heritage at Risk Register⁶¹. This work has helped advance the understanding of the relationship between heritage volunteering and wellbeing and has identified achievable objectives for the future which will help people, places and our understanding of the past.

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ *Inspiring Futures: Volunteering for Wellbeing*, IWM, 2017, accessed June 2022 - <https://www.iwm.org.uk/volunteer/programmes/volunteering-for-wellbeing>

⁵⁷ *Rebuilding Volunteering Capacity ...*

⁵⁸ *Assessment of the social impact of volunteering in HLF-funded projects: Yr 3*, 2011, last accessed 9 Feb https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/research/social_impact_volunteering_2011.pdf

⁵⁹ *Heritage indicators*, 2019, accessed May 2022 - <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2019/hc2019-heritage-indicators/>

⁶⁰ HOD Headlines 2018, accessed May 2022 - <https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/news-desk/news/hods-headlines-2018>

⁶¹ Lewis, C., Siriwardena, N., Laparidou, d., Pattinson, J., Sima, C., Scott, A., Hughes, H., Akanuwe, j., *Wellbeing in Volunteers on Heritage at Risk Projects*, Historic England Research report 57/2021, accessed Feb 2022 - <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/results/reports/57-2021>

The *HAR Wellbeing in Volunteers* project used post-participation interviews with 35 volunteers on ten completed HAR projects across England, which were recorded online during lockdown in 2020. They were complemented by an online survey providing quantitative data. The research identified six main themes of wellbeing benefits experienced by the volunteers: purpose, being, capacity, sharing, self-nurture and self-actualisation⁶².

The reported benefits under those themes were linked to:

- strengthened feelings of belonging, identity and purpose;
- sharing a “sense of privilege” in saving significant historic assets, while connecting with others;
- gaining skills, expanding knowledge and diversifying life experience;
- increased physical activity, improved emotional and psychological mood;
- supporting placemaking;
- engaging in self-reflection, leaving a legacy, and exploring aspirations for the future;
- excitement of being involved in discovery, authenticity, and continuity (offering connectedness, fulfilment and reassurance by linking past to present to future)⁶³

All the benefits are significant, even when not specifically targeted, which makes the potential for their social impact even more impressive if those outcomes are planned for and embedded from the beginning.

2.2.2. Participation: Visiting



As previously mentioned, the value of visiting heritage sites has been demonstrated by a number of researchers, including Fujiwara in 2015, who showed that visiting heritage sites has a positive impact on wellbeing equal to or larger than doing other activities, such as playing sports or visiting libraries⁶⁴.

Historic England has been working with researchers at University of Southampton, University of Cambridge and University of Surrey throughout 2020-2021 to examine the ways that people are using heritage sites to support their wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic. The *Places of Joy* project investigated the links between

⁶² C. Lewis, et al., *Heritage at Risk, Volunteering and Wellbeing*, Historic England Research, Issue 20, Feb 2022, accessed June 2022 - <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/research/heritage-at-risk-volunteering-and-wellbeing/>

⁶³ Lewis, C., et all, *Heritage at risk*..

⁶⁴ Fujiwara, D., Kudrna, L., Cornwall, T., Laffan, K., Dolan, P., *Further analysis to value the health and educational benefits of sport and culture*, DCMS, March 2015, accessed Feb 2022 - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/446273/Health_and_educational_benefits_of_sport_and_culture.pdf

heritage visits and positive experiences for people at a time of national crisis. The study's findings revealed the importance of visits to heritage sites in promoting positive subjective wellbeing, as well as satisfying deeper psychological and socio-cultural needs⁶⁵.

Prof. Sofaer and her team collated fascinating data, which indicated that the visits had a significant impact on increasing happiness and reducing anxiety. This suggests that heritage sites have potential to affect hedonic (subjective) wellbeing⁶⁶. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, these benefits may be extended to opportunities to physically and psychologically escape from the stressors of household confinement, improving social capital, and developing a sense of connection with the world outside the home⁶⁷.

Interestingly, this research demonstrated that many of the values of heritage articulated by participants are “eudaimonic” in nature: capability, relational wellbeing, ontological security, and trust – and not necessarily learning (which is traditionally associated with visiting heritage sites). Furthermore, heritage sites seem to offer opportunities for experiencing a combination of hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing effects that visitors do not always anticipate. For that reason, heritage sites have an increased positive impact on people because they provide an unusual co-location of a wide range of wellbeing values and effects⁶⁸.

2.2.3. Mechanism: sharing



Sharing memories and experiences about a place or time in our lives has the power of bringing people together and supporting social connectedness. There is now plethora of heritage wellbeing projects that base their intervention strategies on reminiscence exercises, as the evidence supports their efficiency for simultaneously improving mental health and social cohesion.

This is exactly the case with the '*Worcester Life Stories*' project, funded by Historic England and the NLHF – an innovative collaboration between Worcester City Historic Environment Record and Worcestershire Health and Care Trust's Older Adult Inpatient Services.

⁶⁵ Sofaer, J., Gallou, E., *Places of Joy: the Role of Heritage During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, Historic England Research, Issue 20, Feb 2022, accessed May 2022 <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/research/places-of-joy-the-role-of-heritage-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

⁶⁶ Sofaer, J., Davenport, B., Stig Sørensen, M., Gallou, E., Uzzell, D., *Heritage sites, value and wellbeing: learning from the COVID-19 pandemic in England*, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 2021, 27:11, 1117-1132, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13527258.2021.1955729>

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

The project developed the 'Worcester Life Stories' platform, hosted by the Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust, where local people produced a free Life Story booklet of memories from their own lives, for reminiscence, general interest and especially for those living with dementia, as a link to the past with therapeutic benefits. The aims of the research project were to gain a better and more practical understanding of how heritage contributes to wellbeing, sense of place and identity; understand the most effective ways to link heritage with dementia and community mental health outcomes; and acquire a better understanding of how heritage is meaningful to people in their everyday surroundings and why they engage with or feel excluded from their heritage⁶⁹.

Worcester Life Stories launched in June 2020 and it has been awarded funding from the NLHF for a number of initiatives, including development of 'Know Your Place Worcester'⁷⁰- an online historic map and photograph resource, giving people access to material from Worcester City Council's Historic Environment Record never seen before, as well as being able to share their own stories and images of the city.

This work demonstrated the importance of place to people's wellbeing - evidenced through the weekly quizzes during the COVID-19 lockdowns⁷¹, where people rejoiced and connected over pictures of 'old Worcester' online although they could not meet in person⁷². The local Clinical Commissioning Group Leads for Dementia across Worcestershire and Herefordshire were so impressed about how the Life Stories platform could be used for people living with dementia that they secured funding for the platform to become part of an offer for people in hard-to-reach communities, and for people who are house bound, by taking the materials to them in the form of a 'coffee and memory bus'.

In addition, the Life Stories platform is used within the Older Adult Mental Health services inpatient services, working with the local Housing Associations to take both KYP and Life Stories into their sheltered schemes and homes⁷³.

2.2.4. Healing: therapy



The therapeutic effects of historic landscapes have been well documented in a wide range of innovative projects.

⁶⁹ Wellbeing and Older people, Historic England, accessed May 2022 - <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/current/social-and-economic-research/wellbeing/wellbeing-and-older-people/>

⁷⁰ *Know Your Place*, accessed Feb 2022 - <http://www.kypwest.org.uk/explore-the-map/>

⁷¹ *Worcester Life Stories* You Tube Channel, accessed May 2022 - <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPCBspDMD95IszGHlpt5sBw>

⁷² Lord, N., *Worcester Life Stories: A Partnership Between Heritage and Health*, Historic England Research, Issue 20, Feb 2022, accessed May 2022 - <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/research/worcester-life-stories-a-partnership-between-heritage-and-health/>

⁷³ Ibid.

The now well-known *Operation Nightingale* project⁷⁴, carried out in 2012 by Wessex Archaeology and the Defence Archaeology Group, was the first to successfully utilise the technical and social aspects of field archaeology to support the recovery and skill development of veterans from the conflicts in Afghanistan and other war zones – demonstrating that the participation in a heritage activity such as archaeological excavation and recording has a potential to be used as a therapeutic intervention for people living with PTSD and other mental health problems. The participants reported reduced symptoms of anxiety, depression, isolation and psychological traumatic symptoms towards the end of the project. The veterans also shared feelings of increased perception of their ability to work and socialise as a team, which led to an early return to work for many of them.⁷⁵ The example of this pioneering work was soon followed by other projects such as *Breaking Ground Heritage*⁷⁶, and informed the approaches to social prescribing adopted by organisations such as Forgotten Veterans⁷⁷ and York Archaeological Trust⁷⁸.

Another excellent example is The *Human Henge* project, which aimed to enhance the mental wellbeing of participants through activity and exploration in the prehistoric landscapes of Stonehenge and Avebury. It was delivered in 2018 by the Restoration Trust in partnership with Richmond Fellowship, English Heritage, the National Trust and Bournemouth University and supported by Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust. Findings highlighted that involvement in *Human Henge* had a positive impact upon participants' mental health and well-being, and to some degree this was still apparent one year after involvement in the programme⁷⁹. One of the participants summed up their own experience: “*There was so much that went on during the project. We made pottery, explored the landscape, gazed at the night sky. It was a wonderful experience. It has all had a very beneficial effect on me, it was an interesting experience that gave me a purpose. ... treatments and therapies hold you for a few hours in a room, whereas exploring something new gives you a thirst to do things. It gives you a sense of adventure.*”⁸⁰

The experience of *Human Henge* and other similar projects underlined the need for guidelines that could help organisations to deliver safe projects that could support the mental health of those involved, while enhancing the historic environment. A few years later, A UKRI MARCH Network Plus funded project, carried out between November 2020 and May 2021, in partnership with Historic England, saw an expert panel develop best practice guidelines for organisations offering heritage projects as

⁷⁴ *Operation Nightingale*, Wessex Archaeology, accessed Feb 2022 -

<https://www.wessexarch.co.uk/our-work/operation-nightingale>

⁷⁵ Finnegan, A. 2016. *The biopsychosocial benefits and shortfalls for armed forces veterans engaged in archaeological activities*. *Nurse Education Today* 47: 15–22.

⁷⁶ *Breaking Ground Heritage*, accessed Feb 2022 - <https://breakinggroundheritage.org.uk/>

⁷⁷ *Forgotten Veterans*, accessed Feb 2022 <https://www.forgottenveteransuk.com/>

⁷⁸ *Archaeology on Prescription*, York Archaeological Trust, accessed May 2022 -

<https://www.yorkarchaeology.co.uk/archaeology-on-prescription>

⁷⁹ Drysdale, I., *Human Henge Evaluation report*, 2018 -

<https://humanhenge.org/2019/01/30/human-henge-evaluation-report/>

⁸⁰ *Human Henge - How can historic landscapes be good for you*, English Heritage 2017 -

<https://blog.english-heritage.org.uk/human-henge-how-can-a-historic-landscape-be-good-for-you/>

interventions for people who live with mental health issues⁸¹. This was achieved through a Delphi process, utilising the skills of those with lived experience of mental health issues, as well as mental health and heritage professionals, bringing together their expertise to create a practical and beneficial tool based on real-life experience. The research study was conducted by Dr Karen Burnell (Solent University), Dr Paul Everill (University of Winchester), Dr Louise Baxter (Bournemouth University), Eva Makri (Solent University) and Dr Kathryn Watson (Co-Researcher)⁸².

2.2.5. Place: Belonging



People are emotionally connected to places and want to share their meaning with others. Research by the National Trust combined Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) scanning, qualitative interviews and a survey of over 2,000 people to understand the emotional connections with our special places and respective functions of the brain⁸³. The research found that key areas of emotional processing in the brain are activated by ‘a place deemed to be special’ by an individual, supporting the feelings of a deep connection. 75% of members of the public want to pass on their love of a place to significant others while 92% agree that they would be upset if their meaningful place was lost⁸⁴.

History is the third most quoted factor that makes people most proud of Britain – 35% of nearly 8,000 surveyed adults felt proud of our history. According to the Taking Part Survey, ‘the British countryside and scenery’ (53%) was the top factor that makes people proud of Britain, followed closely by the British health system (52%), then history (35%). 15% agreed that architecture and historic buildings make them proud of Britain⁸⁵.

Local heritage conveys a sense of attachment to one’s locality, and increased levels of attachment to a place and its community are associated with higher wellbeing⁸⁶. Higher appreciation and connection with local heritage can influence the level of wellbeing experienced by individuals in their place of residence. Researchers, looking

⁸¹ Guidelines for involving people with mental health problems in heritage projects, Solent University, 2022 - <https://www.solent.ac.uk/research-innovation-enterprise/research-at-solent/projects-and-awards/march-plus-project>

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ *Places that Make us...*

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ *Taking Part Survey*, DCMS, 2019 as quoted in *Heritage and Society 2019...*

⁸⁶ Curtis, S., Congdon, P. and Atkinson, S. and Corcoran, R., MaGuire, R. and Peasgood, T. *‘Individual and local area factors associated with self-reported wellbeing, perceived social cohesion and sense of attachment to one’s community : analysis of the Understanding Society Survey.’*, Project Report. What Works Centre for Wellbeing, accessed June 2022 - <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/resources/individual-and-local-area-factors-associated-with-self-reported-wellbeing-perceived-social-cohesion-and-sense-of-a-achment-to-ones-community-analysis-of-the-understanding-society-survey/>

at data from the Understanding Society study, found that the perception of social cohesion and sense of attachment to one's neighbourhood were positively associated with self-reported wellbeing⁸⁷.

Historic England has invested serious amount of resource into supporting the relationship between people and places and promoting the public value of positive engagement with local heritage and community participation in place-making⁸⁸. The Heritage Action Zone and the High Street Heritage Action Zones programmes have invested more than £2.5 million over the last 7 years in more than 70 localities using the power of the historic environment to create economic growth and improve quality of life in villages, towns and cities across England.

In October 2019 Historic England commissioned Newcastle-based research consultancy ERS Ltd to assess the impact of the Sunderland's High Streets Heritage Action Zone on local residents to better understand the relationship between people's wellbeing and the character of their local area. It forms part of Historic England's strategic research to improve understanding of how the historic environment can be used to achieve positive social benefit and explore ways of delivering projects to enhance wellbeing outcomes. The project focused on two groups of local people, one older, one very young, and their sense of place and belonging in relation to local history and the development of the Heritage Action Zone.

The project identified considerable degrees of loneliness and isolation in the older age group but one that was addressed in part by simple events and gatherings providing food. It took time to develop the relationships with each other and the project team and building up trust was an important element. The project was most successful when it related the history of their neighbourhood to the lived experiences of past people that the current residents or school children could relate to. Asking for survey data on wellbeing was difficult to achieve in these groups, so simpler forms such as the Rickter scale were used on boards the participants could handle.

For the young people having the chance to share their own work with the school and their families created a sense of pride in their work and a longer lasting legacy – at the beginning of the programme the young people had a very low level of knowledge about their local area, but at the end they could talk confidently about various aspects of local history, geography and buildings. The project stimulated curiosity in both groups and made gains in connecting people and place and supporting recovery from Covid-19 restrictions.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Places Strategy, Historic England, 2019, accessed May 2022 - <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/planning/he-places-strategy-2019> ; Future strategy, Historic England, 2021, accessed May 2022 - <https://historicengland.org.uk/about/what-we-do/strategy/>

2.2.6. Environment: experiencing



The heritage sector often tries to make the case for the intrinsic link between historic and natural environment - two parts of one holistic entity, forming the world around us with its natural and cultural aspects. As people connect with the outside world, they often simultaneously experience the effects of engaging with nature, heritage and art. This is, in fact, something to be built upon when searching to maximise the wellbeing effect of connecting with the environment.

The perfect example lies in the multitudes of benefits experienced when visiting historic parks and gardens. During the various lockdowns in the last two years or so, many relished the daily opportunity to leave the house and exercise – which is how many local parks were suddenly much more appreciated as important assets. The number of park visits surged, and visiting local green spaces proved to be important to many people’s wellbeing in those times. In 2021, the Office for National Statistics analysed the impact of lockdown on exercise levels and usage of public green spaces⁸⁹. People exercised more during the lockdowns and visits to parks increased in 2020 and 2021. In May 2020, 36% of people responding to Natural England’s annual *People and Nature Survey* said that they spent more time outside during the pandemic than before, a figure that rose to 46% in July⁹⁰.

All public parks and greenspaces, such as urban commons and cemeteries, have a history and are protected by registration in the national Register of Parks & Gardens of Special Historic Interest. They are part of the story of our towns and cities, and vital to life in urban areas.

In 2021 Historic England commissioned an analysis of the economic, social and environmental values of 72 registered public parks of ‘special historic interest’ in eight cities using the Greenkeeper tool⁹¹, launched in mid-2020. The analysis showed that this cohort of nationally important parks generate 37 million visits per year and £856 million in annual benefits, including physical health, mental wellbeing, amenity value and carbon sequestration (the capture and storage of atmospheric carbon dioxide by trees). The mental health benefits alone equate to £543 million per year⁹².

The challenge now is to identify the specific wellbeing benefits of connecting with that heritage aspect of our historic parks and gardens, and to measure their cultural significance to people.

⁸⁹ How lockdown changed our relationship with nature, ONS, 2021, accessed May 2022 - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/howhaslockdownchangedourrelationshipwithnature/2021-04-26>

⁹⁰ White, J., Public Parks and Greenspaces Matter, Historic England Research, Feb 2022, accessed May 2022 - <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/research/public-parks-and-greenspaces-matter/>

⁹¹ Greenkeeper Tool, accessed May 2022- <https://www.greenkeeperuk.co.uk/>

⁹² White, J., Public Parks...

DCMS is now developing a valuation framework⁹³ for culture and heritage capital, a parallel for natural capital accounting that will include public parks. In step with the Public Health England 2020 recommendations, it would be helpful to have evidence-based case studies highlighting historic public parks and health outcomes, especially for disadvantaged groups. We need to ensure the heritage and cultural significance of these parks is recognised and celebrated alongside their natural qualities⁹⁴.

2.3. Impact and gaps

Most of the existing evidence and research findings on heritage and wellbeing were summarised in the What Works for Wellbeing Centre's *Heritage and Wellbeing: state of the evidence report*⁹⁵ published in 2019. The report found that heritage and heritage interventions can have a wide range of beneficial impacts on the physical, mental and social wellbeing of individuals and communities, and offered a detailed account of the contributions of the main research reports on heritage and wellbeing between 1990 and 2018. More specifically, the individual wellbeing impact includes outcomes such as increased confidence, social connectivity and life satisfaction; The community wellbeing impact is around improved social relationships, increased sense of belonging, pride of place, ownership and collective empowerment.

Heritage can also have significant benefits for the wellbeing of people who are less well-represented. The What Works Centre for Wellbeing has found that in places of high wellbeing inequality, 'even if those with lower life satisfaction are less likely to engage in these activities, they yield greater wellbeing returns when they do'⁹⁶.

The 2020 Heritage Alliance report on *Heritage, Health and Wellbeing*⁹⁷ also explored the positive impact heritage can have on individual and community wellbeing. The report examines the existing work in this space, before showcasing more than 30 case studies that cover the breadth of the work in the heritage sector. They collectively demonstrated that heritage organisations are already supporting the nation's physical and mental wellbeing through a huge number of projects and schemes – although wellbeing is still not always an explicit goal or approach embedded with intent.

The role of heritage in providing a sense of community cohesion, an opportunity for reflection, and an understanding of place seems quite unique and of significant value to both individuals and communities. The wellbeing benefits of heritage are amplified even further if participants are allowed the autonomy to guide their own learning.

⁹³ Culture and Heritage Capital Framework, Gov.Uk, accessed May 2022 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/valuing-culture-and-heritage-capital-a-framework-towards-decision-making>

⁹⁴ White, J., Public Parks...

⁹⁵ Pennington, A., Jones, R., Bagnall, A., South, j., Corcoran, R., *Heritage and Wellbeing : state of the evidence report*, What Works for Wellbeing, 2019, accessed May 2022 - <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/blog/heritage-and-wellbeing/>

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ *Heritage, Health and Wellbeing*, The Heritage Alliance, 2020, accessed Feb 2022 - https://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Heritage-Alliance-AnnualReport_2020_Online.pdf

This is especially true for individuals who would otherwise be at risk of exclusion from mainstream society⁹⁸.

There are however certain challenges and drawbacks – in fact, all above mentioned reports identify a range of similar barriers. The WWfWC scoping review found that most evidence in the field of heritage and wellbeing was of lower methodological quality, and there is a need for more robust methods in future research. The identified research and evidence gaps were summarised as a “need for a greater understanding of wellbeing impacts within community settings and more evidence on how impacts may vary between different population groups”⁹⁹.

These points echoed the findings of Historic England’s *Wellbeing and the Historic Environment* Assessment (2018), which identified several research gaps, mainly in linking community wellbeing to heritage, capturing the contribution of intangible heritage, and the unique contribution of the relationship between people and place to wellbeing¹⁰⁰.

The Heritage Alliance’s report on Heritage, Health and Wellbeing adds challenges such as inclusivity, access, sector capacity and sustainability of programmes and resources¹⁰¹.

In terms of evaluation and measuring wellbeing delivered through heritage interventions, all existing reports agree that the most significant issue for any researcher in this area is the lack of longitudinal studies and randomised control trials (RCT), delivering robust quantitative data; followed by the prevalence of small sample sizes, the need to understand causation and the underrepresentation of research on heritage sites in regional, rural, and coastal regions¹⁰².

We should also be always aware that although heritage has a great potential to improve mental health and wellbeing, it can also have a negative impact on individuals and some communities, who may feel traumatised or marginalised in specific heritage contexts¹⁰³.

There are some clear next steps for researchers and practitioners in the area of heritage and wellbeing, mainly around addressing the above identified gaps and embedding wellbeing as a core outcome of their work. Partnerships and co-production are another major aspect of any successful wellbeing project, if it is to target real need and attempt to have most impact to people. As recommended by all existent research reports so far, a focus on wellbeing can also improve the sustainability of heritage organisations, allowing them to become central not only to

⁹⁸ *ibidem*

⁹⁹ Pennington et al., *Heritage and Wellbeing...*

¹⁰⁰ Reilly, S. et al, *Wellbeing and the Historic Environment...*

¹⁰¹ Heritage, Health and Wellbeing...

¹⁰² Reilly, S. et al, *Wellbeing and the Historic Environment...*; Pennington et al., *Heritage and Wellbeing...*; Heritage, Health and Wellbeing...

¹⁰³ Giliberto, F., *Heritage, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Heritage and Our Sustainable Future*, Issue 6; 5th November 2021, UNESCO, ISSN 2752-7026, accessed 8 Feb 2022 - <https://unesco.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Mental-Health-and-Wellbeing-Report.pdf>

post-pandemic community recovery, but to embed themselves in local healthy living infrastructure and community support.

The Baring Foundation report *Creatively Minded and Heritage*¹⁰⁴, delivered by the Restoration Trust in 2021, went a step further and suggested that heritage should be a core resource for people looking for mental health treatments, as it brings such a significant added value to our health and wellbeing – something which Laura Drysdale, the Restoration’s Trust CEO and others argue very convincingly in the publication¹⁰⁵. The report encourages heritage organisations to ask themselves how they could use their places, people and collections to deliver more mental health and creativity projects, and that heritage and creativity projects become widely available as a mental health prescription¹⁰⁶.

As Historic England’s 2021 *Future Strategy* points out, heritage has the potential to improve our lives, by helping us understand our past, our individual and communal identity and help us connect with the places where we live¹⁰⁷. In 2022, Historic England’s Wellbeing and Heritage strategy openly made the case for the historic environment’s role in contributing towards our wellbeing, demonstrating how it can make a positive difference to the people’s health. It committed the organisation to embed wellbeing outcomes in its work, collaborate with organisations that share the same ambition and support the sector to do the same¹⁰⁸.

Many other heritage organisations, from The Canal and River Trust¹⁰⁹ to archaeological companies and local amenity societies have been equally developing strategies and plans which have now put wellbeing at the core of what they do. The wellbeing potential of heritage is acknowledged by major funders in the sector, such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund, who have made wellbeing one of their main desired outcomes of potential applications¹¹⁰.

All the existing evidence has already demonstrated that connecting with heritage contributes significantly to people’s wellbeing – both contributing to their physical and mental health, whilst improving social connectedness, strengthening a sense of meaning and belonging, and supporting community cohesion. And it doesn’t stop there.

The healing power of heritage spreads from the individual to society more generally and has the potential to address health inequalities and improve wellbeing on a national scale. One of the best ways to do that is to embed wellbeing outcomes from the beginning of any project, while targeting local need and focusing on co-

¹⁰⁴ *Creatively Minded and Heritage*, Restoration Trust, Baring foundation, 2021, accessed May 2022 - <https://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creatively-minded-and-heritage/>

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ *Future Strategy*, Historic England...

¹⁰⁸ Wellbeing and Heritage Strategy, Historic England...

¹⁰⁹ Waterways and Wellbeing report ...

¹¹⁰ Wellbeing Outcome, NLHF, 2022, accessed June 2022 -

<https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding/good-practice-guidance/wellbeing-guidance>

production and partnership. Social prescribing is a very impactful and efficient way to achieve this.

Social prescribing is becoming embedded in the arts, culture and heritage sector with the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance finding that 40% of organisations surveyed are working with social prescribing and 90% would like to learn more about it¹¹¹.

Well-established and long-running social prescribing schemes operate within the heritage sector and have been evaluated to provide evidence of outcomes and benefits to service users, delivery bodies and the healthcare sector. However, these schemes are infrequent, primarily limited to specific areas of museums and archaeology, and not always operating within a classic social prescribing delivery model (i.e. referral or recruitment via a link worker based in primary care)¹¹².

At the same time, government initiatives like the Loneliness strategy and the Levelling Up agenda, are encouraging statutory bodies, local authorities, private and third sector organisations to come together in addressing important societal issues such as health inequalities and isolation. This gives the heritage sector yet another opportunity to not only make the case for the wellbeing benefits and the public value of heritage, but to demonstrate the wider social impact of its work and the significance of the historic environment for a healthy and sustainable human life.

In the next chapters, we would present case studies from our own work at Historic England and that of the wider heritage and VCSE sector to show how engagement with heritage and the historic environment could be utilised for wellbeing delivery through social prescribing. We have included a simple diagram, which accompanies each of the case studies, indicating how this work relates to the Six routes to wellbeing framework developed by Historic England. The truth is that these case studies offer more than one way to delivering wellbeing through heritage, but we have chosen to link each one of them to a specific pathway as an example for that particular approach. We hope that this will help better understand how the framework can be utilised in practice, and what methods of engagement can help utilise these approaches for successful delivery of wellbeing and social prescribing.

¹¹¹ Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance, April 2019. Annual Survey summary report, accessed June 2022 - <https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-04/CHWA%20Annual%20Survey%20report%20without%20comments.pdf>

¹¹² Social Prescribing and the potential of Historic England's local delivery, SQW report, 2019...

3. Historic England and Social Prescribing

Historic England, like all other public bodies in the country, strives to demonstrate the public value of its work and to showcase the potential of the historic environment to have positive social impact and improve people's lives¹¹³.

From Heritage at Risk, through Listing, Research, Development advice and the Heritage Action Zones place-based regeneration schemes, there are many existing programmes through which Historic England projects can become successful platforms for modelling social prescribing through heritage. Volunteering, site visits, apprenticeships and targeted therapy / healing interventions have all been trialled successfully and proved to be one of the six routes to wellbeing through heritage, as demonstrated by Historic England's Wellbeing and the Historic Environment Assessment in 2018¹¹⁴.

Much of the work Historic England delivers either engages or affects people and communities, and hence has the opportunity to contribute to their improved wellbeing whilst encouraging the connection with local heritage and the historic environment. Historic England's priorities often go hand in hand with those of local people and organisations, which opens avenues for collaboration for co-design and joint working of any intervention plans. The focus in all this remains the local need and what matters to the people living in those places.

Health inequalities continues to be the main challenge of all public policies in the last few years. The government is looking to address this through its Levelling up and Health Inequities agenda, which will inevitably include an expectation of all public bodies to contribute to these efforts with similar approach. Where and how they position and target their intervention will be crucial to ensure that what they do makes a difference for the communities in the most deprived areas and those left behind in any health and social care provision. Social prescribing is a way to address this by linking up existing and new voluntary and community engagement with the needs of the local communities.

In April 2020 Historic England commissioned SQW, an independent research and consultancy organisation, to explore the potential for Historic England to deliver social prescribing, key opportunities, best practice and models of engagement¹¹⁵. The report found that *“Historic England appears to be well placed to engage in social prescribing activity. The organisation has relationships and partnerships with organisations within the heritage, arts and cultural sectors at local, regional and national levels. Historic England has mechanisms in place to act as a facilitator of research, share best practice and develop relationships to enable social prescribing. Specific areas of Historic England's current work align with well-evidenced routes to wellbeing outcomes, meaning explaining the benefits of projects to referrers/link workers (and potential funders/commissioners) should prove relatively uncomplicated. Historic England was also identified as having access to (or*

¹¹³ Historic England Future Strategy, 2021...

¹¹⁴ Reilly, S. et al, *Wellbeing and the Historic Environment...*

¹¹⁵ Social Prescribing and the potential of Historic England's ...

*ownership of assets which could enable social prescribing activity, including listed heritage sites, visual assets, and staff with a wide variety of skills and knowledge.*¹¹⁶

The report identified some examples of ongoing Historic England programmes with good potential for delivering social prescribing. These included Heritage Action Zones, which focus on regeneration and revitalisation of local heritage areas with active community engagement and co-production; Enriching the List, which invites the public to share their knowledge and pictures of listed places, thus enriching the existing records for these significant heritage assets with their personal contributions; and Heritage at Risk, which identifies heritage sites at risk of being lost as a result of neglect, decay or inappropriate development and works together with communities and volunteers to repair and remove them from the register of “at risk” sites. The Historic England wellbeing team is already working on developing pilot wellbeing projects within those programmes - and some of them include social prescribing models.

During the process of internal consultation on the recently published Wellbeing & Heritage strategy, our team has found further strong evidence for the potential of Historic England to deliver wellbeing. Existing work in most Historic England teams gave us impressive examples of public value delivery (often with clear health and wellbeing outcomes for the participants) ranging from Enriching the list and the Archive public engagement projects, to Heritage Schools, High Streets Heritage Action Zones partnership programmes and community archaeology. Many of these can relatively easily be linked to local social prescribing infrastructure, which can enable people with assessed health needs to benefit from taking part in these programmes. This will simultaneously increase both the wellbeing delivery of such project and its public value, whilst supporting the local community and nourishing their connection with the historic environment.

3.1. *Historic England & Social Prescribing - Case studies*

3.1.1. Heritage Action Zones



Place: belonging

In Kirkham, Lancashire, the *Kirkham Heritage, Health and Wellbeing programme*¹¹⁷ is part of the High Street Heritage Action Zone initiative (HSHAZ), in partnership with Fylde Council and Historic England and in collaboration with the NHS, Lancashire County Council and other stakeholders. The idea for a Kirkham

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Kirkham Heritage, Health and Wellbeing programme , accessed May 2022 - <https://www.kirkhamfutures.org/plans/health-and-wellbeing-programme>

Heritage and Wellbeing scheme was conceived by Andrew Chatterjee (Regeneration Programme Manager) in 2019 as one strand of a £3 million grant application to Historic England's High Street Heritage Action Zone initiative (HS HAZ) scheme. Fylde Council commissioned Helen Shearn Associates (HSA) to undertake a feasibility study and planning a programme to improve personal and community wellbeing using social prescribing. The programme has four overarching heritage themes and activities: Sustainable textiles; Life stories and memories; Heathy living and food and Heritage skills and craft. The feasibility study showed how the programme could contribute to the NHS Long Term plan with its whole systems approach, working better together, making best use of resources, assets and supporting health priorities¹¹⁸.

Building on the SQW report on Historic England's potential to deliver social prescribing and a review of academic studies, HSA developed a social prescribing vision for Kirkham with recommendations for the three social prescribing process steps: referral, consultation with a link worker, interaction with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector.

One of the first priorities was to commission a pilot project delivered by the Phoenix Rising partnership. This was also a pragmatic approach to extend and capitalise on the learning and relationships from their similar project in Central and North Lancashire and South Cumbria for the Thriving Communities funded scheme by the National Academy of Social prescribing (also supported by Historic England). They initially provided tasters and then regular weekly sessions in combined activities involving art, nature and movement that will draw on the distinct heritage themes of Kirkham¹¹⁹.

The whole programme has been created in collaboration with local people and communities, who helped in the first testing phase of the project to gather all the necessary feedback and ideas. This then informed the creation of a consortium, working to make the best of existing resources and opportunities such as partnering up with Lancashire museum service, Kirkham Treasures and the Kirkham archives to create heritage and wellbeing activities. These included heritage dance and a social and wellbeing event for the most isolated older people. In addition, a new Hillside Heritage and Arts Eco Skills centre is planned to provide the ideal environment and catalyst with a sustainable multi partnership programme of heritage based wellbeing activities and specialist courses for the people in Kirkham.

¹¹⁸ Heritage and Social Prescribing – Thriving Communities webinar, June 2021 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFI4w3LZrv4>

¹¹⁹ Chaterjee, A., Shearn, H., *Kirkham: Forging a Heritage Programme as a Bridge to Wellbeing*, Historic England Research, Feb 2022, accessed June 2022 - <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/research/kirkham-forging-a-heritage-programme-as-a-bridge-to-wellbeing/>



Figure 6. Poulton Street, Kirkham, Lancashire © Helen Shearn Associates

The Wyre and Extended Rural Primary Care Network (WREN PCN) is very keen to support this programme and strategic planning is underway on funding and recruiting for a unique and innovative bridging role – a Local Heritage Health and Wellbeing Coach, working alongside the existing local social prescriber, employed by the NHS or the voluntary and community sector, and assisting in specialised referrals to heritage activities and initiatives in Kirkham. In this way, Kirkham will not only widen the spectrum of its social prescribing activities and meet more of its population’ needs, but will also contribute into showcasing the wellbeing potential of engaging with heritage and unleashing it for the benefit of its community and the historic environment in the area¹²⁰.



Figure 7. The Cotton heritage dance performance by the About Time Dance Company in Kirkham, October 2021. With school girls from Carr Hill School, Kirkham, Lancashire, © Jenny Reeves (About Time Dance Company)

¹²⁰ Gradinarova, D., *Heritage and Social Prescribing*, Historic England Research, Issue 18, Sept 2021, accessed June 2022 - <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/research/back-issues/heritage-and-social-prescribing/>

3.1.2. Heritage at Risk



Process: volunteering

Heritage volunteering, which accounts for 5.5% of all voluntary work undertaken in England, can have particular wellbeing benefits, as demonstrated earlier¹²¹.

Historic England commissioned the *Heritage at Risk and Wellbeing* project carried out by University of Lincoln in 2020-2021 to explore the wellbeing benefits derived from volunteering through participation in historic *Heritage at Risk* (HaR) projects. The reported benefits under the themes of purpose, being, capacity, sharing, self-nurture and self-actualisation are present, even when not specifically targeted, which makes the potential for their social impact even more impressive when these are embedded from the beginning. The study showed that this engagement offers a very diverse range of wellbeing outcomes and led to the development of a methodology for the working practices during projects, and for the recording, analysis and understanding of volunteer experience – hence, providing a framework for projects of this kind and a model for initiating future HaR projects¹²².

With a relevant evaluation framework and wellbeing focus in place, the delivery of our HaR work can help Historic England articulate its public value and contribution to tackling health inequalities in quite a compelling way.

In some places, Historic England's local HAR teams are already supporting social prescribing pilots in the making.

In Cornwall, Historic England's South West Heritage at Risk team are supporting a project led by the Cornwall Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to deliver the ambitious Monumental Improvement project¹²³, which implements social prescribing in HaR renovation work. The project is planning to refer local people to a range of educational and wellbeing activities focusing around the protection and improvement of 40 Scheduled Monuments listed on Historic England's Heritage at Risk register or classified as vulnerable. The 40 sites span over 4,000 years of Cornish history, with some Scheduled Monuments predating the pyramids. Working with landowners, partners and local communities, the project will help to stabilise these important heritage sites to ensure that they can be enjoyed by future generations, and simultaneously will provide a wide variety of local people with health and wellbeing

¹²¹ Taking Part 2018/19: statistical release: Volunteering (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 19 September 2019), accessed July 2022 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/takingpart-201819-statistical-release> accessed 21 July 2020.)

¹²² Lewis et al, *Wellbeing in Volunteers* ...

¹²³ Monumental Improvement, Cornwall AONB, accessed May 2022 - <https://www.cornwall-aonb.gov.uk/monumental-improvement>

opportunities through social prescribing. The project is envisaging to develop heritage activities which will be used for local social prescribing referrals, offering the participants the chance to partake in guided walks, volunteering, archaeological training, and further skills development¹²⁴.

The Cornwall AONB team wants to demonstrate the wellbeing potential of connecting with our local heritage, the significance of our historic environment and the positive influence it has on both people and place.



Figure 8. Members of the Monumental Improvement project visiting a Heritage at Risk site in Cornwall. © Cornwall AONB

3.1.3. Enriching the List



Mechanism: sharing

Enriching the List is a Historic England service, which has been running since July 2016. It encourages members of the public and heritage professionals to add new content to the statutory listing for sites. Additional content can include photos, historical events and social history, information about site architecture or archaeology, and links to useful online resources. List entries are the most viewed element of Historic England's website until 2021 (with four million hits per year), and there is recognised potential for this as a resource for community engagement.

Historic England used Enriching the List as a wellbeing tool for the first time in 2018, as part of the Ramsgate HAZ work, where the local East Kent Mencap purchased a listed building in need of repair to expand their services for people with learning

¹²⁴ Monuments Matter to People in Cornwall, Ideas Hub, NASP-
<https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/monuments-matter-to-people-in-cornwall/>

disabilities and their families. The building, Foresters Hall on Meeting Street, needed restoration and refurbishment, which led to East Kent Mencap's involvement with the Ramsgate Heritage Action Zone. With the support of Historic England's Enriching the List team, a project was proposed for members to document the restoration process using Enriching the List to record photographs and individual reflections¹²⁵.

A group of East Kent Mencap members took photographs of the building, which were then uploaded on the EtL platform with individual reflections on that part of their local history. This allowed them to develop a relationship with their building and a sense of ownership. Having their images and reflections uploaded and available through Enriching the List reportedly provided participants with instant connection to the building and a reward for their efforts¹²⁶.



Figure 9. East Kent Mencap participants in Enriching the List project: courtesy of East Kent Mencap

Contributions through Enriching the List can reveal new information not only about a building but also about a person. Some of the most captivating are those that provide glimpses into the stories of the people that have been associated with it in the course of its history, even up to recent times. It provides an opportunity to creatively contribute to the lasting legacy of designated heritage assets and offers an avenue for personal storytelling. In recognising the potential of this a small project was designed with the aim of evaluating the wellbeing benefits of engagement with the NHLE via Enriching the List.

A subsequent research project, called *Enriching the List, Enriching lives* was carried out in 2021-2022 internally to Historic England. It aimed to identify the wellbeing

¹²⁵ Roberts, L et al, Historic England's potential to ...

¹²⁶ Heritage and social Prescribing webinar...

benefits that some of the Enriching the list most regular users (also called super-users) derive from using the service. Six participants were selected from among Enriching the list's 'super users' for this study. Data was collected in one-to-one phone interviews with participants. The questions sought to understand the contributors' relationship with Enriching the List with regard to: Getting started, Impact of lockdown, Engagement and activity, Motivation, Interest in local heritage, Interest in the List, Wellbeing, and Purpose¹²⁷.

The results of the interviews are painting a very diverse picture: some participants happened across Enriching the List by chance, whilst others had seen promotional activity and followed it up. They described their participation either as 'a hobby' or as 'volunteering' or 'contributing'.

In addition, Enriching the List was identified as a reason to go and see things that would not otherwise have been visited. One participant said : *'I'm going to places that I've not been to, some I've never been to, last week I went up to Lancaster... where I've not been since I was on holiday there as an 8 year old in 1954.'* The participant reinforced this by stating that *'There are thousands of places I wouldn't have gone to'*¹²⁸.

Others shared that participation helped them specifically in periods of personal difficulty. It gave people a purpose and enabled them to get their existing photo archives and newly created material out there into the public domain. Participants felt as if they were making a difference, learning new skills and enjoying an opportunity and motivation to exercise.

There was a strong sense among participants that doing something useful had a positive impact on their mental health – even more so when considering the legacy element of this activity: once submitted, the participant's text, photos and information became part of a permanent presence for the future – something that brought a lot of personal satisfaction. One participant stated: *"Members of the public and perhaps researchers and the like, they will be looking back perhaps 50 years, 100 years from now and they will be looking at these photographs. So it gives me some satisfaction to think that I'm contributing something which might be useful to...people in the future"*¹²⁹.

This notion of having a purpose and a focus was strong amongst the participants, showing the activity can be a powerful means of supporting wellbeing.

This research is small in scale, but it represents the first enquiry into the benefits of Enriching the List to its contributors. It provides insight into how volunteering in this way can provide positive benefits for life satisfaction and mental health. Enriching the List provides a great opportunity for 'meaning making' through its role in providing new perspectives for individuals on life and experiences and gives a purpose that helps current and future generations connect with, enjoy and understand our heritage better.

Historic England have commissioned the development of a free community wellbeing tool out of this service – called Enriching the List, Enriching lives. It will be useful for a variety of heritage and wellbeing project and interventions, including for

¹²⁷ HE Research, Enriching the List, Enriching Lives, Bishop et al., 2022

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

social prescribing. The toolkit is now in its final stages of external consultation and will be available later this year on Historic England's website.

3.2. Partnership with NASP and Thriving Communities case studies

As identified by the SQW report, Historic England has a variety of opportunities to lead the sector in modelling social prescribing through heritage – by championing embedding wellbeing and health aims and outcomes in heritage work, supporting the collation of evidence, development of toolkits and guidance, and fostering cross-sectoral partnerships, especially with the health sector and those leading in the social prescribing field.

Following these recommendations, in 2020 Historic England formed a partnership with the National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP). The National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP) was launched on the 23 October 2019. The Academy creates partnerships across the arts, heritage, health, sports, leisure, and the natural environment to promote health and wellbeing at a national and local level. NASP champions social prescribing and the work of local communities in connecting people for wellbeing.

This was followed by the establishment of the post of Historic Environment Lead within the Academy, and allowed Historic England to become a strategic and funding partner of the Thriving Communities Fund¹³⁰ (which supported 37 cross-sector innovative social prescribing projects across the country), to organise the first national Heritage & Social Prescribing webinar in June 2021¹³¹, support the development of many local, regional and national heritage and social prescribing pilots, release the Heritage Special edition of Podcasts on Prescription in December 2021¹³², produce internal guidance on Social Prescribing for Historic England's staff and to establish a sector-wide Heritage and Social Prescribing Community of Practice in 2022.

The Thriving Communities Programme, created by the National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP) in a unique partnership with the Arts Council England, Historic England, Natural England, NHS England and NHS Improvement, Sport England, the Money & Pensions Service and NHS Charities Together supported 36 projects across England with its £1.8 million fund.

Historic England joined the Thriving Communities Fund, providing support for projects which use the power of culture and heritage alongside nature, sport, health and financial support to benefit the wellbeing of communities most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Three of the Thriving Communities Fund supported projects have utilised the historic environment in designing their social prescribing projects –

¹³⁰ Historic England Supports National Social Prescribing Initiative, Historic England, March 2021, accessed May 2022 - <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/historic-england-supports-social-prescribing-initiative/>

¹³¹ Heritage and Social Prescribing webinar...

¹³² Heritage and Social Prescribing, Podcast on Prescription, NASP, Dec 2021, accessed June 2022 - <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/podcast-on-prescription-heritage/>

Exeter's All's Well, Delapre Abbey's Green Happy Community Hub, and the Canal & River Trust Nottingham & Beeston Canal's Waterways & Wellbeing.

3.2.1. Exeter's All's Well



Participation: visiting

Exeter's All's Well is a project run by Exeter Community Centre Trust (ECCT), Exeter Historic Buildings Trust (EHBT) and Devon & Exeter Medical Heritage Trust (DEMHT), aiming to show the benefits of engaging with heritage for health. The project used the funding from the Thriving Communities Fund to support vulnerable communities through history and heritage.

The Trusts recruited and trained 30 local Volunteer Trail Guides and community hosts to show visitors round the heritage and history of the St David's area of Exeter. Through a range of activities such as training and workshops, presentations, curation, story-telling skills and personal development activities, confidence and resilience building and training in using spaces therapeutically they developed the resources available to increase social prescribing in the area. Open days, community events, exhibitions, artefact handling sessions in Exeter Community Centre and St Nicholas Priory all provided ways for the community to engage¹³³.

¹³³ 3000 people see that All's Well in historic Exeter through heritage with health benefits, Ideas Hub, NASP, accessed May 2022 - <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/alls-well-exeter/>



Figure 10. People waiting in Exeter Community Centre to go on the newly-researched All's Well St David's Trail, ©Exeter Community Centre

In March 2020, ECCT set up St David's Community Help Scheme, taking referrals from Wellbeing Exeter – the social prescribing hub. The scheme highlighted potential to engage the community in deeper cultural awareness of the area, its heritage and diversity as a way of promoting health and wellness. All's Well continued to build on this, engaging more people and shaping the experience of heritage with health benefits.

The Exeter Historic Buildings Trust is developing St. Nicholas Priory as a hub for the creative, cultural and social engagement of the community. In the Benedictine wellbeing tradition, the Trust opened a 'Modern Medicinal Garden' at the SNP in summer 2021, a volunteer-led project following a process of community garden design workshops. The St David's trails and events promoted the Priory as a living example of a community welcome to all. By training volunteers, the Trust developed understanding of wellbeing through plant-based remedies and medicines – their past and present uses¹³⁴.

Those taking part experienced improvements in confidence, feeling less lonely, a greater sense of community belonging, more frequent contact, and better physical health. They wanted also to see people understand the local community places

¹³⁴ St Nicholas Priory, All's Well – Our Latest Community Project!, accessed June 2022 - <https://www.nicholaspriory.com/all-s-well/>

and grow their knowledge of the heritage and distinctiveness of their neighbourhood.

In the long-term, the plan is to help transform social prescribing in Exeter, with increased collaboration between public, voluntary agencies and community groups, facilitating co-commissioning and co-delivery of services. In February 2022 All's Well project team hold their Social Prescribing Connections Conference¹³⁵, which brought together those working with community and culture in Exeter to celebrate, challenge and learn how best they can contribute to the wellbeing of their City. The ambition is that this will form St David's Community Wellness Network of public and VCSE organisations, which can be the sustainable solution that works for local people, from COVID-19 and beyond.

3.2.2. Delapré Abbey's Green Happy Community Hub



Environment: experiencing

Delapré Abbey's Green Happy Community Hub is a partnership project between Delapré Abbey Preservation Trust, Action for Happiness Northamptonshire, Warts and All Theatre, The General Practice Alliance Federation, Northampton Leisure Trust, Northamptonshire Sport, and the University of Northampton, who worked together to put communities at the heart of public health. Based on Action for Happiness' 'Ten Keys to Happier Living', this project aimed to reach and improve the health of up to 3000 people through arts, culture, and physical activities utilising green and heritage spaces. The programme focused on arts and culture experiences, community decision making, volunteer training, social groups to form relationships, variety of exercise classes, mindfulness, skills building, and resilience through talking therapies¹³⁶.

¹³⁵ Exeter Community Centre, accessed May 2022 - <https://www.eccentre.org/index.php/resources/resource-one>

¹³⁶ First Green Happy Café coming to Northamptonshire, Delapre abbey, accessed May 2022 - <https://delapreabbey.org/first-green-happy-cafe-coming-to-northamptonshire>



Figure 11. People taking part in the launch of the new 3km health walk as part of the Green Happy Community Hub at Delapré Abbey, © Delapré Abbey

Through person and community-centred approaches to health and wellbeing, and utilising and building on the community asset of Delapré Abbey and Park, the project empowered people to have control over their health and change conditions in society that drive poor health.

“The main target group of the population we are working with are people with long-term conditions and low wellbeing. The beautiful Delapré Park sits within an urban environment, making it an ideal location. For many with long-term conditions they have become isolated as they have had to be shielded, the open space of the park provides an opportunity for people to come together and be safe together. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that communities need outdoor space to enjoy, relax and explore.”, says one of the project partners, Dr David Smart, Clinical Director Prevention and Mental Health, General Practice Alliance¹³⁷.

The Far-Cotton and Delapré ward in Northamptonshire is one of the top 10% most deprived wards in the country and deprivation has a noticeable impact on the life chances of young people and increased health inequalities.

Delapré Park is much loved by the Northampton community, with over 750,000 visits across the year. Centrally located, it is an ideal location for green social prescribing, in heritage setting. The goal was to reach up to 3000 people, making a

¹³⁷ A Green Happy Café in the centre of Northampton, Ideas Hub, NASP, accessed May 2022 - <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/green-happy-cafe/>

significant impact on the health and social care of the population. There are plans for legacy assets, such as green routes, park activities and a wellbeing app.

DAPT works with a number of core partners to put communities at the heart of public health. They describe the change needed as a “radical shift” and want to see more person and community-centred approaches to health and wellbeing. Through non-clinical methods, using participatory approaches, co-creation, a reduction to barriers to engagement through “Access Funds” and utilising and building on the community asset of Delapré Abbey & Park, they aimed to change the conditions that drive poor health by addressing community-level factors such as social networks, social capital, and empower people to have control over their health¹³⁸.

3.2.3. The CRT Nottingham & Beeston Canal’s Waterways & Wellbeing project



Healing: therapy

The Canal & River Trust Nottingham & Beeston Canal’s Waterways & Wellbeing project is designed to make use of the Nottingham & Beeston Canal as a focal point to help people tackle mental and physical health problems.

People living along the length of the canal, which runs from Nottingham to Beeston, can access a variety of activities to help boost their physical and mental health. Activities include canoe and paddleboard sessions, gardening along the canal, volunteering opportunities, heritage and wellbeing walks. There are also opportunities to join photography courses, arts activities, cookery classes and communal meals at venues along the canal¹³⁹.

¹³⁸ Action for Happiness – First Green Happy Café coming to Northamptonshire, embedding green social prescribing in the community for 3000 people, Ideas Hub, NASP, accessed May 2022 - <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/action-for-happiness/>

¹³⁹ *Social Prescribing in Nottingham*, Canal & River Trust, accessed May 2022 - <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/about-us/where-we-work/east-midlands/social-prescribing-in-nottingham>



Figure 12. Canoe and paddleboard sessions on the historic Nottingham & Beeston canal, enjoyed by participants in the Waterways and Wellbeing project

The project is being run by a partnership of local organisations including the Canal & River Trust, Nottingham Community & Voluntary Service, Notts County Foundation, Canalside Heritage Centre, Nottingham Photographers Hub and local foodbank Himmah. This programme is open to everyone living in Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County and aims to support people who struggle with their mental wellbeing or social isolation.

The 36 projects have been undergoing a detailed evaluation from the start – both on local and national level – and the results of this evaluation will be available in October

2022. Most projects have now either completed their programmes or are in the final months of their delivery. They have brought a very impressive and useful range of evidence for the opportunities and challenges of developing and delivering social prescribing cross-sectoral partnership projects, and their experience and collated data will be crucial for the advancement of knowledge and practical implementation of social prescribing in the heritage sector.

NASP and its strategic partners (The Arts Council, Natural England, Sport England, Money and Pension Service and others) are now setting up the joined priorities for the next 3 years. For Historic England, these include continuing to make the case and gathering robust evidence for the wellbeing benefits of heritage, developing and scaling up the existing provision of social prescribing within the sector and through preparing a set of social prescribing guidance for heritage organisations and link workers. We are also aiming to develop further the recently established heritage and social prescribing community of practice, to support the work of the regional social prescribing cross-sector networks, and help linking the existing heritage social prescribing offer with the NHS regional infrastructure.

4. Wider heritage sector and social prescribing – case studies

4.1. *Museums on prescription*



Mechanism: sharing

The heritage sector involves a great diversity of heritage, cultural and charity organisations that utilise the richness of the historic environment and local heritage to offer activities and opportunities for people to engage and improve their wellbeing. In the last 5 years the amount and scope of heritage and wellbeing projects have expanded significantly – and more and more they are demonstrating interest and innovation in exploring the benefits of social prescribing.

One of the first pioneers in linking heritage specifically with social prescribing was the Heritage-in-Health project carried out by the University College London Museums Collection¹⁴⁰. It explored the effects of museum object-handling for people in receipt of care or medical treatment with groups varying in age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background and diagnosis. Based on SWB and PWB measures, the quantitative UCLMC studies demonstrated an increase in wellbeing scores following the handling sessions, with slight variations in improvement across groups with certain health issues¹⁴¹.

The results of this work inspired further progress into applying museum interactions to social prescribing approaches, leading to the significant findings of the UCL-led Museums on Prescription projects in 2014-2017 that participation in museum-based activities, such as object handling and reminiscence, led to improved mood and feelings of satisfaction, and benefited from opportunities for learning and acquiring new skills¹⁴². The study also showed that such types of cultural engagement can help fight social isolation and loneliness for adults of a variety of age groups, as well as lead to increased sense of belonging, improved quality of life, increased social, creative and

¹⁴⁰ Ander, E., Thomson, L., Noble, G., Lanceley, A., Menon, U., Chatterjee, h., Heritage-in-Health, A guide to using museum collections in hospitals and other healthcare settings, 2017, accessed May 2022 - <https://culturehealthresearch.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/ucl-heritage-in-health-guide-2012.pdf>

¹⁴¹ Thomson, L.J., Ander, E.E., Menon, U., Lanceley, A., Chatterjee, H., Evaluating the therapeutic effects of museum object handling with hospital patients: A review and initial trial of wellbeing measures. *Journal of Applied Arts and Health*, 2(1), 2011, accessed May 2022 - https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anne-Lanceley/publication/265346265_Evaluating_the_therapeutic_effects_of_museum_object_handling_with_hospital_patients_A_review_and_initial_trial_of_wellbeing_measures/links/56570be08ae4988a7b51fab/Evaluating-the-therapeutic-effects-of-museum-object-handling-with-hospital-patients-A-review-and-initial-trial-of-wellbeing-measures.pdf

¹⁴² Museums on Prescription, UCL accessed May 2022 - <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/biosciences/partnerships-and-innovation/outreach-public-engagement/public-engagement/museums-prescription>

learning activity and healthier lifestyle changes¹⁴³. In addition, the high levels of significance and effect sizes in the study infer that findings can be generalised more widely “the formation of social capital through co-productivity, exchange of ideas, and enhanced sense of community and belonging”¹⁴⁴.

As summed up in the What Works Centre for Wellbeing’s report *Heritage and Wellbeing: The State of the Evidence*¹⁴⁵, providing activity-based care is increasingly seen as a central aspect of care for people with cognitive impairments, including dementia. At the study site of Castleside Inpatient Dementia Service, Newcastle - upon-Tyne, UK activities were delivered by TWAM staff utilising the museum’s object handling collection, predominantly social history objects from the 1950s to the 1970s. The study sought to examine the impact of object handling sessions within a dementia-specialist hospital context to assess the effects of engagement for people with moderate-to-severe dementia in relation to mood and social interaction (resident-to-resident and resident-to-care staff), and patient agitation. A new coding protocol, The Museum Engagement Observation Tool¹⁴⁶, was developed to evidence these effects. The study added support to the value of museum object handling for activity-based dementia care as part of a non-pharmacological intervention. Of the papers submitted to the Arts Council’s calls for evidence, six addressed dementias, half in the museum context¹⁴⁷. They found that adults aged 50+ visiting museums every few months or more associated with a lower incidence rate of dementia over a 10-year period compared with less frequent attendance, suggesting that visiting museums ‘may be a promising psychosocial activity to support the prevention of dementia’¹⁴⁸.

There is now a range of evidence that suggests that museums and galleries can help with a range of health issues, enhance wellbeing, and build social capital and resilience. These organisations have the potential to address a wide spectrum of health, wellbeing, and social needs, including:

- healthy ageing;
- health education;
- reduction of stress, social isolation and pain intensity (possibly linked to reduced drug consumption);
- enhanced mental health (possibly linked to reduced reliance on mental health services);

¹⁴³ Chatterjee, H.J., Camic, P.M., Lockyer, B. and Thomson, L.J., Non-clinical community interventions: a systematised review of social prescribing schemes. *Arts & Health*, 2017, accessed May 2022 - <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17533015.2017.1334002>

¹⁴⁴ Chatterjee, H., Effects of a museum-based social prescription intervention on quantitative measures of psychological wellbeing in older adults, UCL, 2017, accessed May 2022 – [https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10042751/1/Chatterjee LT et al\(2017\)Pespectives Main Text accepted version.pdf](https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10042751/1/Chatterjee_LT_et_al(2017)Pespectives_Main_Text_accepted_version.pdf)

¹⁴⁵ Pennington et al, 2019...

¹⁴⁶ Morse, N, Chatterjee, H., *Museums, health and wellbeing research: co-developing a new observational method for people with dementia in hospital contexts*, UCL, 2018, accessed May 2022 - https://culturehealthresearch.files.wordpress.com/2021/05/pph_museum-health-wellbeing-dementia-tool_morse-et-al_2018.pdf

¹⁴⁷ Pennington et al, 2019...

¹⁴⁸ Fancourt et al, 2018...

- increased mobility;
- cognitive stimulation;
- sociality and employability.

Museums are also increasingly turning their attention to how their outdoor spaces can be used for health and wellbeing projects¹⁴⁹. They could play a key role in piloting frameworks through which people can be signposted to the cultural and community resources they require. There is need for innovative models of access and practice¹⁵⁰, so that museums can maximise their potential of being active local wellbeing and social prescribing community hubs.

4.2. Wessex Archaeology and Well-City Salisbury



Healing: therapy

Wessex Archaeology started their Well-City Salisbury project in May 2021, when they partnered up with organisations across Salisbury (ArtCare, The Salisbury Museum and Wiltshire Creative) to support people with a mental health need through creative courses, volunteering opportunities and training. Incorporating a social prescribing model, Well-City supports local organisations and health services working with people with mental health needs¹⁵¹.

¹⁴⁹ Pennington [et al, 2019...](#)

¹⁵⁰ Desmarais, S., Bedford, L. and Chatterjee, H.J., *Museums as Spaces for Wellbeing: A Second Report from the National Alliance for Museums, Health and Wellbeing*, 2018, accessed May 2022 - <https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-08/museums-as-spaces-for-wellbeing-a-second-report.pdf>

¹⁵¹ Well-City Salisbury, Wessex Archaeology, accessed May 2022- <https://www.wessexarch.co.uk/well-city-salisbury>



Figure 13. Well City Salisbury project team, courtesy to The Salisbury Museum

In May 2021, the project received £260,000 from the National Lottery Community Fund to fund this innovative three-year project¹⁵². In Year One each organisation run two 8-week creative courses for up to 12 participants, which played to the strengths of the organisation. For example, Wessex Archaeology run a course on creative landscape walks, whereas Wiltshire Creative organised a music course. In Years Two and Three volunteer mentor and peer to peer course are introduced, so that there is a progression for people who wish to stay connected to the project and continue their wellbeing journey with them. These courses present participants with opportunities to develop further skills, gain confidence and potentially become volunteers. Each year ends with an exhibition and a celebration, while at the end of Year Three there will be opportunities to share learning and experiences through symposiums, conferences, articles and resource packs.

The free 8-week long creative courses, such as photography, textiles and pottery, are delivered by the four project partners and facilitated by staff and local artists experienced in supporting people with mental health needs. Courses are available for both adults (over 20s) and young people (14-19).

Well-City Salisbury primarily uses a model where participants are referred onto a course by their GP practice, support organisation, community group or school wellbeing team. However, they also welcome self-referrals if that route doesn't work for people and where they currently are.

¹⁵² *Well-City Salisbury project gets £260k of Lottery funding*, Salisbury Journal, 11 May 2021, accessed May 2022 - <https://www.salisburyjournal.co.uk/news/19292685.well-city-salisbury-project-gets-260k-lottery-funding/>

The project was launched with a pilot creative course delivered by The Salisbury Museum which started in October 2021, followed by the opening of the courses in creative writing, art and earth works in January and February 2022.

Participants are encouraged to take up a maximum of 2 creative courses per year and to stay involved by exploring other project pathways, such as available volunteering programmes.

Salisbury Well-City has its own evaluation programme, led by The Centre for Public History and Heritage at Manchester Metropolitan University¹⁵³.

4.3. *Historic Houses and Social Prescribing*

Historic Houses have a great potential to play a significant role in demonstrating the power of heritage to improve people's lives and health. People readily associate heritage and the historic environment with traditional architecture, historic buildings and collections - and the benefits of exploring these sites are proven and well recorded¹⁵⁴. It is not only yet another way to have a great day out in beautiful surroundings, but an encounter that stimulates our minds through learning and exploring – and fuels our imagination and emotions through stories and associations. And it doesn't stop there.

Many historic houses and their estates incorporate a variety of heritage assets apart from the actual houses - historic parks and gardens, battlefields, historic landscapes, archaeological sites, dry stone walls, historic farms, bridges and viaducts – all full of character and rich historic fabric. The treasures of the natural and historic environment, culture and heritage are there in abundance and represent a uniquely powerful toolkit for unleashing the wellbeing potential of the historic houses in this country.

From general volunteering and house / garden visiting, through organising tours, walks and exercise classes, to specially designed public engagement activities and school / youth educational programmes – many of the existing projects that they already have on offer can be adapted to or utilised for local social prescribing referrals. The key to achieving this is to engage the local voluntary and social enterprise groups who play a vital role in supporting communities, and to understand local population need¹⁵⁵.

Some Historic Houses' members have already started piloting social prescribing programmes and are happy to share the benefits of supporting local people to connect with nature and heritage on their grounds.

¹⁵³ *Well-City Salisbury*, The Salisbury Museum Volunteer Blog , Nov 2021, accessed May 2022 - <https://salisburymuseum.wordpress.com/2021/11/20/well-city-salisbury/>

¹⁵⁴ Sofaer, J. et al, 2021...

¹⁵⁵ Gradinarova, D, *Just what the doctor ordered*, *Historic Houses* magazine, October/November 2021, referred to - <https://www.historichouses.org/social-prescribing/>

Blenheim Palace



Environment: experience

Blenheim Palace have partnered with Aspire, the Oxfordshire-based charity supporting homeless and disadvantaged individuals, the Eden Project and the University of Oxford on a new social prescribing project, funded by Research England¹⁵⁶. It is aimed at addressing the mental distress, social isolation and physical inactivity caused by lockdown. The six-week programme saw a group of volunteers take part in two-hour walks and mindfulness activities around the Estate. Overall the project's aim was to increase the participant's wellbeing by engaging them in social activities connected to nature and the great outdoors in heritage setting¹⁵⁷. Activity trackers monitored their progress and questionnaires will be used to gather data and assess its effectiveness.

Feedback from the first cohort has been resoundingly positive around the impact of the project on their mental health and general wellbeing - with initial results indicating an increase in activity levels for all participants involved. Many have confided that the sessions have enabled them to overcome the initial anxiety felt at the prospect of joining a project and meeting new people, to feel comfortable and understood amongst others with shared experiences, expressing genuine engagement and appreciation for the weekly opportunity to be mindful and reflective¹⁵⁸. Many participants have made new friends and developed the confidence to explore other opportunities for personal development after spending their walks chatting with fellow participants and support workers about how else they can support their own personal wellbeing in a way that best suits them - from new hobbies, access to learning, volunteering and support to get 'work ready'¹⁵⁹.

The positive feedback and results of the pilot led to the decision to continue the programme for further 12 months. The final report confirmed the initial findings,

¹⁵⁶ *We've Piloted A Social Prescription Programme*, Blenheim Palace, accessed May 2022 - <https://www.blenheimestate.com/news/social-prescription-programme.html>

¹⁵⁷ *The University of Oxford & Blenheim Innovation Partnership*, Innovation for Health and Wellbeing, accessed Aug 2022 - <https://www.blenheimestate.com/assets/files/downloads/estate/innovations-project.pdf#page=3>

¹⁵⁸ Wellbeing works - Aspire and Blenheim Estate's 'Social Prescribing' pilot, Aspire website - <https://www.aspireoxfordshire.org/blog/wellbeing-works-aspire-and-blenheim-estates-social-prescribing-pilot>

¹⁵⁹ Walking at Blenheim Palace for wellbeing film, Uni of Oxford - <https://www.alumni.ox.ac.uk/article/walking-at-blenheim-palace-for-wellbeing>

with some key findings pointing to 12% increase in step counts, reduction of anxiety by 19%, 8% increase in happiness and 20% increase in life satisfaction.¹⁶⁰



Figure 14. Blenheim Palace – Social Prescribing pilot. © Blenheim Palace

Powderham Castle



Healing: therapy

Powderham Castle in Devon follows a broad and inclusive approach to health and wellbeing as part of their mission to embed Powderham at the heart of their community. Welcoming almost 40,000 visitors a year, Powderham works closely with local groups and partner charities to develop inclusive programmes that engage all sections of the community¹⁶¹ - these range from street dance in the castle to school play productions in the riding school, tai chi and yoga and development of more accessible, interactive tours of the castle. They have developed a programme of wellbeing-focused events, including ‘*An Evening of Zen*’ – a mindfulness inspired evening including meditation in the pleasure gardens and outdoor Tai Chi sessions. A sensory garden installation, developed with Dr Diana Waters, includes a soundscape of audio triggers to help participants with memory engagement and meditation. This garden is also intended to provide an immersive experience for local dementia groups such as Mede Care Home, which Powderham host for regular social meetings.¹⁶²

Powderham castle are also letting Powderham’s gay history out of the closets in support of the local LGBTQ community. They have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Exeter, which will include further research into the untold LGBTQ histories of the Courtenay ancestors. Powderham are active in the

¹⁶⁰ *The University of Oxford & Blenheim Innovation Partnership...*

¹⁶¹ *Heritage, Health and Wellbeing...*, p. 41

¹⁶² *Fireside yoga, sensory gardens and inclusive histories*, Health and wellbeing case studies, Historic Houses, accessed May 2022 - <https://www.historichouses.org/case-studies/health-and-wellbeing-case-studies/>

LGBTQ community, regularly hosting local youth group X-Plore for their fundraising events, and supporting Pride events throughout rural Devon. Powderham also offers a Pride Tour of the castle, which helps visitors engage with historic sexuality conversations.

Storytelling and hosting music events and festivals that leave people feeling lifted are also part of Powderham castle's offer. As the Lady of the house and its caretaker, AJ Langer Courtenay sums it up: "*I believe that the most effective way for people to learn the health benefits of connecting with arts and culture is to experience it. I would like Powderham to be a hub for social prescribing*"¹⁶³.

Mapperton House



Process: volunteering

After initial meetings with local NHS link workers, GP surgeries and NASP, Mapperton House is working with these organisations to create a model that will draw on their gardens, house and historic environment to create a social prescribing offer for local people¹⁶⁴. Building on the positive feedback from volunteers previously involved at Mapperton, and on their experience of engaging local communities in rewilding and nature projects¹⁶⁵, Mapperton and the Montagu family are hoping to make the house and its gardens more accessible to people who, for various reasons, including social inhibitions or restriction on their mobility, might be struggling to join local activities and feel included in their community. In Luke Montagu's own words, "*Social prescribing is a really important part of the mix of things that we can do to engage with the local community*"¹⁶⁶.

Visitors to Mapperton already enjoy taking a walk through the beautiful gardens and immersing themselves in the past through the guided tours of the house. Such a sensory experience can create positive emotions in people of all ages, especially for those who are feeling isolated and lonely.

¹⁶³ *AJ's Turn in parliament*, Powderham Castle website, accessed Oct 2021 - <https://www.powderham.co.uk/news/view/ajs-turn-in-parliament>

¹⁶⁴ Gradinarova, D, *Just what the doctor ordered*, 2021...

¹⁶⁵ *Case Study: Mapperton Wildlands*, Rewilding Britain, accessed Aug 2022 - <https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/blog/case-study-mapperton-wildlands>

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*



Figure 15. Volunteers taking part in Mapperton estate re-wilding walks, planned to be included in their social prescribing offer

As a next step, they want to offer people who have benefited from a social prescribing at Mapperton the chance to continue their wellbeing journey by joining the volunteering team there, which will help people feel part of something bigger and being an important part of their community.

4.4. Heritage Link Worker – The Restoration Trust



Place: belonging

Following the wide internal and external engagement programme undertaken by the Wellbeing team at Historic England in preparation for the forthcoming Wellbeing & Heritage strategy, many heritage organisations took part in the first Heritage and

Social prescribing webinar, organised in partnership with NASP in June 2021¹⁶⁷, and reached out to express interest in piloting social prescribing. One of them was the Norfolk-based charity The Restoration Trust, already well-known for pioneering heritage and wellbeing approaches in their work and developing partnership “culture therapy” projects in support of people with mental health problems.

Historic England awarded The Restoration Trust a grant towards the end of 2021 to run a 2-year social prescribing and heritage pilot project in Great Yarmouth and Waveney. The project aims to demonstrate heritage’s potential to meet the wellbeing needs of local people through social prescribing, via the appointment of a Heritage Link Worker.

In March 2022, the Heritage Link Worker was appointed and started working with partners Access Community Trust, D.I.A.L. Great Yarmouth and local Primary Care Networks and social prescribing link workers to connect local people, who are referred to social prescribing services, with heritage activities and organisations in the area, including within the Heritage Action Zones in Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft¹⁶⁸.

Building on the Restoration Trust’s archaeology and mental health project ‘Burgh Castle Almanac’, based at the Roman fort on the banks of Breydon Water, the Heritage Link Worker Project is looking to address the barriers that prevent people on low income and with poor health from enjoying local heritage.

The Heritage Linkworker project is planning to engage between 150 and 200 referrals, primarily through the partnerships with D.I.A.L Social Prescribing and Access Community Trust, but also by establishing links with the existing NHS social prescribing structures within the local PCN. The regional teams of NASP and Thriving Communities Programme are another resource, expected to help build that network between heritage, health and the third sector in the Great Yarmouth area. The expected outputs will include a monthly newsletter update with case studies about the work, and a practical guidance/toolkit for social prescribing link workers and social prescribing providers.

The project aims to add to the social prescribing resources in the locality and develop the social prescribing offers of local heritage providers and asset holders. The Heritage Link worker has already helped establish “heritage groups” in Great Yarmouth, Lowestoft and Gorleston, who offer heritage walks, tours of local historic sites and activities at the local museum and archives¹⁶⁹.

The project’s key output will be an Evaluation Report that will identify the impact of the Heritage Link worker on the health and wellbeing of the referred individuals, and

¹⁶⁷ Heritage and Social Prescribing – Thriving Communities webinar, June 2021 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFI4w3LZrv4>

¹⁶⁸ Heritage Link Worker pilot project goes live, Restoration Trust, accessed June 2022 - <https://restorationtrust.org.uk/2022/03/28/heritage-link-worker-pilot-project-goes-live/>

¹⁶⁹ Our Heritage Groups, Restoration Trust, accessed August 2022 - <https://restorationtrust.org.uk/>

which will also describe the options for next steps and scaling up of heritage and social prescribing.

Sustainability will be achieved through impact locally and on the wider heritage and health sectors. The Heritage Link worker will help connect the local heritage organizations and providers of suitable heritage activities to the developing social prescribing infrastructure in the area, thus facilitating the creation of a network that could be used afterwards by generalist link workers and other social prescribers. This will showcase the potential of the heritage sector to deliver wellbeing through social prescribing pathways and will help the local link workers, the health sector and the local authorities in the area to utilize this potential for the benefit of the local communities.

4.5. Archaeology on Prescription – York Archaeology Trust



Process: volunteering

Archaeology on Prescription is a new, innovative social prescribing project that seeks to engage York's residents in archaeology and improve people's health and wellbeing. The project is currently being piloted by York Archaeology on the City of York Council-owned site of a former care home. Whilst the project engages with people from all over the city, local residents, particularly those who live or have lived in the surrounding Walmgate area, are also being encouraged to get involved to help create the most detailed picture of life in this part of the city from the medieval period to the modern day¹⁷⁰.

¹⁷⁰ Archaeology on Prescription, York Archaeological Trust, accessed May 2022 - <https://www.yorkarchaeology.co.uk/archaeology-on-prescription>



Figure 16. Participants in Archaeology on Prescription, working on the excavation site in the Walmgate area, York, ©York Archaeological Trust

The scheme brings together York Archaeology and a range of local partners operating in the city, to reach those who will benefit the most. For the first pilot, delivered in Autumn 2021, these included Converge, an educational charity for those with lived experience of mental health based at York St John University, and Changing Lives, who work with people recovering from addiction. The user response to this has been overwhelmingly positive. The second phase of the project involved more partner organisations across the city, in particular those working with younger people such as Tang Hall SMART, The Hut and SASH, and Afghan and Syrian refugees.

In 2022, York Archaeology Trust have been building on lessons learnt from the delivery of the first pilot to develop their model further and create a sustained programme of activity. They are working closely with the health sector through the Vale of York CCG and Ways to Wellbeing team to develop a referral process for individuals in the local area who might benefit from joining the project. They are hoping that this will help them to engage as many people in archaeology as possible and have a profound, positive and sustained impact on the wellbeing of the people of York¹⁷¹.”

Katrina Gargett, Community Engagement Officer for York Archaeology, has been working with the National Academy for Social Prescribing, who are supporting York Archaeology in learning more about the local social prescribing landscape and developing their partnership with the health sector.

¹⁷¹ Archaeology on Prescription, Ideas Hub, NASP - https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/archaeology_on_prescription/

“We are keen to ensure that *Archaeology on Prescription* goes beyond a short-term intervention, as projects that end just as participants have become immersed can be detrimental to well-being,” adds Katrina. “While the outdoor excavation side of the project has been hugely engaging, we’re now extending this to cover year-round activities that can continue throughout the winter months¹⁷².”

The National Community Renewal Fund awarded York Archaeology a £120,000 grant for the next stage of Archaeology on Prescription, which includes embedding a social prescribing link worker and utilising the project’s activities for social prescribing referrals.¹⁷³

The project has gained popularity and praise for their innovative and transformational work. The work of Archaeology on Prescription has been featured in national and regional press¹⁷⁴, including in the Heritage special edition of NASP’s Podcast in Prescription, aired in December 2021¹⁷⁵. To top this up, the project won the community engagement award at the Museums and Heritage Awards 2022 where it was praised for ‘actively changing lives’¹⁷⁶.

4.6. *Community heritage and social prescribing*

Outside of the heritage sector, there are also plenty of examples of community and voluntary organisations, utilising their local history and heritage to develop social prescribing activities. History clubs and cafes bring together people with interests in exploring the past of their hometown or village – or give local folk an opportunity to socialise and bond over common memories and experiences over the years. Heritage based activities and craft courses in local museums, libraries and community centres help engage children and young people outside of school, support their learning and entertainment and often serve as a place of safety, respite and inspiration. Parish churches host fundraisers and support group meetings, charities run campaigns based on local anniversaries and significant landmarks, and art classes take inspiration from historic landscapes and community heritage, helping people overcome issues buried in their own past.

¹⁷² Heritage Special edition of NASP’s Podcast on Prescription, Dec 2021 - <https://pod.co/podcast-on-prescription/podcast-on-prescription-s2-ep3-suzannah-lipscomb-desi-gradinarova-katrina-gargett>

¹⁷³ Archaeology on Prescription website - <https://www.yorkarchaeology.co.uk/archaeology-on-prescription>

¹⁷⁴ *NHS-prescribed archaeology classes help dig your way out of depression*, The Times, 23 May 2022, accessed Aug 2022 - <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/nhs-prescribed-archaeology-classes-help-dig-your-way-out-of-depression-s5zr7kgh3>

¹⁷⁵ Heritage Special edition...

¹⁷⁶ *Archaeology on Prescription wins Museums and Heritage Award*, The York Press, 16 May 2022, accessed Aug 2022 - <https://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/20141829.archaeology-prescription-wins-museums-heritage-award/>

4.6.1. Exploring Heritage in Heeley City Farm



Place: belonging

Heeley City Farm has been successfully delivering Community Heritage Work across Sheffield and beyond since 2008¹⁷⁷. This is a friendly farm and environmental visitor centre in Heeley, at the heart of South Yorkshire – a place where children and adults can come and meet friendly animals, enjoy fresh, home cooked meals in the Café or stock up on plants from the peat-free Garden Centre. There are also lots of events and activities in support of the local people’s wellbeing and health – from support groups for dementia patients’ carers, through volunteer gardening and food growing sessions and community history and heritage projects¹⁷⁸.

For the last 13 years, Heeley City Farm’s Community Heritage Team have engaged thousands of people from the Sheffield area, including many volunteers, work placements and general participants of all ages in a variety of local heritage and wellbeing projects. These have included excavations, art, building roundhouses, transcription of medieval documents, sharing of memories, workshops and much more¹⁷⁹.

The Heritage department of Heeley City Farm ran two very successful Heritage Lottery funded projects ‘Exploring Tinsley Manor’ (2012-2015) and ‘Tinsley Time and Travel’ (2015-2018) focused on Tinsley, now a post-industrial suburb on the northern edge of Sheffield. Using themes which have shaped the community since pre-history, those of transport, travel and change, the aim of the project was to engage residents and the wider community in a broader understanding of Tinsley’s heritage of transition and resilience¹⁸⁰.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had a serious impact on the charity’s work, but also mobilised it to play a very important part as a community hub in Sheffield’s voluntary sector response during lockdown. They enhanced their capacity by securing a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant for the appointment of a Heritage and Wellbeing Officer, who is now helping them explore social prescribing as a new delivery model, connect with local link workers and reach more people through engagement with local heritage.

¹⁷⁷ Heeley City Farm, accessed Aug 2022 - <https://www.heeleyfarm.org.uk/>

¹⁷⁸ Heeley City Farm – community heritage, NASP, Ideas Hub, accessed Aug 2022 - https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/heeley_city_farm/

¹⁷⁹ Community Heritage, Heeley City Farm, accessed Aug 2022 - <https://www.heeleyfarm.org.uk/CommunityHeritage>

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

In the summer of 2021, Heeley City Farm carried out their 'Healthy Holidays' scheme, a programme of summer holiday activities, targeted at the recipients of free school meals. They delivered three workshops – one dedicated to the history of their site 'Hidden Houses', one on ceramics, pottery and clay, and one on animal bones (and sheep!) called 'Everything Sheep'. They were great fun and enjoyed by all participants¹⁸¹.



Figure 17. The "Healthy Holidays" scheme engaged local children with heritage, pottery and fun activities at the Heeley City Farm near Sheffield, ©Heeley City Farm

For Heritage Open Days this year they presented some of their community archive in the People's Museum of Heeley. Over 180 people visited the pop-up museum in their small cabin office.

Currently, Heeley City Farm's Heritage department is awaiting to see the results from their recent NLHF application for the 'Heeley Heritage Hub' project, aiming to engage under-represented and vulnerable groups from their community to connect with their local heritage and history through social prescribing pathways.

¹⁸¹ Heeley City Farm – Community Heritage...

4.6.2. The Land Girls



Healing: therapy

The Land Girls project is run by Borderland voices, a small charity based on the border of Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Cheshire, promoting mental health and wellbeing through engagement with arts and culture¹⁸². The project is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund with additional match funding from Staffordshire County Council (the ‘People helping People’ fund) and Leek Arts Forum. It is investigating the Women’s Land Army (WLA), 1919–49, and how it changed the local landscape – physically and socially. The Land Girls (members of the wartime Women’s Land Army) and the Lumber Jills (working in a sister organisation with the Forestry Commission) helped produce vital food and timber during both World Wars, when most men were at war and these industries needed women’s help to continue their work.



Figure 18. The Land Girls Project in Leek, North Staffordshire connects local people to the heritage of the Women’s Land Army in their area, ©Borderland voices

¹⁸² Borderland voices, accessed June 2022 - <http://borderlandvoices.org.uk/>

The project is researching connections between former Land Army girls, local farm owners and the community to present these creatively with writing, art and photography. The project was due to start in Spring 2020, however the pandemic affected the timetable considerably. The main aims of the Land Girls project are to preserve the personal histories of the Women's Land Army in Leek/North Staffordshire, and help the local community reconnect with that part of its history and heritage, while supporting them to connect to each other. In practice, it has also helped people build resilience over the testing months of the pandemic and lockdown, maintaining their health and wellbeing.

When circumstances allowed the project to function more fully, participants were able to further develop skills and gain experience in writing, publishing and research, by creating art and publications, organising exhibitions and even updating the website and recording podcasts¹⁸³.

Many existing Borderland Voices (BV) participants not only live with mental health issues but are also elderly and/or isolated. The laughter, social interaction and peer support they enjoy in workshops is as vital as their shared arts interest in creating their support network. It operates during and between sessions, and sustains people if illness keeps them away for a while.

Due to the limitations of the COVID pandemic, the project participants are remotely recording the reminiscences of local people with Land Army connections and researching their placements. Eventually they intend to include a range of volunteering, educational and community benefits, such as public open days, research techniques, writing for exhibitions, IT/website/podcast skills, giving talks, leading guided walks, conducting oral history interviews and working with local schools.

Being isolated in a strange place, separated from friends and loved ones, parallels the situation many Land Girls found themselves in, and struck a chord with the Borderland Voices writing group during the past months. Just as the Land Girls were encouraged to write and express their emotions, so the writers have used words to try and make sense of 2020. When circumstances permit, they will publish all the research as a booklet, release podcasts and produce an informative and creative exhibition to share around the Moorlands¹⁸⁴.

Social Prescribing Link Workers are already quite well embedded in general practices in Leek and the Moorlands – one at least was in post before COVID, others were appointed during the pandemic and have been working with patients remotely. The Borderland voices coordinator, Andy Collins, has been in touch with all of them since March 2020, and they have been working together to develop a line of referrals for the Land Girls project. Since things began to ease slightly in the second half of 2021,

¹⁸³ The Land Girls Project, Borderland voices website - <http://borderlandvoices.org.uk/land%20girls.html>

¹⁸⁴ In search of the Women's Land Army around Leek': update Nov 2020 <http://borderlandvoices.org.uk/pdf/Land%20Girls/In%20search%20of%20the%20Women%20Nov%202020%20update.pdf>

Borderland Voices restarted face-to-face sessions at the beginning of September and began to get a steady trickle of referrals¹⁸⁵.

Borderland Voices has been around a long time, so people tend to know how they work. Their Women's Land Army project, of course, is time-limited and only a part of all the activities they offer, but even when they don't have that focus, enabled by the Heritage Fund, the heritage of the area often inspires their work.

4.6.3. Somers Town Museum in Camden, London



Mechanism: sharing

Diana Foster, director of the Somers Town History Club, founded 'A space for us', a living memory project – not only to celebrate the local heritage and history, but also to benefit the local community as a social enterprise through education and arts. Diana wanted to create a space for people to come together and share narratives of life, place and the past. Through workshops, campaigns, walks and talks, members could come together to discuss art, historic publications and photographs – but most importantly, they could share stories¹⁸⁶.

The club has been very successful and has been helping its attendees for years. These attendees tend to be older people, typically those suffering with loneliness or dementia. For many people in these situations, a warm welcome and kind encouragement is the best remedy. 'A space between us' allows people to explore what is important to them and gives them the opportunity to share this with others – something at the core of social prescribing.

Diana's vision was to offer people opportunities and not just activities, to help people feel a sense of purpose and to build a network – whilst also allowing them to participate in something they feel passionately about. The outcome was the inception of a club built entirely out of the skill, dedication and knowledge of its participants. George joined 'A space for us' shortly after suffering a personal loss, and the history club helped him to deal with his grief through sharing his memories and knowledge of Somers Town with others. His experience and enthusiasm have since attracted others to the club, while also provoking interest and spreading awareness amidst the younger generations. George took part in many of the club's public engagement events, including through media and film¹⁸⁷.

¹⁸⁵ The Land Girls Project, Ideas Hub, NASP, https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/land_girls/

¹⁸⁶ Somers Town Museum, A Space for us - <https://aspaceforus.club/about-us/>

¹⁸⁷ SPIRIT! a film about Somers Town - <https://aspaceforus.club/film/>

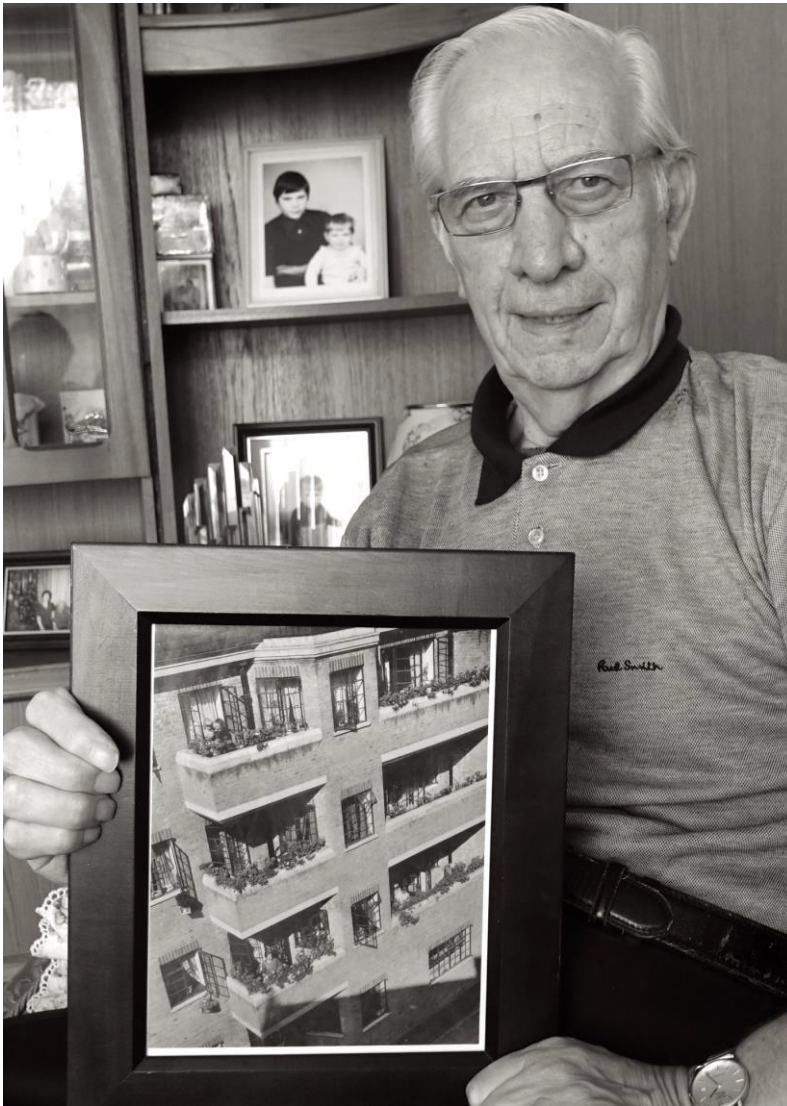


Figure 149. George took part in many of the Somers Town History Club's events, including through media and film, ©Somers Town Museum

Heather Allen, a social prescribing link worker, explains why people are referred to this initiative: *“People share stories with me of their lives and they just want to be heard – some want to volunteer and make a difference, some would like the opportunity to be more creative, improve their physical fitness, connect with nature, preserve their community or reignite the lost artiste inside themselves. The History Club is an amazing place to explore this, bringing people together across generations sharing their stories”*¹⁸⁸.

Somers Town Museum is an excellent example of social prescribing through heritage and history – allowing people to connect with each other and with the places that matter to them.

¹⁸⁸ Somers Town Museum – “A space for us”, Ideas Hub, NASP - https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/somers_town_museum/

5. Conclusion and recommendations

Social prescribing is an efficient and sustainable way to demonstrate the public value of heritage and the historic environment, engage local people with their history and raise awareness of the significance of local cultural and natural assets.

It is a new and developing approach for delivering wellbeing to individuals and community and as such, it brings a range of challenges as well. Similar to the recommendations that the various research reports have identified in terms of heritage and wellbeing already, social prescribing presents quite a few barriers to a full or smooth implementation in the practice of heritage organisations and practitioners. The need for improved understanding – of both the wellbeing potential of the historic environment and the ways it can partner up with health partners to deliver social prescribing, together with the use of high quality mixed methodology and appropriate evaluation framework to produce clear and robust data, plus the necessary development of guidance, resources and training on social prescribing for the heritage sector are only some of these.

In order to try and address these efficiently and promote sector-wide collaboration in wellbeing and social prescribing, Historic England partnered up with the Council for British Archaeology and established the first Wellbeing and Heritage working group in 2021, which brought together national and local heritage organisations interested in wellbeing and social prescribing. The group's main aim is to raise awareness for the wellbeing value of heritage by working collaboratively to gather evidence and share best practice, which includes clarifying definitions, creating wellbeing and heritage evaluation framework and identifying research priorities in the area. They are currently working on creating a heritage and wellbeing evaluation framework, foster research collaboration and support the understanding and implementation of social prescribing in the sector. As part of this work, a Heritage and Social Prescribing Community of practice was established in January 2022, which is looking to develop the knowledge in this field, allow a space for knowledge and practice exchange and the creation of necessary toolkits and resources.

The Heritage and Social Prescribing Community of practice has already identified some additional challenges for the heritage sector for delivering social prescribing, such as:

1. Language and terminology – and more specifically the terminology often used by heritage professionals and the participants' perception of it. People often are left with the impression that archaeology is boring, heritage is “stuffy” – or that it is simply not “my heritage”. Finding a common language, so that each group can easily understand what the offer is and what the benefits are and how they meet their needs, is crucial;
2. Accessibility of heritage sites. Many of them are quite remote, in rural locations, which are difficult to reach without the ability to use personal transport. Even the urban heritage sites are not always easily accessible for

people of different abilities and means, with physical access and problems of interpretation being equally problematic as cost.

3. Lack of experience (and understanding) in working with the health sector. Knowing who to talk to and how to develop connections with local service providers and health workers/authorities is equally important and a serious obstacle for many heritage organisations.
4. The need for multi-disciplinary buy-in in larger organisations. Lack of funding is an obvious issue, often raised by many, but the network of staff and volunteers needed to cater for social prescribing in places requires multi-disciplinary capacity that most do not have currently.
5. Pressure on Link Workers and the NHS – problems with staffing, the impact of the Covid pandemic on the health and social care provision, the ongoing NHS reorganisation – all this makes connecting with the sector even more complex and sometimes daunting when trying to initiate and initial approach.
6. The sheer scale of the potential demand for social prescribing, combined with the growing NHS's expectation towards voluntary/charitable organisations and what they can provide to meet that demand, is another critical issue that hasn't really been appreciated in its full complexity yet.
7. Lack of funding and long-term investment is the biggest challenge for many organisations piloting social prescribing - particularly for developing a sustained programme or for offering high level support;
8. Ethical challenges when the priorities for supporting wellbeing may clash with those for protecting heritage - we need a set of principles to help the heritage sector manage this. This includes the ethical issues around the sort of randomised trials which provide the most robust impact evidence – i.e. how to form control groups and undertake quality evaluation in a sensitive manner that won't be counterproductive to the goal of the evaluation.

Historic England has created social prescribing guidance for its staff, which marks the start of resource creation and training programme development in this area. The Heritage and Social Prescribing Community of practice will have the opportunity to review these first examples of guidance and learning materials for the sector and adapt / adopt as appropriate for wider use. In parallel with the efforts of NASP's Accelerating Innovation Programme, this community of practice will also look to expand the heritage sector knowledge about the social prescribing structures of the health and the third sector and explore the opportunities for collaboration and project development.

In terms of evaluation and evidence, there is even more that needs to be done by the heritage sector. The available data proving the wellbeing benefits of engagement with the historic environment and all aspects of heritage are less in both numbers and quality than those gathered by other sectors, such as the natural environment, sport or the arts.

When looking to prove efficiency in social prescribing, the heritage organisations (or the deliverers of heritage interventions) will need to be very specific in their research and data collation, and ensure that they can demonstrate how engaging with heritage is leading to cost savings to the NHS, less GP and A&E appointments and decreased prescription of medication and clinical treatments. This, of course, is not easy and together with the need for quantitative evaluation of heritage wellbeing activities and project, presents some of the biggest challenges in being successful in social prescribing delivery. It is, however, by a great degree an expected obstacle.

It is always difficult to draw a new route and create a new approach – especially when reaching outside the range of experience and toolkits that have been used traditionally in our sector. We often talk about cross-sectoral collaboration, and a variety of government and policy initiatives (from the Culture White paper in 2016 to the Levelling up paper from earlier in 2022) have insisted on its significance for real impact – but we rarely have the opportunity to undertake a real partnership of that type on a big scale. Social Prescribing gives all sectors that exact opportunity.

The Heritage and Social Prescribing Community of practice has already identified some major opportunities for our sector in implementing social prescribing.

1. To raise the profile of heritage and increase active participation and support for heritage through wellbeing. That includes extending public perceptions of the value of heritage and demonstrating its relevance to everyday life, whilst reconnecting people with the places on their doorsteps and encouraging greater use and care for them.
2. To demonstrate the potential of heritage to deliver wellbeing and improve people's lives by supporting the NHS, helping address health inequalities and focusing on what matters to the person. Fostering a deeper connection with the past can help strengthen individual and communities' identity and feelings of belonging, improve wellbeing by educating, creating purpose, promoting diversity and inclusion; Welcoming and empowering new communities, connecting people, providing safe spaces and in turn creating legacy of care for heritage and nature.
3. To work better in productive partnerships with others, especially with organisations specialising in brokering social prescribing and those who have the expertise and the experience in these areas and in working with specific groups in need. Their input will be crucial in order to know what will work for efficient wellbeing delivery and how we can adapt some of our approaches and methodology in order to maximise the impact of our work and meet local need efficiently.

In order to build on all work done so far in this respect, Historic England is continuing its strategic partnership with the National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP) in developing further initiatives and approaches that will help the heritage sector to overcome the above-mentioned challenges and optimises the opportunities. Apart from supporting the work of the Heritage and Social Prescribing Community of Practice, Historic England and NASP are also looking at developing social prescribing voluntary schemes of Heritage Connectors and Heritage Buddies, which are aiming

to link existing community support structures with heritage wellbeing provision in places. This approach has been considered for adaptations in all sectors working in collaboration with NASP – i.e. nature, arts, sport, financial support – and heritage – in attempt to achieve a true, holistic and efficient support that will make a difference and build the “whole-community approach to social prescribing”¹⁸⁹.

On the research front, we are partnering up with a variety of academic partners. As shared earlier, the team of prof. Carena Lewis from University of Lincoln delivered the insightful report on the *Wellbeing Benefits in Heritage at Risk Volunteers* earlier in 2021, which clearly demonstrated the multi-layered value of volunteering through heritage¹⁹⁰.

Prof. Jo Sofaer from Southampton University led on piloting piece of research looking at what people perceive to be the value of the historic environment when they reconnected with local heritage after the first lockdown in the *Places of Joy* project – the results showing new aspects and depth of people’s appreciation of heritage and making us all re-consider our approach to public engagement and wellbeing project design¹⁹¹.

Dr Karen Burnell from Solent University and other colleagues supported by the MARCH Network undertook rigorous Delphi process to produce the guidelines for engaging people with mental health problems in heritage projects, providing one of the first detailed toolkits of approaching such a sensitive but massively important area of work in a professional and ethical way¹⁹².

Historic England is now looking at pursuing further research with these and other academic partners to look deeper in the unique value of heritage and its potential to deliver wellbeing and social prescribing, including through a specific connection with place and by undertaking long-term evaluation and rigid clinical trials. We are supporting other organisations to do the same, continue piloting social prescribing and innovative therapeutic heritage wellbeing interventions and collating the much-needed data and further evidence.

In the current post-pandemic period, when every part of the society is trying to rebuild and recover, in growing international political and economic uncertainty, it is particularly necessary and appropriate that we all focus on where we can bring most social impact together and help people across the country feel and live better. Social prescribing looks at what matters for the individual, but its benefits matter to the society and nation as a whole – it offers an efficient mechanism to address health inequalities and to support those in most need. Heritage has a unique opportunity to be used for achieving positive societal change – there is no healthy future for humans

¹⁸⁹ The Social Prescribing eco-system, NASP...

¹⁹⁰ Lewis, C. et al, 2021...

¹⁹¹ Sofaer, J. et al, 2021...

¹⁹² Burnell, K., Everill, P., Baxter, L. Makri, E., Watson, K., Monckton, L., Gradinarova, D., Guidelines for involving people with mental health issues in heritage projects. MARCH Network Plus Fund Report, 2021, accessed Aug 2022 - <https://www.solent.ac.uk/research-innovation-enterprise/research-at-solent/projects-and-awards/documents/march-plus-guidelines-report.pdf>

without a healthy connection with our past and without building a positive identity as individuals and as a nation.

We all know that to stay healthy, we need to exercise and eat well, we need to connect with nature and find time for our favourite hobbies. But we also know that as human beings we need to feel connection with both the past and the future – our own and that of the world around us. We need to make sense of what is happening, gather strength and find purpose to carry on in the hardest of times. We need hope, we need inspiration, and we need to know that we are not alone. If there is one thing that has the power to bring everyone together in times of adversity and challenges, it is the story of our common past as humans, which made us who we are.

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