

CONSERVATION, PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

KEY MESSAGE

CONSERVATION SUPPORTS HEALTHIER AND LONGER LIVES AND CONTRIBUTES TO THE WELLBEING OF COMMUNITIES BY FACILITATING MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE.

There has been a growing recognition of the positive contribution that conservation and preservation of heritage makes to the lives of individuals and communities. The topic is benefitting from an expanding evidence-base, although more research is undoubtedly needed.

This brief seeks to outline the key topics within this subject and suggests areas for focus moving forward. It pays attention primarily to the benefits conservation provides to a community and the individuals it comprises, but also discusses how those communities can be leveraged to add value to the conservation sector.



1 Conservation Creates Opportunities for Individuals to Develop Skills and Competencies

Research continually draws attention to the positive impact of participation in heritage activity and conservation. Whether this is through volunteering or professional involvement, evidence repeatedly points to individuals gaining, amongst other things, greater confidence, resilience, communication skills, and financial skills.

The conservation sector is ideally placed to provide opportunities for this type of personal development.

The Evidence

- A cross section survey by the Burns Owens Partnership found that participation in Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) projects helps to maintain and deepen the skills, knowledge and social networks of volunteers and to increase their sense of belonging to their local communities. (Ref 1A)
- "Heritage also offers opportunities for involvement in community projects and volunteering, accounting for 5.5% of all voluntary work undertaken in England. Voluntary work at heritage sites gives participants opportunities to develop new skills, connect with new people and places, access enjoyable physical activity, and give back to the community." (Ref 1B)
- In relation to social inequalities, a study of 182 individuals, half of whom were previously unemployed, found improvements in debt reduction, access to debt advice, and ability to manage finances. Another small study found increases in perceived economic well-being in adults with depression over a 3-month period. (Ref 1C)

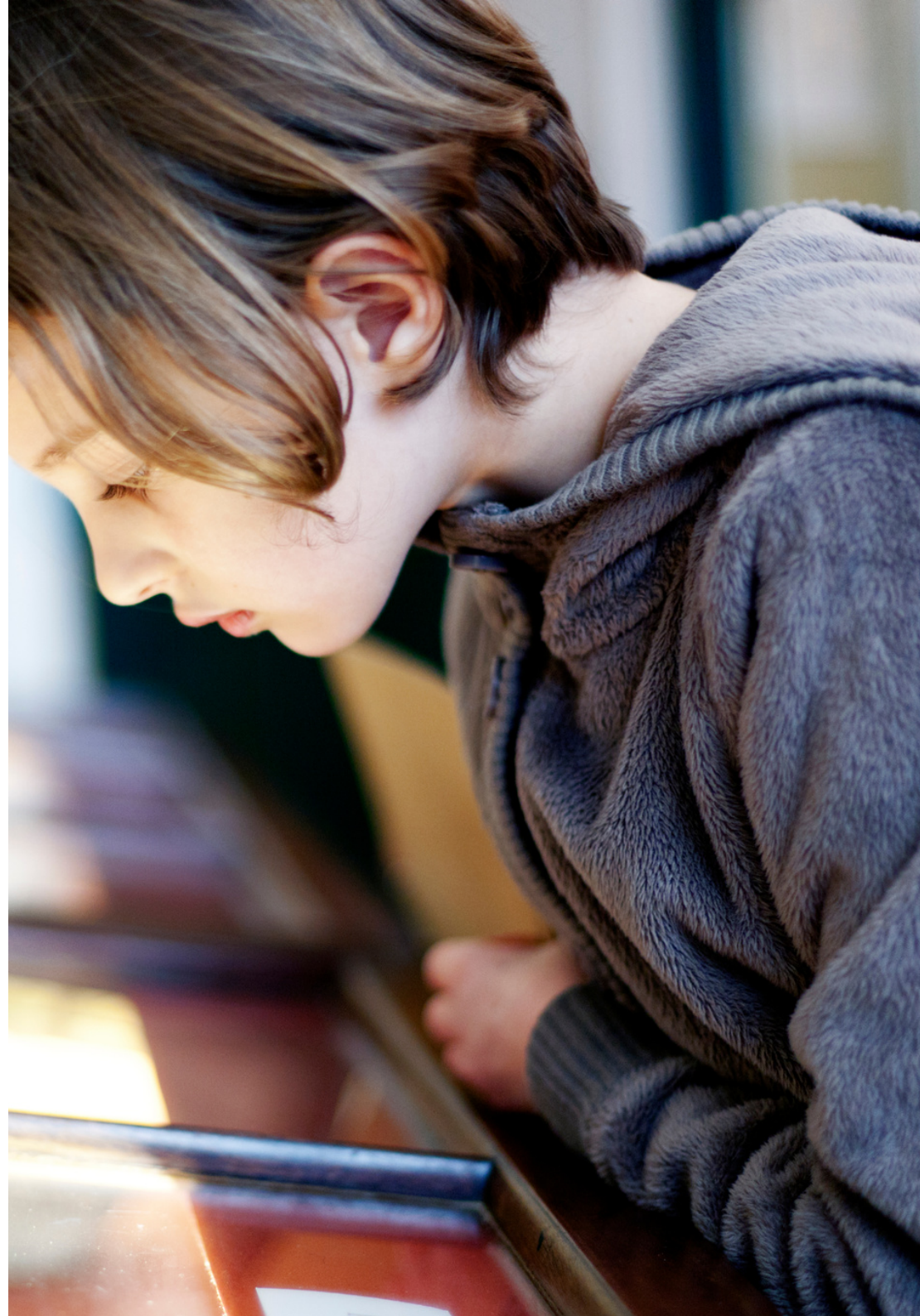
CASE STUDY IN TOUCH

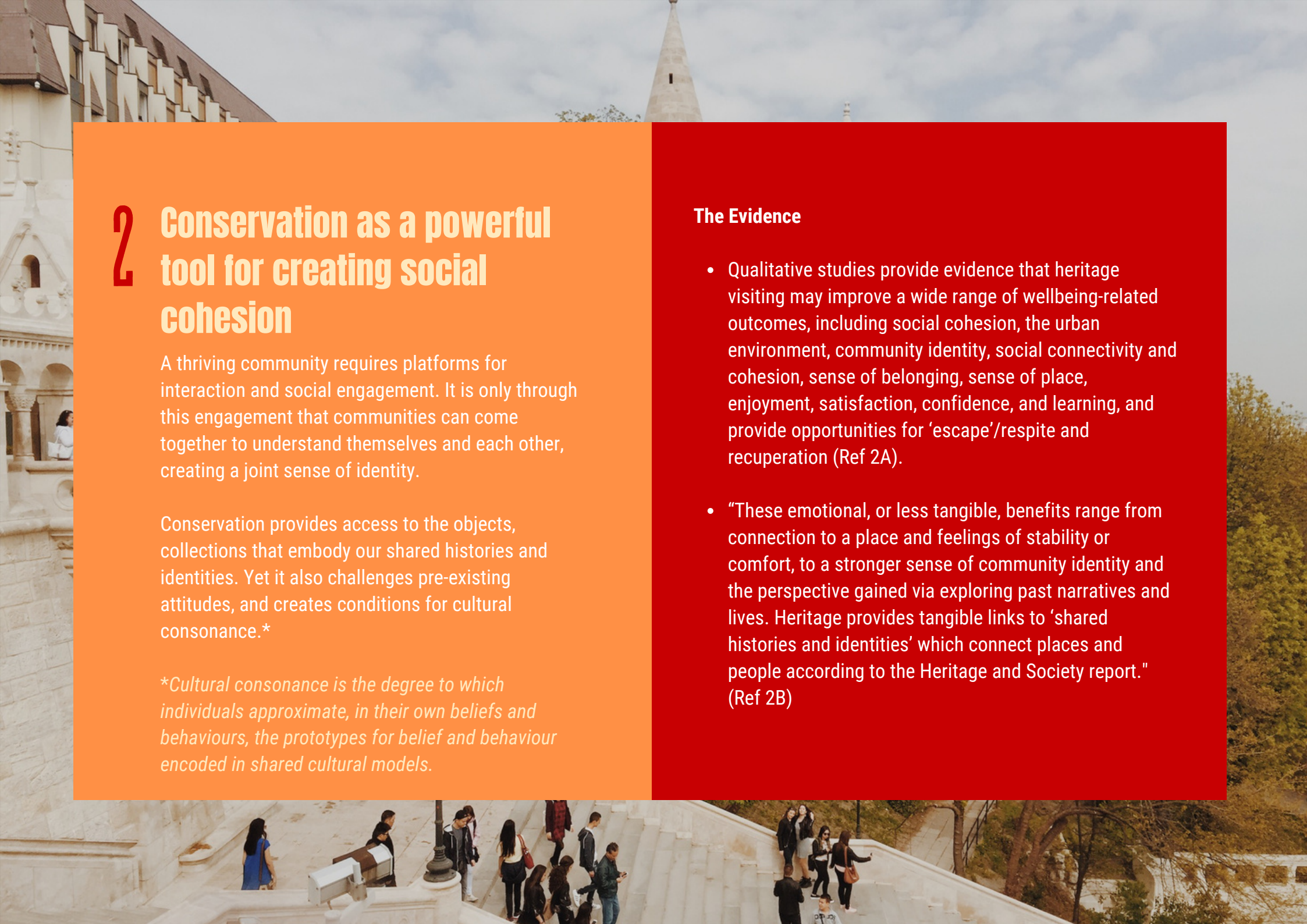
In Touch was a volunteering programme run by Manchester Museum and the Imperial War Museum North.

The Manchester Museum and Imperial War Museum North already had well-established volunteer programmes. However, like many museums, they were concerned about the limited diversity of their volunteer teams. Working together, the two museums aimed to establish a model that would engage a wider range of people in volunteering.

Participants in the programme gained knowledge about the museums and their collections. However, they also gained skills which could be transferred to future employment and experiences which boosted their CVs. By the end of the programme 62% of participants said the programme made them feel differently about themselves or their families and 81% felt positive about their lives.

Find out [more about In Touch](#).





2 Conservation as a powerful tool for creating social cohesion

A thriving community requires platforms for interaction and social engagement. It is only through this engagement that communities can come together to understand themselves and each other, creating a joint sense of identity.

Conservation provides access to the objects, collections that embody our shared histories and identities. Yet it also challenges pre-existing attitudes, and creates conditions for cultural consonance.*

**Cultural consonance is the degree to which individuals approximate, in their own beliefs and behaviours, the prototypes for belief and behaviour encoded in shared cultural models.*

The Evidence

- Qualitative studies provide evidence that heritage visiting may improve a wide range of wellbeing-related outcomes, including social cohesion, the urban environment, community identity, social connectivity and cohesion, sense of belonging, sense of place, enjoyment, satisfaction, confidence, and learning, and provide opportunities for 'escape'/respite and recuperation (Ref 2A).
- "These emotional, or less tangible, benefits range from connection to a place and feelings of stability or comfort, to a stronger sense of community identity and the perspective gained via exploring past narratives and lives. Heritage provides tangible links to 'shared histories and identities' which connect places and people according to the Heritage and Society report." (Ref 2B)

3 Engaging with conservation can improve health and wellbeing outcomes

Increased access to Social prescribing* has been outlined in the NHS Long Term Plan (2019). There is encouraging evidence to suggest that prescribing activities within the conservation and heritage sectors yields positive, impactful, and lasting results.

The potential for conservation engagement to help patients with mental-health issues, trauma, anxiety, and loneliness reflects a powerful way the sector can contribute to society.

**Social prescribing is a means of enabling GPs, nurses and other health and care professionals to refer people to a range of local, non-clinical services.*

The Evidence:

- In an "analysis of museum object handling sessions, interviews and observations... key themes (arising) included increasing positive emotion, decreasing negative emotion, enhanced vitality, tactile stimulation, improved social skills and sense of identity, development of novel perspectives and thoughts and acquisition of new knowledge. Our findings indicated that engaging with objects alleviated some effects of long-term hospitalisation, such as the deterioration of confidence and identity." (Ref 3A)
- The **Heritage and Wellbeing: State of the Evidence** review highlights a mixed-method study by Chatterjee et al which found that patients showed an average increase in life satisfaction scoring of 4.77% and health satisfaction of 7.62% after an object handling session. Two main themes emerged from the qualitative data: personal / reminiscence (with two sub themes of nostalgia and meaning making), and impersonal / educational (with five sub- themes of tactile, visual, museological, learning, and imaginative/creative). (Ref 3B)

CASE STUDY

OPERATION NIGHTINGALE

Operation Nightingale is a project run by the Ministry of Defence in collaboration with Wessex Archaeology and Breaking Ground Heritage to allow soldiers to recover and rehabilitate through archaeological tasks. It was established in 2011.

Since its inception, Operation Nightingale has facilitated over 300 placements on 35 projects. Data obtained as part of the programme has demonstrated overwhelmingly that "participant's self-declared anxiety and depression decreases in severity while their positive wellbeing increases."

Participants have also been observed to have an improved ability to return to roles within their regiment after their involvement in the project.

Find out more about [Operation Nightingale](#).



During my time as a participant on the Operation Nightingale digs I could see the positive effects that it was having on my peers digging alongside me. It was also having a positive effect on me



4 Conservation can act as a Powerful Tool for better Communication

Objects transcend language. As such, they represent a powerful means of communicating with groups and individuals who may not respond well to language-based forms of communication. Objects and collections can also facilitate communication between people who do not share a common language.

Engaging with collections also offers valuable opportunities to enhance general educational outcomes. Museum visits and object handling sessions have all been shown to make a meaningful impact on young students especially by encouraging creativity, strengthening their empowerment, and building social skills.

The Evidence:

- "The arts are powerful tools for health communication: they can be used to engage specific populations through culturally resonant activities; transcend language barriers; appeal to people emotionally and humanize issues around health; embody concepts and demonstrate what individuals can do proactively themselves; and empower individuals and communities through collaborative engagement." (Ref 4A)
- "The arts can be used to communicate in a way that is sensitive to local cultural traditions and challenges and to cross the hierarchical divisions and tensions that can exist in health communication." (Ref 4A)
- An evaluation of the National / Regional Museum Partnership Programme (2006-2007) identified "powerful learning outcomes for pupils. The perceptions of teachers and children were found to reflect one another, and over 90 percent of pupils perceived their museum visit as enjoyable and felt they had learnt something." (Ref 4B)

5 Conservation of Heritage enables the Sustainable Economic and Social Development of Communities

Building on a community's heritage and history has been identified as a positive tool for successful regeneration and enhancement of urban areas and existing environments.

Preserving and maintaining a community's historic buildings and sites is not only a green, low-carbon method of regeneration, but it reduces the negative affects of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Historic assets are catalysts for regeneration. They foster a greater sense of place, safety, joint responsibility, and community engagement.

The Evidence:

- "Heritage capital investments also have the potential to alleviate negative 'spillover' community effects of crime and knock-on effects of social fragmentation and deprivation, which will in turn undermine efforts to regenerate an area if left unchecked." (Ref 5A)
- "The economic benefits of heritage-led regeneration were found to be: increased business turnover; increased local economic activity, employment opportunities, and value for money (a return of £1.60 for every £1 spent). Social and environmental benefits included improved physical environments (enhanced townscapes); increased civic pride and sense of identity; improved place vitality, social interaction, community engagement, community safety and crime reduction, image of local areas, and sustainability." (Ref 5B)



6 Engaging with Individuals and Communities adds Value to Conservation Projects

An object's value is determined by the people who interact with it. In other words, "conservation must be related more to the present day and to the people that give objects their meaning." (Ref 6A)

Interacting with local communities and individuals adds contemporary social value to objects and the work of conservators. It gives objects meaning and a function in the present day which, ultimately, allows society to grow and develop.

The Evidence:

- "Social value means that an object, locality or collection is considered important by a community in the present day. Social value is comprised primarily of the meaning that an object or locality possesses for people. There can be several reasons why the given objects, localities and phenomena are significant. For instance, these reasons can be spiritual, political, national or related to a sense of place. In any case, they are closely related to the community's identity and social cohesion." (Ref 6B)
- "Heritage is society-specific and inherently political. We cannot remove heritage management from the social and political environment. It is important to consider the views, goals and expectations of the community and society where the given heritage item is located." (Ref 6C)
- "Connectivity with the public and the support of the society are essential for the successful long-term preservation of heritage." (Ref 6D)

7 Engagement with Conservation Improves Overall Quality of Life

Studies point to a correlation between museum visiting and a person's overall perception of their happiness and life-satisfaction. There is also clear evidence to suggest that people who engage meaningfully with artefacts have higher feelings of self-worth and a greater sense of place.

Conservation offers a clear opportunity to allow people to have a more meaningful engagement with their heritage.

Since 99.3% of people in the UK live within a mile of a heritage asset, conservation of these items and places is a logical method for improving overall quality of life.

The Evidence:

- "Findings from the Northern Ireland Continuous Household survey 2019/20 show higher life satisfaction scores for those who visited a heritage site compared to those who did not. According to the Taking Part survey, three quarters of adults (73 per cent) in England visited a heritage site at least once in 2017/18." (Ref 7A)
- "Three observational studies led by Fujiwara found evidence of significant associations between museum visiting (or living in proximity to heritage places/features) and higher levels of happiness and self-reported health (Fujiwara, 2013), life satisfaction (Fujiwara et al., 2014), and higher likelihood of reporting being in good health (Fujiwara et al., 2015)." (Ref 7B)

The background of the slide features a photograph of ancient stone columns and a cityscape. The columns are in the foreground, and the city is visible in the background, suggesting a historical or archaeological site. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent yellow rectangle.

POINTS FOR ACTION

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- **All political parties** should continue to acknowledge the evidence summarised in this briefing and in other relevant research and widely promote the positive relationship between conservation, people, and communities.
- **Researchers should** continue to undertake investigations into the relationship between conservation and communities to increase our understanding of the benefits and to create more widely accessible sources of information and guidance.
- **Policy-makers in the health and wellbeing sector** should recognise the value of conservation in social prescription methods and create a well-trained, well-supported third sector work-force which is confident in working with conservation professionals and heritage organisations.
- **Conservators** should recognise that interaction with the wider community adds social value to their work and more actively seek ways of creating meaningful opportunities to foster greater interaction.

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Ref 1C: Quoted on page 14 in *Evidence Summary for Policy, The role of arts in improving health & wellbeing*, Report to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (April 2020)
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Ref 2A: Three studies by Bryson et al., 2002; Everett & Barrett, 2011; Packer, 2008 referenced on page XX in *Heritage and Wellbeing: The impact of historic places and assets on community wellbeing - a scoping review.* Technical Report by What Works Wellbeing, 2019.
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<https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/9789289054553>, page 17.

Ref 4B: Referenced on page 57 in *Heritage and Wellbeing: The impact of historic places and assets on community wellbeing - a scoping review.* Technical Report by What Works Wellbeing, 2019. <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/blog/heritage-and-wellbeing>

Ref 5A: *The Value of Heritage: the First Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Conservation, Places & People:* <https://conservationplacespeople.appg.info/resources/PPP-APPF-First-Report---The-Value-of-Heritage-011222.pdf> Page 7

Ref 5B: AMION Consulting and Locum Consulting (2010) study quoted on page 66 in *Heritage and Wellbeing: The impact of historic places and assets on community wellbeing - a scoping review.* Technical Report by What Works Wellbeing, 2019.
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Ref 6A: *Modern Conservation: Connecting Objects, Values and People*, Kurmo Kansa, 2015,
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Ref 6B: Ibid.

Ref 6C: Ibid.

Ref 6D: Ibid.

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