

Project: Building a resilient future for Oldway
Client: Torbay Council
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Heritage-led LUF project case studies

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Introduction

This report follows an earlier document that briefly summarised nine successful, heritage-led LUF projects from around the UK. Four examples were chosen to explore in more detail here – two from England, one in Scotland and one in Wales. They were selected for their relevance to Oldway. Each example has a grand but deteriorating 19th or early 20th century building at its heart that is owned by the local authority and is much loved by local people. All the schemes require a roughly similar level of investment. All four schemes aim to use the restoration and reuse of their historic assets to activate cultural activity, social benefits and economic development in deprived towns. In each case, the officer responsible for the LUF bid kindly gave their time to discuss their project and answer questions. This report is largely based on these conversations and I am grateful to Stuart Holden, Jamie Wilkinson, Delyth Webb and Rachel Lewis.

Summary

While none of the Local Authority areas considered has exactly the same challenges and opportunities as Torbay, each has useful similarities. Porthcawl and Weston-Super-Mare are Victorian seaside resorts that have suffered decline. Aberdeenshire is also coastal, is made up of small or medium-sized towns with pockets of deprivation alongside wealthier communities, and has an

important fishing industry. Wigan is much more urbanised but Haigh Hall is the most similar to Oldway in terms of the scale and grandeur of the main building and its meaning to local people. There are striking similarities not only in the nature of the schemes that the authorities proposed to LUF but in the thinking behind them.

- To varying degrees, the senior leadership and elected members of all four councils recognised that the care of historic assets was fundamental to economic prosperity in their towns. This was most pronounced at North Somerset and Bridgend, where heritage is strongly embedded in their economic strategies.
- Pride in place, cultural capital, wellbeing and community cohesion were recurring themes in all the projects. All the officers involved felt that heritage, culture and creativity were central to the aims of LUF.
- All the projects expect to see a positive economic impact on their wider towns. In all cases, the successful applications framed this as very important but secondary to the social and cultural benefits.
- All the officers emphasised that LUF appears keen to support high profile, single-site projects with a strong identity that are already well developed and can make visible progress relatively quickly.
- All four councils devoted significant resources to developing their bids by reprioritising officer posts in their heritage and development teams and making use of consultants.

Case Studies

Haigh Hall, Wigan





Local Authority: Wigan Council

LUF award: £20 million

Summary

Wigan Council will use the funding to restore Haigh Hall, a Grade II listed building. They hope it will make the site a popular destination for culture, community, events and hospitality once more. The plans include a new world class dining experience, an underground bunker cinema, an art gallery for a collection of Theodore Major's work, a rooftop terrace for astronomy and 8 hotel rooms.

Background

The site has been owned by Wigan Council for many years. It operated it as a public amenity until 2016 when a lease was signed with a hotel operator. The hotel business failed and the Council was forced to spend a significant sum to terminate the lease and regain control. The loss of public access caused local friction and a protest group was set up which put a lot of pressure on the Council. When the operator vacated the Hall, Wigan Council recognised that the deteriorating condition of the site was having a negative impact on the image of the area (and thus the visitor economy) and that it was damaging the Council's reputation. They had already begun to work on plans for the restoration and reuse of Haigh Hall when the LUF opportunity arose.

Key points from meeting with Stuart Holden, Be Well Service Manager, Wigan Council, 01.08.23

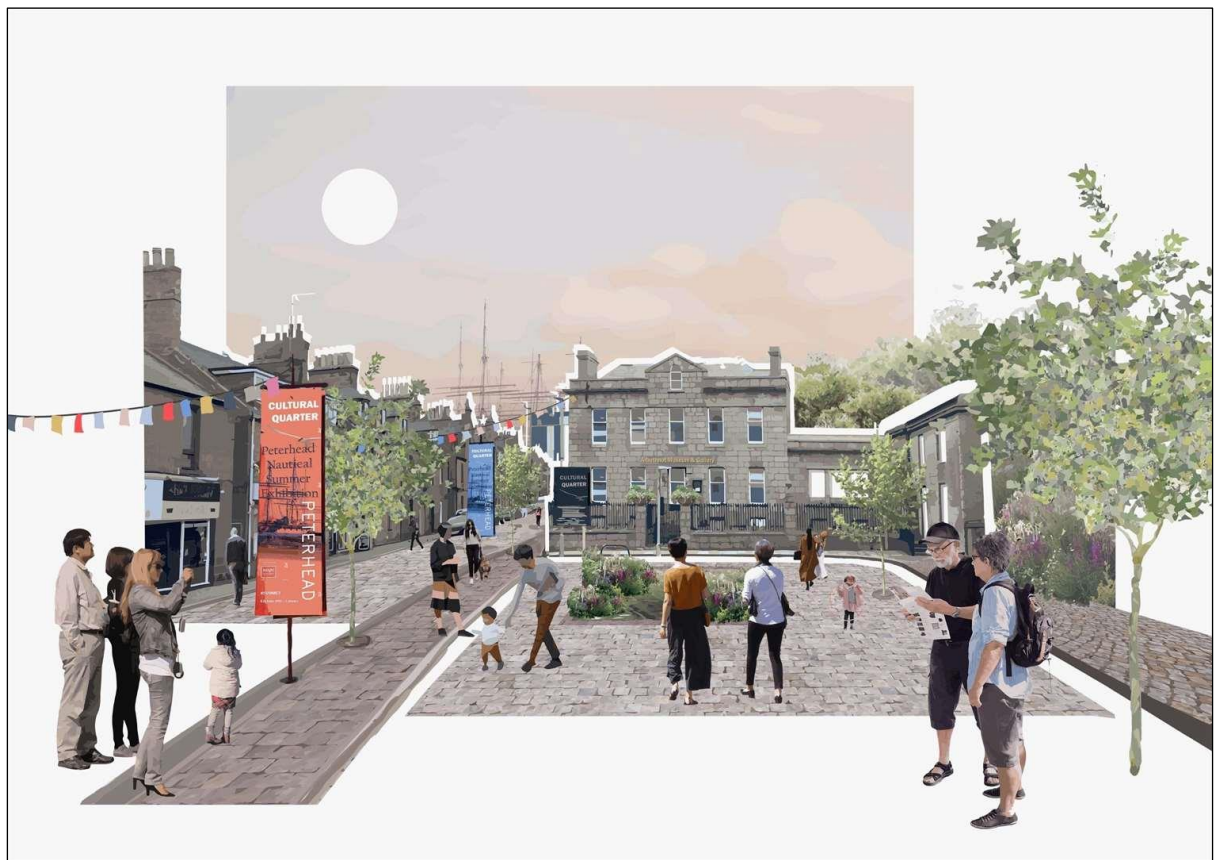
- The total cost of the Haigh Hall project is £31m. The LUF grant is £20m with the remaining £11m coming from Wigan Council's own budget.
- The Council has committed a further £2m to the surrounding parkland as match funding for a parallel but separate project which has received £6m from NLHF.
- The officer team works across both projects but they are being delivered differently
- 'Do nothing' was never an option that was seriously considered by the Council.
- At the start of the project development, elected members wanted to retain maximum operational control after the experience with the hotel operator. They have since recognised that bringing in private operators for specific activities (eg catering, managing the hotel

rooms, commercial weddings) will improve the offer and bring in higher revenue receipts for the Council.

- There was no significant opposition to the proposal to focus LUF on a single site as it was perceived by both the public and elected members as having huge potential benefits.
- There is a new, dedicated post to manage the Haigh Hall project along with a team of existing officers whose roles have been reprioritised.
- The team is also making extensive use of specialist consultants
- During the development of the bid, 80% of Stuart's work time (not including extensive unpaid overtime) was spend on Haigh Hall
- Local people feel very strongly about Haigh Hall and the protest group was successful in generating a lot of press coverage and putting significant pressure on the Council and the Leader
- The Leader of the Council championed the project at a political level. The local MP Lisa Nandy was also a high profile supporter.
- The Council places a high value on culture and the Haigh Hall project fitted within its Cultural Manifesto.
- The Chief Executive is a very strong advocate for cultural assets
- Prior to the Haigh Hall project, Wigan Council had submitted a shopping development proposal to LUF which failed.
- Culture is a strategic priority for LUF. The project application frames Haigh Hall as primarily a cultural project with social and wellbeing benefits, not as an economic development project. It is very clear about the benefits of cultural opportunities for people, with the positive economic impact being a welcome but secondary benefit.
- The application was informed by data on cultural engagement in local communities and how it links to deprivation. This was drawn from existing datasets rather than commissioned for the application.
- The application explicitly explored how Haigh Hall would fit into the cultural landscape in the region, specifically with major players such as the Tate and the Lowry.
- The agreement to house a major art collection valued at £200m is a significant element of the proposal. The financial projections assume that the Arts Council will grant NPO status.
- A Haigh Hall project was being developed before the application. It was ready to go and could be delivered relatively quickly.
- Despite a strong commitment to culture, the Council's record on caring for and adequately investing in historic assets is mixed. It remains to be seen whether good practice at Haigh Hall will have a positive impact on the authority's wider historic asset management.

[Haigh Hall LUF application and appendices](#)

Arbutnot House, Aberdeenshire



Local Authority: Aberdeenshire Council

LUF award: £20 million

Summary

'Cultural Tides: North Sea Connections in Aberdeenshire' focuses on the development of a cultural quarter in Peterhead centred around the restoration and renewal of vacant Arbuthnot House. It also includes the renovation and extension of Macduff Marine Aquarium.

£18 million will revitalise the heart of Peterhead by transforming the disused Arbuthnot House into a new destination museum and cultural hub. The historic building is to be sensitively restored and complemented by a striking new extension housing both the town's library and a new regional museum showcasing Aberdeenshire's extensive historical collections and artwork.

Multi-purpose workshop spaces are intended to support participation and learning, whilst a new dedicated facility is set to attract temporary national exhibitions. The facility is also to include a cafe and restaurant with views of the harbour, and the building's former walled garden will be transformed into a new public green space.

The Carnegie Building, which houses the existing museum and library, is to be restored and converted into a new cultural venue with a live entertainment space as well as dance and music studios on the upper floor.

Background

Arbuthnot House was the main office base of Aberdeenshire Council until it moved out in 2014. The building has lain empty ever since and has suffered from vandalism. An attempt to sell it to property developers for conversion to a restaurant in 2019 was not successful. At the time of the LUF application, it had been on the market for six years.

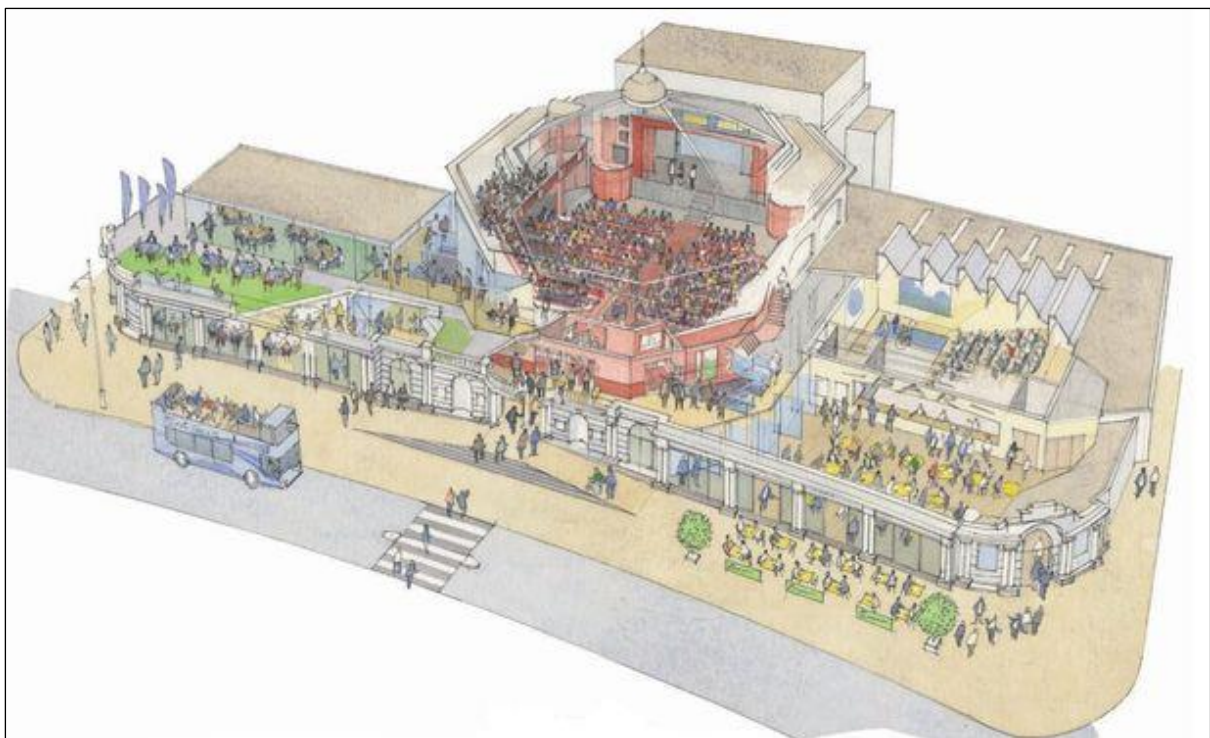
Key points from meeting with Jamie Wilkinson, Investments and Projects Executive, Aberdeenshire Council, 03.08.23

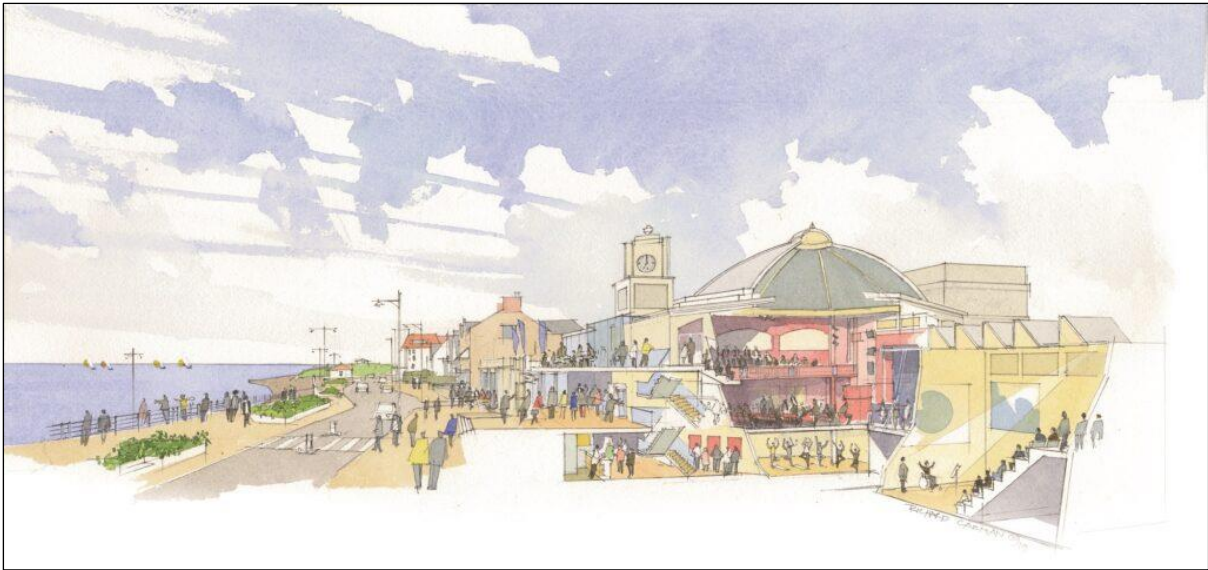
- The total project cost is £27m, with £20m coming from LUF. Aberdeenshire Council has underwritten the remaining £7m but is keen to find alternative sources of funding to cover it.
- The project was designed to match the criteria and priorities of LUF
- There was some political pressure to develop an economic development project focussed on the seafood industry, but officers successfully made the case that LUF is primarily about quality of life rather than economic impact, and that access to culture is a key priority.
- It was apparent to officers that LUF was keen to support high profile, single-site projects with a strong identity that could be delivered relatively quickly rather than proposals to scatter investment more widely.
- JW feels that LUF was also particularly keen to support smaller coastal communities and that their project matched with what was being sought in a number of ways
- Feedback indicated that it was looked on favourably that the project had been designed to deliver on LUF priorities rather than retrofitting LUF to less well-matched project.
- The MacDuff Aquarium element (30 miles from Peterhead) was included as elected members were keen to see benefits in more than one location, but it was a challenge to present it as linked to the main project.

- The impact assessment showed that while the scheme would have some positive economic impact, the biggest benefits were around pride in place and wellbeing through access to heritage and culture.
- The application made the case that in a relatively remote area with only small towns, access to heritage and culture was limited and much needed.
- Without LUF, Arbutnot House would have remained vacant, deteriorating and negatively impacting the town.

[Cultural Tides: North Sea Connections in Aberdeenshire LUF application](#)

Grand Pavilion, Porthcawl





Local Authority: Bridgend County Borough Council

LUF award: £18 million

Project summary

The funding will be targeted at a major restoration and re-development of the Grade II Listed Grand Pavilion in Porthcawl, addressing the condition of the building's concrete structure and preserving its unique heritage whilst also meeting the needs and aspirations of the community for extended and improved arts, culture, and heritage services. A range of modern facilities were proposed in the funding bid, including:

- new function spaces at first floor (Esplanade) level
- new rooftop function and cafe spaces offering elevated sea-views across the Bristol Channel
- new studio theatre and ancillary facilities
- increased and improved welfare facilities including new changing places facility
- business incubation or workshop spaces to street level
- new office facilities

Background

The building has been in continual use as a theatre and for other community uses since it was built over 100 years ago. It has always been owned by the local authority. In 2016 a separate charity, the Awen Trust, was set up to deliver all BCBC's cultural services and it took on the operation of the Pavilion. The Trust receives an annual subsidy from BCBC of around £1m. The building was operational at the start of the project but the internal spaces were not working very well which meant only activity could take place at a time. Maintenance was done reactively. Works done in 70s and 80s were not holding up well and concrete cancer was affecting the historic fabric.

Key points from meeting with Delyth Webb, Group Manager Strategic Regeneration, Bridgend County Borough Council 18.07.23:

- BCBC has two historic buildings as the focal points for its major regeneration programmes – the Town Hall in Bridgend in the north and the Grand Pavilion in the south. The authority strongly believes that regeneration planned around historic buildings provides better value

and is better received by the public than new build. New developments are considered in relation to the historic anchor sites.

- Welsh local authorities have only recently taken over responsibility for listed building approvals from Cadw. As a result, BCBC feels that it must demonstrate good care of its own listed building assets as an example, although this is very challenging in the current economic climate and not all its assets are in the condition they would like.
- As a result of its conviction that heritage is integral to economic development, BCBC has moved its Conservation & Design team out of Planning and into Regeneration. This is to enable C&D staff to challenge Planning and advocate for historic buildings and the historic environment more strongly.
- Prior to their LUF bid, BCBC and the Awen Trust had already begun design work, business planning etc on the project so they were able to submit well-developed plans as part of the application. BCBC have since been told that this was a significant factor in the decision to award LUF money.
- When considering where to focus the LUF application, BCBC concluded that no other project was at a similar stage of development. Basing the application on another project would necessarily have been much more speculative and less likely to succeed.
- Had LUF not been available, it is doubtful that BCBC would have been able to deliver the Grand Pavilion project by other means. It would likely have remained in the current state, with conservation issues requiring an investment of several millions within the next decade and no obvious source for that funding.
- BCBC would expect public outcry if it did not care for the Grand Pavilion as the freeholder, as it is much loved by local communities.
- The project will substantially increase the income that can be generated by the Grand Pavilion. It will also increase the annual running costs. BCBC expects to continue to subsidise its operation, but to a lesser degree.
- DW has also worked on projects focussed on new industry and has the impression that heritage-led projects are favoured by LUF.
- The commissioning of artist's architectural drawings and a fly-through helped a great deal with both public engagement and the LUF application.

Weston-Super-Mare





Local Authority: North Somerset Council

LUF award: £20 million

Project summary:

£20 million was awarded from LUF following a successful bid by North Somerset Council as part of the authority's Weston Placemaking Strategy, a 10-year vision for Weston's renewal.

The investment will be used to focus on several high-profile heritage sites across Weston's town centre and seafront, including the historic Birnbeck Pier which has also benefitted from £3.5m from the National Heritage Memorial Fund.

Weston sites set to receive investment include:

- Tropicana - Building on the international profile raised by the SEE MONSTER project, the Tropicana will see enhancements and expansion to the events space to create an attractive, 8,000 capacity facility and improvements to food and drink facilities.
- Marine Lake - Sensitively development of year-round facilities for food and drink and leisure, tapping into the trend for outdoor swimming, attracting residents and visitors alike.
- Weston town centre - Create more flexible spaces to attract independent high-quality retail and other uses. Using digital and creative design, encourage people to move around the town centre and seafront.
- Birnbeck Pier - LUF funding will be used to improve buildings at the shore end of Birnbeck Pier, bringing them back into use. This will complement the funding already attracted to improve the pier structure itself.
- Grove Park - Improving the entrance to this town centre green space and repurposing the park's buildings after they've been vacated by Weston-super-Mare Town Council.

Background

North Somerset Council's commitment to caring for its heritage was sparked 7 years ago by a visit by a Historic England urban panel which brought home to members the quality and value of Weston's historic architecture and its potential to drive investment.

The LUF project is 'book-ended' by two much-loved historic assets, Birnbeck Pier and Tropicana. The pier is a significant Victorian survival and the UK's only pier to link to an island. Since its closure in 1979 it has suffered serious decline and partial collapse. The negative impact on the town of its visible decay has led the Council to launch a CPO process to gain control of it, after attempts to encourage the owner to look after it failed. At the other end of town, Tropicana is a 1930s swimming lido that closed in 2000. Various attempts to find private operators failed. In recent years it has operated as a café and hire venue. It has hosted two major art installations – Banksy's Dismaland, which attracted global attention, and See Monster.

Key points from meeting with Rachel Lewis, Heritage & Design Manager, North Somerset Council, 10.07.23:

- NSC at all levels views heritage and the historic environment as key to economic development and investment, both in tourism and attracting new residents and businesses – this is evident in the placemaking strategy.
- North Somerset is a tier 2 LUF area. It was successful in round 2 by tweaking the round 1 application with better evidence and showing more connectivity between sites.
- At both Birnbeck Pier and Tropicana, NSC will remain as the freeholder with third party operators – the RNLI at Birnbeck and a private sector operator at Tropicana. NSC has approached operators of similar venues in Bristol as it was felt small local organisations, while they were keen, did not have the necessary wherewithal to operate successfully.

- NSC has not so far made a capital contribution to Birnbeck but does support with revenue in form of staff and insurance. The capital project will total around £20 million, with funding from LUF, the Heritage Memorial Fund and the RNLI.
- RNLI will be leaseholders at Birnbeck but will not pay rental. Entry to the public will be ticketed with takings split 50/50 between NSC and RNLI. NSC believes the takings will cover the running costs of the pier plus create a maintenance fund.
- Two officers in the Heritage & Design team currently spend most of their time on the Birnbeck project. The wider team includes conservation, urban design, HER, archaeology and project officers.

[Weston Super Mare placemaking strategy](#)

Conclusion and recommendations

Based on these case studies, we can conclude that there is an opportunity for Torbay to create a winning LUF proposal with Oldway at its heart, bringing significant benefits and generating pride in Paignton and the Bay. The masterplan that is currently being developed by the 'Developing a resilient future for Oldway' team aligns very well with the shape of these successful projects. Their examples show that we should pay particular attention to cultural opportunities in both programming and use of space, alongside healthy living and income generation. I recommend that:

1. Torbay Council and the LUF partnership consider a heritage-led approach to LUF that prioritises the restoration and re-use of Oldway.
2. Torbay Council allocates resources to develop a bid beyond the end of the current NLHF project using the new masterplan as its basis. This should be done in parallel with the proposed Heritage Enterprise project at the Rotunda and in close coordination with strategic partners such as NLHF, Historic England and Arts Council England.
3. The 'Developing a resilient future for Oldway' team reviews how spaces and opportunities for culture, heritage and creativity are presented in the developing masterplan.