

# BURNLEY HERITAGE ACTION ZONE 2020-2024

## INTERIM EVALUATION REPORT TWO. MARCH 2023

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# ABOUT BURNLEY HERITAGE ACTION ZONE

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Burnley High Street Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) received £1.2m funding in 2020 from Historic England, combined with investment from Burnley Borough Council and the private sector. The HAZ aims to contribute to Burnley's larger conservation area and town centre strategy plans by kick-starting the reversal of the at-risk heritage conservation status of the lower St James Street section of the town centre. It's three-pronged approach provides:

- Physical interventions including capital works on historic buildings.
- A cultural programme led by Burnley arts and culture partners to celebrate the identity of the local high street and contribute to the wider cultural agenda.
- Community engagement to involve local people in local heritage and cultural activity and training.

Six key components form the backbone of the HAZ which are:

- Building on existing assets especially local creative people, businesses, and heritage, to develop and enhance the cultural offer.
- The restoration and improvement of historic buildings and the public realm, upgrading the street itself, and historic properties through grants to local property / business owners
- Bringing an empty heritage building back to life as a hub for local artists and creatives to work, exhibit and grow
- Helping the Empire Theatre Trust achieve its long term vision to bring an abandoned space back to life by supporting specific improvements and meanwhile uses in the shorter term
- Community engagement and activity encouraging local people to take more interest in the heritage of the area through events and training
- Supporting an independent cultural consortium to build a creative programme celebrating the identity of the area and contribute to the wider cultural agenda.

## SUMMARY

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**To date the HAZ programme has achieved:**

- ✓ **3 BUILDINGS IMPROVED; 6 MORE ENGAGED IN THE PROCESS; 1 EXEMPLAR BUILDING PURCHASED**
- ✓ **4500 AUDIENCES AND 300 PARTICIPANTS IN 32 CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES** SUCH AS WORKSHOPS, TALKS, BOOK LAUNCHES, EXHIBITIONS, CONSULTATION EVENTS, TOURS, PROJECTS, OPEN DAYS AND EXHIBITION OPENINGS.
- ✓ THESE ACTIVITIES HELP **PEOPLE FEEL DIFFERENTLY ABOUT THEMSELVES AND BURNLEY, NOTICE HERITAGE IN NEW WAYS, AND FEEL MORE PART OF A COMMUNITY.**
- ✓ **85 PEOPLE TRAINED IN 7 HERITAGE SKILLS / CRAFTS TRAINING DAYS** WHICH INTRODUCED HERITAGE TO NEW PEOPLE. TRAINEES FELT THEIR **SKILL LEVELS TRIPLED** ON AVERAGE - SKILLS WHICH WILL NOW BE USED TO **IMPROVE HERITAGE PROPERTIES, LISTED BUILDINGS, AND PROPERTIES ON LOWER ST JAMES STREET.**
- ✓ **FOOTFALL ON LOWER ST JAMES STREET HAS INCREASED BY AN AVERAGE OF 42% PER MONTH** IN 2022 AND 2023, COMPARED TO 2021.
- ✓ **PERCEPTIONS OF THE STREET HAVE DRAMATICALLY IMPROVED** THANKS TO **PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS**, AND THE **HISTORIC CHARACTER IS FELT MORE STRONGLY** THAN BEFORE.

## SWOT SUMMARY

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Burnley's HAZ is starting to make excellent progress towards its aims. It is having a tangible impact on the built heritage of Lower St James Street, the perceptions and usage of the area amongst the local population, and people's understanding and appreciation of heritage.

That said, there are challenges which risk it not achieving its fullest potential. Some are a legacy of the impact of covid, others are to do with the timeframes and restrictions of the funding, or the selection and expectations of properties and property owners.

<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical changes to the street</li> <li>• Visible improvements to properties</li> <li>• Public affection for the area, history, and Empire Theatre</li> <li>• Increases in footfall.</li> <li>• Impact of Heritage Training programme</li> <li>• Visual impact of exhibitions programme</li> <li>• Improved perception of the area</li> <li>• Improved usage of the area</li> <li>• Impact of weatherproofing Empire Theatre</li> </ul>	<p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limitations of 12 month start-finish funding timeframe to make changes to properties.</li> <li>• Pop-up nature of activities – no consistent ongoing Burnley cultural programme</li> <li>• Disconnect between property owner expectations and actual property values.</li> <li>• Loss of The Gallery, Culture Festival and resulting impact they had.</li> <li>• Delays to start-up of exemplar project</li> </ul>
<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Snowball effect on property owners now neighbouring properties look noticeably better.</li> <li>• Legacy of exemplar project in longer term</li> <li>• UCLAN redevelopment of Newtown Mill</li> <li>• Development of Pioneer Place</li> <li>• Ongoing progress of Empire Theatre</li> <li>• Good evidence for potential of further investment</li> <li>• New cultural strategy work</li> <li>• New National Lottery Heritage Fund and Arts Council England 10 year strategies</li> </ul>	<p><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing materials costs</li> <li>• Shortage of capacity in construction and trade (and resulting tendering issues)</li> <li>• Current HAZ funding due to end soon.</li> <li>• Economy's impact on disposable income and knock-on effect for small, independent businesses</li> </ul>

## SUMMARY OF ACTIVITY IN THE PAST YEAR

SPRING 2023	156 St James Street - reinstatement of new shopfront, bay windows, and rainwater goods.
	Stand Out Exhibition at 117 St James Street, with Blaze Arts and Young Producers.
	Herb harvesting from new planters, for upcoming tea ceremony and Words Festival.
	Empire Theatre progress acknowledged in the Theatres Trust Theatres at Risk Register 2023 and Empire Theatre appraisal options report produced.
WINTER 2022-23	160 St James Street – reinstatement of new shop front, bay windows, rainwater goods, internal first fix works.
	143 St James Street – completed: ribbon cutting event with Historic England / Burnley Council
	Empire Theatre Exhibition, with Manchester Metropolitan University School of Architecture students
	Heritage bag making workshop
	Saturday Girl About Town Book Launch and Pop Up Studios, with Casey Orr
AUTUMN 2022	Stone Carving heritage skills workshop, with Burnley College
	Burnley Histories Talk: Welfare State International, with Mid Pennine Arts and Burnley Youth Theatre
	Maintaining Your Heritage Property Workshop, with Buttress Architects
	Saturday Girl Pop Up Studios, with Casey Orr
SPRING/ SUMMER 2022	MP and Historic England tour of Lower St James Street progress
	New Empire Theatres Trust banners produced for outer safety barriers
	Empire Theatre confirms building is more water tight and weather proof building one year on from HAZ funded roof improvements
	139/141 St James's Street - Planning approved
	153, 150-152 and 164-166 St James Street – in planning stages
	Voices of Counter Culture book completed
	Under One Sky Light Exhibition with Burnley College Students
	Saturday Girl Pop-Up Exhibition, with Casey Orr and members of the public
Empire Theatre interview filmed	

### KEY

CAPITAL WORK	CULTURE CONSORTIUM
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	EMPIRE THEATRE

## CAPITAL WORK IMPACT

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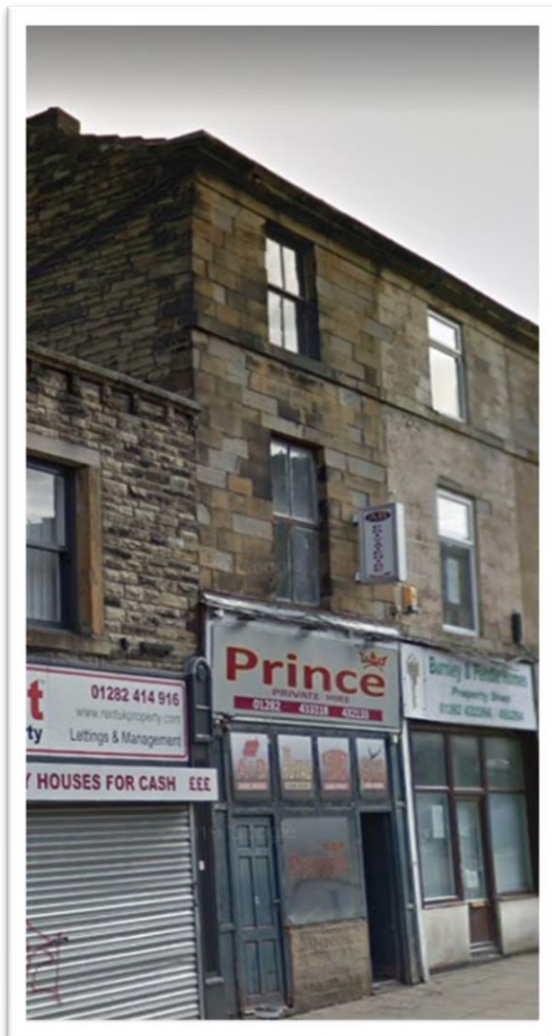
Three buildings have completed work and two are due to complete very soon. Three have had plans approved, one of which is starting to move forward. Another property has expressed interest although the timing and cost is proving prohibitive.

The exemplar building has also just been purchased.

**COMPLETE:** In 2021-22 shop front renovations were carried out at The Country House Gallery, and at 117 to create the pop-up gallery.

**143** was the first property of 2022 to complete renovations, including its new shop front and building works carried out by local company Penyard Ltd. The completion was celebrated with a ribbon cutting ceremony. The property is now home to Delta Taxis.

**BEFORE**



**AFTER**



### **COMPLETING.**

**156** is a vacant space in a red brick block of three storey terraces. It plans to replace the shop front and reinstall oriel bay windows. The work is due to be completed in Spring 2023.

**160**, the next property in the same red brick block, formerly a café / bistro and art space closed due to the impact of covid and the need to carry out essential roofing and structural work. The roofing is now complete. A grant was approved to restore its former bay windows and carry out other improvements, due for completion in April 2023. It will then work towards reopening as a public facing community and exhibition space with artists' studios.

#### **PLANNING COMPLETED.**

**139-141** Last year submitted its plans. These have now been approved and a meeting with HAZ to look at next steps will happen before the end of March 2023. One property is occupied and one vacant. It is hoped the improvements will help fill the vacant property. These are next door to the newly completed number 143 shown above, creating a terrace of 3 renovated properties when finished.

**158** (next door) also started to engage with the HAZ process and commissioned plans and received planning permission. By the time this came to fruition the 12 month allocated budgets has passed and he missed the moment. He has since decided to sell, but the plans and permission will be part of the package for the new owner when the time comes. In the meantime, there is some urgent damp work needed, which is affecting the neighbouring buildings.

**164-166**, the building between the red brick terraced block and The Cross Keys sandstone pub ending the road, has also been engaged in the process. It is the three times the size of its neighbours and would take a great deal of work to renovate, although some of its original frontage does still exist. It has had planning approved, so is ready to start the process if more funding becomes available.

#### **INTERESTED.**

**150-152**, the former Windmill Models shop, has been in a very bad state of disrepair for years and is often commented on by locals (including in the perception survey) as in drastic need of improvement. The owner of this property has also shown interest, but no formal progress has been made yet due to the large investment needed and the end of the funding deadlines.

The capital developments are having a snowball effect. Physically SEEING the changes in one property spurs on another owner. The more a full block or a few neighbours in a row can be developed, the more likely any remaining property owners are likely to want to do the same.

#### **EXEMPLAR BUILDING**



Excellent progress had been made on working towards the exemplar building. A property had been identified and the purchase was going ahead. Unfortunately, the seller pulled out of the deal the day before completion, wiping out a year's work and putting the project back to the start.

Finally, an alternative property, nos. 123 – 125 in the middle of the Empire Buildings, was identified in November 2022 and the purchase has just been completed. The space needs renovation throughout including being made wind and watertight, restoring windows, shop front work, and internal works. If all goes to plan the work will be completed in September 2023.

# PUBLIC IMPACT

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## 1. Public perception of the area is noticeably improving.

In the past two years (2022 and 2023, compared to 2021 or before)

1. 25% more people noticed **historic features** of the buildings in the area.
2. 18% more people have **heard of the Burnley HAZ**.
3. 34% more have **heard of the Burnley Town Centre Conservation Area**.
4. 56% more say **street furniture is good or very good** (Benches, lighting, planters, bins etc).
5. 53% more say **pedestrian areas are good or very good** (Pavements and crossings etc).
6. 43% more say the **quality of the traffic is good or very good**.
7. 12% more say Lower St James Street has **a lot or a great deal of historic character**.
8. **Positive descriptions of the area** have increased from 0% to 35%
9. Before 2022 and 2023 when asked what people liked best, the most frequent answer was 'nothing'. **What people like best about the area now is the character**. This includes the historic buildings, the general ambience of the area, and being waterside.
10. **People enjoy the independent bars, cafes, and shops**, which count for 11% of 'the best things' in the area. Prior to 2022 these didn't feature as a 'best thing' at all.
11. The **improvements to the area** are the 3<sup>rd</sup> most common 'best thing' about the area.

## 2. Public usage of the area shows signs of improving.

- Though most people are just passing through, in the past two years there have been **increases in the use of cafes, bars, beauty and health services, and shopping**.
- **Footfall increased an average of 38% per month** from 2021 to 2022 calendar years looking at comparable months (i.e., comparing month on month when no lockdown was active).

## 3. HAZ is bringing heritage appreciation and knowledge to a new audience, leading to improved care for heritage.

Amongst the **heritage skills training programme** so far:

- 17% of trainees were previously unlikely to visit or notice heritage features.
- 56% had received no heritage training of any kind previously.
- On average, trainees felt their skill level tripled thanks to the workshops attended.
- 47% said they will definitely use their new skills and 45% more said they probably will.
- 19% talked about how the training will help them maintain their heritage properties, including listed buildings, and properties on Lower St James Street.

The **cultural and community engagement programmes** have helped people:

- a. Feel differently about themselves and Burnley more generally.
- b. Look for and notice heritage in ways they hadn't before.
- c. Feel more part of a community.

# RISKS AND CHALLENGES

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## CAPITAL WORK

There have been difficulties achieving the original aims for the improvement of the properties.

- **Procurement of trades.** Following pauses in building work over lockdowns, a backlog of work means all trades are now in high demand, coupled with shortages in the workforce.
- **Materials costs.** Difficulties getting materials into the country following Brexit and lockdown delays has led to a national shortage of materials, pushing costs up, often by 100%.
- **Fund spending timeframes.** Allocation of funds in the HAZ programme are limited to 12 month spending periods and underspend cannot be carried forward. As a result, lags caused by trade issues above, and property owner barriers below, mean properties that would otherwise be renovated are missing out because budgets can't flex to match supply and demand. This is compounded by the fact successful renovations are creating more interest from other property owners, creating a snowball effect. However just as the potential is reaching its optimum level, the funding is starting to be wrapped up.
- **Property owner readiness.** Several factors dictate which properties can be renovated, from the perspective of their owners.
  - Some owners don't live in the area and are driven by the profit margins, so renovating the heritage isn't their priority.
  - The dramatically shifting market means properties are no longer worth what owners expected, making it hard to balance investment or property sales when minimising loss is their biggest priority. They have no match funding to invest, can't sell due to negative equity, or have unrealistic ideas about their property's value which affects their investment or long term plans.
  - Some owners don't feel confident about the processes and paperwork renovation requires. They may have a genuine interest and money to invest, but the time needed to support them to put ideas into practice, can lead to them missing the funding deadline for that year. Hence their property is no further along, and there can be reputational damage as the project is unable to deliver on what they expected.

## ENGAGEMENT WORK

The main challenge has been realising local UCLAN students' ideas to bring the street's brewery and pub heritage to life. They created plans to explore a local micro-brewery and bespoke beer using water from a nearby hidden well. It transpired the well is sadly inaccessible due to a car park. Though alternative ideas are being investigated, the project which had held great excitement and potential to make a tangible difference to footfall and the identity of the street, may be under threat. (Other ideas about using local plants to create teas, celebrating old tea room cultures, are underway however).

## FOOTFALL

Footfall increased from 2021 to 2022 but has started to decline again (though still exceeds 2021). There is no solid evidence about why this might be, however contributing factors could include the cost of living changes, leading to less disposable income so less reason to be in the town centre, or the loss of the Culture Festival and Gallery. In October / November 2021 the festival kick started a twelve month upturn compared to the rest of the year's footfall. However, in October 2022, monthly figures started, and have continued, to drop below those of the year before. Hopefully more festival activity in summer will help regain momentum.



## GOING FORWARD

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### FOR THE PUBLIC

The perception survey shows that although the improvements have made a difference over the past two years, there is still work to do.

The four most significant improvements the public would like to see next are:

1. 60% want to see **more appealing businesses** in the area. By this they mean fewer taxis and takeaways, more independent shops, and daytime cafes. They want rent deals that encourage these kinds of businesses for the long term, and to see empty shops disappear.
2. 28% want to see **more property renovation**. They notice the levels above ground floor as being in dire need of more attention. 'Look up' was a consistent comment. They also note that whilst the right hand side (looking away from the town centre) is looking better, the left hand side lets it down and needs the same amount of attention.
3. Very closely linked – 16% want more **shop front improvement** to reinstate more of the historic character. They notice that signage contributes to this and complained about newer and neon signage.
4. After more appealing businesses, and improvements to buildings and shop fronts, there are two other improvements still needed. People want the area to be **cleaner and tidier**, and for a **clear and distinctive identity**. The Northern Quarter of Manchester was mentioned regularly as the kind of area people hope it can become.

### FOR PROPERTY

**Further funding to continue the interest starting to grow is needed** to fulfil the street's potential visually and in terms of business and footfall.

The potential for development and interest of property owners is only just starting to gather momentum. However, it can take more than 12 months to act on that interest and put it into practice. In addition, the HAZ funding ends after the next year of activity.

**Property Owners need longer than 12 months to turn initial interest into completed renovation.**

Challenges to the supply side of the sector, the exploration of financial factors, and the support some owners need to go through the planning process all mean 12 months is often not enough time.

### FOR PARTNERS AND LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE

**Plan now for legacy and longevity.**

Momentum is building in the cultural consortium, with the shop front engagement and exhibition work, plans for the exemplar building starting to make progress, new partners showing interest in the consortium, and the new cultural strategy work within the council. The remaining twelve months is just enough time to plan and fundraise for a more permanent cultural plan for Lower St James Street but only if this begins straight away. Not only culture coming *from* the street, but happening *directly on it*, inspired by its past, and referencing the architecture local people have such fondness for. The development of Newtown Mill and increasing number of students is another opportunity and reason to start working toward the long term legacy for the street right now.