

NORTH WALSHAM HIGH STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE

EVALUATION REPORT

21. JUNE 2024

NK&



01

SUMMARY

PAGE 04

02

CONTEXT

PAGE 06

03

METHODOLOGY

PAGE 08

04

IMPACT

PAGE 11

05

WORKSTREAMS

PAGE 24

06

LEGACY

PAGE 30

“Overall, there is a view that we are a caring community and very positive things are happening that are linked to the HSHAZ (even if people don’t know it). Of course there are niggles and some real practical things that unfortunately we didn’t always get right.

Someone who is moving to North Walsham from a nearby part of North Norfolk said, ‘North Walsham is on the way up!’ They have the impression that there is an upward momentum for North Walsham. Lots of people acknowledge that.”

-Stakeholder Interview

01 SUMMARY

A concise overview of the report and the key findings and recommendations.



01 SUMMARY

The North Walsham High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) project, a four-year programme of capital and community regeneration projects, recently came to an end in March 2024.

The aim of the HSHAZ project, led by North Norfolk District Council (NNDC), was to celebrate and enhance North Walsham's unique historic character and rich heritage, making it a more attractive and vibrant place for people to live, work and enjoy leisure time and contribute to the town's long-term economic, social and environmental viability. With the project coming to a close, the Council wanted to understand the impact of the project and how well it met its objectives.

Approach and Methodology

To have an objective assessment, NNDC asked design strategy consultancy NK& to carry out an evaluation study of the project. The findings are based on the interpretation of a combination of anecdotal, qualitative, and quantitative data, as well as reports submitted by the HSHAZ project team to NNDC and Historic England. To gather more insight for the creation of the report, NK& carried out additional retrospective data collection including stakeholder interviews, a public one-day engagement event, and a public impact assessment survey.

Assessing the Key Objectives

The bulk of the report is focused on exploring how well the HSHAZ project met its five key objectives, outlined at its inception. The project was in fact a complete programme of five interlinked workstreams with various budgets and timelines, but the impact assessment looks at how the various data sources come together across the workstreams to draw conclusions, summarised at right.



Environmental Impact

The project has made public spaces in the town, especially Church Approach and Black Swan Loke Garden more attractive and better used. Views about impact vary between the different sites.



Accessibility + Inclusivity

Many visitors are positive about more space for pedestrians, street furniture and events, but there are mixed views on the traffic regulation into the town centre. Inclusive journeys need to be better considered.



Historic Preservation

Linking physical improvements and the Cultural Programme have helped bring the town's heritage to life, but broader awareness was limited. Focus on elements with greater visibility could have had more impact.



Cultural Impact

An impressive number and variety of events were delivered which demonstrably created a draw, fostered community spirit and added to dwell time.



Economic Impact

It is too early to assess economic impact, but many residents support a shift towards more service-led businesses, which this scheme has facilitated. Events appear to be a draw.

Legacy

One of the most critical next steps is to share the successes and lessons learned from this project to create greater awareness of what was achieved, acknowledge what could have been done better, and how this could be built upon.

Recommendations for how to capitalise on the momentum of the project and continue to bring vitality to North Walsham include:

- Maintaining and looking after the improved public spaces is critical to their continued use and attractiveness. Ensure there is a plan with clear ownership and responsibility for this, including landscaping.
- Communicate how hazard concerns have been addressed through a recent safety assessment and consider how to make journeys across the town more inclusive for all users.
- Continue the conservation efforts of the Building Improvement Grant (BIG) scheme and continue telling stories about the town's unique history and identity through cultural programming and marketing.
- Establish a funded and supported local cultural organisation to continue to deliver a regular series of events and activities around the town centre.
- Implement a Vision and Marketing Plan to attract more visitors (local and further afield), including a cohesive business plan, through an active business forum, for the town centre.

02 CONTEXT

An overview of the project background, including the issues it sought to address, funding and timescales.



02 CONTEXT

The North Walsham High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) project grew from the ambitions of local stakeholders to regenerate the town centre with a focus on the significant built heritage of the town.

The changing nature of high streets across the UK, with a greater focus on amenities, diversification, active travel and well-being, was being felt in North Walsham as well. Outside perceptions of the town were not very positive, and there was a lack of vitality and poor public realm in the town centre. However, with a rich history and good physical and historical assets, a unique and long-standing market culture, and a passionate local community, there was scope to deliver an ambitious project.

In 2019, a successful bid was made for funds from the High Street Heritage Action Zone administered by Historic England, with North Norfolk District Council (NNDC) agreeing to match the initial bid of £975k and to implement the HSHAZ project. Subsequent funding was also secured to widen the scope, with a total budget of around £3.8m.

The project's overall aim was to improve the town centre's vitality and attractiveness to shoppers, visitors and businesses by capitalising on its built heritage, with a complete programme of five interlinked workstreams with various budgets and timelines. The HSHAZ project officially ran from April 2020 until April 2024, but there were significant delays to the various schemes because of issues including the COVID-19 pandemic, rising costs, and lack of resources.

The five workstreams were:

1. **Public Realm Improvements (Placemaking):** improvements to key physical spaces and 're-stitching' of the town's historic core.
2. **Building Improvement Grant (BIG) Scheme:** grants to support the restoration of historic buildings and

bring vacant floor space back into use.

3. **Cedars Historic Building Restoration:** a Grade II visually and historically important building that sits at a principle gateway to the town centre
4. **Cultural Programme:** activities and events designed to work with the public realm and improve perceptions of the high street and its heritage
5. **Wayfinding + Interpretation:** a design scheme to enhance the visitor experience and build greater civic pride in North Walsham's history

The project also attracted significant match funding that is a measure of stakeholder investment. There was always an intention to lever in additional funding, but NNDC have been especially successful. The BIG scheme was structured with private investment built in, and received upwards of £190k from business owners and landlords. As part of the Public Realm Improvements, the New Anglia LEP provided £1.1m, Norfolk County Council approximately £470k and North Walsham Town Council £45k. Of this, nearly £80k went towards improvements within the HSHAZ boundary, including for additional road surfacing, bike hoops, electricity pillars and lighting.

Two related project which were not part of the HSHAZ but were closely linked are the creation of a bus interchange (completed in June 2022), which used the front part of New Road Car Park, new and refurbished toilet facilities on New Road and Vicarage Street, and a Vision and Marketing report (delivered in March 2023 and separately funded through European funding) which sets out a strategy for the town to market itself and attract investment. Of the match funding, about £436K was spent on a new bus interchange, which facilitated

Five Key Workstreams



Public Realm Improvements [Placemaking]

£2.7m
February 2022-March 2023, Black Swan Loke



Building Improvement Grant (BIG) Scheme

£530k
May 2021-March 2024



Cedars Historic Building Restoration

£465k
March 2022-August 2023



Cultural Programme

£90k
April 2020-March 2024



Wayfinding + Interpretation

£40k
February 2023-March 2024

03

METHODOLOGY

An explanation of the approach to the evaluation and the data sources used.



03 METHODOLOGY

The findings from this evaluation are based on the interpretation of a combination of anecdotal, qualitative, and quantitative data, as well as reports submitted by the HSHAZ project team to NNDC and Historic England

It's important to note that while the HSHAZ project objectives were set out at the beginning and project monitoring reports were sent on a quarterly basis to Historic England, there were no established regular evaluation and feedback loops integrated into the process. This posed several challenges to an impact assessment, including establishing a baseline against which to measure changes over time, the breadth of data available, and resource constraints. It's also difficult to attribute specific impacts to the HSHAZ project versus other concurrent developments or initiatives in the area. Social, economic, and environmental changes have also taken place over the last four years, including the unprecedented COVID -19 pandemic and an economic recession, which adds to the complexity of capturing these dynamics accurately.

To address this and gather more insight for the creation of this report, NK& carried out retrospective data collection involving the following activities, but there are limitations to the assessment and the findings should be read with that in mind:

Stakeholder interviews: interviews with 18 key stakeholders, project participants and delivery consultants to understand the aspirations, challenges and successes of the project.

'Tell Us' public event: a one-day engagement event held in the town centre, open to everyone, which asked for feedback on the HSHAZ project. Around 50 people attended this event.

Impact assessment survey: a public survey, open to everyone, which asked for feedback primarily on the

public realm improvements of the HSHAZ project. The survey, which was open from March 21st until April 14th, was offered digitally and via printed copies that were available at the 'Tell Us' event and at the North Walsham library. Additional assistance to complete the survey, if needed, was provided by NNDC on request. The survey had a total of 182 responses, with the majority of respondents (76%) being residents of North Walsham. 7% of the respondents were between the ages of 18-34, 30% between 35-54, and 58% were over 55. A small percentage (4%) preferred not to state their age. Of those who chose to note their gender (20% chose not to), 52% were female, 27% were male and 1% was non binary. Given these demographics around the survey respondents, it should be acknowledged that findings will have a bias and skew towards issues and viewpoints that are more common and relevant to older residents.

Historic England Cultural Programme Survey: this survey was conducted by Historic England in 2023, year 3 of the project's delivery, across 42 national HSHAZ schemes. There was a total of 1120 responses from cultural programme audiences and deliverers, with 43 responses from North Walsham (the target response rate was 40 per scheme).



'Methodology' continues →

'Tell Us' public event

03 METHODOLOGY

The following quantitative data sources were also reviewed and considered as part of the evaluation:

Car Park usage data: an internal NNDC dataset for car parks owned by the Council

Business rates data: an internal NNDC dataset

Footfall data: relevant data is available from July 2021 until April 2024 and comes from a platform called Springboard, which ran counts from a camera installed in the middle of the high street. For more detail, see note at right.

A Note About Footfall Data

Footfall data, which measures the number of people passing through a particular area, can be valuable for assessing the health and vitality of a town centre. It can be used to track visitor trends and analyse pedestrian flow, assess the impact of events and initiatives, and draw comparisons with other similar towns. However, it is also essential to note that it is only one type of information source and be cautious of several factors including inaccuracies and reliability, sampling bias based on the camera's single location, and seasonal variations, all of which play a factor in the reliability of data available for North Walsham's town centre.

The data overall shows variation and without consistent patterns it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions, but the following are takeaways from comparing two 6-month periods: August 2021-January 2022, before the HSHAZ project works began, and August 2023-January 2024, after the majority of the works had been completed:

- Increase in footfall for the months of April, May, June, July and August
- Decrease in footfall for September, October, November, December and January
- Increase in footfall for Thursday market days. Thursday market days also showed a higher than average footfall per day than non-market days.
- Decrease in footfall on Saturdays

To further set the context for the decrease in footfall, data from another platform called Active Xchange, which tracks footfall via mobile data within 100 square metres, shows that all the high streets in North Norfolk showed a reduction in annual footfall in 2023 compared with 2022, with the inland towns faring worse than the coastal towns. This could be due to several factors, including the

ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic uncertainty, changes in the retail landscape, demographic shifts and the weather. This is also consistent with the general picture for towns in the East of England and high streets nationally.

Town + High Street	2023 % change from previous year
Fakenham High St (Market Pl + Norwich St)	-39.80
Hoveton High St (Stalham Road)	-27.40
North Walsham High St (Market Pl)	-24.10
Holt High St (High St and Market Pl)	-17.30
Cromer High St (Church St)	-14.70
Mundesley High St (High St and Station Rd)	-13.50
Stalham High St (High St)	-9.70
Well-Next-The-Sea High St (Staithe St)	-8.40

Source: ActiveXchange (2024) footfall for North Norfolk's High Streets

For North Walsham, weather does seem to have an influence on people's movements. There was more precipitation in 2023 compared with 2022 (206 days in 2023 and 164 days in 2022) and fewer clear days (17 days in 2023 and 30 days in 2022). Using this and additional weather data, Springboard data showed an increase in footfall on days when there were higher daily temperatures, lower precipitation and lower wind speeds.

04

IMPACT

The assessment of how well the project met the key objectives outlined at the start.



04 IMPACT

“While the work was going on, there was a lot of moaning, but when it all started coming together and these beautiful spaces emerged, it shut a lot of people up. I think people are enjoying it now. It’s definitely changed people’s view of the town. A friend came to visit for the food festival recently and said, ‘Wow! What’s happened? It’s so buzzy in the town. I’ve never seen North Walsham like this!’ It’s being noticed more and people are more inclined to go into the town.”

-Stakeholder interview

This section goes into more detail on how well the HSHAZ project overall meets its five key objectives:



Environmental Impact

public space created, expanded or enhanced



Accessibility + Inclusivity

made the town centre more accessible for all residents through a variety of transport modes



Historic Preservation

made the town’s history more visible and relatable



Cultural Impact

created a platform to stage social and cultural activities



Economic Impact

had a positive impact on the town’s economy



Environmental Impact

public space created, expanded or enhanced

‘Environment impact’ for the scope of the HSHAZ project refers to changes in the natural or built environment that positively or negatively affect the surrounding ecosystem, infrastructure and human activity. The HSHAZ project was focused on the creation, expansion and enhancement of public spaces within and around the town centre, carried out primarily through the ‘Placemaking’ workstream, which identified physical improvements to key public spaces. The three main areas identified were the Market Place, Shambles Terrace/Church Approach and the Black Swan Loke Garden. Bank Loke, Black Swan Loke and Bier Loke - three lokes that acted as connections and arrival spaces into the town centre - were also given some upgrades, but to a lesser degree.

In the Market Place, the instigation of a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) which resulted in a change to traffic regulations, enabled a re-design of the area. This included re-routing the buses, removing most of the parking and limiting vehicle traffic to before 10am and after 4pm. Pavements were resurfaced and widened, enabling cafes to have outdoor seating and encouraging people to linger. New planting, seating, bike loops and electric pillars to support the well-established market, were also installed. New bins, wayfinding signage, and industrial cleaning of the existing pavement helping to merge the new and old into one identifiable space.

The eastern end of Market Street, known as Church Approach since it opens up to St Nicholas Church, was turned into a terraced garden incorporating planting, seating and tables. Research into buildings and businesses that used to stand here, including a tea merchant and boot maker, informed the design of this space, and is reflected in the signage and planting.

“It is brighter and more modern, with the focus on pedestrian access and shopping, rather than vehicle access.”

“Whilst I was all for pedestrianisation I think the high street improvements look very bland and uninspired. Such a shame it couldn’t have been given more personality similar to the space improved near the Black Swan.”

“The town centre certainly looks better, however the shops around let it down, we need more variety of shops, entertainment and eateries.”

“Visually improved but at the expense of health and safety, footfall and parking.”

-Impact Survey

“It looks a lot nicer and is a more pleasant place to be in. Much wider footpaths means people aren’t scurrying around. There’s more lingering, chatting to people.”

“The scope of the project has been really ambitious and the number of things that have been done is extraordinary.”

-Stakeholder Interviews

‘Environmental Impact’ continues →

04 IMPACT



Environmental Impact

public space created,
expanded or enhanced

The site where Black Swan Loke Garden now sits was a parcel of derelict land, which was purchased by the Council to provide a quicker, more attractive pedestrian link between the main town centre car park (at Bank Loke) and the Market Place. The Garden, which was opened very recently on March 14, 2024, features planting, seating and a community-designed mosaic, and is open 24/7. Wood panelling along the walls is made from decommissioned timbers from the Cromer Pier decking and the glass detailing is light casing reclaimed from the Council's demolished public toilets.

The prevailing view from the engagement activities has been very positive in terms of making these spaces look more attractive, especially for Church Approach and Black Swan Loke Garden, with around 75% of respondents in the Impact Survey saying that these spaces were more attractive than before. Figures for the Market Place were lower at about 50%. For the town centre overall, there was a notable shift in sentiment comparing before and after the HSHAZ project, with a 21% increase in people saying it looked good or v. good. Interestingly, the shift was from those who thought it was 'fair' before. These views are supported by comments from the stakeholder interviews as well as the other engagement events, where nearly all participants agreed that the town centre now looks better. Those who disagreed felt the town centre now feels too modern at the expense of its historic character.

An accompanying finding is that many people believe these spaces are now better used, again with more positive sentiment around Church Approach and Black Swan Loke Garden. Overall, there were very positive responses about improvements to these spaces,

although it should be noted that people also expressed a lack of knowledge about these two spaces as they are less frequented and visible than the Market Place.

The Market Place is the public space people had the most knowledge of and seemed to use the most, and that also had the most mixed reviews in regards to the work done. Overall, apart from attractiveness, the majority of participants in the engagement activities felt the Market Place functions better than before, but concerns around safety remain: confusing/unmonitored traffic regulations (which meant vehicles continue to come through the Market Place even when they are not allowed to), new or unfamiliar layouts of space that lead to trips and falls. More detail on this is in the Accessibility/Inclusivity assessment on pg. 14. Other concerns for those unhappy with the project are the closure of a few longstanding shops in the town centre and a perception that the town centre feels emptier without vehicular traffic. On-street 30-minute parking spaces were replaced by an equivalent number of 1-hour spaces in the adjacent car parks.

Impact Survey

The figures below compare how respondents felt about the different spaces before and after the works were completed.

75%

of respondents said Church Approach and Black Swan Loke Garden looked more attractive than before.

50%

of respondents said the Market Place looked more attractive than before.

21%

increase in people shifting from 'fair' to saying the town centre overall looked good or very good now

18%

decrease in people saying it is easier to get around now, with an increase in negative sentiment of 27%

12%

decrease in people saying how lively it is now compared with before the works

04 IMPACT



Accessibility + Inclusivity
made the town centre more accessible for all residents through a variety of transport modes

This objective was focused on making the town centre more accessible for a variety of residents through multiple modes of transport, including increasing active travel such as walking and cycling.

There were multiple approaches to achieving this objective, including making the links to the town centre, such as Black Swan Loke and Bank Loke, more obvious, safer and more attractive, improving the provision of parking in the car parks directly adjacent to the Market Place and re-considering traffic routes through the Market Place. The latter was consulted on extensively, with a decision made to limit through-traffic, re-route buses and reduce parking directly in the Market Place (while still ensuring there was enough disabled parking and enabling loading/unloading for shops). The current TRO for the Market Place permits vehicles only before 10am or after 4pm, except for delivery vans and disabled drivers. Accessibility for Church Approach focused on new landscaping and enhancing the pathway to encourage pedestrian connectivity to the Market Cross, while one of the key aims of creating Black Swan Loke Garden was to improve access from Bank Loke car park, making it quicker and easier to get into the town centre.

This has had mixed feedback, especially in the Market Place. While many people have said they enjoy the lack of traffic and the invitation to linger, there is a view from some that the traffic regulation and reduction in parking has perhaps been too much of a compromise with no clear winners. The Impact Survey shows positive results for the accessibility of Church Approach and Black Swan Loke Garden, but less than half of the respondents said the Market Place was easier to get around, due to level

changes in the curb lines, un-authorised vehicles driving through throughout the day and limited parking directly in front of shops. It should be noted that this question is open to interpretation – drivers, for example, may say it is harder to get around because through traffic is no longer allowed. Comments at the ‘Tell Us’ engagement event also reflected unease when navigating the Market Place. Noting that most people taking part in these were over 55 and therefore potentially may have greater accessibility requirements, it still points to some users having a perception of not feeling safe here. Additional feedback from a Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) representative corroborated this, noting that the many level changes and uncertainty around vehicular traffic can create confusion for people as well as guide dogs and lead to falls. Feedback from survey participants suggested more legible and consistent surfaces and curbs, and enforcement of the TRO.

The creation of a new bus interchange at New Road Car Park was not part of the HSHAZ project but is a closely related scheme, and has been received very positively by the town. Funded by Norfolk County Council, this interchange provides a new location for buses to stop and turn, as well as an area where passengers could wait in relative comfort and have facilities nearby. Improvements to the footpath through to Memorial Park and to the wider amenity of the area were undertaken alongside the construction of the new bus interchange. One criticism, however, is that the route from the bus interchange to the town centre has not been made fully accessible, especially for those with vision impairment, and therefore makes a journey into town difficult and unsafe. Another key element of the HSHAZ project that was

intended to help make the town centre more accessible is wayfinding and signage, but as this was only recently installed it is too early to assess its impact.

“There’s much more space for pedestrians. The new travel hub has removed buses and congestion from the Market Place, along with the removal of the majority of traffic from the town centre. There’s a good provision of cycle parking.”

-Impact Survey

“People aren’t aware of what is HSHAZ and what isn’t... the rest of the surrounding area isn’t safe. All of these things need to be glued together with the facilities that enable you to get there. The inclusive journey part is as important as the scheme itself.”

-Stakeholder Interview

‘Accessibility + Inclusivity’ continues



04 IMPACT



Accessibility + Inclusivity made the town centre more accessible for all residents through a variety of transport modes

Whether the public realm improvements have had a significant impact on the number of people coming into the town centre is difficult to say, as the quantitative data available is inconclusive, but there are some indications that there has been a small uplift in visitor numbers after the major improvements completed.

Footfall data for the Market Place is available from July 2021 until March 2024, but there is no significant period where data from all four years is available, and the most current data which compares 2022, 2023 and 2024 is only available for the months of January, February, March and April. Data comparison before works to the Market Place began (before September 2022) and after their completion (after March 2023), where data is available for 2022, 2023 and 2024, indicates:

- Footfall for the first quarter of all three years shows a very slightly higher number for 2022 but nothing significant.
- Footfall across the four months shows no discernible pattern emerging in relation to the project timeline, as footfall was the highest in March 2023 when the works were just completing (by a very slim margin compared to March 2024), and higher than March 2022, when work to Church Approach but not the Market Place had commenced.
- Overall footfall for all three years has been highest in the month of March, and highest on Thursdays, which corresponds with Market Day.
- The total number of visitors for the year to date is .2% up on 2023

Comparing footfall data per quarter for 2021, 2022 and 2023 (before and after the works) for the second half of

the year indicates:

- Visitor numbers were highest in Q3 2023. Footfall in Q4 was highest in 2021, but all three years showed very similar numbers.
- The highest numbers for Thursdays were in June and September 2023, after the works had been completed

The highest number of visitors across all four years was in June 2023, with over 150,000 visitors to the town centre. Q2 2024 was not concluded at the point of this writing, hence the much lower figure shown in the graph at right.

Looking at car park data could also indicate a more active town centre. Data is available for a four-month period (April-July) comparing the use of free car park spaces in Bank Loke Car Park in 2022 and 2023. All months showed an increase in the use of free car parking (which is available for 60 minutes) and could indicate that more people are visiting the town centre, although not necessarily that they are staying for longer periods of time. Lack of consistent enforcement also makes this difficult to quantify.

Relevant Footfall Data



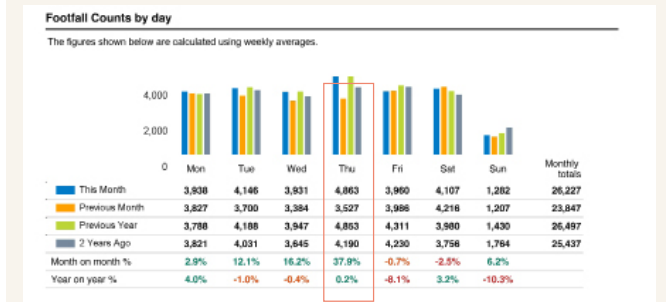
March had the highest footfall for 2022-2024, and the highest overall footfall was for June 2023.

Source: Springboard



Visitor numbers were the highest in Q3 2023. Visitor numbers for Q1 were all very similar, and overall there are no dramatic changes.

Source: Springboard



Thursdays (Market days) continue to have the highest visitor numbers of any day of the week, and March 2024 ('this month') shows higher numbers than 2023 or 2022.

Source: MRI OnLocation for Footfall Analytics, North

04 IMPACT



Historic Preservation
made the town's history more
visible and relatable

As a market town with a considerable number of historic and listed buildings (and Historic England as a funding partner), making the town's history more visible and relatable was another key objective of the HSHAZ project. This was approached by interconnecting the public improvements, cultural programming and building improvement grants (BIG).

The Cultural Programme and public improvements were particularly linked, which has helped to bring the town's history to life in an appealing way. The improved public spaces created platforms for events and activities, including those with a historic element, to take place. Some of these included ghost walks which took place in and around the town centre and street art which demonstrated historic local events such as the Great Fire, the 1381 Peasants Revolt and the Ruined Tower.

Signage, interpretation (information panels telling the stories of a particular site) and artwork also play a critical role here. Research into previous shop owners and traders at Church Approach was used to create traditional painted signs on the planted path and a matching interpretation lectern has been installed at the top of the slope. Interpretation panels have also been installed in Bier Loke, which leads to St. Nicholas Church. In Black Swan Loke Garden, a community-designed mural showing historic events and attributes of North Walsham, is prominently displayed and provides an attractive focal point for the space.



Clockwise from top left: Rites of Spring Festival 2023, Bier Loke historic timeline, sign leading to Market Place, mural at Black Swan Loke Garden, Church Approach slope naming previous merchants, interpretation lectern at the top of Church Approach

'Historic Preservation' continues →

04 IMPACT



Historic Preservation
made the town's history more
visible and relatable

The Building Improvement Grant (BIG) scheme was focused on supporting the repair and restoration of historic buildings. Ten projects were granted funding, and four of these were significant historic buildings that were brought back into use. Another important Grade II listed building in the town, the Cedars, was restored through a separate workstream, and is now fully let office space. There has also been the cumulative effect of transforming a number of buildings at the bottom of Church Approach, including the Shambles Café, Hop Inn and North Kebab that have created a noticeable uplift to that corner of the town centre.

However, awareness of the work that was done could have been more widespread. When asked in the Impact Survey whether the town now better shows its history, about 25% of people responded 'not sure' for Church Approach and the Market Place, and 42% for Black Swan Loke Garden, and this was reflected in the comments as well. Similarly, there was a lack of knowledge around the BIG scheme and Cedars project in the 'Tell Us' event, which could be due in part to these buildings not being publicly accessible and much of the restoration being structural or focused on interiors.

There were also suggestions that more is needed - other key historic sites like the Town Clock and St. Nicholas Church should be highlighted, and historical facts/events such as Nelson going to school here and the town's industrial heritage in weaving should have interpretation.

Some criticism came in the form of people who felt the work in the Market Place should have been focused on restoring more historic shop fronts and creating interpretation opportunities (an early idea was to have a 'discovery and education' trail running through here), which would have been visible to a much larger audience. The selection of which stories to tell and how they are told was also raised.

The HSHAZ project has undoubtedly helped to preserve and bring to life the town's history, and many of the residents showed appreciation for what has been put in place. Historic England felt the North Walsham scheme was very successful, and compared with other HSHAZ projects in the East of England, was the largest in terms of funding and the most complex.

"It leads the eye to the market cross as it did before, but the new, brighter materials and design feels as though the council is more invested in the town and its history"

"Are you referring to some artwork mentioning boot makers as I haven't noticed anything else?"

"If more attention had been paid to the appearance of shop fronts and buildings in general, giving more maintenance and a coat of paint then the town would be showing its history a lot more."

-Impact Survey

"Just plonking some signs about the heritage isn't enough - it's boring. We can celebrate our heritage in another way and talk about other things too - Nelson and the slave trade, the swing Riots...people want to select their history."

- Stakeholder Interview

"North Walsham has done it wonderfully...it will help people who come into town go into the town centre and spend money, because one of the things it's doing here is showing that the historic environment is a sort of catalyst for regeneration, if you want it to be."

-Tony Calladine, the East of England Regional Director for Historic England

04 IMPACT



Cultural Impact
created a platform to stage
social and cultural activities

The fourth key objective of the HSHAZ project was to create a platform to stage social and cultural activities, and in conjunction with the Cultural Programme, this was certainly achieved.

Between 2022-2044, over 150 events and activities were delivered by a range of community groups or commissioned projects working with the local community. Events included creative workshops, music, dance and theatre performances, historic-themed exhibitions and photo opportunities, heritage walks, literature and poetry readings, circus skills, parades and more.

Many events were public events, held for example on market days, in public spaces and to 'passers-by'. As they were open to everyone it was effectively impossible to capture exact attendance numbers, but formal evidence and reports indicate that the Cultural Programme activity resulted in engagement with well over 5,000 people.

The programme deliberately utilised the public spaces undergoing improvement as part of the wider HSHAZ programme, with participants being asked to demonstrate how their activity or event would enliven and showcase the newly regenerated town centre. A fashion show used the Church Approach as a catwalk and a variety of activities were held in the Market Place, including performances, workshops and art exhibitions. Circus workshops and performances put on by the Foolhardy Circus involved over 1000 people, and a pop-up bookshop run by Holt Bookshop had an impressive 350 visitors. Other ongoing events such as Street Feast, run by North Walsham Town Council, North Walsham

Lights Up and Children's Day have also continued to prove popular and the general uplift to the Market Place has created a more pleasant atmosphere. The events have demonstrably created a draw and contributed to the liveliness of the town centre, made it feel more welcoming, and helped to instil more civic pride, as evidenced by the findings from Historic England's Cultural Programme Survey (at right).

While it is not possible to point to a strict correlation between footfall data and event programming as there are too many variables involved, including the weather, it is clear that there is a relationship. For example, the Cultural Programme supported the Rites of Spring Festival held over a week in May 2023, which had over 1000 attendees. Footfall for the Market Place in May 2023 was higher than the visitor numbers in May 2022.

Market days (Thursdays) also continue to see surges in visitor numbers, which has historically been the case in North Walsham and shows that activity in the town centre and not just shops or services, is a strong draw (see graph on pg. 15).

"There are more things going on in the town now. People can sit outside and socialise too."

"The new events, especially the theatre events, are a massive draw to the town."

-Impact Survey

HE Cultural Programme Survey

67%

of people are now more likely to visit their high street due to the cultural activities.

86%

of respondents now view the high street as a place where they can experience culture and arts, creating a more positive outlook on their local areas.

81%

of individuals reported a greater sense of pride in their high street and local area.

76%

of respondents found their high street and local area to be more welcoming than before.

72%

of audiences stated that the cultural activity was the main reason for their visit to the high street.

79%

attendees visited local shops, cafes, and businesses either before or after participating in a cultural program activity, indicating a positive influence on local economies.

04 IMPACT



Economic Impact had a positive impact on the town's economy

This final objective, of having a positive impact on the town's economy, is the most complex and the most difficult to assess because of several factors:

- **Time lag:** It often takes time for the full effects of regeneration efforts to materialize. Changes in economic activity, footfall, and property values may not become apparent immediately. The HSHAZ project was only formally completed in March 2024 making it difficult to assess the impact of regeneration projects in the short term.
- **Complexity of factors:** Multiple interconnected factors, including economic, social, environmental, and cultural aspects are involved, and therefore evaluating the impact of regeneration requires analysing a wide range of indicators, from retail sales and employment figures to community engagement and public perceptions.
- **Data availability:** Comprehensive and reliable data on the performance of the town centre is limited or difficult to obtain, and different datasets make it challenging to develop a complete picture.
- **Baseline comparison:** There is a lack of accurate data on pre-regeneration conditions, so it is difficult to determine whether observed changes are the result of regeneration efforts or other external factors, such as COVID or the recession.
- **External influences:** Economic impact does not occur in isolation, and external influences such as changes in consumer behaviour, economic trends, and government policies can affect outcomes.

That being said, there are some conclusions that can be drawn from the engagement activities around public perception and some of the quantitative data available.

The makeup of the businesses within the town centre is slowly changing towards being more service and leisure-oriented, rather than purely retail-oriented, which reflects trends in high streets across the country and is where there is longer-term economic viability. Some business owners and townspeople feel strongly that this change has been detrimental, and certainly to those businesses who have had to close their doors or are making less money. This group, which has been especially active and critical on social media, attribute this primarily to the removal of short-term parking spaces in front of shops and buses no longer going through the town centre, an approach to traffic regulation that was designed to make the town centre more pedestrian friendly.

There has been an increase of one more vacant business unit after the works were completed, (Source: North Norfolk District Council (2024) Business Rates, Internal Dataset), but this could be due to many factors beyond parking availability, including shifts to online shopping, rising operating costs and economic downturns, and changing consumer preferences. A certain degree of business turnover would also be anticipated for a variety of reasons such as retirement, change in circumstances, etc.

A number of new businesses, including Coffeesmiths, Urban Bites and Morrisons have chosen to invest in the town both during and since the works, suggestive of some degree of business confidence.

“Some places have closed but we have more café businesses than we did before and that’s the way high streets are changing. Some people don’t like it because that’s not the way they were 30 years ago.”

- Stakeholder interview

“There are conflicting reports. A number of shops have closed and lots in the town put that down to the changes, however, COVID and COL crisis are probably bigger contributors. Whenever I have been into town, it’s very lovely.”

- Impact Survey

“Again fanfare over quality. Before a town becomes ‘pretty’ and gentrified, surely the economic stability of the town should have been addressed. Prettiness grows old and fades but stability and economy does not.”

“I knew it was nonsense right from the beginning. All the shops are closing and there’s less footfall. We need more traffic and parking in the centre – that’s what makes it lively. Now it’s silent.”

- Tell Us Event

‘Economic Impact’ continues →

04 IMPACT



Economic Impact
had a positive impact on
the town's economy

Many other residents and visitors, however, agree this shift towards a more diverse offering including restaurants and cafes, community organisations and cultural and leisure facilities is a positive indicator for the town's future. They believe it is a good basis on which to build on, but that there is much continued work to be done to market North Walsham and make it a destination like some of its neighbours.

The refurbishment of the Cedars building, including an upgrade to fibre broadband, has enabled new kinds of businesses to set up in the town centre. A firm of AI and IT consultants, with a large base of remote staff, is expanding from neighbouring premises and could be a significant local business player, encouraging more in this sector to relocate to the New Road area.

As noted in the Accessibility+Inclusivity section on pg. 15, the recent improvements have not yet shown either a detrimental or observed significant uplift in footfall, appreciating it is very early after the completion of the project to make an assessment and there are various previously mentioned factors at play.

The results of Historic England's Cultural Programme Survey, however, make a case for events being not only a draw for people but that they are also more likely to linger and visit places in the town centre before or after. The data indicates that cultural activities are serving as a driving force behind increased footfall to local businesses, so more could be made of this.

"There's a real job [for the Town Council] now that we've got a much better environment in the town centre to encourage and stimulate new businesses and activities. They can influence how the town is marketed, improve and encourage new businesses and shops but these need to be of a different type. We need much more of a café culture, which will come, although at the moment footfall everywhere is down as there isn't spending power."

"I absolutely feel hopeful though - there are lots more people lingering in the town centre, it's busier. We've created the landscape for the sustainability of businesses but it's down to businesses to see

-Stakeholder Interviews

"[The Cultural Programme] It was also about bringing people into the town and them spending time here. They were popping into shops, like the coffee shop or the bakery or the market to buy fruit and veg...it really encouraged them to stay in the town and shop in the town. If we can keep people in the town for longer, it benefits everyone".

-Cultural Programme participant

"The town offers more events than in previous years (feast in the street a prime example) and the Thursday market does well, but the existing problems of a modern era are not going to go away. Pop up stalls and shops are extremely popular in busier cities, having an opportunity for short term leases for shops to offer something like this could be something to look into."

-Impact Survey

04 IMPACT

Community Engagement

Beyond the key objectives, there was a stated intention and commitment to engage and communicate with the local community throughout the project and as widely as possible to ensure there was buy-in and a sense of ownership. Some workstreams, like the Public Improvements and Cultural Programme, naturally required more engagement, and delivered on this, while there was less awareness about other schemes like the BIG and Cedars refurbishment.

Throughout the project there was continual communications and community engagement activity. These included regular public updates and blogs, printed communications material, HAZ Facebook updates, ongoing discussions with property owners, businesses, and organisations likely to be most affected by works under way or planned.

In 2021, there was extensive public consultation on the public realm improvements, with two significant consultation periods (June-July and September-October) to share the design and highways proposals, invite feedback and to inform the next stages. Engagement activities included a digital platform called Social Pinpoint, traveling exhibitions, face-to-face sessions with key stakeholder groups including the business community, virtual presentations, and several surveys. Overall, the project team spoke with around 700 people and the various surveys received around 650 responses. Further consultation in 2023 included stakeholder workshops to develop plans for Black Swan Loke Gardens.

The concurrent Cultural Programme, where the majority of events were open to everyone, involved the

community by its very nature; all activities and events were delivered by, or in collaboration with, community groups, with an estimated 5,000 people participating.

Other key milestones in the project were also marked by public events. A concert and dance event at the Market Cross in May 2023 celebrated the completion of works in the Marketplace, an open house for the Cedars in July 2023 attracted over 100 visitors, and Black Swan Loke Garden was officially opened with a small ceremony in March 2024.

Progress and milestones were regularly updated on the NNDC HSHAZ facebook page and a dedicated communications resource worked to ensure coverage of events and the development of the project in local media outlets. The HSHAZ project team also had regular engagement with the Big Bash event, Paston College, NW High School, NW Junior School, Youth Council, NW Town Council, Health Centre (Healthier NW) and UEA and numerous community and cultural groups with connections to the town.

This indicates good levels of awareness and participation from the local community, and there was positive feedback on the level and reach of communication and engagement. About 60% of respondents at the engagement events said they felt there was enough opportunity to provide input and the project reflected community needs and aspirations. Despite this, however, it appears more could have been done. Only about 50% of respondents in the impact survey said they felt they knew enough about the project when it was being planned and delivered, and sufficiently informed when the improvement works were

being undertaken. Communication about the works in the Marketplace, especially, were pointed to as being unclear and confusing. There was also the perception from a small group who felt that their feedback either was not listened to, or that the outcomes had already been decided by NNDC.

“[The project team] brought a lot of the community together who might not otherwise have spent much time in town or gotten involved with each other, even school groups and Paston College, which haven’t been known for their community involvement.”

“Community engagement has gone as well as it can do, but communication is a constant battle - you will always get those people who manage not to see anything, and in my experience it’s because they don’t want to.”

“There was a lack of information and project updates in-between. It would have been nice to have that more apparent in the high street so people could see what was coming next. There wasn’t a central point for people to understand what was going on except for social media, which then devalued the information.”

-Stakeholder Interviews

04 IMPACT

Key Public Realm sites before and after the improvement works



Market Place before



Market Place after



Black Swan Loke Garden before



Black Swan Loke Garden after



Church Approach before



Church Approach after



Cedars before (exterior)



Cedars after (exterior)



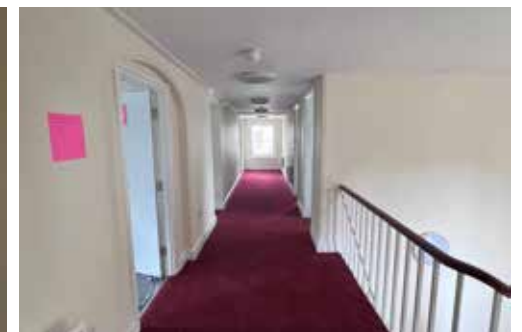
Church Approach before



Church Approach after



Cedars before (interior)



Cedars after (interior)

04 IMPACT

BIG participants before and after the improvement works



Shambles Cafe before



Shambles Cafe after



39 Market Place before (rear view)



39 Market Place after (rear view)



North Kebab Shop before



North Kebab Shop after



Phoenix Building (Barclays Bank) before (exterior)



Phoenix Building after (interior)



Chubby Panda Restaurant before



Chubby Panda Restaurant after



8 Kings Arms St before



8 Kings Arms St after

05

WORKSTREAMS

An overview of each of the five key workstreams, and their successes and challenges.



05 WORKSTREAMS

“The town had been declining from the 70’s, and had lost its pride in its centre, which had led to an unwarranted reputational problem. The important thing was not just physical improvements, although there was concern about the physical fabric of the town, but to work in tandem with the cultural side. There is a very vibrant culture in the town that needed to be brought to attention.”

-Stakeholder interview

The HSHAZ project should be viewed as a holistic programme, but was made up of five distinct but interlinked workstreams. This section summarises the successes and challenges of each one:



Public Realm Improvements (Placemaking)



Building Improvement Grants Scheme



Cedars Historic Building Restoration



Cultural Programme



Wayfinding + Interpretation



Public Realm Improvements (Placemaking)

In 2021, a comprehensive town centre masterplan was created which outlined a number of potential projects to improve the public realm. Taking into consideration the project’s focus on built heritage and initial community engagement, it was decided to focus on four key areas: the Marketplace, Church Approach/Shambles Terrace, Black Swan Loke Garden and three lokes – Bank Loke, Black Swan Loke and Bier Loke, which were all key elements of or gateways into the town centre.

The predominant view is that these spaces look more attractive and are nicer to be in, which has also led to people reporting they spend more time when they visit. Feedback on Church Approach/Shambles Terrace and Black Swan Loke Garden were especially positive, even from those who were not in favour of some of the other elements of the scheme. In the Impact Survey, 58% said they thought the town looked better than before, and about 75% said they thought Church Approach and Black Swan Loke Garden were more attractive. Visitors to the ‘Tell Us’ engagement event felt these areas had been made more vibrant and appealing, and that they would spend more time in them, although the need to maintain the planting and tidiness of these spaces was felt to be integral to this. 71% said they would spend more time here now. Those who felt it was not more accessible or safe pointed out fluctuating curb heights as trip hazards and the fact that many cars do not seem to be obeying the traffic control regulations.

The Marketplace, where pavements have been widened and the majority of through-traffic restricted to after 4pm, now has public seating and several cafes where patrons can sit outside. A number of events held through the Cultural Programme have shown that

it can also function as a platform for activities and performances, drawing crowds and encouraging people to linger and interact with each other. It is too early to place much emphasis on footfall data, as previously noted, but there is a general perception that it is busier. Those running the market appreciate that it looks nicer and has better facilities with easier access to power, but one criticism is that the area for stalls has been reduced. Though the market managers and Town Council were consulted, it was not until the works were nearly complete that they realised the pedestrian areas are barred to vehicles, which has created some difficulty in where market stalls can be placed and impacted other events like the Street Feast food festival, where many of the stalls are actually vehicles (i.e. food trucks or horse boxes).

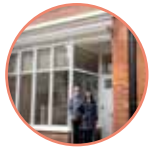
While the reduction in traffic has generally made it safer for the majority of able-bodied pedestrians, some older residents and those with disabilities have found it harder to navigate and report trips and falls. There are also reports of vehicles not observing the restrictions and driving through at all hours, which is difficult to enforce.

“Almost without exception what has been done is much better. Everything works so much better than it did – spaces that have been created for people to sit, to experience events. Overall it’s just a nicer space to be in.”

“There are still lots of vehicles driving through and the signage isn’t terribly clear or visible. But only the police can really enforce this and they can’t be there all of the time.”

-Stakeholder Interviews

05 WORKSTREAMS



Building Improvement Grants Scheme

The objective of this scheme was to contribute to the rejuvenation of the historic high street by offering grants, with match funding from owners, to support the repair and restoration of historic buildings and bring vacant floor space back into use. After significant effort from the HSHAZ team to engage business owners, a total of 32 'expressions of interest' were received, out of which 10 were eventually granted funding, with work ranging from repairing roofs to reinstating architectural features and converting buildings into new uses. The scheme was led and managed by NNDC who appointed a conservation architect and Quantity Surveyor (requirement from the funders) to provide expert advice to applicants and provided professional sign off on the work. With the support of the HSHAZ team, they administered the works with contractors and owners.

The scheme delivered on its objectives, including bringing four significant historic buildings in the town back into use. Owners and businesses in North Walsham have been made aware of the potential for conservation-led restoration of their properties. Some of the grants were towards studies, surveys, project development and planning assistance which may not have resulted in full projects, but were useful to owners in preparing their own works, some of which are now starting independently. Others have been inspired by the work on shop fronts to upgrade their own premises themselves, but were able to use the help they were given through the 'expression of interest' part of the process. One business, is continuing repair and conservation work, and has recently taken over a closed historic pub which is being restored and will open as a wine and craft ale bar.

The key challenges for this workstream were around process and delivery. The guidance from Historic England was not detailed or clear enough, and a lot of time was spent trying to create a clear and streamlined approach. There was also a lack of flexibility from Historic England on how proposals could be delivered. A skills deficit in conservation meant the architects were lucky to engage the contractors on the timescales required and ensure works could be prioritised in line with the funding deadliness and restrictions around various elements of the work.

Many of the applicants had little or no experience in participating in a scheme like this, and so there was nervousness around making the required commitment to provide match funding and manage their own projects, added to which there was often a disconnect between landlords and tenants. For the architects, this made managing expectations difficult, and said that a 'dummies guide' construction projects and the funding milestones would have proved invaluable for informing clients on the timescales and processes that they should expect.

One participant also said he thought more should have been spent on making the town's history more visible, through features like giving shop fronts canopies and installing a brass timeline in the Marketplace, for example. Despite this, public sentiment appears to be broadly supportive, with the majority of respondents from the 'Tell Me' event saying the scheme made the town centre more appealing to visit.

"There were some issues with negative perception around the wider HSHAZ within the town which made progressing some schemes difficult and led to some applicants withdrawing...we found negotiating the balance between encouraging application and cautioning the availability of funds and fund priorities a challenge throughout the scheme."

-Hannah Wooler, MOPA [Conservation Architect]

"The HSHAZ team and architects were great, but the process was horrendous. In hindsight we wouldn't have done it - we would have just done it on our own. We wouldn't have gone to the same extent as we don't have the same [conservation] standard as HE, but we didn't get a better product because of the grant."

-BIG scheme participant

"The improvements have made the town more appealing."

"Money was spent that most of the community won't feel the benefit of."

-Tell Us' Event

05 WORKSTREAMS



Cedars Historic Building Restoration

The Cedars is a Grade II listed building that sits at a principle gateway to the town centre and is visually and historically important. Following a long period of vacancy and disrepair, the main objective for its inclusion in the HSHAZ project was to prevent further deterioration and enable its adaptation to public use.

The building is now fully let to a range of tenants including a financial services firm, North Walsham Town Council, Norfolk County Council Registration Office and a firm of AI and IT consultants. This firm, with a large base of remote staff, is expanding from nearby premises and could be a significant local business player, encouraging more firms in this sector to relocate.

The journey to get to this end result had significant challenges, which included cost increases, contractor availability and changes to the original plans. The implementation of the scheme was delayed by the original contractor going into liquidation, which also added significantly to the cost of the refurbishment works. Another challenge was deciding on, and then attracting, the right tenants

Like the BIG scheme, the wider public seems broadly to either not be aware of, or affected by, the refurbishment, but those who were made aware of it at the 'Tell Us' event were supportive of the upgrades.

“It took longer than hoped, and it’s a hard building to get utilised - you had to get a multiplicity of tenants in. The discussions to get people involved were long and frustrating...There was also lots of demand for charity spaces, but post-COVID they don’t have the money to spend on rent that they used to.”

“What was done was impressive but it wasn’t planned to take 18 months. The other issue was future tenants – it reached a point where there was a lot of support for a pub there, which wasn’t appropriate as this was a community space.”

-Stakeholder Interviews

“This was embarrassingly dilapidated. Now it’s beautiful.”

-‘Tell Us’ Event

05 WORKSTREAMS



Cultural Programme

The Cultural Programme was designed to work in concert with the improvements to physical spaces by allowing people to use the town centre in a new way, help improve perceptions of the high street and its heritage and enhance the local character of the high street. The programme was originally designed to start in April 2020 but was delayed and hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Most businesses were shut and well-established community groups and organisations in the town were either not functioning or trying to establish an online offering. The original application was for a total of £224,000. After an initial delay an award was made of £90,000 and a start date of April 2021 was agreed.

After a slow start and difficulty galvanising interest and commitment, the appointment of a project manager in early 2022 enabled the design and delivery of a rich and varied programme of events that also followed a streamlined proposal process that could be easily replicated or continued. From a standing start with nothing in place originally, over the next two years, nearly 5000 people took part in over 150 events and activities, all delivered by a range of community groups or commissioned projects working with the community. Events included creative workshops, music, dance and theatre performances, historic-themed exhibitions and photo opportunities, heritage walks, literature and poetry readings, circus skills, parades and more.

The Cultural Programme intentionally utilised the public spaces undergoing improvement as part of the wider HSHAZ programme, with participants being asked to demonstrate how their activity or event would enliven and showcase the newly regenerated town centre.

Events such as a fashion show which used the Church Approach as a catwalk and historic circus workshops in the newly created space in the Market Place challenged perceptions about how the town centre could be used and created a draw for people. Other events had strong connections to the town's history, including the Sir William Paston exhibition, Ghost Walks and street art which demonstrated key historic events such as the Great Fire, The 1381 Peasants Revolt and the Ruined tower.

The Historic England survey on the Cultural Programme had overwhelmingly positive results, with the majority of participants reporting that they felt more connected to their community and greater pride in the town, as well as saying it shifted their perception of the high street as a place where they can experience culture and arts, creating a more positive outlook on their local areas. More results can be seen on pg. 18.

Even such a successful scheme, however, was not without significant challenges, especially regarding accessibility. Communication with groups and engagement was difficult as many were not online, so new distribution networks for printed materials needed to be established and collateral created. A few events that were held in historic buildings, which aren't always accessible, meant some people couldn't attend, but where this was known ahead of time the organisers tried to address this, for example through the loan of a ramp from a mobility shop. Another way the programme tried to be accessible was by making events free, but this had the unforeseen consequence of resulting in low or non-attendance for some performances as participants were less committed.

Many events were sold out and oversubscribed, but perhaps more could have done to create awareness around of the programme to a wider audience. At the 'Tell Us' engagement event, admittedly a select group, some people reported low participation and awareness of whether or how the programme connected people and the town. Overall, however, it appears that the programme gained momentum as it went on, with more people attending events like the Britten Symphonia concerts than at the start, for example.

The Cultural Programme undoubtedly brought more people to the town centre and had a positive impact on those who participated in the events either as performers or spectators. There seems to be a desire for a similar programme to continue, with all respondents at the 'Tell Me' event unanimously saying 'yes' to this suggestion, but it will need to have strong leadership, follow a selection process that is easy to understand and implement, and engage a diverse audience.

"It ticked a lot of boxes - new skills, community atmosphere, bringing people together who didn't know each other. It opened up some interesting dialogues. I didn't realise how much I was going to enjoy it. It was a privilege to be a part of it."

-Cultural Programme participant

"It needed better, further-reaching publicity. We would have been more involved if we'd heard about things."

-Tell Us' Event

05 WORKSTREAMS



Wayfinding + Interpretation

The wayfinding scheme, which includes signage and interpretation panels at focal points in the town, was designed to enhance the experience of visitors to the town centre, and build a greater sense of civic pride in North Walsham's history. The initial designs by design studio Momentum Wayshowing included a wider wayfinding and signage scheme for the town, but this was ultimately excluded because of costs and timing. Instead, the focus was on developing and installing signage and interpretation for Black Swan, Bank and Bier Lokes and at Church Approach. Research into previous shop owners and traders at Church Approach was used to create traditional painted signs on the planted path and a matching interpretation lectern at the top of the slope. A timeline of the town's key historical moments was installed at Bier Loke, and the mosaic in Black Swan Loke Garden also speaks to the town's history and identity.

As the installation has just been completed, there has not been the opportunity to get public feedback, but from a project team perspective it has been a mixed success. Wayfinding was originally part of public realm discussions but not delivered as part of that workstream and therefore relied on a limited budget and scope in a separate workstream, implemented after placemaking had finished. The project team felt this would have done better as an integrated part of the public realm improvements. The limited budget also meant that the focus was quite narrow, and currently doesn't support people on complete journeys into and through the town centre. This was echoed by the designers, who although very pleased with the outcome, felt this was a missed opportunity.

"For us, what we've tackled is a piece of the puzzle and we'd love to come back and complete the rest of it. A key part is directional signage around North Walsham, improving journeys from the train station all the way to the town centre. There are also other opportunities that are on the interpretation side and more art-focused, in a kind of street art, visual way."

-Nathan Farquahar, Momentum Wayshowing



06 LEGACY

Recommendations on what needs to happen now to build on the work and investment that has gone into the project.



06 LEGACY

One of the most critical next steps is to share the successes and lessons learned from this project to create greater awareness of what was achieved, acknowledge what could have been done better, and how this could be built upon.

To capitalise on the investment made, the following should be considered by local organisations that have a role in the future vitality and viability of the town centre:

“[We should be] showcasing the project - writing about it, making a film! The best legacy is to produce something which tells the story of the project in all of its dimensions and speaks to multiple audiences. We have 12000 people who live around here - we should draw them into town.”

-Stakeholder Interviews



Environmental Impact

The maintenance and upkeep of the improved public spaces is critical to their continued use and attractiveness.

- Create a plan with clear ownership and responsibility for the Market Place, Church Approach and Black Swan Loke Garden, including the planting and landscaping
- Consider applying for funding to deliver some of the other projects identified in the town centre Masterplan



Accessibility + Inclusivity

Communicate how hazard concerns have been addressed and make it safer for all users.

- Share more widely the results of the recently undertaken Stage 3 Safety Audit and subsequent remedial action taken
- Consult with an accessibility focus group (this could include for example, a walk around with simulation glasses that mimic visual impairment)
- Create a strategy for making journeys across the town more inclusive



Historic Preservation

Continue the conservation efforts of the BIG and continue telling stories about the town's unique history.

- Provide advisory services to local businesses and historic building owners who may want to restore their buildings
- Invest in low-cost but effective visual improvements, like painting and signage, to the other shop fronts in the town centre
- Link with cultural organisations to deliver events that can share historical narratives, especially lesser known or visible ones
- Identify other interpretation opportunities in the built environment



Cultural Impact

Deliver a regular series of events and activities around the town centre.

- Build on the relationships between community groups that were built through the Cultural Programme, such as New Stages
- Establish a local cultural organisation that has funding and Council support
- Have a dedicated space within the town centre that different groups can use (like the pop-up space)



Economic Impact

Implement a Vision and Marketing Plan to attract more visitors (local and further afield)

- Improve and diversify the offering in the town centre with attractors across various uses, including culture, leisure and entertainment, retail, health, events and activities.
- Create a local business partnership and a cohesive business plan for the town centre. Implement initiatives that support and encouragement local businesses
- Create a clear brand for the town supported by a town co-ordinator, marketing campaigns and collateral including a website and a programme of events

06 LEGACY

Lessons Learned

Reflecting on the project, below are the key takeaways from the project team and stakeholders on what to keep in mind when undertaking another project like this, and what could have been done differently.

Establish clear, measurable objectives from the start of the project and come back to them continually.

While the HSHAZ project had identified objectives and goals at the outset, they were broad and did not have measurable outputs that could be tracked before, during and after its completion.

- Have a dedicated resource and platform/tool to measure the objectives against throughout the life of a project, including audience and community feedback.
- Agree which types of data are important for the above (i.e. footfall, transportation use etc.) and have complete, reliable data sets that can be regularly updated and easily accessed.

Ensure consistent and transparent communication with the community from the early stages through to completion.

Community engagement throughout the project was inconsistent, with some workstreams and time periods having more engagement than others. Negative press was also an issue.

- Have a dedicated Comms resource throughout.
- Have one key information source/platform where people can get reliable updates, like Social Pinpoint, and also consider something physical and centrally visible. Update these regularly.
- Social media can be effective, but also enable negative conversations. Have a strategy and respond to 'negative noise' with positive voices and project champions. Take the press on the journey with you.

Allow for flexibility in plans to adapt to unforeseen challenges and adopt phased implementation.

Significant challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic, funding constraints, and scope changes majorly impacted timelines and budgets. But a resilient team brought in significant additional funding and delivered the project on time and budget

- Ensure contingency plans and mitigation of identified risks are explicit.
- Be alive to additional funding sources and opportunities for more cost-effective implementation methods (Value Engineering).
- Be clear on objectives and deliverables. Ensure any changes are communicated well and sufficiently resourced.
- Be prepared to make further adjustments based on real-time data and feedback

Recognise the interdependencies of a programme as broad as this, within the Council and with partners.

Corporate buy-in across the Council and close relationships with local stakeholders are essential to successful implementation. Maintaining that unity in the face of opposing voices from some local businesses was challenging.

- Form advocacy groups of influential community members who can champion the project
- Highlight how this will deliver tangible economic and social benefits and align with the Council's broader goals
- Have a cohesive town centre business plan that local business owners sign up to and that demonstrates clear benefits/support for them.

Ensure sufficient resources exist within the wider project team (including trusted consultants) to deliver all aspects of the project.

The project team was strong and committed, but they were often overstretched. Resource restrictions, local pressures and consultant capacity caused tension in the latter stages of the Placemaking workstream.

- Ensure there are enough resources within the project team to deliver it
- Consider recruiting or co-opting specialist services/knowledge into the project team to reduce dependence on consultants and have more control
- Establish clear responsibilities for ownership and decision-making