



Historic England



Deborah Cadman, Max Caller, and Birmingham City Council Commissioners
Council House, Victoria Square
Birmingham
B1 1BB

27th September 2023

Dear Ms Cadman and Mr Caller,

What comes to mind when you think of Birmingham? Maybe it's Cadbury's in Bournville or Bird's Custard in Digbeth, the art at the Ikon or the shows at the Rep? More canals than Venice? The Bullring? Or perhaps it's Pigeon Park? What these all have in common, and maybe your answer did too, is heritage.

Birmingham's heritage and creativity are at the beating heart of the city and its identity. We've got medieval buildings moved brick by brick across town, workshops that survived the Luftwaffe, creative spaces that inspire audiences, and parks that have served the city's residents and visitors for 150 years.

The outpouring of emotion after the tragic fire at the Crooked House earlier this year demonstrates the level of passion that exists for heritage in the West Midlands. That's because it's a place's past and its people that shapes its present. It's what makes a place different to everywhere else, it's what makes it special.

As the process of balancing the Council's books begins, local communities are rightly concerned about the fate of publicly owned historic places and buildings and arts and culture venues – from libraries to theatres. Birmingham's plentiful and varied civic heritage must not be forgotten. Birmingham's financial reconstruction must not come at the cost of its priceless heritage.

Cannon Hill Park, Soho Foundry, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Aston Hall, Moseley Road Baths, Highbury Hall, Sarehole Mill, Icknield Street School, Sutton Park, Symphony Hall – these are just some of the precious, publicly-owned places that play a central part in the story of the city.

Far from being a quaint luxury or a drain on resources, these places should be seen as key drivers of economic regeneration that can help Birmingham recover. By providing skilled jobs during the restoration process, and acting as a draw for tourists, who contributed £8 billion to the local economy in 2022 alone, Birmingham's historic places are as much about the future, as they are the past, and its cultural spaces help to celebrate those stories, and embrace the opportunities ahead.

As well as acting as a catalyst for regeneration, as in Digbeth or the Jewellery Quarter, historic and creative buildings have a major role to play in protecting the future of the planet. Repairing

and reusing existing buildings can help reduce the city's climate impact, by limiting the carbon footprint associated with demolition and re-build.

One of our responsibilities as a society, is to ensure that we pass our culture and heritage on to future generations in a better state than we found it. In a hundred years' time, when the current financial predicament has long since been forgotten, people will marvel at what the city has to offer and will be grateful that we did everything we could to protect and champion the cultural and historic fabric of the city.

Historic England, Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund stand ready to support the Commissioners to ensure that Birmingham's distinctive heritage and creativity is preserved and prioritised in discussions about the future of the local authority.

We look forward to working with you,

Louise Brennan, Historic England Regional Director for the Midlands
Peter Knott, Midlands Director, Arts Council England
Robin Llewellyn, Director of England, Midlands & East for The National Lottery Heritage Fund