



ISSN 1647-4112 (print) ISSN 2182-2751 (on line)

[www.ijhsd.greenlines-institute.org](http://www.ijhsd.greenlines-institute.org)

International Journal of Heritage and Sustainable Development

Vol. 3, No. 1, 2013, pp. 103-112

---

## A tale of two theatres: can the localism bill provide a sustainable future for 'local' heritage in England?

Stella Anne Jackson

*Department of Archaeology, University of York, UK*

saj504@york.ac.uk

---

Sustainability in the context of cultural heritage is about finding ways in which it can continue into the present. In fact, many of the applications received for sites to be statutorily designated in England are done so in an attempt to keep the site open and in use, thus providing a meaningful and sustainable contribution to the present. Definitions of cultural heritage, however, often relate only to iconic and special places, and in particular to the materiality of these sites. The social significance of heritage is not, therefore, recognized in the legislation, despite a strong participatory rhetoric from the current government focused on community engagement. This paper discusses these issues in relation to two theatres which have recently been assessed for listing in North West England, and asks whether the new Localism Bill for England could help to provide a sustainable future for buildings such as these.

© 2013 Green Lines Instituto para o Desenvolvimento Sustentável. All rights reserved.

**Keywords:** designation, social significance, localism, community, government, Big Society.

---

### Introduction

One of the most significant changes in environmental policy in recent decades has been the introduction of the idea of sustainable development (Clarke, 2006). Sustainability in the context of cultural heritage is about finding ways in which the past can continue to contribute to the present, resulting in a heritage which forms part of social and economic change rather than one which is protected outside mainstream society (Fairclough, 2009). The Faro Convention, for example, emphasizes the value and potential of cultural heritage as a resource for sustainable development and quality of life (Council of Europe, 2005). Any sustainable future for historic towns and cities, however, must not be concerned only with the continuity of sites and buildings, but also the continuity of living culture, the *genius loci* that characterizes heritage places and creates a sense of place (Nasser, 2003). In fact, many of the applications received for sites to be added to the National Heritage List for England by members of the public are done so in an attempt to keep the site open and in use, thus providing a meaningful and sustainable contribution to the present. Definitions of cultural heritage in the UK, however, often relate only to iconic and special places, and in particular to the materiality of these places, with the criteria for listing in England being intimately entwined with the value systems of early, nineteenth century conservators such as John Ruskin and William Morris.

Traditionally, therefore, conservation has been heavily focused on the physical architectural and historical significance of sites, rather than accommodating the perceptions and reactions of everyday users of the historic environment (Hubbard, 1993; Poullos, 2011). However, we are now beginning to recognize that heritage is as much about people in the present as it is about the structures and 'monuments' of the past, with communities often arguing for 'local' sites to be 'saved'; not just for their architectural or historic interest, but also because of the social significance of the site to that particular community. Although the argument is often made that heritage is what we wish to pass on to future generations, in fact it is intrinsically what we find significant now, and what we would miss if it was no longer there (Gibson 2009). Sustainability adopts a holistic view of heritage (Mason, 2008), seeing it as an essential component of cultural identity, sense of community, belonging, social inclusion and participation; and as Giddens (1990)

and Grenville (2007) have argued, the historic environment is valued because familiarity of the surrounding social and material environment can anchor societies and thus provide social cohesion (Magdin, 2009). People do, of course, want new buildings and good new architecture, but they also want their cultural landscapes to have connections with the past (Fairclough, 2009). Heritage is therefore a deliberate act of selection, being what we decide to preserve, not an entity in its own right (Ashworth, 2002; Blake, 2000; Fairclough, 2009). It is thus the result of an intentional choice to create, maintain and preserve selected places (Phelps *et al*, 2002; Lowenthal, 1998; Russell, 2010).

This paper will discuss these issues in relation to two theatres which have recently been assessed for designation in North West England, the Palace Theatre in Nelson, and the Thameside Hippodrome in Ashton-under-Lyne; both of which do not conform to what might traditionally be considered as heritage sites, and both of which had a local community who fought hard in their attempts to retain them. Having considered these it then asks whether the proposals set out in the new Localism Act for lists of 'assets of community value', could help to provide a sustainable future for buildings such as these.

### Statutory designation

Most countries have heritage management systems that include legislative protection for heritage assets, and there is often a fundamental acceptance within state-run agencies that the heritage they protect will be of benefit to future generations, and to quality of life (Cowell, 2004; Schofield, 2008). In England, sites which are considered to have 'special interest' are designated as such by the Department for Culture Media and Sport, and are therefore added to the National Heritage List for England. This is carried out on the advice of English Heritage, the government's non-departmental statutory adviser. As part of current PhD research, five-hundred applications for Statutory designation have been analyzed, and through this it is clear that many of the applications are made in an attempt to keep the site open and in use, especially those sites which are community assets/resources, for example libraries, churches, theatres and so on. These sites are often very important to the local community, often for their social and cultural value rather than for traditional conservation values.

The statutory protection of heritage in England, however, has historically been restricted to the preservation of isolated sites and monuments which are considered to be of national importance (Hunter, 1996). This ideology still flows through much of the legislation and policy in England, despite a gradual shift in emphasis over the past one hundred and fifty years from seeing heritage as a physical entity passed down from one generation to the next, to a much wider definition which includes anything from the past which is valued in the present (Schofield, 2008). This definition of heritage as iconic, national monuments, is defined by Smith (2006) as the Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD), which places an emphasis on decision-making by heritage experts in a professional, objective environment (Hobson, 2004). Smith argues that the AHD naturalizes a range of assumptions about the nature and meaning of heritage, placing primary attention on the physical objects of heritage, which are often linked to ideas of the nation.

However, it is becoming increasingly clear that people are now less likely to accept the 'authorized' view, preferring instead to choose for themselves what kind of past to believe in (Thomas, 2008). From the 1990s onwards, therefore, the social value of heritage and 'lived' interpretation have become key concepts in academic debate (Kristiansen, 1998), and recent planning policy in England, as well as English Heritage documents such as Conservation Principles (English Heritage, 2008), does seem to demonstrate an awareness of the multivocality of heritage. At the designation level, however, and even within these documents, the expert view and the primacy of historic fabric is still dominant; with many in the heritage sector being reluctant to acknowledge that the values ascribed by local communities are as valid as their own 'expert' opinion (Byrne, 2008). Social and cultural significance, therefore, is still not widely accepted in practice, with fabric-focused, professionally defined assessments remaining the dominant paradigm of significance (Carman, 1996; Gibson, 2009). Despite growing emphasis on the value of local communities, therefore, concern for the involvement of the public remains to be converted into inclusive public debate (Poulios, 2011). Therefore, of the three interrelated objectives of conservation - physical, spatial and social - the most neglected aspect is social, which although difficult to define, is arguably the most important as effective conservation and sustainable development relies on the support of residents, property owners and those who depend on the area for their livelihoods (Nasser, 2003).

### National designation applications

The places people tend to feel most attached to, are often the mundane and everyday places that are not deemed to be special enough to be offered statutory protection in the form of designation (Atkinson, 2008; Fairclough 2009; Schofield & Szymanski, 2011). They are the 'everyday' heritage sites that form our cultural landscapes, the seemingly ordinary and mundane houses, shops and offices that we live and work in, and which make up the local street scene (Ross, 1991). However, despite a strong participatory rhetoric from the current and previous governments in relation to community engagement, the social value which is attached to seemingly mundane and 'everyday' sites is often considered to be of less importance, or in fact not relevant.

Applications for statutory designation in England can be made by anyone, and 49.2% of the applications analyzed were submitted by members of the public. In addition, almost half (42.8%) refer to

the local significance of the site. The application form itself does suggest in one of the final sections that applicants may wish to 'add some comments about the significance of the heritage asset to the local area or community' (English Heritage, 2011a). However, over 89% of applicants referred to local significance in earlier stages of the form before having seen this. In fact, the guidance for completing the form states quite clearly that social factors cannot be taken into account during the assessment process (English Heritage 2011c, p.7), suggesting that applicants are aware that the site will not be designated due to its local interest, but that they want this significance to be recognized and understood by the decision-makers. One applicant, for example, stated that 'I understand that this building is not an exemplar, but I believe it to be a good example and important to the local history' (no. 199). Although 56.2% of the applications do not make reference to local significance, therefore, this may be because the guidance has been read and taken into consideration. Thus, most of the sites applied for are likely to be valued by the local community, often because they will form part of their everyday heritage.

The identity and personality of most towns is derived from the way in which sites and buildings come together to create a recognizable local townscape (Nasser, 2003). Local distinctiveness is, therefore, the value most referred to in the applications assessed, at 26.94%.

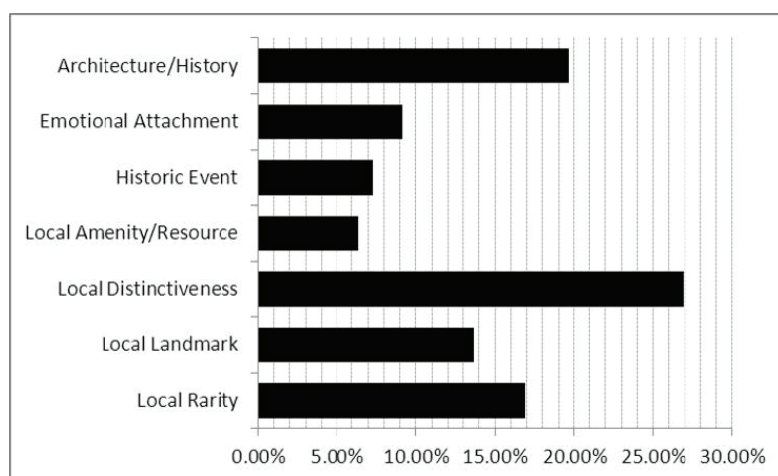


Figure 1. Type of local significance referred to in designation applications.

The term 'local distinctiveness' was developed by the organization Common Ground in the early 1990s (Clifford & King, 1993). It relates to the relationships between people and the places that are important to them; the things which are valued locally, the social memory, detail and patina of the street scene, which characterizes the local area and provides a sense of place (Common Ground, 1993; Clifford, 2001; Schofield & Szymanski, 2011). The demolition of a familiar building, therefore, removes an element of security, often provoking a sense of fear and disorientation (Magdin, 2009), and can thus have a profound effect on inhabitants, often resulting in hostility from the local community (Hubbard, 1993; Schofield & Szymanski, 2011). Just over half the applications, therefore, were made as an attempt to 'save' a piece of heritage from the threat of demolition or alteration, as is the case with the two case studies below.

However, applications are not always made simply to ensure that the structure is retained. Of those assessed, nearly 10% express an explicit assumption, or hope, that if the site is designated, this will ensure continued or future use. This is especially the case for buildings with community value, such as libraries, churches, and theatres. In addition, 81.25% of these are applications for buildings which are threatened by planning, demolition or sale. The majority of them assume that the building will continue to be used, with applicants stating for example that 'the library ... has an active users' group campaigning for its retention' (no. 92); 'there are literally dozens of customers, commuters & locals here who are appalled & infuriated at the prospective loss of a thriving small business with a unique atmosphere' (no.108); 'the prospective purchaser is not a publican and has no intention of continuing with its current use' (no. 135); and that 'we would like to ensure the building is protected and still used as community space' (no. 180).

Other applicants, though, refer to the possible future use of the buildings should they be listed and thus retained as part of the local landscape. Many of these suggest, for example, that the building 'should be made into a museum' (no.123), or that 'it could be put to variety of uses within the local community.' (no.209). A final group of applicants also hope that listing will mean that the building is maintained, repaired and, often, restored, stating for example that 'I wish to see it restored and saved' (no. 248), or

that designation 'will ensure that a viable and sustainable future is found for the site' (no.14). However, listing in itself does not necessarily ensure that the building is maintained, and as Brady (2011) has found, buildings are often left to decay, even where they are in the ownership of the local council.

### The Palace Theatre, Nelson, Lancashire



Figure 2. The Palace Theatre, Nelson, 1960.

The Palace Theatre in Nelson was designed specifically as a variety theatre by the architectural practice of Matthew, Watson, Landless & Pearse (Figure 2). It opened in December 1909, and provided variety shows, theatrical and operatic productions and Saturday picture matinees for the local community (English Heritage, 2009a). During the 1920s the building began to be used predominantly as a cinema, being formally transformed as such in 1937 when the foyer was altered and the building was redecorated, although it was still used for theatrical performances until 1958. From 1960 onwards it was then transformed into a bingo hall, and remained in use as such until its closure in 2009. However, the building underwent significant modification in 1977 (Figure 3) when the main entrance and a dominant corner tower were demolished due to a road widening scheme, along with the foyer and front-of-house area (English Heritage, 2009a).



Figure 3. The Place Theatre, Nelson, 2009.

English Heritage was asked to consider the theatre for designation in 2009 following the announcement of plans to demolish the building and clear the site for the provision of a car park. Over 200 letters and e-mails of support were sent to English Heritage in relation to this, all of which supported the listing on the assumption that should the building be designated it could then be restored and used either as a theatre, or as a community resource. Applicants stated, for example, that 'the building should be retained and refurbished' (Applicant 5), and that it is a 'ready-made venue for community activities' (Applicant 56). In addition to this, a significant number of correspondents referred to re-use of the building in terms of social and economic regeneration and sustainability, suggesting for example that 'the Nelson Palace Theatre could form the heart of the regeneration of the town' (Applicant 27); that 'it could provide the people of Nelson with an opportunity for future development' (Applicant 102); and that 'this fine building, in very good condition, could revitalize arts and entertainment within the area and serve a wide community.' (Applicant 87).

Theatres of this date are the surviving examples of a boom in the construction of variety theatres in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries in Britain, and often make a strong impression on the streetscape. In terms of designation, however, the selection criteria favor those theatres which have completeness of design, retaining a palpable sense of internal space, and the survival of the proscenium arch; and thus the degree of alteration, especially to foyers, is carefully considered in any assessment (English Heritage, 2011b). Given the level of alteration to this theatre, therefore, it was not considered to meet the criteria for designation. The main reason for this being that it had lost its original entrance, foyer and front of house facilities. The assessment did acknowledge the survival of high quality decorative features in the auditorium though.

In 2010 the theatre was therefore demolished, and the site has now been converted to car-parking use (Figure 4). Would listing it have 'saved' the building and ensured its continued use though? The local community, as well as a large number of theatre groups and national organizations, were in favor of restoring and using the building, but often with buildings such as these that are designated, if an economically viable use cannot be found, the building is left to decay and is not used sustainably, as was the case with the Tameside Hippodrome below.



Figure 4. Site of the former Palace Theatre, June 2012.

### **Tameside hippodrome, Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester**

The Tameside Hippodrome in Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester (Figure 5), was also assessed for listing in 2009, and had a similarly active and vociferous local community who wished to see it protected from demolition, and re-opened. The Hippodrome is slightly earlier than the Palace Theatre in Nelson, having been opened in 1904. It was built for William Henry Broadhead, who had a number of similar theatres in the North West of England; and many famous music hall stars performed there, including Stan Laurel, Gracie Fields, and Harry Houdini (English Heritage, 2009b). In 1933 the theatre was sold to the Union Cinema Group and the auditorium was completely reconstructed in an Art Deco style by Drury and Gomersall, who removed the gallery in the former three-tier auditorium and installed a single 600 seat circle. Following this, it was re-opened as the New Empire Theatre and was used for films and variety shows. In 1935, Drury and Gomersall were invited back, this time to redesign the façade. However, in the late 1930s the theatre was sold to what became Associated British Cinemas (ABC), who ran it until 1974

when the decline in audiences led to plans for the building to be converted to a bingo hall. On the announcement of this, the Friends of Tameside Theatre formed and successfully petitioned for the retention of the building as a theatre, and it was instead purchased by the borough council, who ran it as both a cinema and a theatre/concert venue until 2008, when Live Nation, who had been managing the site, did not renew their operating contract (English Heritage, 2009b).



Figure 5. Tameside Hippodrome, 2012.

The closure of the theatre prompted numerous requests to English Heritage asking for it to be listed in the hope that this would mean the theatre would have to re-open, and in fact on their website the council themselves said that 'Tameside people have made it clear that they would like the building as a theatre' (Tameside MBC, 2008). Those who wrote to English Heritage all expressed an emotional attachment to the theatre, stating for example that the theatre 'is a living member of our social and cultural heritage that cannot be replaced' (Applicant 3). Therefore, despite the building still being extant, the rhetoric of the applications was one of loss, with many of them stating, for example, that 'I miss the theatre & so do all my family' (Applicant 5), and that 'the heart has been ripped out of our town.' (Applicant 8). This is because the theatre is significant to the local community not for the traditional, tangible, value of the physical fabric of the building, but due to its role within the community and its more intangible, social significance. One applicant, for example, described how they felt that it was 'extremely sad to walk past what was once a lively and bright venue and to see a desolate boarded up building', with all applicants asking in their letters for English Heritage to help them re-open it, stating for example that 'I write to you in desperation for this theatre to be re-opened.' (Applicant 6).

In contrast to the Palace Theatre in Nelson, and much to the joy of the applicants, the Hippodrome was listed at Grade II in September 2009 due to the quality and survival of the 1930s Art Deco scheme, which remained complete in the auditorium and public spaces, along with original 1904 fixtures in the backstage area (English Heritage, 2009b). The building has remained closed and boarded up since its designation though, and it has not yet been reopened as the applicants hoped. However, the recently formed Tameside Heritage and Arts Trust, are now working with the Council to acquire, refurbish and reopen the theatre (Dalby-Oldham, 2012); and the Hippodrome looks likely to be one of the first and the largest asset transfers under the 2011 Localism Act, which is outlined below.

### The 'Big Society' and the 2011 localism act

It is widely acknowledged that decision-making in the UK has become too centralised, often failing to respond to the needs and expectations of local communities (Burgess *et al*, 2001). Unlike other European countries, the UK is made up of a number of regions and districts which are largely self-governing, but which are subordinate to, and united under, a central government (Wilson & Game, 2006). Therefore, local government in the UK can be defined more as delegated governance than decentralisation, with all major policy issues continuing to be made centrally, and the service then being delivered and administered locally (Wilson & Game, 2001). This often results in a lack of community engagement at both national and local levels, and the continuance of rigid bureaucratic structures (Burgess *et al*, 2001), with local government simply putting into practice decisions made by central government in Westminster. Local Authorities too are often criticised for failing to meet the needs of local communities (Burgess *et al*, 2001),

with lack of consultation often being the main objection, especially in relation to planning decisions which affect local heritage landmarks.

As the two case studies have shown, the need felt by local communities to protect sites which are significant to them has become much more vocalized in recent years. However, local attachment and social significance is often not understood or taken into account in both designation and planning decisions, with demolition and new development often being promoted based on a definition of heritage which is divorced from any detailed understanding of local issues and needs (Magdin, 2009). So-called 'bottom-up' solutions, though, can enable local distinctiveness to be safeguarded through common ownership by the local community (Rodwell, 2007), and this has been the focus of recent government policy.

Following elections in May 2010, a new Coalition Government came into power in the UK, with a manifesto focused on what they have called the 'Big Society'. This is in essence a localism agenda, aimed at decentralization and the devolvement of power from central to local government; and so in November 2011 the new Localism Bill was enacted. One of the main aims of the Big Society, is to enable local communities to become more self-sufficient and less reliant on state provision, as well as encouraging them to take local action. Thus, there are a number of measures aimed at empowering local communities to enable them to take a much more active role in local decision-making, particularly in relation to planning and development (DCLG, n.d.). The 2011 Localism Act, therefore, represents a profound shift in the way that the English planning system will now work, with local communities much more directly engaged with development (Chitty, 2012).

### Community empowerment

The Act presents a number of opportunities for local communities to protect, or have recognized, aspects of their cultural landscapes which they find significant and which can have a sustainable future. The Community Empowerment section, for example, includes a policy which will require local authorities to maintain a list of assets of community value, with sites nominated for inclusion by the local community. Community groups will also have a right to bid for the purchase of assets on the lists should they come up for sale, or to take over their use through asset transfer, and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) states that 'this will help local communities keep much-loved sites in public use and part of local life.' (DCLG, n.d.). The definition of an asset of community value within the Act is a building or land whose actual current or future use furthers social well-being and the interests of the local community, and a site for which it is realistic to believe that there will continue to be a use which furthers the social well-being of the community, whether or not this is the same use (DCLG, 2011). These lists are not intended, therefore, to be lists of locally significant heritage assets. However, as noted above, designation requests are often made in an attempt to 'save' a local community asset from being closed and/or demolished, with statutory designation often being considered as the only way to do this. The reason the community wish for the building to be retained in these cases is not principally for its architectural or historic interest, but to ensure its continued use as a community asset; and as Rodwell (2007, p.207) has stated, establishing continuity of function is the *sin qua non* of successful conservation and sustainable development.

New Neighbourhood planning powers also suggest that local people will be able to protect the things that matter to them (Chitty, 2012), as general planning policies for the development and use of land in an area can be established through a neighbourhood plan. These will be taken forward by Parish or Town councils, or in non-parished areas (mainly cities), by new Neighbourhood Development Forums, and they will provide communities with a greater say over how their local area changes over time. Plans will outline the characteristics of a place, the elements which communities may wish to preserve, and the areas which can be subject to change, and once ratified by the District council, will be consulted before any planning decisions are taken (English Heritage, n.d.). This may therefore provide an opportunity for communities to 'save' what matters to them without the need for formal designation. In fact, one of the designation applications assessed as part of the analysis outlined above, all of which were submitted while the Act was being developed, stated that 'New Coalition Government proposals would not allow this lack of consultation to happen: these old buildings would be saved if this policy was in law now.' (no. 72).

### Concerns

However, there are a number of areas of concern with these tools in relation to heritage and sustainable development. Consideration of the historic environment in the development of Neighbourhood Plans, for example, can ensure that they are sustainable, and if heritage is included within the plan, this should mean that development is properly integrated with what already exists, thus ensuring the continuance of local distinctiveness (English Heritage, n.d.). However, this necessitates communities to include heritage within the plan, without any specific requirement to do so, meaning that in areas where the plan is drawn up by a predominantly business community, it may not be included. In addition, although they are drafted by the community, they must be agreed with the District council before being formally ratified, which may result in the plan being somewhat different to what was originally envisaged at the start.

The planning policy which underpins the Act has also been the subject of concern. This takes the form of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which was published in Spring 2012 (DCLG, 2012). This framework has as its over-arching policy a presumption in favor of sustainable development (DCLG, 2011). However, it has been suggested that the definition of sustainable development used within the document is perhaps better described as sustained development (Burges, 2012; Youngson, 2012), with a focus on economic development rather than the definition of sustainable development contained within the 1987 Brundtland Report, with which we are much more familiar. However, the Framework does state that identified heritage assets, whether nationally designated or not, are a material consideration in the planning process, and in paragraph 131 states that when considering planning applications, local authorities should take account of 'the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation' (DCLG, 2012, 31).

In addition, the concept of 'community' that is used in the Big Society literature follows the normative ideal of something which is "good", 'safe' and 'comfortable' (Smith & Waterton, 2009). It should not be assumed, though, that everyone within a community will necessarily agree with each other. Throughout the Act and the supporting guidance, there is also a clear emphasis on the 'traditional' Parish Council, and when looking a little closer at the lists of assets of community value, a community nomination is defined as being a nomination from a parish council, or if there isn't one, then from a voluntary or community body with a local connection. However, the District Council in each area will specify what it considers to be a 'community body', so it could therefore be different in each area. The localism agenda would therefore seem to have an essentialised view of 'local', focussed mainly on village life. For example, in relation to assets of community value, DCLG (n.d.) state that communities will be able to save the last village post-office or the local pub, with the idea of local importance at city level not being considered. How will it work in an urban context, therefore, where the 'traditional' community or neighbourhood is perhaps less well-defined? There are, for example, other communities of interest in addition to that which is geographically local, not least the business community, as well as tourists and regular visitors.

## Conclusions

It is now recognized that there is a plurality of views and perceptions in relation to heritage (Schofield, 2009; Gibson & Pendlebury, 2009), and that everyone will have their own special places which hold meanings for a variety of different reasons (Davis, 2005). This means that there are multiple stakeholders, each with their own idea of what is significant about a site/place (Benton, 2010). However, designation decisions and the conservation of the historic environment in England favors the physical, material aspects of heritage, despite an increasingly strong desire from local communities for the protection of sites due to their socio-cultural significance. Thus, although the academic community has now recognized that there is a multivocality of significance at heritage sites, this is not yet recognized by those involved in the decision-making process (Belford, 2011; Gibson, 2009; Smith, 2004).

This analysis, however, has shown that individuals and local communities no longer simply support conservation; they are now becoming actively involved in seeking to have their own sense of heritage acknowledged and legitimized (Smith & Waterton, 2009, p.36), with nearly half the requests made for statutory designation in England referring to the local significance of the site. Any sustainable future for historic towns and cities, therefore, must not be concerned with just the continuity of iconic and 'nationally' significant sites and buildings, but also with the continuity of living culture (Nasser, 2003), the *genius loci* that characterises what might seem to an outsider to be a mundane or 'everyday' cityscape. The national designation criteria exclude large numbers of locally significant buildings, with these sites often considered to be simply less significant and not important. However, this 'everyday' heritage is part of the local distinctiveness of our cities, being an essential component of cultural identity, sense of place, community and belonging.

The national lists cannot easily deal with the need to recognise the social significance of these sites, but the localism bill does seem to offer a number of opportunities for local communities to protect or 'save' these sites, and to provide a sustainable future for them. As English Heritage (n.d.) has stated in guidance on Neighbourhood Plans, for example, the value of local heritage is to its local community, and it is therefore important for it to be protected at the local level by those who treasure it most. This could potentially be achieved either through the involvement of the community in the decision-making process as part of neighbourhood planning, or by the nomination of sites for inclusion on lists of assets of community value. However, given its essentialist notion of the 'local', and focus on village life, it is unclear how it will work in an urban context where there may be competing local, national and international communities of interest.

At the Tameside Hippodrome in particular, there would certainly seem to be support for using the building as a community asset, and it would therefore fit the definition of an asset of community value as outlined in the Act, and it seems that the Council agrees, with an asset transfer already progressing. However, these tools are relatively new and thus there is only very limited empirical evidence for the successful use of the Act in the context of heritage and sustainable development, especially in relation to Neighbourhood Planning, which is not yet fully implemented. Therefore, it is unclear whether other assets across the country would necessarily be transferred to local community groups and re-opened, or if the community would actually want to be involved with this. In addition, although communities would be able to nominate sites for inclusion on the lists, it is the District Council who ultimately decides what is added to

it, and once a building is added, there are no restrictions on what the owner of the site can do with it, although it will be considered to be a material consideration in the planning process. Further analysis is therefore required to fully assess the success of the new legislation in providing a sustainable future for local heritage assets, and this will form the basis of future research by this author.

## References

- Ashwort, G. J. (2002). The experience of heritage conservation: outcomes and futures. In Ashwort, G. J. & Larkham, P. J., eds. *Building a new heritage: tourism, culture, identity in the new Europe*. London: Routledge.
- Atkinson, D. (2008). The heritage of mundane places. In Graham, B. & Howard, P., eds. *The Ashgate research companion to heritage and identity*. Hampshire: Ashgate.
- Belford, P. (2011). Archaeology, community, and identity in an English new town. *The Historic Environment*, 2 (1), 49-67.
- Benton, T. (2010). *Understanding heritage and memory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Blake, J. (2000). On defining the cultural heritage. *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 49 (1), 61-85.
- Brady, R. (2011). *Bridging the gap between designation and decay: a study of the potential for preventive maintenance to contribute to the protection of historic buildings in England*. Unpublished Thesis (MSc), University of Birmingham.
- Burgess, P., Hall, S., Mawson, J. & Pearce, G. (2001). *Devolved approaches to local governance: Policy and practice in neighbourhood management*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Byrne, D. (2008). Heritage as Social Action. In Fairclough, G., Harrison, R., Schofield, J. & Jameson, J. H., eds. *The Heritage Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Carman, J. (1996). *Valuing ancient things: archaeology and the law*. London: Leicester University Press.
- Chitty, G. (2012). The Localism Act is now law. Gill Chitty asks, is 'going local' an opportunity or a threat? *CBABritish Archaeology*, March/April 2012 (123).
- Clarke, K. (2006). Capturing the public value of heritage. In *Proceedings of the London Conference*, London, January 2006. Swindon: English Heritage.
- Clifford, S. (2001). For looking at or living in? Local distinctiveness from the inside out. In *The cultural landscape: Planning for a sustainable partnership between people and place*. London: ICOMOS UK.
- Common Ground for Rural Action (1993). *Celebrating local distinctiveness*. London: Common Ground.
- Council of Europe (2005). *Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* [online]. Available at <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=1998&CM=8&CL=ENG> [Accessed 20 October 2011].
- Cowel, B. (2004). Why heritage counts: researching the historic environment. *Cultural Trends*, 13 (4), 23-39.
- Dalby-Oldham, K. (2012). Community asset transfer and Tameside Hippodrome. *Theatres Magazine*, Summer 2012 (32). London The Theatres Trust. pp.10-12.
- Davis, P. (2005). Places, 'cultural touchstones' and the ecomuseum. In G. Corsane, ed. *Heritage, museums and galleries: an introductory reader*. London: Routledge.
- Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (2011). *Assets of Community Value - Policy Statement*. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office.
- Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (2012). *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)*. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office.
- Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (n.d.). *Key Measures* [online]. Available at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/decentralisation/localismbill/keymeasures> [Accessed 22 February 2012].
- English Heritage (2008). *Conservation principles*. Swindon: English Heritage.
- English Heritage (2009a). *Listing advice report: Palace Theatre, Nelson, Pendle, Lancashire* (unpublished) [online]. Available from: [customers@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:customers@english-heritage.org.uk).
- English Heritage (2009b). *Listing advice report: Tameside Hippodrome, Ashton-under-Lyne, Tameside, Greater Manchester* (unpublished) [online]. Available from: [customers@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:customers@english-heritage.org.uk).
- English Heritage (2011a). *Application to nominate a heritage asset* [online]. Available at <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/protection/process/online-application-form/> [Accessed 22 September 2011].
- English Heritage (2011b). *Designation listing selection guide: Culture and entertainment*. Swindon: English Heritage.
- English Heritage (2011c). The national heritage list for England: guidance for completing the online application form [online]. Available at <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/content/imported-docs/a-e/application-guidance.pdf> [Accessed 15 September 2011].
- English Heritage (n.d.). *Improving your neighbourhood* [online]. Available at <http://www.helm.org.uk/server/show/category.21775> [Accessed 02 August 2012].

- Fairclough G. (2009). The cultural context of sustainability - heritage and living. In D. Thérond, ed. *Heritage and beyond*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- Gibson, L. (2009). Cultural landscapes and identity. In Gibson, L., ed. *Valuing historic environments*. Hampshire: Ashgate.
- Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Grenville, J. (2007). Conservation as psychology: Ontological security and the built environment. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 13 (6), 447-461.
- Hobson, E. (2004). *Conservation and planning: changing values in policy and practice*. London: Spon Press.
- Hubbard, P. (1993). The value of conservation: a critical review of behavioural research. *The Town Planning Review*, 64, pp.359-373.
- Hunter, M. C. W. (1996). *Preserving the past: the rise of heritage in modern Britain*. Stroud: Alan Sutton.
- Kristiansen, K. (1998). Between rationalism and romanticism: archaeological heritage management in the 1990s. *Current Swedish Archaeology*, 6, 115-122.
- Lowenthal, D. (1998). *The heritage crusade and the spoils of history*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Magdin, R. (2003). *Heritage, culture and conservation: Managing the urban renaissance*. Saarbrücken: VDM.
- Mason, R. (2008). Assessing values in conservation planning: methodological issues and choices. In FAIRCLOUGH, G., Harrison, R., Jameson, J. H. & Schofield, J., eds. *The heritage reader*. London: Routledge.
- Nasser, N. (2003). Planning for urban heritage places: Reconciling conservation, tourism, and sustainable development. *Journal of Planning Literature*, 17, 467-479.
- Phelps, A., Ashworth, G. J. & Johansson, B. O. H. (2002). *The construction of built heritage: a North European perspective on policies, practices and outcomes*. Hampshire: Ashgate.
- Poulios, I. (2011). Is every heritage site a 'living' one? Linking conservation to communities' association with sites. *The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice*, 2 (2), 144-156.
- Rodwell, D. (2007). *Conservation and sustainability in historic cities*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ross, M. (1991). *Planning and the heritage: policy and procedures*. London: Spon Press.
- Russell (2010). Heritages, identities, and roots: a critique of arborescent models of heritage and identity. In G.S. Smith, P. M. Messenger, & H. A. Soderland, eds. *Heritage values in contemporary society*. Walnut Creek (California): Left Coast Press.
- Schofield, J. (2008). Heritage management, theory and practice. In G. Fairclough, R. Harrison, J. Schofield & J. H. Jameson, eds. *The heritage reader*. London: Routledge.
- Schofield, J. (2009). Being autocentric: Towards symmetry in heritage management practices. In L. Gibson & J. Pendlebury, eds. *Valuing historic environments*. Hampshire: Ashgate.
- Schofield, J. & Szymanski, R. (2011). *Local heritage, global context: cultural perspectives on sense of place*. Hampshire: Ashgate.
- Smith, L. (2004). *Archaeological theory and the politics of cultural heritage*. Oxford: Psychology Press.
- Smith, L. (2006) *Uses of heritage*. London: Routledge.
- Smith, L. & Waterton, E. (2009). *Heritage, communities and archaeology*. London: Duckworth.
- Tameside M.B.C. (2008). *Tameside Hippodrome: Update* [online]. Available at <http://www.tameside.gov.uk/hippodrome> [Accessed 23 October 2011].
- Thomas, R. M. (2008). Archaeology and authority in the C21. In G. Fairclough, R. Harrison, J. Schofield & J.H. Jameson, eds. *The Heritage Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Wilson, D. & Game, C. (2006). *Local government in the United Kingdom*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Youngson, E. (2012). Heritage and the planning system: Policy change, regulatory reform and emerging guidance. *Rescue News 115*, 1<sup>st</sup> April.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the Scientific Committee of the Heritage 2012, third international conference on heritage and sustainable development, organized by the Greenlines Institute, who accepted an earlier version of this paper for presentation at the conference in June 2012, and who invited me to publish this revised version in the IJHSD. I would also like to acknowledge my PhD supervisor at the University of York, Dr John Schofield, for his help and support in putting this paper together. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my friends and colleagues at English Heritage, especially those in the Access to Information Team, who provided me with much of the data for my two case studies, as well as useful ideas, suggestions and debate which helped to inform the arguments that I have made.