

Case Study

Sense of Place Programme

Introduction

The Sense of Place programme supported a cohort of 6 Midlands museums to explore, articulate, and strengthen their unique local identity. Through a structured programme of workshops, peer learning, and practical activity, participating organisations developed new ways to connect their collections, stories, and communities.

Programme Development

The programme was launched in early 2025, receiving a high quality of applications that demonstrated strong sector interest and a clear demand for support in developing place based approaches across museums.

The programme was delivered in partnership with Culture Leicestershire, working collaboratively to provide a diverse programme of sessions covering areas such as collections and tourism.

Participating museums in 2025-2026 included:

- Pen Museum
- The Almonry Museum
- Bassetlaw Museum
- Tamworth Castle
- Selly Manor Museum
- Rugby Museum and Art Gallery

The Aim

The programme aimed to help museums:

- Define and articulate their “sense of place”
- Deepen connections with local communities
- Improve interpretation and storytelling
- Embed place based thinking into future planning



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The Approach

Museums took part in a series of facilitated sessions and independent work, focusing on:

- **Understanding local identity and heritage narratives**
- **Mapping community connections and audiences**
- **Reviewing collections through a place based lens**
- **Testing new interpretive approaches**

Programme Sessions

The programme was structured around a series of themed sessions combining in person and online delivery, each designed to explore different dimensions of sense of place in museum practice.

It began with an in person launch at the Museum of Making in Derby, where participants explored place, identity, and local pride, alongside a hands-on creative workshop using textiles to reflect on future community-focused collections work.

Subsequent sessions focused on how sense of place connects to the visitor economy and tourism, including the role museums play in shaping perceptions of place and contributing to local economic growth. This was complemented by a practical exploration of working with creative practitioners to strengthen community engagement and develop participatory approaches to placemaking.

Further sessions examined the role of collections in telling local stories and supporting community relevance, even where collections may not have an obvious local connection. The programme also explored how sense of place activity can contribute to health and wellbeing outcomes, particularly in relation to social prescribing and reducing isolation.

The programme concluded with a celebration event at Rugby Museum and Art Gallery, bringing the cohort together to reflect on learning and share outcomes.

The Sense of Place programme has challenged and inspired us to think differently about how we engage communities with heritage. The combination of funding, professional development and peer support has strengthened our practice and helped us turn local ideas into future opportunities.

Tamworth Castle

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Mentoring and Peer Support

Sessions combined peer discussion with tailored 1:1 mentoring and regular drop-ins, creating a flexible and supportive learning environment. This approach enabled participants to explore challenges in depth, share ideas, and build confidence through collaboration.

Participant Reflections

Participants reported increased confidence across individuals and teams, with skills embedded more widely across their organisations. The combination of mentoring and peer support was highly valued, fostering a strong network that continued beyond the programme.

Programme Grants

Targeted support helped museums use their £3,000 MDM Programme grants strategically, aligning activity with organisational priorities and future ambitions. This included positioning projects to unlock additional funding opportunities, including Arts Council England bids.

Outcomes & Impact

The programme strengthened how museums understand and communicate their role within their local context. Participants developed more confident storytelling, clearer organisational identity, and more audience-focused approaches to interpretation. It also supported a shift towards more inclusive, participatory ways of working, with deeper engagement with local communities and stronger relationships built over time. Sense of Place thinking is now influencing future planning and day-to-day practice across the cohort.

- Clearer, place-based storytelling and identity
- More creative, audience-focused interpretation
- Stronger, more meaningful community engagement
- Influence on strategy, partnerships, and forward planning

As a result of the programme's success, Museum Development Midlands has been invited to present a case study and share key learning at the 2026 Museums Association Conference, highlighting the programme's impact and wider relevance to the sector.

