

Government commits to enhancing heritage records in digital strategy

The Heritage Alliance

The Secretary of State for Culture Media & Sport, Karen Bradley, has launched the [Government's UK Digital Strategy](#). The Strategy commits to a welcome 'major enhancement and rationalisation' of national and local heritage records as set out on page 39 of the Culture White Paper. The Strategy also sets out the Government's intention to examine how the planning system can be made both more efficient and give the public greater involvement through better use of data and digital tools. Although there is not a consultation to accompany the Digital Strategy, the Government will create a forum to work with the tech community to support tech sectors and innovation and the adoption of digital in the wider economy. The Alliance has already been approached by DCMS to feed into its future thinking on the digital cultural project.

The Digital Strategy builds on the Government's previous statements in its Industrial Strategy green paper ([see our summary here](#)), Culture White Paper and elsewhere. In her foreword Karen Bradley states that the Digital Strategy 'contains ambitious plans for infrastructure, connectivity, skills, business, safety and security, online government services, and data – guided by experts, underpinned by investment, and led by a Government that will work with industry to address challenges and build on existing strengths... to create a world-leading digital economy that works for everyone'

The digital strategy has seven strands:

1. [Connectivity](#) - building world-class digital infrastructure for the UK;
2. [Skills and inclusion](#) - giving everyone access to the digital skills they need;
3. [The digital sectors](#) - making the UK the best place to start and grow a digital business;
4. [The wider economy](#) - helping every British business become a digital business;
5. [Cyberspace](#) - making the UK the safest place in the world to live and work online;
6. [Digital government](#) - maintaining the UK government as a world leader in serving its citizens online; and
7. [The data economy](#) - opening up further central government data sets, to support further innovation at both national and local levels.

Heritage and culture

The Digital Strategy [Summary document](#) sets out the Strategy's approach to culture noting that 'technology has the potential to bring arts and culture to new audiences; to inspire children and young people; and to support teaching and learning through interactive and online experiences. Many of our national and local cultural institutions are digitising their collections and screening content online, opening up access, especially for those who find it difficult or are unable to visit'.

To accelerate 'the digitisation of culture', and make culture accessible for all, the Government has said that it will 'undertake a major enhancement and rationalisation of heritage records nationally and locally, including an update and improvement of Historic England's customer-facing IT. This project will improve the presentation of heritage records and their links to other publicly accessible

data sets, such as Google Earth and StreetView to ensure records function as educational and community assets as well as efficient technical planning tools'. The Government will also:

- undertake a Digital Culture project to look at how arts and cultural organisations can make the most of the opportunities offered by digital technologies and how to make the UK one of the world's leading countries for public collections content; and
- Within the context of the DCMS Museums Review, consider how museums in England can use digital technology to improve audience engagement with collections.

Digitisation of the planning system

As part of the Government's drive to accelerate the level of housing development, it is considering how the planning system can be made both more efficient and give the public greater involvement through better use of data and digital tools. To accelerate data and digital transformation in planning, it is undertaking a research and development pilot which seeks to identify and develop the highest value data and digital opportunities to improve the planning system for land and housing in England.

Digital training

In [chapter 2](#) of the Strategy the Government states that it 'will continue to work with partners to ensure that small businesses and charities have the skills they need to make the most of the digital economy.' The Government will ensure 'that adults who lack core digital skills can access specified basic digital skills training free of charge, where it is made available by providers as part of the publicly-funded adult education offer. This will mirror the approach taken for adult literacy and numeracy training'. This could be of great importance to the heritage sector where many volunteers are older and may not have the right skills to fully exploit digital opportunities.

Encouraging innovation in digital for social good

In [Chapter 3](#) the Strategy examines how technology can be used for social good. The majority of the work done within the heritage sector will result in social good so this could be an area ripe for further development. The Government states that 'the UK is a world leader for social tech' - the use of digital technologies to generate positive social impact. The Government has already supported social tech via the £10 million Social Incubator Fund and provided support for tools and platforms that make it easier to find opportunities to volunteer and give, such as Do-it and Localgiving. The Government 'will continue to look for ways that digital technology can promote and support social action, providing government support where it can make a difference'.

Other issues

The Digital Strategy also states that the Government will:

- implement the EU General Data Protection Regulation by May 2018. The ICO has published an [overview of the Regulation](#). The Alliance is currently considering any issues that emerge for the heritage sector. Please get in touch if you have any information you would like to feed into this;
- Implement a Universal Service Obligation, giving every individual, business and public premise across the country the right to request an affordable high speed broadband connection. A Business Connectivity Forum, chaired by the Department for Culture, Media

and Sport, will bring together business organisations, local authorities and communications providers to help businesses access fast, affordable and reliable broadband;

- roll out free Wi-Fi on trains and in more public places; and
- ensure adverts for broadband accurately reflect the speeds and technology actually on offer for the majority of customers.

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