



I am delighted to be invited to speak to you today, as the Heritage Alliance focuses its attention on the historic environment of England's countryside.

The organisers of your conference have asked me to address some pretty big questions by way of setting the scene. They have asked me to define the rural historic environment; to discuss why it is different from its urban counterpart; to describe what pressures are acting upon it; and to suggest what might be done about those pressures.

As you will appreciate, with only 20 minutes to provide answers to these questions, I will have to gallop, rather than trot, across the landscape. So forgive me for adopting a necessarily selective approach.

In a moment, I'm going to offer you some hard facts and figures about the rural historic environment. But first I want to start with some more general observations.



England is the most populous country in Europe and it is the one in which the industrial-era flight from the countryside to the town started the earliest. It is arguably as a direct result of this precocious and thoroughgoing urbanisation, that England has developed a deeply reverential - if sometimes romanticised and nostalgic - vision of its rural heritage.

It is a vision framed around a powerful set of icons - the parish church, the local pub, the village green, the great house, and the family farm - all set within what is often, if incorrectly, referred to as a "timeless landscape".

This vision is tremendously powerful. It is inextricably linked to our sense of national identity and is often invoked in times of crisis.

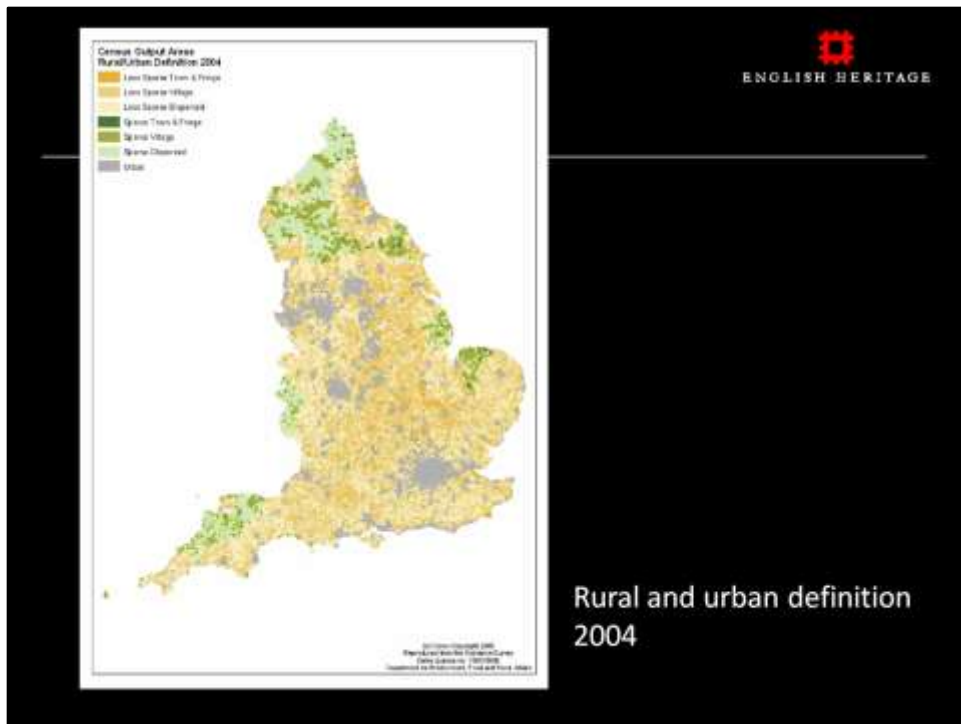
Many of you will be familiar, for example, with the contribution to the Second World War effort made by Frank Newbould's "Fight for it now" series of paintings or by the elegiac Kentish countryside which infuses Powell and Pressburger's "A Canterbury Tale".



In the immediate post-war period, it was this rural heritage - albeit seen through a somewhat urban-centric and rose-tinted lens - that provided so much of the impetus behind the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act and 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. Acts that, more than 60 years later, still largely frame how we plan, manage and protect our rural areas. Acts that, when compared to the planning situation in many other countries, are generally agreed to have been very effective.

This rural heritage is often referenced by our politicians: John Major's "warm beer" and "bicycling old maids" speech providing a particularly memorable example. And - as recent events have demonstrated - it is most certainly an issue that should never be overlooked when formulating policy.

**So my first key point is that the rural heritage has a particularly powerful hold on the public imagination, irrespective of whether people live in the countryside or in the city.**



Let me drill down a bit further now and offer you some facts and figures about some selected aspects of the rural historic environment.

In order to do this I will use the sophisticated rural-urban definition that the Government introduced in 2004 for the purpose of rural policy-making. On the basis of this definition, it is calculated that more than 90% of England's land area is classified as rural, with just under 20% of the population living there.



### 2.3 Designated Historic Environment Assets Analysed by Rural and Urban Classification

RURAL/URBAN CLASSIFICATIONS	AREA OF WORLD HERITAGE SITES (KMP)	%	NO OF LISTED BUILDINGS ENTRIES	%	AREA OF SAMs (KMP)	%	AREA OF PARKS & GARDENS (KMP)	%	AREA OF BATTLE-FIELDS (KMP)	%
Town and Fringe (Sparse & Less Sparse)	74.3	13	62,704	17	83.0	17	208.2	12	18.0	17
Urban → 10K (Sparse & Less Sparse)	71.2	12	134,162	36	82.0	17	333.2	19	26.7	25
Village, Hamlet & Isolated Dwellings (Sparse & Less Sparse)	446.8	75	173,403	47	329.0	67	1,168.6	68	40.5	58
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>592.3</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>370,269</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1,710.0</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>105.1</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: English Heritage  
 Extensive heritage assets such as World Heritage Sites, scheduled monuments and registered landscapes can cross rural/urban definition boundaries. To avoid distortions caused by double counting, the distribution of these assets has been calculated by area.

And, using the same definition, we can say that 75% of England's World Heritage sites are in rural areas; 47% of its listed buildings; 67% of its scheduled monuments; 68% of its registered parks and gardens; 58% of its registered battlefields and an estimated 40% of its conservation areas.

And we must not forget that a great deal of our most important rural heritage is not designated.



For example, few of the iconic field barns of the Yorkshire Dales National Park are listed and only some are within conservation areas. Similarly the superb surviving Iron Age fieldscape of Cornwall's West Penwith, enjoys no statutory protection whatsoever.

Designated or otherwise, rural communities care very passionately about this heritage.

In a recent survey of the most valued public benefits of the English uplands, for example, the main benefits identified by local people were: "Heritage and culture", "Community and tradition" and "Landscape and Environment".

But it is also of immense importance to the millions of people from towns and cities who visit the countryside every year

In another survey of public attitudes to upland areas in 2006, respondents identified improvements in cultural heritage, including - and I quote - "the visual presence in the landscape of traditional buildings", as their most highly valued public good.



And this heritage is also fundamentally important to UK PLC - stimulating both domestic and international tourism, creating jobs and encouraging inward investment.

**So my second key point is that, while much of the rural heritage is available for everyone to enjoy and while it delivers benefits for the population and country as a whole, a disproportionate responsibility for its upkeep falls on the one fifth of people who live in the countryside.**

Of course, this responsibility is even more tightly focussed than that. The Country Landowners Association, for example, estimates that its membership alone manage “at least a quarter of all listed buildings, more than half of all monuments and huge amounts of other designated and undesignated heritage”.

- 80% of “at risk” scheduled monuments are in rural areas.
- 13% of listed Places of Worship in the countryside are “at risk”: 11% in urban areas.
- Listed traditional farm buildings are the single largest category on local authority Buildings at Risk Registers.
- 9% of principal listed farm buildings that have not been converted to other uses are now visibly derelict. Many thousands more at serious risk.



If we return, once again, to the rural-urban definition, we can also use it to say something about the balance of risks to the rural and urban heritage. For example:

80% of scheduled monuments that are identified as being at risk are in rural areas.

13% of listed Places of Worship in the countryside are “at risk” compared to 11% in urban areas.

And while it is not yet possible to offer you comparable figures for the entire stock of listed buildings, we do know that listed traditional farm buildings are the single largest category on local authority Buildings at Risk Registers.

And we also know that amongst the listed farm buildings that have not been converted to alternative uses, 9% of are now visibly derelict. This means that well in excess of 4,000 listed buildings are in a state of collapse, with many thousands more also at serious risk.

**So my third key point is that it can be clearly demonstrated that some aspects of England’s rural heritage are at a higher degree of risk than their urban counterparts.**

“While the United Kingdom has a relatively large predominantly rural territory.....none of this land is found within England”

**Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)**

Rural Policy Reviews: England, United Kingdom, 2011

I want to turn next to consider whether there are any particular “differences” posed by managing the historic environment in the town and the countryside.

Recent research has increasingly stressed the degree of inter-connectedness and similarity between the rural and urban economies in England, particularly as agriculture is now a comparatively minor factor in terms of rural GDP.

Some commentators even suggest that all of England’s countryside is effectively “exurbia” – a sort of extended “green suburb” for urban Britain.

In its recent Policy Review for Rural England, for example, the OECD concluded that “While the United Kingdom has a relatively large predominantly rural territory.... none of this land is found within England” .

## Three key differences between management of the rural and urban historic environments.....

1. Greater emphasis on the “land-use futures” debate
2. Relationship with the restructuring and profitability of agriculture
3. Relationship with the natural environment sector

So, if the economic distinctions between town and countryside in England have been largely eroded, does today’s heritage management in the countryside face different challenges or require different approaches?

Well, I certainly believe it does - and I would particularly identify three main reasons for this:

Firstly, because the protection of our rural heritage is intimately linked to future decisions on the use of land in a way that the urban heritage is not.

Secondly, because the state of the rural historic environment is heavily dependent on trends in agriculture.

And thirdly, because management of much of the rural historic environment is far more directly, intimately and routinely linked to the natural environment than it is the city.

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## Three key differences between management of the rural and urban historic environments.....

1. Greater emphasis on the “land-use futures” debate
2. Relationship with the restructuring and profitability of agriculture
3. Relationship with the natural environment sector

Let me explore these assertions in a little more detail.

Clearly, cities and towns may be added to, regenerated or densified but their primary land use changes very little.

By contrast, in the countryside there is a very active debate about how land should be used, with competing demands for housing, food production, energy production, flood and carbon management, leisure and conservation. In recent years it has been argued that there is insufficient land to satisfy all of these competing demands and that hard choices need to be made – and made very soon.





This interdependency between the historic environment and the use of land is perhaps most obvious in terms of the relationship between the rural heritage and agriculture. And it is perhaps stating the obvious to say that, in part, this is because so much of the rural historic environment is actually the heritage of agriculture - whether in the distant or the more recent past.

For example, the working buildings of the farm now make up seventy thousand entries in the English statutory lists, representing perhaps one hundred thousand individual listed buildings.

And while it may be true that agriculture is no longer a major contributor to rural GDP, it is equally true that nearly three quarters of England's total land area is still actively farmed. As a result, the conservation of many thousands of archaeological sites depends on trends in agricultural land use and the future of thousands more traditional buildings and hundreds of designed landscapes is reliant, at least in part, on the future restructuring and continuing profitability of farming.



The importance of rural land use in general and agriculture in particular for the historic environment mirrors its importance to the natural environment. This ensures that both sectors' interests overlap significantly in rural areas and it means that we often - although not invariably - have allied objectives.

Indeed, we have an overlapping and inseparable interest in managing many features in the cultural landscape, such as hedgerows, parkland, commons and wetland.

This makes the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Natural England; the Forestry Commission; the Environment Agency; and the two families of National Parks and the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – along with a host of green NGOs – vital partners for our sector.

**So, my next key point is to emphasise the need for the heritage sector to work very closely with both farming interests and with key players in the natural environment, if we wish to successfully deliver our objectives for the rural heritage.**



Indeed, let me take this line of argument slightly further and offer what you may consider - in the current climate - to be a mild provocation.

Our sector has been very vocal in recent weeks about our concerns in relation to planned changes to the spatial planning system. And quite rightly so. And, this is hardly a surprise because, as a sector, we have always been very focussed on the implications of this system.

But the historic environment is also affected by policies that lie wholly or partly outside spatial planning controls. Policies that can have impacts that are just as significant, such as forestry, agriculture, energy, coastal defence and flood management.



Fig. 1.2a Padbury, Buckinghamshire, in 1953, with well-preserved medieval ridge and furrow under grassland, hedges and field trees. © Ministry of Defence



Fig. 1.2b Padbury, Buckinghamshire, in 2003, where intensification has led to the destruction of archaeological remains, loss of character and a decline in biodiversity. © English Heritage

Agriculture, in particular is capable of exerting a huge influence on the historic environment and the character of rural landscapes. The intensive agriculture of the 1960's and 1970's, accelerated by our entry into the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy, was the single biggest cause of damage to our cultural landscapes in the post-war period. It caused the loss of archaeological sites, historic parkland and historic landscape character on an unprecedented scale which, arguably, outstripped the impacts of development. These two images of Padbury, in Buckinghamshire, for example, illustrate the sort of impacts that occurred over much of southern and eastern England at the time and are still quite possible today.

Despite this, I would suggest, the historic environment sector has been little involved in the policy debate on agriculture – at least by comparison with the efforts it has devoted to the spatial planning system. As a result we have largely surrendered the ground to our colleagues in the natural environment sector, potentially to the detriment of our interests.

It is extremely welcome, therefore, that the Heritage Alliance has now founded its rural advocacy group in order to address just this sort of policy issue.

CAP-funded environmental farming schemes in England make a major contribution to the conservation and enhancement of archaeological sites, designed landscapes and historic buildings



And the most immediate of these is the latest round of reform of the Common Agricultural Policy - the CAP for short. This is important, firstly, because it will determine the future balance between production and conservation within the farmed landscape.

And, secondly, because a significant proportion of CAP funding supports environmental farming schemes in England which have multiple conservation objectives - including conservation of the historic environment alongside the natural environment, natural resources, landscape, and public access.

And, while the principal focus of expenditure from these schemes is the natural environment, they also direct between £15 and 20 million every year towards the conservation and restoration of archaeological sites, historic landscapes, traditional buildings and other historic features.

This funding has been steadily doing good work for over 20 years in England but has increased significantly since 2004. It is now represents more money than English Heritage is able to direct to comparable heritage assets. And it reaches farmers and land managers who are not normally directly eligible for lottery funding.

It is, therefore, a funding stream our sector should strive to protect. But a funding stream that is under real threat because the UK's overall allocation of CAP funds is likely to reduce from 2014.



At this stage, however, it's important for me to reiterate that my emphasis on the importance of agriculture, land use and rural development policy is not intended to detract from the current vital debate on the future of the planning system.

**Instead my intention - and my final key point - is to stress the need for the heritage sector to address all of these policy areas because they all have an important part to play. And to say that, if we can get them to work in a more integrated way, it could deliver real benefits for our heritage.**

Let me therefore try to illustrate this in more detail, by returning to the future of the historic farm building stock.

There were over 1 million of these buildings when they were last surveyed in the 1960's. Amongst those that have been listed, around 30% have already been converted to new uses. Some converted very well, some badly, some appallingly.



And, although a small proportion of the traditional farm buildings that have not been converted still find some use on the farm, the vast majority are now functionally redundant. In many cases they have been largely redundant for a century or more.

There is, therefore, an understandable reluctance by owners to invest in them; an inevitable maintenance deficit; and an increasing problem of dereliction. Nearly a tenth of unconverted listed buildings are now visibly falling apart and the numbers “at risk” are far higher. I would estimate at least another 25 to 30%.

If the vast majority of these threatened buildings do not find new uses, they will collapse. And the balance between adaptive re-use and total loss will largely depend on whether, or not, the future planning system and any associated guidance adopts a constructive and enabling approach.



In addition, rural development policy also has a potentially important role to play. It could promote a good deal of rural regeneration by using some of the CAP funding to get new business uses into sympathetically converted buildings - business uses that would otherwise occupy characterless modern units.

Of course, there must be a balance: not a free-for-all. Nobody wants a planning system that turns landscapes like Upper Swaledale into a “valley of a thousand gites” or into a light industrial park.

And this is why it is so important that the CAP-funded environmental farming schemes should continue to provide support for the repair and maintenance of the most important historic buildings and those buildings in the most sensitive landscapes. In other words to those buildings and landscapes that are simply too significant to accommodate intrusive conversion.

The challenge for our sector is firstly to defend that funding stream and then to make the challenging decisions about where to target inevitably limited resources.



This slide shows just such an integrated approach in a single farmstead at Hawkshead in the Lake District. Here two separate CAP funded grant-aid schemes have been brought together to support the repair of a sensitive historic barn as well as the conversion of its less sensitive neighbour to a micro-brewery – all enabled by sensible planning policies.

It's a win-win solution – and it even has added beer. What could be better? If we can get this right more often – if we can get these policy areas working together more creatively - we will be making a major contribution to retaining the character and vitality of our rural landscapes.



And, in doing so, we will be helping to make sure Frank Newbould would still think our countryside is worth fighting for

[ENDS]