

Securing the Long-Term Future of the Heritage Sector

The COVID-19 pandemic is having, and will continue to have, a significant impact on the heritage sector. This brief covers some of the key issues around the long-term sustainability of the heritage sector, and highlights where the government can support us.

Social distancing

A reduction of the required social distancing to 1 metre is very welcome by the sector. It will have a significant, positive effect on the viability of organisations in our sector. To take two illustrative examples:

- **Archaeology:** An archaeological organisation was running at 75% of their theoretical capacity but has work available to run at 100%. They are now able to meet this potential because social distancing rules have been reduced.
- **Heritage railways:** The 2m social distancing restrictions meant that train passenger capacity was significantly reduced, from a normal 50 passengers to 24 or 16 (depending on train operator) per carriage. The reduction in from 2m to 1m social distance guidelines means railways can run stock and make reopening financially viable.

That being said, many heritage sites and visitor attractions are still not able to open with social distancing guidelines in place. For many, the guidelines restrict visitor numbers to a point wherein opening is not financially viable. For this reason, we ask for **further financial support from the Treasury and funding bodies** to support some parts of the heritage sector until organisations are able to function normally. Without financial support, there is a substantial risk some of our nation's heritage will be lost forever.

Further furlough scheme flexibility

We are grateful that the Chancellor has extended the furlough scheme to October. However, this means that the scheme will end just as we head into the winter season – a challenging time for many organisations in the heritage sector that rely on seasonal demand. If support is completely withdrawn, it is likely that many heritage organisations will cease to exist – having faced the equivalent of three winters in a row. To abandon them when they need government support most would undermine the original objective of the furlough scheme, and risks our nation losing vital connections to our past forever. The government should consider extending the furlough scheme to those sectors that will need it through the winter, to ensure that they are able to bounce back in time for next year's high season.

VAT reform

In the longer-term, the government should also consider implementing VAT reform to kickstart the construction sector. There is an opportunity for the equalisation of VAT between repair and maintenance and new build to support the growth of the sector. Most heritage organisations will not have the funding to carry out essential maintenance and do planned capital work. By encouraging capital projects through a lower VAT rate, small organisations of specialist builders and craftspeople will be able to find more work and continue to support the longevity of the sector. This will have a positive impact across the heritage and construction sectors.

The maintenance and repair of listed buildings also have a key part to play in reaching the Government's net zero target. A recent Historic Environment Forum Heritage Counts report found that we can reduce the carbon emissions of historic buildings by over 60% by 2050 through refurbishment and retrofit. The full report can be found [here](#).

Other fiscal measures to support private owners of heritage (such as changes to Sideways Loss Relief) would also be appreciated. Long-term, low interest loans – backed by the government - can also form part of a sustainable solution for private businesses in our sector, who are otherwise unable to access grant funding.

Supporting heritage skills into the future

Heritage sites and organisations rely heavily on the vital skills and expertise of the self-employed sector and contractors. These individuals provide public engagement (art, performance), building work (plasterers, stonemasons), conservation, heritage engineering, specialist archaeological services, and other small consulting contracts. In the long-term, there is a risk that many self-employed contractors will be unable to survive, as they simply fall between the gaps of the existing government schemes, leading to a loss of specialist skills. For example, in a recent survey conducted by The Institute of Conservation, 90% of respondents reported a loss or postponement of work due to COVID-19.

Without these skills, more heritage assets will fall into disrepair and capital and conservation projects will face issues commissioning work. These contractors are also required to teach the next generation of specialists - if they cease to trade, specialist skills could be lost forever.

The government should ensure that these skills survive through targeted grants and support for heritage skills. This would ensure the future survival of the sector, and the important work that it undertakes. This could be in the form of apprenticeship support or skills and work training through government funding. Encouraging young people into apprenticeships in the heritage sector would boost existing organisations and secure the future of our vital work.

Positive Messaging Campaign

We would also urge the government to support us in a **positive messaging campaign** around helping domestic, and later international tourists, to feel safe about returning to visiting heritage, cultural, and tourist sites. We cannot lose our heritage sites in the longer term because the public feel unsafe returning to visit them. We know the public is keen to return to heritage and cultural sites but feel nervous about doing so. We are encouraged to see the work of organisations like VisitBritain promoting our country for visiting in the future. We appreciate the guidance being drawn together by DCMS and would support a joint campaign between sector bodies and DCMS to engage tourists as soon as is reasonable.

We appreciate the responsiveness of the government to our concerns, and the constant lines of communication with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport. We look forward to working with you to develop policies which support our sector in this time of crisis, and allow us to provide our public good now and as soon as it is safe for physical sites to do so again.

This brief was prepared by The Heritage Alliance, England's largest coalition of independent heritage interests. We unite over 140 organisations which together have over 7 million members, volunteers, trustees and staff. Most of England's historic environment is owned, managed or cared for by Heritage Alliance members.