

## Baroness Bonham-Carter Heritage Day 2014

I want to start by thanking the Heritage Alliance for this opportunity.

In the opening line of your (admirably succinct) manifesto you state that our *“Heritage is one of our greatest national assets”*. Emphatically, yes - as a country we are blessed with a wealth of historic buildings, archaeological sites, and an extraordinary variety of landscape.

I do – however - think there is a bit of a perception problem with the word ‘heritage’ with connotations of something old and of the past, and also of inheritance - and ownership - by the few.

Whereas in fact one of the unique – one of the most important things - about our heritage is that it is shared and in being so it defines and binds communities, provides understanding of the world we inhabit and of what makes us human. It gives people the opportunity to exercise and enjoy their imagination, and it allows them to identify and value things which reflect knowledge, beliefs and traditions, and – importantly - understanding of the beliefs and traditions of others.

Heritage I would argue, in encompassing both past and continuing cultural practices, embraces the diversity and richness of modern, vibrant, creative, multi-cultural Britain.

Remember Connecting Light - part of the wonderful Cultural Olympiad –when artist Zachary Lieberman turned Hadrian’s Wall into the world’s longest art work, illuminating it with 450 giant balloons. An ancient barrier transformed into a modern communications system, whereby people from all over the world sent messages via the artist’s website and the balloons flashed their responses. Thousands turned up, millions tuned in and Hadrian’s Wall got a new image and a new kind of audience.

So our heritage is very definitely something we share, and it is fluid not rooted in the past.

And what happened with Connecting Light is a good example of the benefits of collaboration – 120 landowners had to agree to it and they did. To quote your manifesto again – *“the future survival of heritage depends on private, independent and public sectors working together to create the right framework for success”*.

**So this asset needs nurturing, it needs preserving, which means it needs money. And as we all know times are tough and DCMS has had to face cuts like most other departments.**

**But we have restored National Lottery funding to its original good causes which means the arts, and heritage sectors have been receiving this extra funding since 2012.**

**We on the Liberal Democrat benches are concerned - however - about a cuckoo in the National Lottery nest. One of the founding principles was that there should only be one National Lottery. This is not the situation today, there is the Health Lottery, which is one in all but name, and there is a new problem of gambling operators offering products which masquerade as lotteries but are in fact bets. These damage the ability to raise funds for good causes such as heritage and need scrutiny.**

**The Heritage Alliance asks us to increase the appetite for philanthropic giving in the heritage sector.**

**Here again we Liberal Democrats agree. The coalition introduced a match funding scheme from public funds to act as inducement. The last Labour government launched a similar scheme to encourage donations to UK universities which has been hugely successful. But there was a crucial lesson learnt and that was the importance of investing in the teaching of fundraising skills.**

**I read of - (a rather underhand test) - that eight regional museums were subject to but which illustrates the problem. A (fictional) recently widowed woman sent a letter – to each museum - praising them, explaining that she was looking for new hobbies and clearly indicating that she had money at her disposal (oh and including a £10 note). Only one museum responded, and only with a brief letter of thanks.**

**So we think that part of the money should be specifically used to help small and medium sized organisations who may not have a history of fundraising, learn how to do it. Heritage Alliance's 'Giving to Heritage' project, will hopefully help in this way as well.**

**And then of course there is Crowd funding – if you google heritage crowd funding - a host of sites come up. It involves large numbers of people giving small amounts of money through the web to causes they support - Citizen philanthropy – the giver gains partial ownership of the cause they care about. So two gains – funds and a personal connection.**

**The Liberal Democrats absolutely agree that we should look at the level of VAT on repairs and maintenance not least because there is a serious housing problem and renovating old buildings is the sustainable way to tackle this.**

And we must make sure that the Green Deal, we so believe in, is flexible about the problems of old buildings, and that it does not introduce a new layer of bureaucracy.

Traditionally constructed buildings, can be energy efficient while retaining their character. And if they are not made energy efficient they are likely to be too expensive for their owners to live in.

We also need to make sure we value the skills and expertise of those who maintain a lot of our heritage. I heard recently of a dry stone wall maker in the Cotswolds – an 80 year old man. He was asked to build a small dry stone wall for a family, which then had to be ‘inspected’ by a new young conservation officer. He was, understandably, rather upset that with all his years of experience, he wasn’t trusted to practice his craft and had to be watched over by someone with none of the experience he possessed. It’s of course right Local Authorities guard our heritage, but we must treat those that do with real respect.

Again turning to your Manifesto – *‘Heritage-led Tourism contributes over £26 billion pounds a year’* – it could contribute more. Two problems we have identified are accessibility and visibility.

How can people experience our rich Heritage if they cannot get to it. The Lib Dems are committed to completing the coastal pathway- which not only provides access to our heritage, but is also our heritage in and of itself.

We have also said we want to radically increase the use of light-rail between communities. Not only will such light rail make it easier for people to see our great Spa and market towns, but could also mean the reopening of some of the stations closed by Beecham which are another piece of our national heritage. Lib Dems also want to introduce a fuller ‘Right to Roam’ as put into practice by us in Scotland.

But greater access must go hand in hand with targeted advertising – and we are supporters of the GREAT campaign – which of course grew out of the Olympics which was the ultimate advertisement for the UK.

We want to ensure small tourist boards work together at a national level, in order that the smaller attractions and heritage sites can raise their voice about the clamour. By working together sites can reach diverse audiences more effectively, helping bring people to places not normally on the traditional tourist trail.

It is good that the new model English Heritage states as one of its objectives advancing the public’s knowledge as well as their enjoyment.

And we believe that Tourism should be allowed its place in an acronym – why is it shunned considering its contribution – DCMTS; DCTMS; even DTCMS – take your pick.

Finally completing the roll out of high speed broadband is an essential part of this linking up of people and their heritage. For those wishing to run a business based on heritage in a rural area, being able to promote their work via the internet, manage their finances and organise their business are vital if we are to help them flourish.

Of course greater ability to conserve more sites, and greater access to appreciate them leads to another pressure – people to do the conserving, (like the dry stone waller), people to be the custodians.

While the Heritage Lottery fund is already involved in traineeship schemes, and there is the Heritage Schools initiative, more needs to be done.

The general expansion of apprenticeships must be utilised to feed into the needs of the Heritage sector. For instance the Arts Councils initiative of a - Creative Employment Programme of apprenticeships, and paid-internships, in the culture sector for unemployed 16-24 year olds.

And we welcome the new model English Heritage's commitment to create apprenticeships for young people covering all conservation skills.

To conclude can I thank the Heritage Alliance again for today, and for the work they do. As they say '*our heritage is a source of national pride and an engine of economic growth*' – and as their 'Heritage Counts' report states has a significant impact on people's sense of wellbeing. We must all commit to ensuring English Heritage's own wellbeing.