

Rural heritage under threat: looking after our landscapes post Brexit

The Heritage Alliance

People love the countryside. It is a core part of our national and local identities. We want a thriving countryside providing multiple benefits for society: a prosperous rural economy, strong rural communities, recreation, nature and wildlife, physical and emotional wellbeing, beauty, and history.

Of the £4.5 billion the UK receives in EU funding each year, some £3.1 billion gets spent on farming of which 80% is spent on 'Pillar 1', which simply subsidises farm incomes based on the size of the agricultural holding. Despite the EU referendum, the majority of the public are not fully aware of how their money currently subsidises farming, what the issues are or how farming could deliver more for society.

A key component of our countryside is our rural heritage of traditional farm buildings, small villages, field boundaries, ancient monuments, woods and parkland. These are not only important in their own right, but they also deliver further tangible benefits for rural communities. They underpin the beauty, diversity and 'sense of place' which attracts inward investment and tourism, and the active conservation of historic places creates skilled employment, often in areas where jobs are scarce.

Yet our rural heritage is under great pressure. The changing economics of farming has caused the loss of hedgerows, archaeological features, parkland, water meadows and historic field systems, and the obscuring of cultural landscape remains by encroaching scrub. The functional redundancy of traditional farm buildings has led to disinvestment and dereliction.

Much rural heritage has been lost over the last 100 years. For that reason, what remains has been eligible for CAP funding under the rural development programme (RDP), and – where funding has been available – it has been effective. Too often, however, artificial EU boundaries have treated rural heritage separately from the wider environment in which it sits, excluding it from integrated approaches to land management, and limiting funding, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Funding environmental public goods

The UK leaving the EU is a chance to find new and better ways of looking after our historic landscapes as part of our wider environment.

With most other stakeholders, the Heritage Alliance would like to see a shift in emphasis, away from per-hectare farm support and towards paying farmers and other land managers to provide the range of key environmental goods which we all value but which the market would not otherwise provide. As the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee

concluded in its inquiry into the Government's 'Vision for the Common Agricultural Policy', published in December 2005: "The only long-justification for future expenditure of taxpayers' money in the agricultural sector is the provision of public benefits.

The Heritage Alliance welcomes Secretary of State, Michael Gove's, recent speech on the future of our environment post Brexit in which he states that the funding farmers currently receive can 'only be argued for against other competing public goods if the environmental benefits of that spending are clear'. The Heritage Alliance will be meeting Mr Gove in October to discuss the issues in this paper.

Our historic environment and landscapes are crucial 'public goods' because:

1. Heritage is an integral part of our rural environment

The character of our rural landscapes has been shaped by the action and interaction of natural and human forces across the ages of time. Our natural and historic environments are inseparable: both are all around us. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the 'global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it' says that "cultural and natural heritage inherited from past generations... must be passed on by present generations to future generations. The European Landscape Convention requires landscape to be "integrated into ... planning, ... cultural, environmental, agricultural, social and economic policies".

For all these reasons heritage has always been included in rural development schemes. However, because heritage was excluded from EU Directives, it tended to be de-prioritised, despite the requirements of the Agriculture Act (1986) to balance agricultural production with the conservation of archaeology. Although on paper it was one of the five key priorities, heritage received a tiny proportion of funding, around £20m a year compared to total CAP funding of £3bn. Under the current Countryside Stewardship scheme heritage has been further demoted to a secondary priority with less than £5m a year. Under Countryside Stewardship 95% of funding goes on habitats, species and water in order to meet European Union objectives.

In future spending, we should prioritise what matters to the public *domestically*, and properly integrate heritage with other public goods, based on objective assessment of need, public value, and effectiveness.

Funding for public goods should go to those who deliver them most effectively, so should not be 'capped', or limited to 'active farmers'. The needs of farmers and the need for food security should be aligned with good social and environmental outcomes: the more a farmer delivers for society, the more support they get.

2. Rural heritage will be lost if we don't find funding for it

There is a cost to maintaining our rural heritage of stone walls, barns, and archaeology, but very limited sources of funding. Economic re-use should be encouraged where appropriate, and other funding where possible, but often this isn't possible. Most of this heritage is in decay. For example, according to Historic England, 84 percent of scheduled monuments are in agricultural land (including the uplands and common land). Almost a third of these are impacted by agricultural practices (such as cultivation) or natural processes (like animal burrowing, erosion and scrub growth). Future heritage aware agricultural policy is crucial to their survival. This is linked to the future of traditional skills and the rural economy of maintaining these skills. For many of our big tourist draws such as Lake District World Heritage Site heritage is integral (walls, buildings and monuments) to the landscape and why people value and visit it.

Once heritage is lost, it is lost. **For much rural heritage, an improved replacement of CAP funding will be its only chance of long-term survival.**

3. Payments for heritage public goods are highly effective

Despite heritage's tiny proportion of overall CAP funding so far, there is a widespread view, evidenced in Natural England's reviews of effectiveness, that this has been effective compared to other agri-environment scheme objectives ("There is robust evidence that the schemes made a significant contribution to the protection of historic features..."). For example, RDP funding has removed 820 Scheduled Monuments from the Heritage At Risk Register since 2009, and prevented thousands more being added. Without that funding, these achievements would be undone and the Register would grow again. Other specific heritage benefits include:

- 24,000 further heritage assets, covering 355,000 hectares, actively maintained via positive management regimes; and
- 44,000 additional, nationally important but un-scheduled, heritage assets on agricultural holdings given basic protection from destruction through scheme cross-compliance measures.

Heritage assets also provide other environmental benefits. For instance, historic boundaries reduce soil erosion and run off, well managed parks and gardens can reduce surface water flood risk and heat island impact, and well maintained watermeadows can reduce flood risk.

4. Heritage is popular with the public

Paying for public goods is (by definition) easier to justify when it is spent on things the public – who are paying – want it to be spent on. A YouGov survey from 2016 revealed 57% of respondents felt British farming subsidies should put either more (25%) or the same (32%) emphasis on environmental protection than current EU subsidies do. 95% of all adults agree it is important to them that heritage buildings and places are well looked after. More specifically, although there is little research into public views on where CAP money should be spent, what there is suggests that heritage is a high priority for those who are paying: the

EFTEC Uplands survey carried out for DEFRA in 2006 suggested that cultural heritage was the public good most valued by the public, ahead of other objectives (“it was clear from the focus groups and... reasons respondents gave for being willing to pay for landscape improvements that cultural heritage is something that is highly valued”).

5. Land managers want to look after rural heritage

Environmental objectives will always have to be delivered mainly by those who physically look after the environment, and it is likely to be much more effective to work with the grain of what farmers and other land managers want to do. Heritage isn't just popular with the public, but with applicants too. Even though heritage options are among the most demanding options for the applicant, they have been fully- or over-subscribed in past agri-environment schemes, and continued to be popular in the 2015-16 Countryside Stewardship application rounds despite heritage having been demoted as a scheme priority.

6. It achieves many other public objectives

Re-using farm buildings creates new homes, and houses new or expanding businesses. Looking after heritage creates significant rural employment, with multiplier effects in fragile low-wage local economies (“in particular, it helps to support local employment in areas... where alternative rural employment opportunities are limited”).

Heritage and landscapes are also a major driver of the £17bn rural tourism industry, and closely integrated with it: many farms are tourism businesses too. There is real scope to expand this, creating jobs, and helping to rebalance the post-Brexit economy away from London. Information from Visit England shows that, since 1989, farms have seen the greatest increase in visits, particularly in the last ten years, since the Foot and Mouth outbreak of 2001. Visitor / heritage centres and gardens have also seen very strong increases in that time.

The Heritage Alliance and rural heritage

The Heritage Alliance brings together over 110 organisations representing 6.3m members, volunteers, and staff. Together they care for, or about, the vast majority of England's historic environment, including over half of rural England. The Alliance is represented on DEFRA's Rural Development Programme Monitoring Committee, and the Alliance's specialist Rural Advocacy Group has drafted this paper.

Heritage Alliance Rural Heritage Advocacy Group

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