

# The Heritage Manifesto 2023

Support community cohesion by putting heritage at the heart of regeneration



Harness cultural learning and skills at every age to help the workforce thrive



Reform the tax regime to promote long-term sustainable growth



Embed the historic environment in nature recovery and net zero strategies



Futureproof heritage institutions at both a national and a local level

The  
Heritage  
Alliance

The voice of England's independent heritage movement

## A GREAT BRITISH ASSET

Heritage is the background and the bedrock of Britain; it is everywhere and benefits everyone. It breathes life into our towns, cities, coasts, and countryside, creating places that people want to live and invest in. Heritage is universally engaging: telling our nation's stories, supporting social cohesion, generating community identity and a sense of place. It offers up lessons about our past and provides creative solutions to the greatest challenges of our future. If properly supported, heritage can pave the way to achieving net zero, regenerating communities, improving our wellbeing, and powering a green skills revolution.



### Productive

England's heritage industry produces a GVA impact of £36.6bn and provides over 564,000 jobs. It underpins the success of multiple other sectors, from construction to the creative industries. In total, heritage indirectly generates 2% of national GVA - this is more than the aerospace sector, the security sector, or the defence sector (1). Heritage is a living and breathing part of our everyday economy - from canals and railways to high streets and theatres.



### Popular

Tourists spend over £18bn on heritage trips each year, and 7 of the 10 most visited attractions in England are heritage sites and museums (2). 63% of us visited heritage sites last year - more than three times as many as attended football matches (3). Historic sites are the backdrop to our popular creative exports and underpin the success of British film and TV. There's no Bridgerton without Bath's Royal Crescent, no Peaky Blinders without Birmingham's historic canals, no Mission Impossible 7 without the North Yorkshire Moors Heritage Railway.



### Public good

Heritage generates significant public good. It supports regional growth, improves our wellbeing, regenerates communities by creating pride in place, and supports long-term environmental sustainability through repair and reuse. Heritage is at the heart of communities from industrial heartlands to rural parishes - 80% of people think local heritage makes living in their area better (4).

## TO REALISE THE POWER OF HERITAGE, WE CALL ON ALL POLITICAL PARTIES TO:

### Support community cohesion and put heritage at the heart of regeneration by:

Investing in and empowering councils and communities so they can protect and make the most of heritage locally. This should include support for targeted regeneration schemes, removing permitted development on demolition, incentivising reuse, and embedding culture-led regeneration and community ownership in future housing and community strategies.

### Embed the historic environment in nature recovery and net zero strategies by:

Ensuring Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMS) provide robust long-term funding to land managers of at least £4.4bn a year (which includes delivering heritage outcomes on an equal footing), reforming EPCs, and bringing forward skills training, funding, standards, and advice in a National Retrofit Strategy.

### Reform the tax regime to promote long-term sustainable growth by:

Equalising VAT on repair and maintenance with newbuild, simplifying and reducing the burden of business rates, and continuing support for the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme.

### Harness cultural learning and skills at every age and help the workforce thrive by:

Encouraging youth visits to heritage sites in the curriculum through subsidised entries, implementing cross-subsidised shared apprenticeship schemes, reforming the Apprenticeship Levy, and offering unsponsored conservation skill-oriented visas for heritage.

### Futureproof heritage institutions at both a national and a local level by:

Ensuring the adequate funding and continued stability of arms-length heritage bodies, protecting the 20% share of Lottery funding for the National Lottery Heritage Fund, supporting statutory Historic Environment Records with ringfenced investment in local authorities for heritage expertise, and supporting proposals for a National Centre for Archaeological Archives.



## 1. Support community cohesion by putting heritage at the heart of regeneration

Heritage is a largely untapped resource for immense public good. Ensuring heritage is front and centre of place-based investment programmes will unleash its potential to contribute to recovery and growth, creating pride of place in local communities and supporting inclusivity. The next government should build on the recommendations of the **Heritage Action Zone schemes** for local regeneration projects up and down the country. Such programmes must support councils and community partners to deliver improvements to the local historic environment.

The National Planning Policy Framework is the bedrock in an effective planning system, but the heritage protection system must be made more effective so that sensible adaptations can be made without causing harm. We call for the approval of the Canal and River Trust's draft **Listed Building Consent Order** and a commitment to explore how this system could be used more widely in future. It is also vital that the **permitted development right for demolition is abolished** to encourage reuse over unnecessary waste.

Reusing existing buildings allows local areas to meet their housing and amenity needs while maintaining a sense of place, offering low-carbon opportunities for new homes, community assets and cultural venues. There are 2,400 vacant historic mills in the North West alone which could provide 52,000 new homes, and there are enough vacant properties in the UK to fulfil up to 46 per cent of new housing needs by 2030 (5). Communities require more than housing - adapting historic buildings into new homes must be balanced with the creation of community assets. **Culture-led regeneration and community ownership** must be embedded in future housing and communities strategy, and the new **Infrastructure Levy** should ensure developer contributions go toward the investigation, protection and regeneration of heritage assets.

## 2. Embed the historic environment in nature recovery and net zero strategies

The climate emergency poses an existential threat to heritage, from the collapse of castles through coastal erosion to the withering of historic gardens through droughts. But these assets also present opportunities for reducing carbon emissions, boosting green skills, sustaining habitats, and protecting our ancient landscapes.



The rural historic environment is under equal threat to the natural environment, with 40% of rural agricultural heritage already lost. Our much-loved countryside would look very different without our dry-stone walls, hedgerows and ancient monuments which provide unique habitats and attract worldwide interest. **Collaborative working between environmental regulators and heritage sector bodies** must be strengthened to understand the vital role heritage has to play in our response to the changing environment. **Environmental Land Management Schemes** must provide robust long-term funding (at least £4.4bn per year) to deliver heritage outcomes on an equal footing with other outcomes across all delivery tiers, and **appropriate indicator datasets** must be developed to monitor undesignated historic landscape assets which are otherwise unprotected.

Our built environment is the oldest in Europe, with 1 in 4 homes built before 1919. These homes are not incompatible with climate adaptation, but the wrong approach will do more harm than good. The UK needs to **double the number of conservation-skilled retrofit contractors** if it is to meet its Net Zero targets by 2050. We call for skills, training, funding, standards and advice to be packaged into a **National Retrofit Strategy**. This strategy must include plans to **reform EPCs to include a whole-house assessment approach** for historic buildings, and the creation of a **one-stop-shop advisory service** for historic homeowners seeking qualified retrofit advice.

## 3. Reform the tax regime to promote long-term sustainable growth

We need a simpler tax regime which promotes repair and reuse over demolition and waste. **Reforming the VAT regime on repair and maintenance** will promote the long-term sustainability of our nation's irreplaceable heritage assets and tackle carbon emissions. Repairs are subject to 20% VAT, yet no VAT at all is charged on demolition or new build. This creates a perverse incentive to demolish old buildings rather than repairing and reusing them. There is already a 5% reduction on VAT on certain energy saving materials - a wider approach to incentivising reuse and repair is a natural continuation of this precedent. We ultimately support a **0% equalisation of VAT** for works to all buildings, tested through a pilot scheme to demonstrate impact. This would release investment, boost skilled jobs, reduce the carbon effects of demolition and new build, and help the next Government meet net zero targets. Even temporary five-year VAT equalisation would generate an economic stimulus of £51 billion (6).

In the interim we call for a commitment to the future of the **Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme** so that VAT can be recovered for our 19,000 listed churches and religious buildings. Ensuring recent **changes to valuations for business rates** are implemented throughout the wider museums and heritage sector would also help the many organisations still suffering devastating fiscal impacts from Covid-19 and inflation. Lastly, a commitment to the future of the **Museums and Galleries Exhibition Tax Relief** will support the ongoing display of special exhibitions around the country.

Retrofitting just half of all historic buildings over a 25-year period will reduce carbon by 39 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> and result in savings of £3.4 billion (12)

87% of adults agree that ‘finding new uses for historic buildings rather than demolishing them’ is important (13)

#### 4. Harness cultural learning and skills at every age to help our workforce thrive

Heritage is nothing without the people that make it work and the communities it supports. By expanding apprenticeships, encouraging volunteering and investing in cultural learning, more people can experience the personal, social, and educational benefits of engaging with heritage whilst boosting sector capacity. Cultural engagement widens educational horizons, increases pride in place, and boosts civic engagement among young people (7). Free educational heritage visits are an important part of this but are in steady decline. We call for **government subsidised youth entry to heritage sites** (8) and **embedding visits to local heritage sites in the curriculum** to strengthen young peoples' connections with their communities and develop a pipeline of future talent.

When young people enter the workforce, valuable schemes such as apprenticeships and Kickstart must also be made to work for smaller organisations and specialist craft skills. We call for a **cross-subsidy mechanism, shared apprenticeship schemes, and reform of the Apprenticeship Levy** to allow unspent funds to be allocated for much-needed conservation skills and green construction skills. Immigration visa systems must consider the unique position of heritage sector jobs being highly skilled but often low paid. The next government should explore an **un-sponsored route for the creative sectors** and routes for **international students to remain and work in the sector**, and for **ongoing shortages in conservation skills** to be accounted for in visa schemes.

Volunteers and trustees are the backbone of many heritage organisations, but Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis have eroded the multiple socio-economic benefits of volunteering and depleted the range of people that can afford to give their time to heritage. The next government should **embed volunteering in place-based regeneration programmes** such as the Heritage At Risk Volunteering and Wellbeing scheme (9), and to recommend a new **Model Employment Contract** which offers all employees at least one volunteering day per year.



#### 5. Futureproof heritage institutions at both a national and a local level

The National Lottery Heritage Fund has transformed the way we care for our heritage, awarding over £8 billion to more than 51,000 projects since 1994 and saving thousands of special places for the public (10). We call on all political parties to **protect the 20% share of Lottery funding for the Heritage Fund**. Historic England and the Arts Council join the Heritage Fund as the bedrock of the sector but have suffered standstill settlements or actual cuts over many years. Their assured future, continuing stability and adequate funding are crucial, particularly given decimated capacity at the local authority level.

Local planning authorities require **ringfenced investment in archaeological and conservation teams, and targeted investment in skills and training** to build resilience. We support the **statutory requirement for local authorities to provide historic environment services and Historic Environment Records**, and the **interim protection of assets** under consideration for designation as further practical steps to prevent unintended damage. The sector is working to develop the **Culture and Heritage Capital approach**, which the next government should champion in future local and national decision making.

Finally, we call for action to secure the uncertain futures of mobile heritage and archaeological archives. There is an urgent need to safeguard the **future provision and use of heritage fuels** alongside the **development of biofuels** to keep historic vehicles running (11). We also urge all parties to support the proposals for a **National Centre for Archaeological Archives** to provide a sustainable future for archaeological finds in England, end the current capacity crisis and secure the research value of objects for future generations.

#### About The Heritage Alliance

The Heritage Alliance is England's largest coalition of heritage interests. It brings together 200 independent heritage organisations covering the full breadth of heritage. Between them, over 7 million volunteers, trustees, members and staff demonstrate the strength and commitment of the independent heritage movement. The Heritage Alliance is ready to put our resources and expertise at the disposal of all decision-makers to secure the best future for England, built on its invaluable past.

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#### References:

- 1: [Heritage and the Economy, 2020](#)
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