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## Introduction

The King's Speech is part of the State Opening of Parliament ceremony, which marks the start of the new parliamentary year. Delivered by the reigning monarch, the Speech outlines the government's forthcoming legislative agenda. The Speech is written by the government of the day, and is delivered by the monarch in a politically neutral tone. After the Speech, MPs reassemble and debate its contents for several days, followed by a vote on the government's programme. The actual Speech is relatively brief, but the government usually produces a more detailed briefing document (sometimes known as a 'Lobby Pack') which expands upon the intent and content of the Bills.

King Charles III gave his first King's Speech as the reigning monarch on **Tuesday 7th November 2023**. He had previously delivered the Queen's Speech in May 2022, on behalf of his mother. This was Rishi Sunak's first State Opening since becoming Prime Minister for the governing Conservative Party, and it is likely to be the last King's Speech before the next UK general election (which must be held no later than 28 January 2025).

- A video and transcript of the King's Speech [can be accessed here](#).
- The full background briefing notes [can be accessed here](#).

This paper begins with a general overview of the key themes of the King's Speech, before providing analysis of **the most significant announcements within the King's Speech for the heritage sector**, with commentary by [the Heritage Alliance](#).

**The Heritage Alliance** is England's largest coalition of independent heritage interests, bringing together over 200 organisations, which contain over 7 million members, volunteers, trustees, and staff. In our recently published [Heritage Manifesto 2023](#), we called on all political parties to respond to five key policy priorities for supporting the UK heritage sector and maximising its benefits for communities and the environment.

## What were the key themes of the King's Speech?

"My Ministers' focus is on increasing economic growth and safeguarding the health and security of the British people for generations to come."

The King's Speech for 2023 was relatively brief, reflecting the short timeframe before the next general election. The Government announced just twenty-one Bills (the lowest number since 2014), seven of which were carried over from the previous Parliamentary session. Overall, the Speech lacked any major surprises, but reiterated the Government's core priorities on economic growth, law and order, energy security, and digital regulation.

- **Growing the economy** took centre stage, with measures to boost skills and innovation, encourage entrepreneurship, and implement new trade deals. This was paired with measures to **strengthen society** through investment in the NHS and social care, local transport improvements, reforms to the housing and rental markets, and creating 'the first smoke free generation'.
- **Crime and justice** also received significant attention, with harsher sentences for serious crimes, new steps for protecting victims, reforms to the parole system, and new terrorism prevention duties for venues and events. The Conservative Party is expected to make law and order a key dividing line with Labour at the next general election.
- The Speech outlined plans to strengthen the UK's **energy security** by continuing to transition to low carbon in a pragmatic way that supports growth and jobs. However, the proposed Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill – which supports the future licensing of new oil and gas fields – is likely to be highly controversial amongst **environmental** groups.
- Opportunities arising from **Brexit** were highlighted at various points – particularly within the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill, which will allow businesses to protect personal data in more proportionate and practical ways than under the European Union's GDPR. In addition to broader measures for modernising and tightening **digital regulation**, the Government proposes to make the UK a world-leader for AI safety.
- There were few concrete legislative proposals for **education**, but mention was made of the [Advanced British Standard](#) (which will merge academic and technical routes into a single qualification), and of steps to promote apprenticeships and reduce poor quality university degrees.

### *What was missing?*

A number of Government proposals have been trailed in the media over the last few months, but were not included in the final Speech or briefing pack. Notable omissions included the Pensions Reform Bill, the Mental Health Bill, the ban on so-called conversion therapy for LGBT+ individuals, plans to privatise Channel 4, and proposals from the Home Office to fine charities for handing out tents to homeless people.

## ***What was the response from political parties?***

- [In his statement to the House of Commons](#), Rishi Sunak said that this King's Speech 'is about what this Government are about – taking long-term decisions to build a brighter future for our country'. He emphasised that the Conservative Party has strengthened the UK's underlying economic and social foundations, meaning that the Speech could look forward 'to change our country for the better'.
- [Keir Starmer \(Leader of the Labour Party\)](#) described the Speech as 'an exercise in economic miserabilism', drawing particular attention to the Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill as a missed opportunity to invest in clean British energy. He emphasised the need for a credible plan for growth, better housing, and a modern industrial strategy to address the cost-of-living crisis and promote national renewal.
- [Ed Davey \(Leader of the Liberal Democrats\)](#) referred to 'cheap gimmicks and reheated policies', stating that the Speech contained nothing to address some of the biggest current issues, from the cost-of-living crisis, to NHS waiting lists, to the sewage scandal. He called for a more positive and proactive approach to tackle these challenges.
- [Adrian Ramsay \(Co-Leader of the Green Party\)](#) criticised the Government for lacking solutions to address the cost-of-living crisis and the climate emergency. He described the measures for new oil and gas drilling licences as 'an act of environmental vandalism', which will cause higher energy bills and carbon emissions in the future.

## ***Which Bills does our analysis cover in more detail?***

- **Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill** – pg. 4
- **Draft Rail Reform Bill** – pg. 4
- **Economic Activities of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill** – pg. 5
- **Holocaust Memorial Bill** – pg. 6
- **Media Bill** – pg. 7
- **Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill (*Martyn's Law*)** – pg. 8

## Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill

“My Ministers will ... introduce new competition rules for digital markets...”

- The Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill is introduced on page 25 of the briefing document.
- It promises to empower consumers with new rights over subscription contracts and enable faster enforcement against consumer rip-offs.
- It gives the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) new powers to regulate and address anti-competitive activities, including amending the thresholds for merger reviews and increased investigative and enforcement capabilities
- The CMA will also be able to designate firms with ‘strategic market status’ and apply tailored rules to govern their behaviour. Again, this is intended to enable proactive intervention in digital markets to promote competition and innovation.

### **Analysis by The Heritage Alliance**

This Bill is carried over from the previous Parliamentary session – [a consultation was launched in September](#) to gather information on a number of key issues (including fake or misleading reviews on digital platforms, and hidden fees or ‘drip pricing’ within online sales).

The provisions in the Bill to ensure the fair treatment of consumers and businesses would be broadly beneficial to heritage organisations that make use digital services, or who have suffered from bad digital practices (for example, receiving fake or malicious reviews on platforms such as TripAdvisor or Google Reviews). If the Bill is successful in encouraging an innovative and well-regulated technological sector, this could lead to the development of tool and platforms that will make it easier for heritage organisations to share their stories with digital audiences.

## Draft Rail Reform Bill

“My Government will invest in Network North to deliver faster and more reliable journeys between, and within, the cities and towns of the North and Midlands, prioritising improving the journeys that people make most often.”

- The draft **Rail Reform Bill** is introduced on page 37 of the briefing document.

- The Bill will create a new public body, Great British Railways, which will take over management of rail infrastructure and passenger rail franchising functions.
- Its aim is to provide more accountability, better services, and an improved focus on customers and freight within rail industry.
- Specific objectives include simplifying fares and ticketing, rolling out pay-as-you-go systems, and removing anomalies like single tickets 'being almost as expensive as a return ticket'.
- The Bill helps to deliver the Government's 2019 manifesto commitment for major rail reform, following the recommendations of the independent Williams Review.

### **Analysis by The Heritage Alliance**

The Rail Reform Bill is flagged as 'draft' legislation: the briefing document notes that, due to the scale and complexity of the proposed changes, it will need to undergo pre-legislative scrutiny in draft form. This means that, in practice, the Bill is unlikely to pass into law before the next general election.

The creation of the Great British Railways (GBR) agency could provide opportunities to better connect heritage destinations by rail, if the new body takes a strategic view of leisure travel needs. However, any rail infrastructure changes driven by the new organisation could potentially involve risks to industrial heritage (for example, if updates are proposed for historic stations). It will be important for heritage stakeholders to engage with GBR as it plans its rail strategy and investments, to minimise any potential negative impacts.



## **Economic Activities of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill**

- The Economic Activities of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill is introduced on page 61 of the briefing document.
- The Bill bans public bodies from implementing their own boycotts, divestment, or sanctions campaigns against foreign countries. The briefing document particularly highlights the Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which seeks to bring about change in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- The ban applies to 'public bodies' (or 'public authorities') as defined in [section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998](#), which includes local councils, universities, some cultural institutions, and central government bodies. The Bill is based on the principle that taxpayer-funded public bodies have different constraints compared to private entities.
- Enforcement agents will be given powers to investigate breaches of the ban, issue compliance notices, and impose monetary penalties.

### **Analysis by The Heritage Alliance**

The ban on public bodies implementing their own boycotts, divestment, or sanctions campaigns could restrict the ability of heritage organisations to take a public stance on international political issues. We recognise that members of The Heritage Alliance will have diverse perspectives on this sensitive area.

It will be essential for the heritage sector to seek clarity on the definition of ‘public bodies’ as outlined in the Bill. The cross-party law reform and human rights charity **JUSTICE** has previously flagged that [the definition of ‘public authority’ within the Human Rights Act is ambiguous](#), and sometimes applied inconsistently. It will also be importance to ascertain whether there will be wider implications for private heritage organisations that receive public funding. The Heritage Alliance will continue to monitor developments closely, and work to ensure that the heritage sector’s concerns are adequately addressed.



## **Holocaust Memorial Bill**

“My Government is committed to tackling antisemitism and ensuring that the Holocaust is never forgotten. A bill will progress the construction of a national Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre in Victoria Tower Gardens.”

- The Holocaust Memorial Bill is introduced on page 56 of the briefing document.
- It will enable construction of a new national Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre in Victoria Tower Gardens, located next to the Houses of Parliament.
- The Bill disapplies the relevant sections of the London County Council (Improvements) Act 1900, to ensure that this this legislation cannot be used to block the building of the Memorial.
- This is a ‘hybrid’ Bill, which means that people who are directly affected will have the opportunity to petition against the Bill in each House of Parliament, and to be heard by a Select Committee.

### **Analysis by The Heritage Alliance**

The construction of the new national Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre has been proposed for some time, having been first commissioned by then-Prime Minister David Cameron in January 2015. This Bill is carried over from the previous Parliamentary session; in June, it [passed its second reading](#) in the House of Commons unopposed. More detailed plans for the Memorial can be [accessed on the UK Holocaust Memorial website](#).

The situation of the Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre at the heart of the nation's democracy would help to ensure the continued remembrance of the horrors of the Holocaust by both politicians and the general public. The Centre would provide significant opportunities to enhance Holocaust education and connect to other heritage assets across the UK.

However, the plans have elicited concerns by the **London Gardens Trust** (a Core Member of the Heritage Alliance), which is dedicated to the preservation of green spaces within the capital. Their website provides [a detailed account of their campaign to protect Victoria Tower Gardens](#), working alongside other campaign groups. The Trust highlights that the Gardens provide the setting for the World Heritage Site around Westminster and the Houses of Parliament, and has prepared [a conservation and significance statement](#).

It is clear that a delicate balance must be maintained between commemorating the vital history of the Holocaust, and protecting the historic and green character of Victoria Tower Gardens.

## Media Bill

“Legislation will be brought forward to support the creative industries and protect public interest journalism.”

- The Media Bill is introduced on page 31 of the briefing document.
- It will repeal Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013, which would have required publishers to pay the legal costs of the people who sue them, even if the publishers won the case.
- It also aims to modernise regulation of public service broadcasters, with a particular focus on adapting to new digital and online services. It introduces a ‘Video-on-demand Code’, to be enforced by Ofcom for regulating private streaming services (such as Netflix).
- It increases accessibility requirements for on-demand content created by public service broadcasters (subtitles, audio description, and signed interpretation), in line the existing requirements for live TV.

### Analysis by The Heritage Alliance

Proposals to privatise Channel 4 had previously been trailed by the Government, but are not included within the description of the Bill (although the briefing document does propose to ‘support Channel 4’s sustainability’, and draws attention to its dependency on television advertising). The reforms contained in Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 were

introduced following the Leveson Inquiry into the ethics and practices of the UK press; however, the legislation received widespread opposition from all national newspaper groups, and has never been enacted.

Whilst the Bill is chiefly directed towards the media sector, it could create new opportunities for heritage organisations to collaborate with broadcasters and reach wider audiences. Its focus on promoting 'quality British content [which will] allow us to project British values globally' could increase coverage of cultural and historical programming, and open up avenues for new partnerships between the heritage and media sectors.

The provisions for greater access to subtitles, audio description, and signed interpretation within on-demand content will be welcomed by many, and will make existing heritage streaming content more accessible for people with disabilities.

Some heritage organisations may be prompted by the Bill to review their own accessibility provisions for their digital content. The Heritage Alliance will continue to engage with its members to understand any potential skills gaps in this area, and determine if there is a need for training or shared resources to improve accessibility. **VocalEyes** is a Core Member of the Heritage Alliance: their website includes a [number of high-quality resources](#) to support digital accessibility and inclusion within heritage organisations, and their [Heritage Access 2022 Report](#) provides detailed analysis of the state of accessibility within the sector.

## **Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill** *Martyn's Law*

"Legislation will be introduced to protect public premises from terrorism in light of the Manchester Arena attack."

- The **Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill**, also known as **Martyn's Law**, is introduced on page 72 of the briefing document.
- The Bill delivers on the Government's manifesto commitment to improve safety and security at public venues, following the 2017 Manchester Arena attack.
- For the first time, it will mandate certain premises and events to take steps to reduce the risk of a terrorist attack occurring or physical harm being caused.
- Premises with capacity of 800+ (the Enhanced tier) must take 'reasonably practicable' measures to reduce terrorism risks, including creating and maintaining a security plan and appointing a designated security lead. If they do not comply, they can face large fines. Premises with capacity of 100-799 (the Standard tier) will also have duties – these will be defined following consultation to ensure that they are appropriate and achievable.



- The measures aim to improve protective security and preparedness at public premises across the UK, so they are better able to respond in the event of a terrorist attack and reduce potential harm. The requirements on venues are intended to be proportionate.

### **Analysis by The Heritage Alliance**

The Terrorism Bill was published in draft form during the last Parliamentary session. It is named after Martyn Hett, who was one of the 22 people killed in the 2017 Manchester Arena terrorist attack.

The new legal duties within the Terrorism Bill to assess and prepare for terrorist risks are likely to have implications for many museums, historic houses, places of worship, and other venues within the heritage sector. Premises or events that fall into the Enhanced tier (with 800+ capacity) will need to take reasonably practicable measures to enhance security and preparedness. This may require investment in security infrastructure, training, and operational changes – placing new financial and administrative burdens on organisations. Smaller heritage venues (100-799 capacity) are likely to face lighter touch Standard-tier duties such as risk assessments, but these could still stretch limited budgets and resources.

However, the Terrorism Bill also provides an opportunity for heritage organisations to review and strengthen protective security, ensuring that staff are trained to respond appropriately in emergencies and that venues can support visitors safely. If implemented proportionately, the Bill could make heritage destinations more resilient and boost visitor confidence without excessively affecting day-to-day operations. Ongoing consultation and guidance will be important in achieving this balance.

**Ecclesiastical Insurance** has flagged that heritage organisations currently [lack awareness of forthcoming law](#), and their website provides useful guidance for how organisations might [undertake a security review](#) in light of these legislative developments. At the Heritage Alliance, we have engaged with the **National Counter Terrorism Security Office** (NaCTSO) to understand how this will impact heritage organisations, and shared resources and workshops providing details of the plans. We will continue to highlight information and resources as further details emerge.

**Want to learn more?  
Join The Heritage Alliance today.**

**The  
Heritage  
Alliance**

Thank you for taking the time to explore our review of the King's Speech 2023 and its implications for the UK heritage sector. If you found this analysis helpful, and are interested in accessing more exclusive insights and resources, then we invite you to consider **becoming a member of The Heritage Alliance.**

Our membership is made up of over 200 organisations, which contain over 7 million members, volunteers, trustees, and staff. Their expertise spans the breadth of heritage sector – from museums and conservation, to science and construction. By joining, your organisation will become part of the leading voice of the UK's independent heritage sector.

- **Be Heard:** We listen to our members, and advocate on their behalf. Your asks, needs, and concerns will be represented at our regular meetings with Members of Parliament, DCMS and other government departments, and sector-wide forums.
- **Be Informed:** Benefit from our insights on the latest political developments impacting the heritage sector, and our ongoing policy research into key economic, social, and environmental issues.
- **Connect and Share:** Exchange ideas with leading organisations across the sector through our advocacy groups and networks. We host two major sector-wide events each year, and a regular programme of free events and webinars for our members.
- **Access Expert Advice:** Benefit from expert guidance and training in topics from fundraising, to project management, to emerging technology. We have provided tailored support in response to Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis.
- **Reach Others:** Promote your events, jobs, and news through our widely-read *Heritage Update* newsletter and our exclusive *Members' Email*.

We offer three types of membership, and our subscription fees are adjusted for your organisation's annual turnover. **Join us today to add your voice to our community, access knowledge and support, and help to shape the future of the heritage sector.**

For more information, [please visit our website](#). 

**For further information or queries, please contact The Heritage Alliance.**

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