

THE HERITAGE MANIFESTO 2024



SUPPORT
community
cohesion by
putting heritage
at the heart of
regeneration

EMBED
the historic
environment in
nature recovery
and net zero
strategies

REFORM
the tax regime
to promote
long-term
sustainable
growth

HARNESS
cultural learning
and skills at
every age & help
the workforce
thrive

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, and 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 £45.1bn and provides over 538,000 jobs. It underpins the success of multiple other sectors, from construction to the creative industries. In total, heritage indirectly generates 2.5% 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 seven of the 10 most visited attractions in England are heritage sites (2). 63% of us visited heritage sites last year – 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 industrial heritage, and 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, and 75% say the government has a moral duty to protect it (4).

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

- 1 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.
- 2 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 (delivering heritage outcomes on an equal footing), reforming EPCs, and bringing forward skills training, funding, standards, and advice in a National Retrofit Strategy.
- 3 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.
- 4 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.
- 5 Futureproof heritage institutions at both a national and a local level by:**
Ensuring the adequate funding and continued stability of arms-length bodies, delivering a new Culture Growth Fund, protecting the 20% share of Lottery funding for the National Lottery Heritage Fund, supporting local authority arts and conservation teams with ringfenced investment, and safeguarding the uncertain futures of mobile and archaeological collections.





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 (PDR) for demolition is abolished** to encourage reuse over unnecessary waste, and that the use of PDR in the planning system is taken under review.

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 enough vacant properties in the UK to fulfil up to 46% of new housing needs by 2030 (5). But communities require more than housing – and 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 strategies, and the new **Infrastructure Levy** should be used to ensure developers contribute to the protection and regeneration of heritage assets.

Retrofitting just half of all historic buildings over a 25-year period will reduce carbon by 39 million tons of CO₂, and result in savings of £3.4 billion. (12)



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 dry-stone walls, hedgerows and ancient monuments which create unique landscapes 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 the 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 across all delivery tiers, and develop **appropriate indicator datasets** to monitor undesignated heritage assets which are otherwise unprotected. As an island with rich marine and coastal heritage, we can further safeguard our unique historic environment by ratifying the UNESCO convention on the protection of **Underwater Cultural Heritage**, using a Memorandum of Understanding between relevant government departments for effective collaboration.

Our built environment is the oldest in Europe, with 1 in 3 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 currently 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. We ultimately support a **0% equalisation of VAT** for repair and maintenance, demonstrated initially through a targeted, time-limited intervention to demonstrate impact. Even temporary five-year VAT equalisation would generate an economic stimulus of £51 billion (6). 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.

In the interim we call for a commitment to the future of the **Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme** beyond 2025, so 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 severe impacts from Covid-19 and inflation.



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.



About The Heritage Alliance

The Heritage Alliance is England's largest coalition of heritage interests, bringing together over 200 independent organisations that represent the full breadth of the sector. Its combined membership includes over 8 million passionate volunteers, trustees, and staff, who 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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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 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 also form the bedrock of the sector but have suffered standstill settlements or cuts over many years.

Continued stability and adequate funding are crucial as we begin to recover from a challenging period. We call for the next government to pioneer a new **Culture Growth Fund** (building on the success of the Culture Recovery Fund) to deliver targeted investment to safeguard our future and leverage new growth. An equivalent scheme to the Arts Council's **National Portfolio Organisations** system to fund the independent heritage sector would further enhance its long-term sustainability.



Local Authority spending on heritage has been cut by more than 40% since 2011, and conservation capacity in planning teams has almost halved since 2009. (13,14)

We call for a **fair, long-term funding settlement for local government** to enable council-funded museums and heritage sites to keep delivering positive community outcomes. Planning departments require **ringfenced investment in archaeological and conservation capacity**, and **targeted investment in skills and training** to build resilience in severely depleted teams. The statutory requirement for local authorities to provide **Historic Environment Records and services** is a key practical step to safeguard capacity and resources at a local level. The **interim protection of assets** under consideration for designation and **new protections for sites without structure** would further 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), and to introduce a designation system for nationally important items of mobile heritage such as historic vessels which currently have no protection. We also urge support for the proposals for a **National Centre for Archaeological Archives** to end the current capacity crisis and secure important objects for future research.

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