

King's Speech 2024

Our Analysis

17 July 2024

The Heritage Alliance



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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 second King's Speech as the reigning monarch on **Wednesday 17 July 2024**. This is the first State Opening of parliament under the new Labour Government.

- A transcript of the full speech can be accessed [here](#).
- A briefing note with details of each announcement 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 2024](#), 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.

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

The King's Speech for 2024 contained over 40 Bills, more than any King's Speech since 1997. Overall, the Speech lacked any major surprises, but reiterated the Government's core priorities on planning reform, growth, improving public services, and mission-led governance.

- **Mission-Led Government:** The King's Speech opened with a commitment to ['Mission-Led' Government](#). The concept of mission-led government has become increasingly prominent and involves the setting of a limited number of ambitious 'missions' by the centre and then organising government (including resource) around their delivery. Labour set out their ['Five Missions'](#) in their Election Manifesto (*kickstart economic growth, make Britain a clean energy superpower, take back our streets, break down barriers to opportunity, build an NHS fit for the future*) and we should view the King's Speech and their broader policy priorities through this lens. Heritage and Culture specifically are not included within these headline missions. However, there are specific areas in which heritage can act as an enabler in meeting the government's ambition.
- **Stability and Growth:** Linked with above, Labour positioning themselves as a government of long-termism and prosperity. This aligns with economic growth being the first of their missions and with their campaign strategy of presenting as pro-business and pro-worker. Both the King's Speech and first speech of the Chancellor have provided indications that where trade-offs must be made (whether to environmental protections or local democracy), economic growth will be prioritised. Again, it will be essential for the heritage sector to present itself as an enabler of growth rather than a restraint whilst identifying unintended consequences.
- **Public Services and Welfare:** The King's Speech outlines multiple Bills to improve public services, including public transport, housing, and education, alongside initiatives to improve public safety, mental health, and justice. The legislative reforms relating to social infrastructure and wellbeing relate to Labour's mission to advance opportunity and create a more inclusive society. The heritage sector can play a significant role here – evidence shows the historic environment and culture-led regeneration schemes enhance wellbeing, improve social cohesion and create places people want to live and work.

Planning and Infrastructure Bill

- This Bill seeks to accelerate housebuilding and infrastructure delivery to drive economic growth. This will be achieved through streamlining the planning system, including accelerating upgrades to the National Grid and simplifying consent processes for major infrastructure, and by increasing the capacity of local planning authorities.
- The Bill is set to include a clause around 'using development to fund nature recovery where currently both are stalled'. This has been accompanied by a commitment from Labour to meet with nature delivery organisations, stakeholders and the sector over the summer to determine the best way forward in balancing development ambitions whilst maintaining environmental protections.
- Reforms to compulsory purchase compensation rules are designed to ensure fair compensation to landowners while supporting the delivery of social infrastructure and affordable housing.

Our Analysis

Planning reform was expected to feature heavily in the King's speech, having been mentioned frequently by both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor throughout their first weeks in power.

We welcome commitments to improve the planning system and increase the capacity in Local Authorities, though this must be done with historic environment services and heritage protections in mind. The 300 promised extra planning officers amount to fewer than one officer per planning authority, but shows a willingness to invest which could pave the way for greater provision of conservation and archaeological expertise. In terms of delivering new homes, we support a brownfield first approach where it involves the regeneration and reuse of heritage assets, but this approach could equally incentivise demolition and waste.

The Planning and Infrastructure Bill could prove to be a useful piece of legislation on which to hook planning reforms that the heritage sector supports, or to ensure provisions not yet enacted under the Levelling Up Act (such as statutory Historic Environment Records, and a government response to the consultation on removing permitted development rights for demolition of historic buildings) are secured.

We are expecting the publication of a paper later this month which sets out the new government's plans for planning in more detail, as well as an anticipated consultation to review of the NPPF in the coming months. Heritage is an important enabler of sustainable development and green growth, and we will work closely with DCMS and MHCLG to highlight how the historic environment can support the government's planning ambitions whilst protecting heritage.

English Devolution Bill

- This Bill aims to transfer significant powers from Westminster to local leaders, in order to drive economic growth and improve living standards. This involves a standardised devolution framework, giving local authorities enhanced control over strategic planning, local transport, skills, and employment support.
- The Bill makes devolution the default setting, allowing regions to receive powers without complex negotiations if they meet governance criteria. It simplifies the creation of new Combined Authorities to ensure more areas can benefit from devolution quickly, with a focus on establishing advanced mayoral settlements.
- The Bill introduces a new 'right to buy' for community assets. This measure is aimed at transforming neighbourhoods, reducing the number of empty premises, and enhancing local decision-making through improved governance arrangements.

Our Analysis

The new government has had a clear focus on devolution since day one in office, with some of the first calls made by Keir Starmer to the leaders of the 4 UK nations and to England's metro mayors.

The devolution of strategic planning decisions may conflict with the simultaneous centralisation of planning powers and decision-making authority for the Secretary of State. This tension between top-down reforms and local decision making and community engagement could present challenges from the Labour back benches, where new marginal seats in rural and green belt areas are more likely to oppose major planning and infrastructure initiatives.

As the effects of this Bill begin to be felt across the UK, it will be more important than ever for heritage organisations to engage at a local level, particularly those in authorities led by new Mayors. It may present new opportunities to influence local decision making and put heritage at the heart of decisions around community assets, infrastructure projects, and transport and skills provision.

Great British Energy Bill

- This Bill will establish *Great British Energy* – a new, publicly owned clean power company headquartered in Scotland, which will help accelerate investment in renewable energy such as offshore wind.
- The Bill builds on the immediate work by the Energy Secretary to deliver Labour's manifesto pledge to achieve clean energy by 2030, including scrapping the ban on onshore windfarms.
- The broader aims of the Bill, and the establishment of *Great British Energy*, are to enhance the UK's energy independence, create new jobs, save money for households and tackle climate change.

Our Analysis

The transition to green energy is a vital part of decarbonising the UK economy, which in turn will benefit UK heritage which is both threatened by the effects of climate change and is itself key to achieving our net zero goals. The removal of the ban on onshore wind and the proposals for new solar farms present opportunities for cleaner household energy which all historic buildings will benefit from, though, as with major planning developments, we are keen to help the government ensure these projects can be enacted in a way which does not adversely affect our historic landscapes and archaeological sites and which maximises benefits for everyone.

The King's Speech lacked the announcement of an overarching strategy to deliver green power by 2030, and to tackle what Energy Secretary Ed Miliband refers to as the 'four horsemen of the apocalypse': grid delays, planning delays, supply chain problems and the skills gap. It will be important for the heritage sector to work closely with DESNZ to highlight how the historic environment can help to achieve net zero targets through appropriate retrofit, repair and reuse, and a circular economy approach to the built environment. Our Heritage Manifesto calls for a National Retrofit Strategy, including plans to reform EPCs to account for embodied carbon, and the creation of a one-stop-shop advisory service for historic homeowners seeking qualified retrofit advice.

Skills England Bill

- The Skills England Bill will transfer functions from the existing Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education to a newly established body called Skills England.
- Skills England will 'sit at the heart of a system that provides learners with the skills required to thrive in life, businesses with the trained workforce they need to succeed, and local areas with access to the right skills to spur economic growth'.
- One of the responsibilities of Skills England will be to identify the training for which the Growth and Skills Levy (currently the Apprenticeship Levy) will be accessible. This will include consulting on and maintaining a list of levy-eligible training and ensuring value for money and alignment between government-funded training and skills need.
- Skills England will create a formal link between migration data and skills policy in a move to ensure that training in England accounts for the overall needs of the labour market.

Our Analysis

Reform to training and apprenticeship provision will be welcomed by many in the heritage sector. The new Growth and Skills Levy could be used to the advantage of skills gaps in the heritage sector, but the government will consult on which types of training will be eligible. We know, for example, that the number of conservation skilled retrofit contractors in the UK needs to double if we are to properly upgrade our historic building stock to reach net zero targets.

In consultation with members, we have previously proposed a number of measures that would make the apprenticeships system work better for freelancers and small businesses. These include greater support for sharing apprenticeships between multiple organisations; the introduction of a

cross-subsidy mechanism to help fund apprenticeships within smaller organisations; and provision for unspent Apprenticeship Levy funds to be allocated to skills gaps.

Labour's commitment to skills reform is promising but the heritage sector will need to engage closely and proactively with the newly established body to ensure that the importance of heritage skills is recognised by Skills England. They commit to working with the Migration Advisory Committee to link migration data to skills gaps needs, though there is a question over how the new Tier 2 visa salary thresholds will feed into this, and whether they now will be reviewed for areas with skills gaps.

House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Bill

- This Bill seeks to modernise the constitution by removing the right of the remaining hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords, the first reform to the chamber since the 1999 House of Lords Act.
- At present there are almost one hundred seats in the Lords reserved for individuals who were born into certain families (hereditary peers), including some which are effectively reserved only for men.
- Labour has described this arrangement as 'outdated' and 'indefensible' and committed to reform in their manifesto. This Bill is the initial move towards broader reform of the House of Lords.

Our Analysis

Modernisation and steps to improve the diversity of representation in Parliament are welcome and important. The heritage sector has been well represented by a number of strong advocates in the House of Lords, including some hereditary peers. We are grateful to those individuals for their service. It will be important that any reform to the House of Lords is well considered and genuinely improves representation in a range of areas of expertise. We note that the proposal to remove Peers who are over 80 years of age from the Lords Chamber has not been included in the King's Speech – though this detail may emerge in the legislation itself. Organisations in the sector should consider how the expertise and advocacy of former hereditary peers can be nurtured outside of parliament, whilst continuing to develop relationships with new and existing Lords who remain in post.

Railways Bill

- This Bill will bring rail contracts into public ownership and integrate track and train management under Great British Railways (GBR) to improve service delivery. By bringing these elements together under a unified structure, the government intends to streamline

operations, reduce inefficiencies, and provide better service to passengers and freight customers.

- The establishment of Great British Railways (GBR) will centralise the management of the rail network and passenger services into a single public body. GBR will act as the "directing mind" for the railways, ensuring a cohesive and strategic approach to rail operations. This integration is expected to enhance coordination across the network, improve service reliability, and align the goals of infrastructure management and service delivery to better meet the needs of passengers and freight users.
- The new Passenger Standards Authority will act as an independent watchdog to monitor service standards and advocate for improvements. Additionally, GBR will overhaul the ticketing system to make it simpler and more user-friendly.

Our Analysis

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, the King's Speech does not promise any new rail routes as part of this Bill. 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.

Holocaust Memorial Bill

- This Bill, reintroduced from the last government, 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 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 reintroduced from the previous Parliamentary session.

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 Parks and Gardens Trust** (THA Member), 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](#).

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.

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

- This Bill was originally introduced in the Queen's Speech in 2022, but its passage through Parliament was delayed by the impact of Covid-19 and changes in government. It seeks 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 a large capacity (as yet undefined) will need to put in place counter terrorism measures to reduce risk from an attack occurring at the premises. Premises with a smaller capacity will be required to notify the regulator of their premises and put in place minimal procedural measures to keep the public safe.
- 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 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. Larger venues may require investment in security infrastructure, training, and operational changes – placing new financial and administrative burdens on organisations. Smaller heritage venues are likely to face lighter touch Standard-tier duties such as risk assessments, but these could still stretch limited budgets and resources. However, 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.

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.

Thank you for taking the time to explore our review of the King's Speech 2024 and its implications for the UK heritage sector. If you are not already a member, 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](#). 

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