

Introduction

The past is all around us. It is part of the fabric of our everyday landscapes. Our streets, buildings, towns, cities and countryside are comprised of deep layers of history, readily available for us to explore and enjoy. Heritage, the word we use to refer to our rich inheritance from the past, can encompass moveable objects too: from the smallest archaeological finds to restored steam locomotives.

What connects the diverse array of things that we call heritage is that it is a legacy worth cherishing and passing on to future generations in as good, if not better condition. We know the power of heritage to change people's lives. Looking after places helps to sustain the communities that live and work there, helping to create jobs and incomes.

At the same time heritage is much more than a physical asset. It is a unique quality that brings meaning and value to our lives. We are inspired to think what we can achieve and create tomorrow by celebrating and understanding what we created in the past. Our heritage enriches and enchants in equal measure – it is a manifestation of human curiosity, imagination and inspiration.

The role of The Heritage Alliance

The Heritage Alliance has a unique and powerful role as the voice of the independent heritage sector in England. We are the largest coalition of heritage interests in the country, representing the sector in all its diversity: from boats and cathedrals to country houses and chapels; and from historic mills and town halls to vintage cars and archaeological monuments.

The Alliance represents the knowledge and interests of the independent heritage sector to policy makers in England, to ensure a supportive policy and funding framework within which the sector can operate and thrive. Working with our members, we also help to build the capacity and skills of the sector, creating resilience and sharing innovation and best practice.

Our combined membership represents the interests of some seven million people and reflects the pride and importance that heritage plays in this country's identity, prosperity and well-being. The size of our membership helps to demonstrate to government and others that the heritage cause is a long-standing grassroots movement that has the support of millions. We celebrate in particular the contribution made by volunteers at all levels within the sector.

The context in which we work

England's heritage is a unique asset that has already contributed to our economy recovery from the financial crisis of 2008. It is also popular:

- Three quarters of British adults agree the government has a moral obligation to protect our heritage (74%). An even larger proportion agrees that the UK's heritage needs to be protected (79%).
- Four in five say the UK's heritage is important in attracting tourists from over the world (81%).
- Only one in five British adults agree that Heritage is obstructive to future housing developments (18%).
- Only one in ten (10%) think the UK's heritage does not contribute anything to the country.
- A majority of Britons say heritage is important to them personally (59%).
- Three in five agree that the heritage sector makes an important contribution to the creative industries (61%), and three quarters say the UK's heritage is important for the economy (73%).

Source: ComRes for The Heritage Alliance, November 2015

These figures are reflected in the participation rates for heritage, which show an increase in the number of people seeking heritage experiences, whether as visitors or volunteers.

At the same time, heritage is facing a host of challenges. Politically, as the willingness of the state to intervene reduces, we can no longer afford to be dependent on government grants or subsidies. Cuts in public spending mean that vital local authority services are under threat, as indicated by a decline in the number of historic environment services posts. In a world of even greater competition for diminishing public resources, the heritage sector needs to work even harder to make its case both financially and politically.

The boundaries of what we consider to be heritage continue to expand. Yet while our view of what comprises heritage continues to widen, only a small fraction of this is formally designated and protected. A key aim of the Alliance is to ensure that the breadth of what constitutes heritage is appropriately served by fiscal, statutory and policy frameworks that support responsible stewardship.

Change can represent significant opportunities as well as threats. The pace of technological change is daunting to many, yet digital channels are providing new and inclusive ways of understanding and promoting heritage. In an era of political devolution, heritage organisations have a role in sharing their knowledge and expertise to inspire and support the capacity of communities to shape and care for their local environment. New ways of expressing the value of heritage are needed to attract new investment into the sector.

The political cycle in England now operates on a five-yearly basis. With the next general election in England due in 2020, it makes sense for the Alliance's new strategic plan period to coincide with this timeframe. Therefore, this strategy runs from January 2016 through to December 2020. Business plans are developed year-by-year on the basis of the overall objectives set out in this strategy.

Our Vision

Our vision is for a society in which England's historic environment and wider cultural heritage is valued, supported and is able to enrich everyone's lives. We believe this can be achieved through the sympathetic, sustainable and imaginative use of the past around us, and by increasing the understanding and enjoyment of all kinds of heritage by everyone, not least the decision makers in Government who set the regulatory, fiscal and policy frameworks for the care of our heritage. We aim to achieve our vision by harnessing the skills, strengths and talents of our members.

Our Strategy

For the next five years, The Heritage Alliance will make a critical contribution to bringing about our overall vision by focusing our efforts and resources in the following areas:

1. Advocacy

We will use effective advocacy to persuade others, including public bodies at national and local level, to support the Alliance's specific policy objectives, as set out in our manifesto for the 2015 election and other policy documents.

Specific activities:

- We will be an assertive and confident advocate for heritage.
- We will draw on our members' knowledge and expertise and work with them to influence the regulatory and fiscal frameworks for heritage.
- We will develop partnerships, including with those beyond the heritage sector both at home and internationally, to help us achieve our policy objectives.
- We will keep our policy objectives under review, always taking account the views of our members.

2. Engagement

We will promote the value of heritage to government, businesses, communities and individuals, in order to increase awareness and support for our policy objectives.

Specific activities:

- We will find new ways to express the value of heritage, so that we grow engagement with our cause.
- We will ensure that heritage is relevant to the issues of the day, demonstrating its ongoing relevance to people's lives.
- We will maintain and develop the information resources we provide to our members on policy, good practice and research.

3. Capacity Building

We will inspire, leading and supporting our members to achieve their full potential as heritage organisations.

Specific activities:

- We will attract capacity-building funding to address areas of shared concern, sharing innovation and best practice.
- We will seek to identify potential new financial resources for the independent heritage movement.
- We will develop our on-line resources to support our members' work.

4. Resilience

We will work to make the Alliance more resilient and self-supporting in financially challenging times.

Specific activities:

- We will increase and diversify the funding available to us for our core costs.
- We will attract and develop the necessary skills to achieve the Alliance's mission.
- We will conduct a stakeholder analysis to help prioritise our work, and keep this under review.

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