

HERITAGE SECTOR RESILIENCE PLAN 2025-35

Historic
Environment
Forum



INTRODUCTION

The historic environment is one of England's most precious assets. The public derives heritage meaning and cultural connection from it and it is one of the top three things that makes them proud of their country. Heritage isn't just about buildings and monuments – it's also about people's stories, memories, and sense of place and belonging.

It can be productive too as both an economic powerhouse that generates billions for England's economy and a social cornerstone that enhances individual wellbeing, education and understanding, creativity and community cohesion. Heritage is a public good but it needs support to thrive. Looking forwards, the sector must develop greater resilience to navigate a range of challenges posed by a changing climate, economic fluctuations, and a range of societal and political shifts.

One significant set of changes for heritage on the near horizon will come from devolution. As the political and administrative landscape in England continues to evolve and change, with greater decision-making powers moving to combined authorities and local governments, so too must the heritage sector evolve to maintain its dynamic role as a

living resource across our cities, towns and communities, while simultaneously acting as a driver of sustainable economic growth, creating jobs, supporting local businesses, and attracting investment to communities across the country.

The Heritage Sector Resilience Plan is designed to provide a clear roadmap for partnership working to deliver a robust and resilient heritage sector. This can only be achieved through a collaborative approach in which everyone with an interest plays their part

The Historic Environment Forum can operate as a facilitator, but the plan is owned by everyone, and success will come with sector engagement as a whole and with the contributions we all make to the delivery of the agreed-upon priority actions.

The priority actions in this plan build on those identified in the first edition of the Heritage Sector Resilience Plan published in 2022 (covering 2022-2024).

WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

Our working definition of resilience for the purposes of this plan is that the heritage sector in England:

- **puts people at its centre**
- **is equipped with appropriate knowledge and expertise**
- **is valued and appropriately resourced**
- **is well-connected and collaborative**

To achieve these ends, there are four 'cornerstones' of resilience which come together to create a resilient heritage sector over the next ten years:



PLAN OVERVIEW

The ten-year plan is structured around four cornerstones, which will significantly strengthen the resilience of the historic environment and heritage sector in England.

For each cornerstone, a series of priorities for collaborative sector action are identified. Not all the actions will be progressed simultaneously. In some cases, further work is needed to scope out the priorities for action, and others will be actioned as capacity allows. Further iterations of the action plan are anticipated, targeting progress in the sector towards the identified ten-year outcome for each cornerstone.

Agreed measures of success will be used by HEF regularly to monitor progress in delivering the plan and to evaluate new initiatives.

The plan covers heritage assets, people and organisations.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The plan is primarily written to drive the activity of the Historic Environment Forum in collaboration with the wider heritage sector, establishing a blueprint for how the sector – organisations and individual practitioners – can work together to develop greater resilience.

The support of government at national, regional, and local levels is fundamental to all aspects of heritage resilience. While this plan focuses primarily on sector-led actions, we recognise that productive partnerships with government at all levels will be essential for the sector to achieve greater resilience. Throughout implementation, we will identify opportunities for collaboration with government bodies to maximise impact and align efforts with broader policy objectives. The plan also seeks to shift perceptions of heritage from being a regulatory ‘hurdle’ to being a valuable partner in sustainable development and community growth.

The plan will also be useful in exploring with others who have an interest in – or relationship to – the heritage sector the role they can play and the benefits they can derive from engaging with our resilience priorities.

THE ROLE OF THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT FORUM

The Historic Environment Forum (HEF) is a collaborative initiative supported by Historic England, that brings together senior representatives from organisations working in heritage in England. It includes 24 members representing different parts of the sector.

The Forum will promote, drive progress against, and monitor the resilience plan, ensuring as many partners as possible can contribute.

It will be responsible for the delivery of some actions, through task and finish groups enabling collaborative activity across a range of members. For others it will rely on action through active partners within the HEF and the sector more widely to deliver shared priorities. HEF is committed to continuous improvement in how it facilitates progress against the plan, encouraging communication with the wider sector, and ensuring the greatest engagement with and impact from the plan's outputs.

REVIEW

The plan will be reviewed annually, with reports provided to HEF and published online. Progress against actions identified in the plan will be reviewed at regular HEF meetings throughout the year.

The priority actions set out in this edition of the ten-year plan will be updated in 2028.

The DCMS will be updated regularly regarding progress against the plan and any changes in priorities.

FOUR CORNERSTONES OF RESILIENCE

Since the initial version of the Heritage Sector Resilience Plan was published in mid-2022, many of the priority actions set out for delivery by sector organisations have been successfully completed (as described in the [HEF reviews of the historic environment sector activity in England published each year](#)).

Sector priorities have developed over the last three years, and four cornerstones of resilience have now been identified for the new ten-year plan. The plan defines a long-term (ten-year) outcome that we seek for each cornerstone to ensure the heritage sector becomes more resilient, followed by collaborative priority actions that are needed to respond to the challenges identified in relation to each cornerstone.



Relevance



**Physical
Resilience**



**Workforce
& Organisational
Resilience**



**Financial
Resilience**

RELEVANCE

CHALLENGES

Collaboration with other sectors

Insufficient understanding and collaborative activity across a range of other relevant sectors including digital and tech, creative industries and the arts, health and social welfare

Messaging

Focus on heritage in jeopardy misses opportunities to highlight benefits;
Too much emphasis on the past and not on the present;
Lack of connection to sustainability issues and opportunities;
Over-emphasis on assets and objects rather than people and the intangible elements of heritage connection

Public perception/ understanding

Perception of heritage as elitist and inaccessible;
Heritage viewed narrowly through the lens of visitor attractions;
Lack of visibility for heritage as a positive impact on wider society (including wellbeing, economy, environment)

Engagement

Limited empowerment of young people; Engagement strategies still too dominated by the desire to grow visitor numbers; Limited tools, techniques and spaces to co-create and celebrate local and personal heritage relevance; Too little done to celebrate heritage beyond the audit approach of 'lists' and designation

VISION

Heritage is defined by and exists through people and what they value. Heritage will only be resilient if communities attach an importance to it and connect through it to heritage assets and the wider environment. We need to work with communities to better understand how it is relevant to them and how we can work with them to strengthen its relevance. The DCMS's Culture and Heritage Capital is developing a framework for calculating the many ways in which heritage delivers benefit.

Over the next ten years we will put people at the heart of our work by encouraging more ways for them to connect with their heritage and that of others, reaching out in particular to those communities who are underrepresented or less likely to engage, so that more people are supported to benefit from heritage in the future. An early priority will be to encourage and inspire younger generations to connect with heritage, while also supporting engagement across a diverse range of communities in all parts of the country.

RELEVANCE: ACTIONS

Our initial work in this area will be to understand how the heritage sector is already engaging with other sectors to foster greater knowledge exchange, shared priorities and collaborative delivery in future across traditional boundaries. This work will promote the value of the heritage sector in the work of nature restoration, food and farming, public health, tourism, arts, sport, culture and the creative industries.

After this, we want to focus on:

- Encouraging new ways for heritage organisations to reach and connect with younger audiences. There is a role here for the Historic Environment Forum in promoting joined-up learning between sector organisations about what works and what doesn't.
- Supporting Culture and Heritage Capital research to assess the wider impact of the historic environment and heritage initiatives through metrics that value not just visitor numbers but meaningful engagement, wellbeing outcomes, community benefit and nature improvements.
- Linking to another of our cornerstones, working collectively and with partners we will continue our efforts to develop inclusive and equitable approaches to engaging with others. Only by developing new skills and new practices will we create the environment to reach more diverse audiences. These could be digital skills, for example but will also require us to reach out beyond our traditional spaces and places.



PHYSICAL RESILIENCE

CHALLENGES

Strategic

Natural and historic environment too often managed in silos;
Focusing only on climate threat misses broader challenges for assets (such as lack of funding to address environmental degradation/conservation deficit)

Knowledge/ Understanding

Limited understanding of climate threats to heritage assets and how to respond to them;
Mitigation and adaptation measures often deprioritized for funding;
Lack of a 'trusted' collective resource for information

Skills and Resources

Rising costs of materials and both craft and professional labour;
Inadequate training provision relating to retrofit and wider trades to support building conservation

Community

Limited tools and expertise to engage effectively with stakeholder communities when adaptation or loss is necessary or desirable;
Heritage protection viewed as a "blocker" to growth and change;
Heritage used by communities to prevent development they don't support

VISION

The physical remains of our past are important. Within ten years we want to see heritage assets that serve people's needs, contributing to everyday quality of life and recognised as a valuable resource for growth and development. Effective, proportionate, and solution-focused planning policies and guidance should guide the management of change, within a framework that supports sustainable approaches to conservation, adaptation and reuse. We recognise that climate or other challenges may mean that some loss is inevitable and where this is the case we will have a clear process for managing these changes well.



PHYSICAL RESILIENCE: ACTIONS

The first step towards achieving this is to set up a task group to:

- build a shared evidence base of solutions, case studies and approaches to maintenance, retrofit, and adaptation of heritage assets, using plain English and accessible formats, which includes the showcasing of successful examples of heritage's contribution to place-making and regeneration. These should demonstrate how effective planning policy has achieved a balanced and successful outcome.

Meanwhile, topic groups such as the Heritage Skills Forum and the Historic Environment Protection Reform Group can respectively tackle questions around how:

- We can create a coordinated approach to improve the quality of heritage impact assessments and supporting statements through shared guidance and training, for example by exploring a more opportunities and outcomes focused approach;
- Develop actions to help ensure heritage is supported and the benefits of heritage are realised in future planning decisions, including integrating heritage and nature conservation in development and land management activity to deliver multiple benefits;
- Encourage and manage additional demand for heritage skills, especially where owners are not currently using those skills, so as to improve the heritage consent system, improve physical outcomes, and encourage the supply of heritage skills and the overall resilience of the sector;
- Develop frameworks for community-led decision making about heritage that matters to them, ensuring that they have a greater voice in its future.



WORKFORCE AND ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE

CHALLENGES

Skills/Knowledge

Business-related skills gaps in the sector, especially in small-medium size organisations;
Limited skills/knowledge retention, particularly due to project-based funding;
Lack of awareness of urgency of measures to tackle climate change;
Lack of capacity to upskill workforce (seen as less valuable than other priorities)

Recruitment and Career Development

Confusing recruitment practices;
Low salaries (also impacting on EDI) and/or poor employment practices;
Lack of visibility of heritage careers for new generations and of awareness of variety of roles in sector;
Tendency to use fixed-term contracts

Volunteers and Participation

Ageing volunteer workforce;
Lack of flexible volunteering opportunities;
Need to seek new forms of engagement and participation beyond traditional transactional models

Governance and Strategy

Organisations fire-fighting for survival are unlikely to have capacity for long-term strategic planning and innovative practice;
Poor governance across the sector;
Lack of genuine diversity in senior leadership roles (including on Boards, Committees, and Councils)

VISION

Within ten years we want to see dynamic and inclusive heritage organisations supported by good governance and employing a diverse workforce with access to clear professional pathways, appropriate salaries and the right skills to meet future challenges and demand.



WORKFORCE AND ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE: ACTIONS

To achieve this we will:

- Support the Historic Environment Skills Forum, set up as a recommendation of the 2022 HEF Heritage Sector Resilience Plan, and promote the collaborations needed to deliver the strategic objectives of the Skills Forum's Historic Environment Skills and Careers Action Plan for England.
- Scope and resource a skills development programme for sector bodies covering the wider skill set needed to manage organisations and to deliver projects, both now and for the future. This will be tailored for the needs of heritage organisations but use nationally recognised frameworks and qualification routes where available.

Priority areas are:

- Project management – to build the reputation of the sector for delivering projects on time and budget and contributing real value
- Communications and marketing – to make the case for heritage and maintain relevance
- Managing organisational mergers and partnerships – to make the most effective use of resources
- Digital literacy / proficiency – to maximise the potential of AI assisted workflows and other technological advances to improve productivity
- Environmental sustainability skills – to reduce carbon emissions and make the sector more sustainable
- Revenue generation, cost estimation and management, fund raising and income diversification – to build financial resilience
- Community engagement and co-creation skills – to ensure heritage professionals can effectively collaborate with diverse communities
- Negotiation skills – to help professionals work constructively with professionals in related disciplines, funding and grant making bodies, and developers and planners to find win-win solutions
- Interpersonal skills – to build confidence

FINANCIAL RESILIENCE

CHALLENGES

Strategic

Limited articulation of the financial value of the sector (cf Natural Capital);
Barriers to funding for a range of heritage organisations;
Requirements of individual funders can collectively create a big burden for small/medium-sized organisations

Expertise and Capacity

Lack of fundraising skills and capacity in smaller, grassroots or community-based organisations; Lack of capability and capacity to engage with alternative fundraising opportunities such as crowdfunding or social investment; Insufficient shared learning in funding strategies to support heritage businesses

Fiscal

Full VAT payable on repairs and maintenance;
Access to Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme now capped, and its future uncertain;
Cuts in inheritance tax reliefs means some privately held heritage may now be unviable

Funding Availability and Income Generation

Need far outstrips available funds;
Limited availability of operational or core funding and project funding approach can impact longer-term organisational resilience;
Need for new models of income generation and membership beyond the traditional transaction model

VISION

Within ten years we want to see sustainable heritage organisations able to access more diversified and longer-term income streams, with heritage recognised as a key driver of local economic growth and a central component of place-based investment strategies across devolved authorities. There should be simpler routes to funding for both core and project costs, and established pathways for private and social investment.



FINANCIAL RESILIENCE: ACTIONS

The first step towards achieving this is to gain a better understanding of the complex current state of funding for heritage, including recent and likely future trends.

We will set up a task group to review existing evidence about patterns in the funding landscape, identify gaps for future commissions and build a collaborative work programme to identify and make recommendations regarding:

- The systematic issues in current funding streams ranging from a cycle of short-term grants to the balance between project and core funding and between meeting emergency and long-term needs
- Underutilised opportunities for increasing financial resilience in the heritagesector by addressing the above, and through exploring the value of non-traditional routes, outside grant-finance
- The skills and additional capacity needed to maximise these opportunities and the best ways of developing them in the sector
- Ways for heritage organisations to engage more effectively with devolved funding streams and local decision-making processes
- New approaches to income generation and innovation, reflecting the changes in society over the next 10 years



GLOSSARY

DCMS Department for Culture, Media & Sport
EDI Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

References to “organisations” include all types of organisation, eg charities, businesses, private owners etc.

References to “workforce” include paid staff and volunteers

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