

English Heritage New Model – Local Government Association Response January 2014

Introduction

The LGA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the future of English Heritage. English Heritage is a key strategic partner for local government nationally and locally in our shared endeavour to protect, enhance and manage the historic environment. We have worked with English Heritage to collect many examples of councils responding to the challenging fiscal climate by introducing new ways of working.

Heritage matters to councils for a variety of reasons. Local heritage is at the heart of the identity of places and local councils are at the forefront of supporting its management, conservation and promotion for residents and visitors to enjoy and learn from. Be it through the planning system, or through supporting community involvement in heritage assets, councils care for and enhance local areas, stimulating interest and encouraging awareness of local heritage.

The historic environment also makes a significant contribution to the economy, helping to attract visitors and businesses to places. It also provides jobs and opportunities to acquire skills, and can be a driver for inner city renewal and rural development by helping to improve the value of places.

The consultation on English Heritage's proposed new model is an opportunity to look at how we can further strengthen the relationship between councils and English Heritage.

Proposal 1: Establishing a Charity to run the National Heritage Collection

In the current fiscal climate the proposal to set up a charity to run and care for the 400 plus properties in the National Heritage Collection is a sensible way forward. The new charity's greater freedom to generate commercial and philanthropic income, and the intention that it eventually becomes self-financing, should put the National Heritage Collection on a more sustainable footing.

The consultation document highlights the scale of the maintenance backlog and it will be a significant task to generate the income that is needed to address this. We strongly support the fact that the Collection will remain in public ownership. This must be the ultimate safeguard if the charity runs into difficulties or fails to generate the necessary income.

Proposal 2: Historic England

Although there is no change to the regulatory, protection and planning functions that will be split off from the charity and delivered by Historic England, we agree that the consultation offers an opportunity to reassess priorities and to look at ways of improving how these vital heritage services are managed and delivered. The

functions of what will become Historic England have always been the part of English Heritage that works most closely with councils.

After a major simplification of the planning system, which councils strongly supported, we have an opportunity to build upon existing partnerships and embed the positive use of planning to boost growth through heritage assets. This also builds upon our joint work to encourage councillors to move the conservation resource in councils upstream and into strategic discussions.

We encourage Historic England to exercise its regulatory and planning functions as part of a whole-place approach to heritage. This means Historic England staff in localities working with councils in a shared way based around the needs of place.

The consultation document proposes that Historic England becomes more public-facing, suggesting a desire for greater alignment to local priorities for conserving and opening up heritage at risk. Councils can play a vital role in supporting this through neighbourhood planning, wider civic engagement and making the links to the role of heritage in achieving local growth priorities.

Such a way of working might have the following characteristics:

Strong political leadership of local historic environment services, which is embedded as part of a place's strategic approach to growth and planning.

Professional conservation leadership and knowledge configured in an efficient way that means expertise is properly utilised. This might be in-house or shared with another council and would deliver:

- **Excellence in knowledge** of individual buildings and places; styles, techniques and materials that are characteristic of a place.
- **Strategic influence** with heritage informing the Local Plan.

National advice and protection exercised in close collaboration with councils so that it reinforces joined-up working and supports local growth priorities. As part of the LGA's work to promote locally-led planning, we are working with statutory consultees in the planning process (including English Heritage) to ensure that it works quickly and effectively to support local priorities.

We encourage Historic England to continue to give sufficient priority to archives within its corporate priorities. Access to English Heritage archives and publications will continue to be valuable for councils as information resources and supporting community engagement with local heritage.