

Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: Protecting Built Heritage, HC 594

Tuesday 17 June 2025

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 17 June 2025.

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Members present: Dame Caroline Dinenage (Chair); Mr Bayo Alaba; Mr James Frith; Damian Hinds; Dr Rupa Huq; Paul Waugh.

Questions 1 - 71

Witnesses

I: Professor Vanessa Toulmin, Chair, Morecambe Winter Gardens; Dr Tegwen Roberts, Former Heritage Action Zone Lead, Eldon Street (Barnsley) High Street Heritage Action Zone; and Camilla Finlay, Director, Clews Architects.

II: Hilary McGrady, Director General, National Trust; Alice Loxton, historian, author and National Trust ambassador; and Ben Cowell OBE, Director General, Historic Houses.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Vanessa Toulmin, Dr Tegwen Roberts and Camilla Finlay.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to this meeting of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee. This is the first session in our protecting built heritage inquiry. Historic buildings make such an important contribution to our local and national identities, our creative industries, our high streets and our rural communities, so it is important that those who help restore and protect these sites are supported in their work.

To speak about the importance of their work and the challenges they face, we are joined by Camilla Finlay, from Clews Architects, Dr Tegwen Roberts from Eldon Street High Street Heritage Action Zone, and Professor Vanessa Toulmin, chair of Morecambe Winter Gardens Preservation Trust.

Before we start, and just so the Committee can get a flavour of where you are coming from, please say a tiny bit about yourselves, because you all have very interesting experiences and backgrounds.

Professor Toulmin: I am Professor Vanessa Toulmin. I was born on the Winter Gardens fairground in Morecambe to a family of Travellers and Showpeople. I have a PhD in the history of entertainment, and I am a professor at the University of Sheffield. I became chair of the Winter Gardens in 2019 by accident and I am still there. After five years of reforming and reorganising the Trust, I run the Winter Gardens completely volunteer-led with 45 volunteers drawn from the local area.

Chair: And here you are today.

Camilla Finlay: Hi; I am an architect. I am accredited in building conservation, and I am a director of a practice that specialises in projects related to heritage; all our work is influenced by that. I look after two cathedrals, Exeter and Worcester, and many parish churches. I also support English Heritage in their projects, and I am a trustee at Historic Royal Palaces and a member of the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England.

Chair: Fantastic, thank you.

Dr Roberts: I am Tegwen Roberts. My background is in archaeology. I was originally an archaeologist. I then went into industrial archaeology specifically because I was interested in buildings, stories and people. I did a PhD at Hull, looking at how people remember industrial places and how, as those places are changed, those memories also change and are fixed. Ever since, my work has been very much about working with community groups and delivering heritage projects for local authorities. I most recently delivered the High Street Heritage Action Zone in Barnsley, which was four years of loads of fun.

Chair: Fantastic; thank you very much. First, a reminder to all Members, if you have any interests to declare, just mention it at the point that you



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ask your question.

- Q2 **Paul Waugh:** Thank you all for coming today. As the Chair says, we are keen on getting a sense of the challenges you face—not just the passion that you have for each of your heritage sites but the challenges you are facing. Professor Toulmin, you mentioned your direct link to Morecambe Winter Gardens. What motivates you to turn that around and make sure that it is there for future generations?

Professor Toulmin: My motivation, first and foremost, is the building. It is an amazing, exquisite building. Alongside that is the love of the local people. It is almost like a barometer of Morecambe's failure and loss and decline and then its rise. If the Winter Gardens is prosperous, Morecambe is prosperous. So it is quite a lot of responsibility, but for every negativity, I think about the love and pleasure that comes. I live in Sheffield. When you think of Sheffield, it is, "When love and skill come together, expect a masterpiece", and that is what I try to do with the Winter Gardens, but it can be difficult.

- Q3 **Paul Waugh:** Dr Roberts, what might surprise us about the realities of trying to maintain a historic building?

Dr Roberts: If you have not run one before, knowing that it can take years to get a project off the ground. The development phase is really important and it can take a lot longer than you think. To get to the point where you are working—where you have scaffolding up and are working on the roof—can take a lot longer than you might assume.

- Q4 **Paul Waugh:** Camilla, in what sense have things changed over the last decade or so? Is working in this field less stable or more stable?

Camilla Finlay: It is less stable, because it is a really challenging field. There is not as much money as there needs to be for the number of historic buildings that we are trying to look after and the communities we are trying to support. Also, the money coming through is very boom and bust, so you can suddenly have a pot of money you have to spend, which is a great opportunity, but there is a one-year time limit to spend it, and as my colleague just said, it can take five years to develop a heritage project. To have an oven-ready project takes real time and investment, so it is very hard to just start and spend that money. We want sustained, continual funding.

- Q5 **Mr James Frith:** Good morning and thanks for coming. That is a lovely quote: "When love and skill come together, expect a masterpiece". Forgive my ignorance, who is that, or is that you?

Professor Toulmin: John Ruskin.

Mr James Frith: Beautiful.

Professor Toulmin: I wish it was me. I might have misquoted him, and probably hundreds of thousands of people in Sheffield will tell you I got it wrong.

Mr James Frith: It could be the new Pulp album as well, couldn't it,



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really?

Professor Toulmin: Yes.

Q6 **Mr James Frith:** That is wonderful; thank you. Vanessa and Tegwen, what makes the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful funding application for a restoration project?

Professor Toulmin: I would say that it is the support and understanding of what you have to do. I have written 13 successful applications for the Winter Gardens and raised £4.4 million, but each time it is a different set of agendas. It is about knowing what happens, and knowing from being in a peer group like Theatres Trust—sometimes you get to that magic part with the button that says “attachments”, and suddenly you find 15 attachments, which you did not know were going to be there. So it is about knowing the full process, knowing everything you have to have involved, and also having the support of your local political leaders, because sometimes you could do a fantastic application but the local political system does not want you to be put forward.

Q7 **Mr James Frith:** Thirteen successful applications, of how many? How many have you submitted?

Professor Toulmin: Thirteen out of 13.

Mr James Frith: Wow.

Professor Toulmin: I have another one in at the moment, so I do not want to jinx it.

Mr James Frith: It is not on 13 yet.

Professor Toulmin: I do not want to jinx it, but that is a very high level for a voluntary organisation. My knowledge of the system enables my organisation to benefit. Probably 80% to 90% of small voluntary organisations that I would like to speak about do not have that support, do not know how to do it and do not have the capacity.

Mr James Frith: Capacity is a huge issue, isn't it?

Professor Toulmin: Capacity, yes, and also—everyone will say the same—for most Treasury grants, you have to have a Government BCR. You know what that is, but most people do not. They do not know what the Treasury Green Book is. There is no understanding, no kind of easy guide for people to understand, so they have to bring experts in. You have to spend maybe £100,000, like you said, to get an oven-ready project. What organisation for a building will spend that on a grant rather than on the roof?

Q8 **Mr James Frith:** You mentioned the Treasury Green Book. Do you hope that the reforms announced at last week's spending review might improve the chances outside London and the south-east for such projects that you are involved in?

Professor Toulmin: Yes, I really do, but I also think it is about the level of understanding the cultural benefits of economic benefits and using



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smaller charities as a benchmark, rather than large organisations like the railway museum. How is that going to help 6,000 or 8,000 small organisations in the country? They need to understand that heritage is everything from the grassroots to the National Trust.

Q9 Mr James Frith: Thank you, and I will ask the same question for the others: what makes the difference between successful and not successful?

Dr Roberts: From my point of view, it is about being able to demonstrate social impact. It is not just about bricks and mortar; it is about the wider social impact of those projects. If you are applying to the lottery fund, for instance, you need to show that it is the people who benefit from that and the longer, wider-term impact. For small organisations, the social impact can be hard to evidence, but that makes a successful application. It is about not just the building, but everything that building does and is for that community and the wider communities of interest.

Q10 Mr James Frith: Camilla, let me start with you next, but this question is for all of you. How does the way funding is distributed to you impact how you manage restoration projects? Camilla, you mentioned in your opening remarks the time you get. That is such a curious rule—to be handed the money but then the clock is started on spending it, and unreasonably so, given the project length is usually known at the start.

Camilla Finlay: Yes. That is key with funding, because as everybody is saying, you want to get funding at the beginning to be able to plan your project, understand your project and set your programme so you can actually know what you are delivering. You then want the funding to deliver that project when you are ready, so you can work with the bats, peregrine falcons and people so that you can plan your projects. The difficulty we have found is that funding comes through—it can be amazing funding directed to a project like a cathedral repair grant fund or a roof repair grant fund that can be really purposeful—but what we need is continuity and stability in the funding.

Professor Toulmin: We also need mentoring support. It is about not just money, but having that support network. The benefit of the Winter Gardens being a theatre and having Theatres Trust has been immense, because the Trust supports us outside projects and has supported us all the way through. There is also the architectural heritage fund mentoring scheme. We were talking about it outside—with the churches as well, and having a group together. Some of the smaller projects do not have that. Even a mentoring scheme for people within the scheme—I wish I could help more people—

Camilla Finlay: A critical friend.

Professor Toulmin: A critical friend within the scheme where people can help each other because you can have so much knowledge but then are not passing it on.

Q11 Mr James Frith: As they set out to do a new application, are some



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people, just by lack of experience, making unforced errors that they might have otherwise been able to step over had they had mentor support or capacity elsewhere?

Camilla Finlay: And time to plan. I work in churches and one of the grants that churches can apply for locally is a small feasibility study grant, to get just a bit of money to really think about how people might plan changes to their church, to bring in communities and change the use of that building and develop it to sustain it for future generations. That small injection of money early on in their journey makes a huge difference. Then, as they plan forward, they have an actual strategy for how they are going to deliver that project and they can look at how they apply for more funding to deliver it. If you do not get that starting point right, you are always on sand. The foundations of the project are not grounded.

Professor Toulmin: The match funding part can be a real deterrent, because when you are a small organisation running a venue, all you are thinking about is how you are going to pay for your insurance, the roof—those kinds of costs. I quantify it like this—my volunteers have sold 25 cups of tea this morning to pay for this. I know it is very strange, but it is almost like a medieval bartering system. I think about how many cups of tea and scones they have made, and how many hours volunteers have worked. My volunteers worked 17,000 hours last year, and we were awarded the King's Award for Volunteering. There is no reward mechanism or recognition for volunteer groups.

Mr James Frith: Other than the King's Award, which is hard to get.

Professor Toulmin: Yes, which only a handful get.

Q12 **Mr James Frith:** So perhaps there should be a sort of recognition of prior successes or qualifications of some sort—beyond academic but in terms of their involvement before. You could come at a new project and not be recognised as having had success elsewhere or having specialist knowledge.

Professor Toulmin: I don't know.

Dr Roberts: With a lot of funders, you can build up a track record. You start small with a small project and then you have a bigger project. Certainly, the lottery fund is good for that, in recognising that you are a—

Q13 **Mr James Frith:** Sorry, to cut in on that point. As I understand it, the lottery fund has some examples of funding exploratory projects to see whether they would or could qualify, like a pre-application.

Dr Roberts: They have stage 1 and stage 2, which is really helpful. I am thinking back to the High Street Heritage Action Zones. The way that works is that the local authority that led the project had the funding and then we ran a grant scheme for local business property owners, so they could apply to us. We supported them through that process. We had an officer—me—working with them to help them through that process. A lot of those property owners would never have applied for funding before.



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They would not have done it off their own bat. They would not have had the confidence to do it.

It is about having a resource there that could help them through that process. We could fund an architect to come in and work with them to draw up the plans, and to have those conversations. That development was important in how the HAZs worked. We need a bit more flexibility with some of that funding and more of a balance between capital and revenue. I think that is always difficult.

Q14 **Mr James Frith:** More balance—how do you mean?

Dr Roberts: We could get capital funding, but there is not always revenue funding to support that. As Vanessa said, groups have a lot of other priorities, like keeping the lights on. That means that they do not prioritise doing the roof.

Camilla Finlay: The lottery funding is transformational for those organisations that receive a grant. Both the cathedrals I have worked for in the last five years have received lottery grants, and the amazing thing they do is fund a development phase. But again, it means that you have a year or two years to develop your project, to understand fully the impact on the heritage, plan your activities and the way that the community are going to engage in that project, and then you go into the delivery phase. There is a good timeline for it, which gives everybody the ability to get there, but to get your lottery application in—even the first round—requires a lot of work and pre-planning.

The other thing is that you need to fundraise for what happens next. Another William Morris quote is “to stave off decay by daily care”, and that costs money. These days the cost of repair and maintenance and just managing these buildings is serious and that cost is ongoing. It does not stop at the end of the project, nor does the volunteer time. The activity plan, the maintenance and the management have to carry on. That project has to be sustainable for the next generation to receive.

Professor Toulmin: For a lot of the funders—this is not their fault—it is all about monitoring rather than supporting. Have you hit this KPI? Have you done this? Have you done that? That is because of the system the funders are in, so it is not a negative; it is just a critique. Why are you not supporting me? Why can you not see I am having a breakdown because the planners have not done this or have not done that? You could lose your grant and, again, it is just the system.

Q15 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** Good morning all. Vanessa, I will come to you first: what challenges do smaller charities in the heritage sector face?

Professor Toulmin: Charities face resource issues because we do not have the resources to put in the larger applications. For example, when I got the capital development fund, we were the only voluntary organisation that had ever been given it, but it cost us £125,000 to put that application in, which is two years’ turnover for us. It cost me four grants to put that application in—it is just impossible. As both my colleagues said, it is the seed funding that is really important to get



people on the path. Community ownership sounds fantastic, but the actual project to buy community ownership will probably cost that community a quarter of the money that they would spend on buying the building.

- Q16 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** You mentioned earlier the love of local people. I am assuming that—not in all cases, but in most—a lot of the smaller charities working on a particular project may well be local because of their connection to the project, which then gives them a bit of a disadvantage.

Professor Toulmin: It always has that local place—it is place-specific. It could also be about people, if you are in a seaside resort. The Winter Gardens has the support of people who have gone on holiday to Morecambe every year. I can tell you the demographics of the people who always come. We have a lot of people from West Yorkshire and Bradford. Morecambe used to be known as Bradford-by-the-sea. We have this kind of strange relationship of the seaside and resorts with inner-city demographics. Local for us can be West Yorkshire as well as Lancashire, because of the relationship. It is the love people have for that particular building or the place, which does not necessarily mean they have to have been born there.

- Q17 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** What more could public bodies do to support volunteer-led heritage sites?

Dr Roberts: As we have all said, it is about support with more development funding—that initial support—and support in accessing expertise, that sense of mentoring and providing access. We do have support from local authorities through conservation officers and archaeological advisers, but they are pressed at the moment. Capacity is very limited. My current role is very much about working with local groups to help them look after local heritage sites, but my post is externally funded. I am only funded through an external project and it will be time-limited. Local bodies could do a lot, but it is more about having consistency and longer-term planning, so that support is there for the longer term and we can plan as a sector with that support in place.

Camilla Finlay: Volunteering is interesting because it happens on two levels, and it is part of our joy and frustration. We have this wonderful sector with so many people volunteering, whether they are working and volunteering for a large organisation like the National Trust or for small charities like a church, or any of the ones that my colleagues are talking about. These are tiny disparate parts. The challenge we have is joining them all together and collaborating so that everybody has a common level of learning and level of access.

Effectively, if you have done this before, you know what you are doing and you can put in the application as you are learning. There is a success that builds success. If you are a small charity, a small volunteer group, starting with a blank sheet of paper, you have a mountain to climb to get your project off the ground. It is hard and it is tiring, so how do you sustain them? It is through collaboration support and critical friends at the right time.



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Professor Toulmin: I can go two ways with this because I chair a very successful volunteer charity, but I am also an academic. Sometimes I say to the volunteer groups, "This building is not going to be done. It hasn't got the potential, the economic basis or the reality." Or sometimes I will say to people, "It is better off being run by Wetherspoons, because you have four community groups in this area; why do you want another one? Just get yourself a better pub," and people do not like to hear that. Sometimes romance can take away from private and public investment. You have to look at each case. It is always, "Well, let's turn it into a community asset," or "Let's turn it into a community group"—but why? Does the community need it? Nobody asks that question. They think about the building.

Camilla Finlay: I think that is why it is so important to look at the beginning—the pinch point at the beginning of projects. You need to have that conversation and discern that with confidence at the beginning of a journey. It is incredibly frustrating to find yourself two years into a project, battling against getting planning, and you haven't got the volunteers and the business plan to sustain it. That is why you have to look at these hard questions early and think about whether this is the right thing. Have we got a sustainable vision that we can pass on, or is this about just managing the fabric?

Dr Roberts: Local authorities have a really important role to play. Again, the capacity is lacking at the moment, but with additional capacity, being able to tie into the wider development plans, the wider plans for that area, being able to support those groups and tie them into the wider redevelopment proposals is key. It does not always happen because of capacity, but it could make a real difference.

- Q18 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** The capacity point is a good one. You might have out-of-date local plans. You need people to point you towards what you need and what is right for the community. If you have out-of-date local plans, communities are disadvantaged straight away.

Professor Toulmin: Sometimes the conservation areas were put in maybe 15, 20 years earlier and they need to be updated to reflect what is happening. Local authorities are really important. Lancaster council has been fantastic. We had a tricky start because of the back history of the building, which is problematic. When I took over the Winter Gardens, I made it go through a governance review. I put it under governance because of the way it had been run. Theatres Trust helped me with that. Sometimes you have to look at these charities and ask if they are the best ones to do it. You have to judge them in the same way. You should not say, "It is because this is a local group who love it." It is very easy to defend the barricades, but it is difficult to then make it into a sustainable place to live.

- Q19 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** Which goes to your point. You have mentioned mentoring, support and critical friends a couple of times, and I totally understand. Vanessa, what practical support is available to smaller charities working on historic buildings?



Professor Toulmin: I am lucky because mine is a theatre. For me, Theatres Trust has been immense, and so has the architectural heritage fund. They have been with me every step of the way. They continue to support us regardless. I can ring them up.

Other funders may be very good, but only for the project. They will support you during the project. Historic England will support the project, and Pilgrim, too. They are all great, but I am thinking about a sustained critical friend and that support. I think in the model I suggested there should be different tiers of support networks for different charities at different stages of heritage groups. It is a bit like having micro-businesses, SMEs and large organisations, in economic terms. You should look at this in the same way.

Heritage Pulse will ask you to answer questions, but the first question is, "How many staff do you have—12 and over?" and you are thinking, "I don't have any, so is this survey relevant for me?" For most, it is not relevant—I send it to people. So it is about understanding the sector, understanding what groups and understanding that one case does not fit all—

Q20 **Chair:** Can I interrupt, Vanessa? It strikes me that you talked about the number of hours volunteers provide for your organisation. Your organisation is volunteer-led. Is there any data on how many heritage organisations are volunteer-led?

Professor Toulmin: No, there isn't. I actually question this, and I have talked to people about it. I mention it to my colleagues: do we have a database of how many heritage organisations there are in this country or how many assets? How many of our 6,000 to 8,000 grade II* listed buildings are run by local voluntary groups? We do not have it.

Q21 **Chair:** Who would collect that data?

Professor Toulmin: Probably most people in this room could come together to collect it, but it is difficult because nobody knows. Historic England does not know, nor do Theatres Trust or Architectural Heritage.

Camilla Finlay: There is huge investment in the amount of volunteering time. It is a huge commitment from so many people into heritage—that they are giving their time. People are passionate and they do get burnt out and tired, but they keep coming back.

Professor Toulmin: There was work done on volunteer groups last year by the taskforce, but not on the ones who own heritage assets. That is the vital thing. Who owns our heritage assets? I would say that probably 75% are owned by voluntary small local organisations.

Dr Roberts: I think there is a percentage owned by local authorities as well.

Camilla Finlay: All parish churches are run by volunteers and church wardens. All PCCs are volunteers. These are big numbers. These are huge numbers of people giving their time and energies to sustain heritage.



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Dr Roberts: Industrial heritage is the same as well, at most industrial heritage sites.

- Q22 **Mr James Frith:** To Vanessa's point about saying no or that this will not work at the outset, are too many people bidding for things that should just not be considered?

Professor Toulmin: Yes.

- Q23 **Mr James Frith:** Camilla, I am thinking about the churches that you are involved with. I have visited churches that are asking for support and repairs for roofs to give them capacity or sustainability. Do you think some of the churches in line and bidding for funding should really not be considered?

Camilla Finlay: Churches are really interesting.

Mr James Frith: Because of the sustainability point.

Camilla Finlay: Yes.

- Q24 **Mr James Frith:** In politics, it is quite welcome to hear somebody being so certain of the need to say no at times. I have found myself in meetings with churches thinking that in the event there was a quarter of a million pounds available to this area of the town, it would be roads not roofs that the constituents would want improving—so the public roads versus the church roof, for example. Are churches, in some cases, just not being ruthless enough in their decision making about getting in line to ask for limited funding?

Camilla Finlay: You have to realise that there are 15,000 listed places of worship, of which thousands are on the heritage at risk register, and 45% of grade I listed buildings are churches. So they are a big number of our heritage assets. When we talk about community, a church building is often a focal point or a landmark in a community. It is also often the biggest roofed space, so it has huge potential to be used and sustained and often it has been there for 600 years. The lead roof on it may be Victorian, it has lasted 150 years and if you were to recover it, that building would last another 150 years. Our greenest architecture is definitely the building that exists. Bells and whistles aside, an existing building—if we are able to sustain it and manage it, give it new purpose and support its community use—is a fantastic asset.

Churches do this really well—the umbrella thing is the point that is quite interesting and it is something that Vanessa is experiencing. It is through coming together as groups that you can focus your attention and understand the state of your estate and what you need to do. Churches do that really well. They understand their buildings because every five years they have a quinquennial inspection, so they know how good or bad their buildings are and they always balance.

When you start a church project—something that I think planners might be interested in taking on—you are asked to do two things. You are asked to consider your statement of need and your statement of significance. The viability of the whole project is about the balance between need



against impact. It is all about sustainability and I think that is really positive. A lot of what is hard for small charities and individual trusts looking after individual heritage assets is not having that support and collaborative infrastructure around them.

Q25 Mr Bayo Alaba: My next question is for Tegwen. We have received written evidence that praised high streets in terms of heritage action zone schemes. What made that model of funding so effective?

Dr Roberts: A number of aspects made it really effective. The first was the fact that it was a four-year programme and it had a portfolio. You applied for an area and within that area, you prioritised projects. We had high priority down to medium to low priority, but we had the flexibility within the four years to fund a range of those projects. If one did not come through, we knew we could then look at other projects within that area. It was a targeted, area-based, place-based scheme. The very strong connection between the capital works to the buildings and the creative community engagement that happened alongside that was key.

In Barnsley, we had a cultural programme that was run by the Civic theatre but also within our main scheme, we used our engagement budget to engage creative partners. Having run a heritage action zone scheme previously, and also a great place scheme, we knew that by bringing in local creative partners, we could reach communities more effectively and in a way that more people could engage with us. For our HAZ—well, for all the High Street HAZs—we launched in lockdown. The first year was really tricky, but we could do that engagement and build that trust with the communities. That use of creative programming, as well as the four-year timescales, meant we could build that trust.

Some of the building owners we were working with had not accessed grant funding before. A lot of the ones in Barnsley were small owner-occupiers. They had a small business in their building and the idea of spending £100,000 or £200,000 on a building was just out of the realms of possibility for them, but we could offer them a grant of 85% in Barnsley. They put in 15%, and we walked them through the process. Even then, with that capacity, we had to spend the first year or two building the trust that we would support them, that funding was there and it was not going away.

Through building that engagement and real sense of place, we had two businesses that bought buildings on the high street. They invested and bought buildings and established themselves on the high street, at a point when high streets are struggling. The confidence came from having a good long timescale, but also the connected community engagement and creativity—really creative thinking.

I only have one, but I brought this document to show you at the end—we produced that at the end of the HAZ. It shows all the things we did alongside it. We had 600,000 people engaged in events over four years. We had a digital reach of 3.5 million, but we also brought eight major historic buildings back into use—over 4,000 square metres of floor space—back into commercial use. There are some really hard-hitting



figures there, but we also changed how people see Eldon Street. Eldon Street now has its own sense of place. It is a strategic and important part of the regeneration of Barnsley town centre. I think it shows how targeted investment from public bodies can change a place and have a positive impact, but it is part of a wider, long-term strategy.

Q26 Mr Bayo Alaba: Thank you. Staying with the Eldon Street scheme, can you elaborate a little bit on the support from Historic England?

Dr Roberts: Yes; we worked really closely with the regional team. They provided help with specialist expertise. I think, for everybody, the high street HAZs were a bit of a voyage of discovery. They were a new thing—there were 67 of them across the country. That is an awful lot of heritage projects all happening in one go, so there were challenges around that. Also, we launched the week after the national lockdown was announced and that was a challenging time for everybody. We worked very closely with our regional team to work through some of those challenges. They were able to help us build a bit more flexibility into the scheme.

We are really very lucky to have the Parkway cinema, an independent cinema, on our high street in Barnsley. They were tenants, and the building had not been involved in the HAZ because it was a 1950s building, but partway through the scheme, the owner said he was going to sell it. They came to us and said, “Can you help?” We went to Historic England and worked with the regional team to extend the HAZ area, so they were in the scheme.

We also looked at stuff that you would not normally do in a conservation area. We put back the historic lighting, the 1950s lights on the front of the buildings. That is the kind of thing we would not normally do through a conservation scheme, but it has changed the whole street. Also, through having that shared relationship, they have invested in being on the high street, and their presence on the high street makes a huge difference to Barnsley town centre. Again, the regional team was great at supporting us and helping us to work through some of those challenges.

Q27 Mr Bayo Alaba: You mentioned that eight buildings were brought back into use. In terms of ownership, were they local investor stakeholders?

Dr Roberts: Yes, we were lucky in that they were all mainly owner-occupied. One was a landlord-tenant—so a landlord owned the building and had tenants on the ground floor, but the upper floors were all derelict. One of those buildings was sold mid-HAZ. It was a bike shop and JE James came in and invested in the building. At the time, the building was derelict. It was a three-storey former YMCA building, a huge building. With the confidence of the HAZ being there and the support from the HAZ, JE James has created a fantastic three-storey bike shop in the middle of Barnsley.

Q28 Mr Bayo Alaba: Since Historic England’s funding finished in 2024, do you feel the benefits have been retained?

Dr Roberts: Yes, I do. My post has gone, so I now have a different job, but in Barnsley, the HAZ was built into the wider development plans for



the town centre. Eldon Street is seen as the gateway to Barnsley. The council invested in the Glass Works development, a big new shopping centre. The HAZ formed the bridge between those two things and that has integrated the new development with the historic centre of Barnsley. It is still very much seen as a strategic, important place in the town centre.

Camilla Finlay: One frustration in the sector, again with the sort of boom and bust of grants coming forward and back, is that Tegwen's role does not carry on to another town and another place that would benefit from this expertise and knowledge. I walked through Banbury to the station today, and our town centre is a historic town centre—it would look fantastic, and we would love the civic pride and the joy to come back to that place. It needs that knowledge and commitment to do that, and that would be really important to a place.

Dr Roberts: There is another thing about the impact being maintained. The relationships that have been built have been really important—the relationships with the business and the town centre. Those businesses on Eldon Street are now real advocates for Barnsley town centre and its regeneration. They are really proud of Barnsley. They talk about Barnsley in other forums. That has made a huge impact, echoing that confidence in place and investment. That has come through the HAZ and it ripples out beyond those projects.

Q29 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** I see. And if they are not owner-operators, the relationship with their landlord would mean that you have a significant buy-in to the sort of civic pride.

Dr Roberts: Yes, 100%. Some of that civic pride came through. We did a lot of work with the archives to uncover the stories of Eldon Street. It was very much about people and stories. Particularly in that first year, when we could not do any capital works, we did so much work on the engagement, and that gave people the confidence that something was happening. We could then go out and share the stories and place digitally. Also, the businesses have taken those stories, and they have become part of what they tell about their buildings and their place now.

We have hairdressers whose building was owned by a female business, and it was the first department store in Barnsley to be aimed at women. They are a women-run business and they have printed out the history and given it to customers coming in for a haircut, so they can read about the history of the building. They are really proud of that. The fact that that pride has rippled through the capital works. It just shows how you can really embed that into a place, and how it can change how people see, value and celebrate that place.

Q30 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** Vanessa, do you want to have a last word?

Professor Toulmin: The importance of the HAZ project and the CDF is that they are capital and revenue. When you have revenue, you have the ability to do storying, and cover your bills or cover your projects or take risks.



In terms of my revenue, there is a young creative project, where I work with 25 young people from Lancaster & Morecambe college who are educationally disadvantaged. They work with me in the building on every aspect. I get funding for that; that is a revenue project. I do not have to pay for it. They did an e-games event. I did not know what e-games was, but they absolutely loved it, and they sent me a card just before I got here, wishing me luck, and said, "Thank you for being so mean. We learnt a lot" and I am thinking, "Oh dear." I could not justify that economically, but they said to me, "In two years' time, you will be the gaming capital of the north-west". They had that vision and I trusted them, but the revenue gave me that. Like with Barnsley, revenue gives you the potential to fail. Capital does not give you that potential. If you fail, the building falls down.

Dr Roberts: It is about working with our creative partners. We have amazing, creative people who know how to work with the communities, how to talk to people and how to translate what we are saying—the stories and our passion for our buildings—into things that people can engage with and understand in different ways. That is where the HAZ was innovative in that sense.

Q31 **Dr Rupa Huq:** This is fascinating stuff, from an all-girl panel, and you have some interesting back stories as well. I had many happy hours in Blackpool at the NUS conference, and we have a hard hat picture of you, Dr Roberts—that is a Beatles song, isn't it? Anyway, it is really good to have you all here. I am going to ask first about the planning system and how it impacts restoration. How do delays to planning applications affect your projects? Sometimes, there is the statutory one, and then what happens in real life.

Professor Toulmin: I am living that example at the moment. Planning delays have caused a three-months delay to my project, which has cost me £56,000, because I still have to pay all the people who are working on the project during the three months. When you have a project fund from DCMS or from the Treasury, you have a deadline, and you employ people to work to those deadlines, but then that deadline is increased by three months. You have to employ your architect and your project team to run the project. A planning delay, which could be over something like the colour of the carpet or the colour of the paint, can cost that amount of money. You still have to run the project. You cannot say to that team, "Right, we are not going to do any work for three months," and take them off, because they have a contract and you have to keep them on. I would say that that is one of the biggest risks.

Q32 **Dr Rupa Huq:** What reason have you been given for the delay?

Professor Toulmin: In the planning system, it can be anything. Sometimes you are told to put everything in at once—all the plans—and then you get all of them discharged at once, but then the discharge can be about anything from the colour of the bricks to the colour of the carpet, to the drainage. There can be different reasons.



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Camilla Finlay: You are talking about the conditions on your planning application.

Professor Toulmin: Yes, the conditions on the planning application. So you think, "Great, I have planning," but then the conditions take five months to discharge.

Camilla Finlay: The planning system is very complicated, and at the moment, it is under-resourced and there are not enough conservation officers. There are not enough experienced and knowledgeable planning officers able to collect the complex issues around heritage and make a decision, so you end up not being able to make the hard decisions confidently. People ask for more reports. People cannot feel confident about delivering changes that we have defined are needed, so it just keeps going on and on. For example, at Guildford cathedral, where they are looking to do an ambitious change project to sustain the cathedral, at the end of the day, they cannot make the hard decision to approve that scheme.

When it comes to heritage, I understand it is more complicated, and, therefore, we need to think about a lot of more aspects, but equally, you need the knowledge, experience and confidence in the planning and conservation teams to be able to make those decisions. So we do need a level of expertise. They really are under-resourced, particularly in conversation. There are so few people there.

Dr Rupa Huq: Boris got rid of the conservation officers.

Professor Toulmin: Sometimes people become very obsessed about originality. Any historic building comes from different ages. You don't have any building that looks as it did the day it was built in 1450 or 1490—even your house—and sometimes listing it pickles it in aspic, and you think, "Why are they listing 1970s purple fluorescent paint?" It is because the active listing lists it on there, and the planning officer will go, "Well you haven't checked the listing." Well, it is not the original colour, but this is what was listed.

Dr Roberts: I think that comes back to Camilla's point about having the expertise among the conservation officers. Also, archaeological adviser numbers have been cut massively over the last 10 to 20 years.

Vanessa Toulmin: They don't take risks. They are worried about the wood, aren't they?

Camilla Finlay: In the planning process, a bit like when we talked earlier about how the real investment needs to be at the beginning of projects, the same is true in planning applications and listed building consents. If you can get a really good journey and collaboration in the pre-application consultation process, when the planning application and listed building application comes forward, it is not unexpected. Everybody is already with you. You are on the journey already. Everybody has a vested interest in approving that and moving forward. That consultation process, with planning and conservation officers, is a really vital part of having an



effective planning process. Again, that requires more time, more people and more expertise to be able to ensure that it is a valuable process.

Professor Toulmin: There is quite a lot of ambiguity, which one local officer can interpret one way and another local officer can interpret another.

Camilla Finlay: That is why you need the confidence and expertise. It is hard with historic buildings—every one is unique, every one is different. You have to look at them case by case. I look after hundreds of parish churches, but they are not the same. Every one requires a specific look and has a specific story, a specific community. You can't just apply one thing to the next. You have to take each one as an exam question, and that is where it is challenging for the planners and conservation officers, because they don't have the time to discern with confidence and be able to make those hard decisions—because, actually, we have to make hard decisions. We have to deliver change when it comes to our heritage, because we want to sustain it for future generations. We can't just put it in aspic.

We have to deliver change—whether that is putting a lift into a building, replacing the roof or putting solar panels on the building—when it comes to heritage, but we can only do that with confidence and expertise so that we don't have a negative impact on the wider setting or our legacy that we will pass on to the next generation.

Q33 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Camilla, over the course of your career, how have you seen the planning system change, in terms of efficiencies within it? It sounds like things are getting slacker.

Camilla Finlay: I just feel that there are fewer and fewer people there with less and less time to be able to support the hard decisions. Making decisions about our heritage—these buildings that have been here for 700 years—is difficult, but they will be there for another 700 years if we look after them and pass them on. We need more people and more expertise. Historic England is brilliant in providing support and advice, but it tends to only engage—or you are only able to get real time with them—when you are looking at grade I or grade II* listed buildings. When you are looking at a grade II listed building, there are lots of them and their time is potentially not available for that.

One of the things in the planning documents—in section 7, the heritage bit—says that what you put in this application should be proportionate to the significance of the heritage. That is really important, because when you get to a grade II listed building, you should be able to make a valued judgment and put in an application that should, with the support of the planner and the conservation officer, be able to move forward if the scheme is done on sound foundations. You need confidence for everybody to do that, and everybody has to be on the same page and on that journey.

Professor Toulmin: There is a difference between planning and conservation officers. Conservation officers sometimes work in planning,



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or often do, but then you have a heritage officer. In Lancaster council, who I work primarily with, its conservation team are really fantastic. But I could then go to Sheffield, which has only one conservation officer and it is seven times the size.

So it depends on which areas to prioritise. Sometimes, certain areas will prioritise heritage over culture or culture over heritage, so they invest in those things, but really, they are together. In terms of the planning system, I agree with lots of things my colleagues say, but I also think conservation officers and the role of Historic England is vital in how they protect those buildings.

Chair: We are tipping slightly into the next batch of questions, Damian, so I don't know if you want to pick up on that.

Q34 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Okay, we will steer away from—hang on, have you got churches? The churches discussion was interesting.

Camilla Finlay: It is interesting, but if you are still on planning, I will make one other point on planning. The other thing, in terms of protecting our heritage and looking after our heritage, which is a role that planners have in approving wider development, can be the setting of an historic building.

Dr Rupa Huq: You want to do a plan of the whole area.

Camilla Finlay: Yes. What can happen is that people don't understand the impact of a development on the setting of a building. I see in my role as a trustee at Historic Royal Palaces that the team there does an amazing job of looking after the estate. They are so excellent at doing that, in terms of what is within their red line, but it is about what is happening outside of their red line. The greatest risk to our world heritage status is development outside in London that impacts on the view and setting of the Tower, and the same thing is happening at Hampton Court with the development on the Jolly Boatman site. That is a huge development right in the context of Hampton Court, and it is a permanent change to the setting of that heritage.

Q35 **Dr Rupa Huq:** What improvements could be made to the planning system to sort things out for you? In recent weeks, someone said to me, "There is too much pre-app". They did their pre-app and then there is another one and there is a cost every time.

Camilla Finlay: They are really expensive.

Professor Toulmin: They are very expensive.

Q36 **Dr Rupa Huq:** The other thing, just on the churches issue, is that they are also warm spaces, with playgroups and food banks. In austerity, they have filled so many gaps.

Camilla Finlay: They have huge potential.

Dr Rupa Huq: I have been lobbied by the people who don't want VAT on—I think that may be in the next session as well.



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Camilla Finlay: That is really complicated. If you want to do one thing to help all heritage it would be potentially to look at VAT, because it used to be that in 2012, VAT was exempt on listed buildings. Churches have benefited from having a grant scheme that has ensured that they did not pay VAT, or they were able to claim back the VAT they paid. That has now been capped at £25,000, which is really catastrophic for anybody trying to do a major project. For anybody who wants to deliver a significant change project in a church, it will cost £1 million and the VAT on that is significant. You have just whacked on a massive great bill, so all those projects that have been planned for the last five years suddenly have to raise another enormous mountain of money, and that goal has just drifted on down the path.

Dr Roberts: There is another issue on cash flow as well, because even when you can reclaim some VAT, you have to wait to do it. If it is significant—again, with the HAZs, we had businesses that could reclaim VAT on some of the works, but they might have to wait three months to do that. For small businesses, doing a capital scheme is £100,000 to £200,000. That is more than their turnover for the year. Having to wait three months to reclaim that VAT is really difficult.

Professor Toulmin: It is not just about cash flow or VAT. Something really important that I forgot to mention is that most of the funding you get from Government or from grants, you get paid in arrears. I am a charity with a turnover of less than £100,000 and I am expecting to cash flow £2.8 million of capital—"We'll discuss it when we get to that".

Q37 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Less pre-app or more pre-app—what other improvements?

Camilla Finlay: The effectiveness of the pre-app is the key. The people in the room have to have the knowledge, confidence and experience to be able to give the good advice. It is about having the right people there to give good advice again. A pre-app is not valuable if, at the end of the day, it comes back with too many questions. You are looking for a path forward and confidence to submit your planning application, so that when you put the planning and listed building consent in, it is more of a tick box, because you know where you are going. I think that is achievable if we have more conservation officers and more joined-up conversations and collaboration.

Dr Roberts: And more skills—that skills development within the sector.

Chair: On that note, I am going to move on to conservation officers.

Q38 **Damian Hinds:** Thank you. I think we have broadly covered conservation officers.

Chair: A lot of it.

Dr Rupa Huq: Oh, sorry.

Damian Hinds: No, that's all right. I want to ask about payments for listed building consents. In written evidence, we have had a variety of views on this topic. There is an argument that if you charge for listed



building consents and they are at economic full recovery level, you could, in return, expect to have more conservation officers at the higher level and fully plugged in properly to the wider local authority system. But clearly, that is a cost, and this sector does not have a lot of free cash flow. I wonder if, between you, you have a thought on that trade-off. I don't know how good everybody here is at reading non-verbals, but I am guessing Vanessa is a no.

Professor Toulmin: I am trying to be polite, because basically I think it would destroy the volunteer organisations who also have to find another level of bureaucracy and payment. Also, when took on the Winter Gardens, there was 10 years of non-listed building consent on it, because the Trust had decided to do everything without listed building consent.

Camilla Finlay: That is the risk.

Professor Toulmin: That is the risk. So that is what will happen. People will just do it, and they will not go for it. At least with listed building consent, you can get the support.

Camilla Finlay: If you have listed building consent, you can then apply for a grant because you have approval to do the work. It is an important process of safeguarding our buildings. If we make it more challenging, there is a risk to it. I note that most major projects need both planning and listed building consent, and you pay for the planning and for the pre-app. That is a lot of money. What would really help is joined-up thinking and expertise. You want to make it as easy as possible to look after our most sustainable existing buildings.

Professor Toulmin: Why are you paying both? You are paying for planning and paying for listed building consent, and you have a grade II* where you have to get listed building consent for putting a picture up. It would just be a nightmare.

Q39 **Damian Hinds:** Thank you; your views have been put very clearly. My final question is unrelated to that. Camilla, you work with Historic Royal Palaces, and you are in one right now. Do you have any advice for Parliaments, from your breadth of experience?

Camilla Finlay: It is really interesting; these buildings are so complicated. I work mostly with cathedrals, and the biggest challenge is how you maintain, manage and do major projects while you keep these buildings in use. We have worked so hard in Exeter cathedral over the last few years to keep the building in use. We have even been doing evensong under scaffolding. It has been amazing, but it is hard work.

The big decision you have to make is whether you are going to occupy these spaces while the works happen or vacate them. You do it quicker if they are empty, but you can work around it—people will. This is my biggest worry for you in taking on this challenge. We have talked a lot about front-ending projects, but when it comes to delivering these projects, it is about the skills, knowledge and commitment in training our craftspeople. I have the benefit of working with the most amazing stonemasons, lead workers, timber repairers and stained-glass experts,



but there are not many of them. They are small groups who have not got enough support, and they need more apprenticeships and training. Once we lose those skills, that knowledge is gone. This is slightly what we are seeing in conservation areas. They have lost a lot of conservation areas. To try to get that knowledge back is really hard. I really don't want us to do this in the heritage sector, so we lose our skills in caring for and working with historic buildings.

Dr Roberts: What we need for skills development to happen is certainty around projects and funding. We need an economy to scale, basically. You need enough projects happening that contractors have enough confidence in to then start their apprenticeships and invest in that skillset.

Camilla Finlay: Yes, and you know that the money will be there, because it takes five to 10 years to train a stonemason to be able to do the sort of work you need to do on this building. That is a serious commitment, but it is a job for life, in a sector with buildings that will be there forever. We need these people.

Damian Hinds: That is a subject to which we will return, I believe with our second panel.

Q40 **Chair:** Yes, we will—very much so. Before we let you flee, are there any questions that you wish we had asked you today or any points that you would like to raise with us before you leave?

Professor Toulmin: I would like to mention support for a building when it is under restoration. You talk about managing it. We have to open our building to raise money. When you are doing a capital project, it is easier to close it, but there is no possibility of getting the costs of running the building, the insurance and all the stuff that you raise. You have to keep the building open, which then delays the project. At least with some of these capital projects, if you are going to have to close for six months, there is some means of getting support, because you can't take the risk. It is about looking at how the capital projects work and understanding that revenue is not just about activity. Revenue is actually keeping you going.

Camilla Finlay: I would like to highlight the climate emergency and the impact that has on historic buildings. The way the weather is changing—the amount of rainfall that we are getting in sudden deluges—means that it is overwhelming rainwater goods on all our historic buildings. We need consistent investment to help us, just in the maintenance, management and local improvements to these buildings, so that we can hand them on to the next generation in better condition. If we don't do that now, we will have roofs leaking, rot—and these are major projects. If you can invest more in the management and maintenance of these buildings, they will pay back.

Dr Roberts: I want to underline the important role that I think local authorities play in all of this, and the importance of having consistency of



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funding and looking at the place-based approach to how public funding can make an impact on our historic places.

Chair: Brilliant. Thank you all for your time today. It has been a real pleasure to meet you all. If you think of anything else that you have forgotten after the event, please do—

Dr Roberts: I will give you that document.

Chair: Yes, absolutely, and thank you very much indeed. We will now let you escape. In the meantime, I will suspend the session while we invite our next panel forward.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Hilary McGrady, Alice Loxton and Ben Cowell OBE.

Q41 **Chair:** We will now hear about the challenges facing heritage sites across the nation and the role that Government can play in helping to resolve them. The National Trust was one of the voices behind the call for us to launch this inquiry in the first place, so I am really pleased that we are joined today by Hilary McGrady, the director general of the National Trust; Alice Loxton, a historian, author and National Trust ambassador; and Ben Cowell OBE, director general of Historic Houses, which represents independently owned historic properties across the UK. I am grateful to all of you for joining us. Alice, do you want to very quickly introduce yourself?

Alice Loxton: My name is Alice Loxton. I am a historian. I write history books, and I also do a lot to engage young people with heritage via social media channels.

Hilary McGrady: Good morning, I am director general of the National Trust. I have worked for the Trust for 20 years. I am here to speak on behalf of what we do as an organisation, but I am also very interested in the wider heritage community, of course.

Ben Cowell: I am Ben Cowell. I am director general of Historic Houses, which is, as you said, the organisation that represents privately, independently owned heritage— there are about 1,400 across the UK.

Chair: Very good, thank you.

Q42 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** Good morning to you all. My first question is to Hilary and Ben. What are the biggest causes of financial pressure on the heritage sector today?

Hilary McGrady: I think the previous panel touched on this. We are in a perfect storm, and it began before covid actually. If you go back as far as 2008, we saw a lot of local authorities struggling to figure out how they were going to deal with the financial crisis. Many of them spun out quite a lot of their smaller heritage organisations into independent charities, which in turn released them, and the ability to be able to fundraise and so on, so it was positive at the time. Fast-forward to covid and you have a lot of small, now independent organisations who, because of covid, had to close and clearly, from an operational point of view, were under stress



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for money. A lot of them benefited from the culture recovery fund, which was fantastic at the time, but inevitably a lot of them had to eat into their reserves to keep going.

You now come to a situation where various wars are driving things like the energy crisis and inflation is driving up project costs—if I speak for the Trust alone, we estimate that our project costs have gone up anything between 30% to 50% since that time. Add in things like—while we are very supportive of it in principle—additional staffing costs with national insurance and the national living wage. Again, if you take the Trust, over 60% of our staff are in the lower grades from a staffing point of view, which has added £10 million to our cost base literally overnight. While that is a good thing in one sense, it is very difficult to absorb.

Finally, you can track very clearly that the funding world out there is reducing. All the main funding bodies have seen a reduction in the funding available to small organisations. While the National Trust, on the face of it, looks as if we have lots and lots of money—actually we have a lot of liabilities—we, too, are feeling the change in the funding scenarios. It is going to be all the worse for the smaller organisations out there.

Ben Cowell: I agree with all that, but the fact I want to get across is that most heritage is owned privately. If you think about there being 350,000 listed buildings—actually, there are much more than that; there are probably about 400,000 or 500,000 listed buildings—the majority of them are in private hands. They are owned completely independently of charities or of the state. I just wanted to put that down, because that is a slight corrective. We have heard from lots of charity owners of heritage, who do a fantastic job in a difficult circumstance, but most heritage is owned privately.

The same cost pressures that Hilary just mentioned entirely apply to all those owners. I am thinking of the sheer cost of occupying, owning and running a heritage building—many of my members operate businesses; they operate commercially. They have the wage bills that Hilary mentioned. They have insurance, which has sky-rocketed in recent years. They also have the cost of regulatory inertia and the cost of processing planning applications that were talked about in the previous session. My members, particularly, have pressures from taxation, some adverse movements in the fiscal regime that just add to their costs—something like insurance premium tax, which has more than doubled since it was introduced in 2011. Little changes in the tax system all bite at the business of looking after and operating historic buildings.

Q43 Mr Bayo Alaba: Thank you. Ben, how is the way in which public funding for heritage is distributed impacting its efficacy?

Ben Cowell: The member properties of Historic Houses don't have the same sort of reliance on public funding. If you mean public funding through, for example, the lottery or the Historic England schemes that we just heard about, lots of that does not trickle through to private owners on the whole. They can apply for things if they happen to have charitable



status, which some of the bigger members of Historic Houses have—some of the smaller members have it as well.

All the same points that were raised in the last session about project funding—about bitty, time-limited projects—equally apply to our members. But we do not have the same reliance on public sector funding, because they are self-reliant; self-determination is the rule of the day. They operate commercially. Many of my members are wedding venues, for example. The change to the wedding laws in 1994 revolutionised country houses. They are sustainable because of the ability to run a commercial business through heritage premises.

There have been some positive movements of late. This year or last year, the Lottery Heritage Fund, one of the bigger public funders of heritage in this country, lifted the cap that it applies to private owners from £100,000 to £250,000, but most of my members can still only apply for a maximum of £250,000 for a project. The big capital projects are not fundable from lottery sources for my members.

Hilary McGrady: Accepting completely the point about a lot of heritage buildings being privately owned, the reality is that for publicly accessible heritage buildings, the money is in decline, as we said earlier. There is a very fundamental gap between the funding available and the conservation need. That conservation gap is very true.

I could not reinforce more the point that was made earlier about the fixation with projects—big projects, endless projects—without two things. The first is understanding the ongoing maintenance and how to build that into future planning for these projects. Also, there is the capacity of the organisations to manage the thing once it is up and running. The commercial acumen to be able to do that is not built in. I think HH and others have done a lot to try to support this over the years, but we see it time and time again where smaller organisations simply do not have the capacity to do that.

That is also linked to the fact that because a lot of these bids are so competitive and expensive, quite often your funding is going where the need is not greatest. Often the smaller organisations are working in the most deprived areas that do not have the capacity to get the money where it is needed. The bigger ones have more skill, more ability and so on.

The final point is that for all the money that is going in, there is a bulwark of everything from compliance to VAT—all sorts of things pushing against it. It is almost as if you cannot progress because inevitably there is some other layer of challenge that is coming to push you back again. That is why it feels, at the moment, that it is going backwards instead of forwards.

Q44 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** Thank you. Alice, what can heritage sites and diversification do to appeal to new audiences, and maintain audiences and income revenue streams?



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Alice Loxton: I think there is a perception—that is incorrect—that experiencing heritage is something you do on a day out. This is something you go to—you are in your bubble at home and then you go to a heritage site. I think it is important to reframe that and make people see that heritage is something that we live in every day. We are all living and experiencing heritage. Even if you live in a new development, you might get on a train in the morning, and that is part of our heritage. When you think about heritage in that sense, it is far more diverse and it involves all of us. That is an important point.

I have done a lot of work with young people, and they are often seen as the group who don't engage with heritage, which is completely untrue. The National Trust has just done reports on this, as has Historic Houses, which I would suggest you have a close look at. There has been this amazing movement—I have been part of this in recent years—that uses social media, which, although it has its terrible effects on society in some ways, has been this amazing platform for lots of young people to get involved in heritage and to tell the stories of heritage. It has become quite a useful asset to lots of heritage organisations.

We heard in the last panel how these places are strapped for time and resources and how difficult it is to run them, especially smaller museums. They often do not have time to do their publicity or to use these channels, and they perhaps don't have the know-how, but young people have been amazing. To give you a sense of the impact of some of these videos—for those who don't know, there are basically mini-documentaries about National Trust locations or churches, or whatever it might be. I did a video, which I posted last year, about the 1696 window tax. It is 45 seconds long and it has been watched for almost five years—that is its total watch time. That is longer than the first world war. It reaches so many people.

I get feedback all the time from historic locations saying things like, "We have already noticed a massive impact on visitor figures with a younger group of super engaged people coming to see us." These are historic locations in the middle of the countryside. That is something that historic organisations could use. It is such a valuable resource. Some of them have—there is the National Gallery's 200 Creators scheme; 35 under 35 at the King's Foundation, which does a lot for heritage crafts; 30 under 30 for *HistoryExtra* magazine.

It has been quite transformative for a younger generation, and mutually beneficial for these heritage sites. It is wonderful that younger people can be involved in a really useful way that is very effective. That has diversified the way that history is talked about. The wonderful thing about social media is that you don't need a commissioner, you don't need lots of money, and you don't need a qualification. You just make it. We are seeing these stories being told by people around the country—local history, things that you often would not see on the mainstream media.

Ben Cowell: Alice mentioned a report that we did a couple of weeks ago. It was about gen Z and how they engage with heritage. We asked lots of



young people—people in their 20s—what they thought about the properties that we represent at Historic Houses. The great thing was there was a huge interest in them, a love of them. They did not want it particularly mediated through digital technology. They did not want to be bombarded with QR codes when they went to visit a historic place. They wanted that sense of authenticity, that experience. It was a refuge from the pressures of the 21st century. It is part of the wellbeing that we all know heritage brings. We have a fantastic resource in this country that brings wonderful things to communities everywhere. That is a given, but we were very proud of that report.

Last week, I went to a house in Dorset called Mapperton, where the owners have diversified their business. This is not the diversification you were talking about perhaps in your question, but they have diversified their business model through digital means. A quarter of their income now comes through - I think it's seven - different channels they've operated, including Patreon. They are doing fundraising and engaging audiences not just in this country, but in other countries, in the business of raising the funds to look after a very precious historic building. There is all sorts of potential.

Hilary McGrady: I agree with all that, and I think we are making slow progress on diversifying our audiences. But there is still a painful truth that the vast majority of people who work in the heritage sector still identify as white—over 90%. We are not representative of the communities we serve. Equally, I know from our membership base that we are improving. We are up to something like 22% from diverse communities. That is still not where we need to be, so I think it is a very real challenge for us. In the longer term, it is an economic challenge for us, as well as the challenge of being a charity here to serve the whole of the nation.

There are lots of ways that I agree with what was said. We have not talked about television—if you think of “Bridgerton”. We still, something like 20 years on, have people going to Lyme Park to see the lake that Mr Darcy walked out of. It is an incredible method of engaging people in heritage and history, but we should not underestimate the challenge that is still out there for us to engage with communities who do not see us as relevant. I think that all organisations are taking that seriously.

- Q45 **Chair:** I have noticed quite a rash of different historic sites having promo videos on various social media sites, where you have guides or others talking in gen Z language, explaining how somebody has a lot of rizz and something is lit. It was highly amusing, and there seems to be a lot of those out at the moment. But I want to talk about VAT—to take this back to something with no rizz at all. Hilary, one of the most common things we hear as a Select Committee, from all the different sectors that we interact with, is people asking for VAT relief. Make your case: what is the specific reason that the heritage sector should receive special treatment for VAT?



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Hilary McGrady: I do not think this is a special pleading case. There is an economic argument to this as well as all the lovely soft stuff about pride and place and so on. By not having VAT relief, you are disincentivising the private sector and the charity sector from doing the great things to the buildings that they can do. It is a direct negative against trying to make the changes that they need, not just for access but even for things like making our properties more energy efficient and reducing the carbon footprint—for all of those things. It is a fundamental disincentive to do any of those things. The economic argument stacks up. I appreciate it is another take from the tax revenue—I get that—but it would pay back time and time again for all of those layered reasons.

I know Historic Houses is looking at a particular scheme that would narrow this, but for the life of me, I do not understand why this is not seen as an opportunity. If you take housing alone, which is one of the current Government's massive challenges, we know that about 670,000 historic buildings out there could be made into residential buildings in the middle of towns and cities, where people have an identity that they want to be maintained. That reduces your carbon footprint—it is much more efficient to refurb a historic building than it is to build a new one. The arguments that it gets in the way and it is only meant for new build are not right. You have the duality of something that restores and keeps a sense of pride in place while delivering all these other benefits.

Q46 **Chair:** You are right, and the argument we had back from DCMS is that the relief for new builds is intended to drive the housing supply. As you say, there is potential for listed buildings to help meet the housing targets too. Who is making that case to the Government?

Hilary McGrady: I think organisations like mine are making that, but personally, I think the private sector is also making it. We are working very closely with Grosvenor Estates, for example. They have huge heritage assets. From a business point of view, they know they have a premium when they develop a historic building from a retail point of view. They also know that whole areas can benefit from investment in heritage. It is not just a historic special pleading thing; that is my point. I think they are making the case, but I do not understand why it is not being heard.

Q47 **Chair:** A Historic Houses report into a rebate for the sector focuses on an exemption for private houses and major charities. Do you have any evidence that an exemption for all listed buildings would generate gross value for the Treasury?

Ben Cowell: The report is about a targeted proposal for this problem. It has been a problem for the heritage sector since 1973 when VAT came in. In the last session, we heard about the change in 2012 to one particular relief around alterations—there was an existing relief and that was taken away in 2012. That was for changes that required listed building consent and that sort of thing. There is no relief, on the face of it, for historic building repairs and maintenance. However, VAT is enormously complex. There are various different reliefs. There is a relief,



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so if your building is empty for two years, you get a reduced VAT rate, for example.

In the sector, we talk all the time about how equalising the VAT with the new builds, for example, would incentivise better care of the heritage, and I am sure that is true. The problem is that it would be too expensive and that is why we looked at a much more targeted scheme, more in line with the listed places of worship grant scheme, which exists to provide a rebate for places of worship that have spent money on capital projects, as we heard.

Our alternative was something similar for non-religious buildings, places that are open to public access—that is crucial. Three hundred of our houses open up to day visitors, and many more open up for weddings and other public visiting. Many of those places are VAT-registered, too. There is also a complexity—if you are a VAT-registered business, this is less of an issue. You pay VAT and you raise money through your sales—that is input VAT— and you can offset the two, and it is less of an issue. The issue lies with the unregistered-for-VAT properties that we have. Our estimates were that about 160 of our houses probably would open to public access for the first time. They are not registered for VAT. If such a rebate scheme existed—that would cost about £6 million, give or take an extra £1 million for the administration cost—it would generate benefits in the region of £14 million.

That was just one slice of the data that we compiled. It was not as detailed as it should be for a proper Green Book analysis of a policy change like that, but it was about proving the point that more targeted VAT relief could work and could incentivise the repair of historic buildings open to public access.

Q48 Chair: That would work on those type of buildings. What Hilary was talking about is how you can bring more listed buildings back into use to answer the Government's housing supply issue. Hilary, have you done any research to suggest how much of a difference that could make?

Hilary McGrady: We have not, but the sector and Grosvenor Estates, as I have said, have done more research on this. We are very happy to come back to you on the nuts and bolts of that. There is another area that I know we have not talked about before: general private sector ownership of historic buildings, who are currently looking at—it looks as if it is a market failure for them. You get multiple buildings around the country lying in waste and no one is able to do anything. Local authorities cannot compulsorily purchase them because they do not want to take on the liability. What it would do, apart from the money element of it, is start to release a regeneration of an area that would allow other organisations and other private owners to come on board. I am very happy to take that away and come back with some more detailed information.

Q49 Chair: It would be useful to know. That would give strength to your argument, if we knew how many potential housing units could be delivered if that was policy. Alice, how would you sell this on a podcast?



How do you make that sexy? How do you give it rizz?

Alice Loxton: Whenever you are trying to engage young people in anything, you just need to understand the channels they use. There is no point in putting an article in *The Times*; you need to be using TikTok and Instagram. The Black Country Living Museum has 1 million TikTok followers. It is educational, proper content. Social media will change—it will not exist as it does in five years' time—but it is about always being aware of using the right platforms and the right channels in the correct way for the right audience.

Chair: Excellent. It has a lot of social media followers and excellent fish and chips as well.

Q50 **Mr James Frith:** Hilary and Ben, what challenges do heritage buildings face when being evaluated for energy performance certificates?

Ben Cowell: This is a huge issue and it is currently under review. Consultations are happening on energy performance certificates and the overall minimum energy efficiency standards system. I know the Government are looking at this, and we have put into those consultations a very clear message, which is that the system is not currently working. It does not work for custodians of historic buildings.

The algorithms that are used in the EPC system take a generic concept of a building and expect a historic fabric to operate in the same way, and it does not. There are different ways that you treat or live in historic buildings. My members know that, so it is all about the curtains, it is all about the double-jumper—it is all about other things. The EPC metrics do not take that into account in the same way.

There is a disconnect between heritage buildings and the EPC system. This potentially has some difficult consequences if some of the proposals come to pass, particularly around, for example, properties that are in short-term lets that might come into the system for the first time. That is one of the proposals currently being consulted on. It would be disastrous because about half of the holiday cottage-type places that are currently there are buildings that are more than 100 years old and do not have an EPC C rating—they will not have one. For many of them, it would be far too expensive to bring them up to a C level.

Q51 **Mr James Frith:** Do you expect special dispensation now on the outputs that other buildings have to abide by? Would you expect a different grading or some different qualification? We do not tolerate that with our vehicle output, do we, so why should we on buildings?

Ben Cowell: That is very true and we definitely need to decarbonise the stock of historic buildings. We agree with that totally. It is just about a fair way of doing it that respects the differences that there are with historic buildings. There is an exemption system at the moment. You have to apply for an exemption if you are the custodian or the owner of a property. You have to demonstrate that you have spent a certain amount of money, and that you have tried your best to get it up to energy efficiency standards.



I believe the proposals are to lift the cap on what that expenditure is. There is going to be a significant order of magnitude difference in the amount you have to spend. We are talking tens of thousands of pounds. I have a member who had a series of cottages, who tried very hard to get one of those cottages up to the standards, as currently measured. They spent £40,000 on a cottage and got to EPC F. Technically, that will not be lettable if the rules come to pass.

We definitely think the heritage exemption is not only—it is there at the moment, it is justified, and it should be accepted that these buildings operate in a different way.

Hilary McGrady: I agree with all of that. I do think we need a retrofit strategy. These are exceptional buildings that need more thought. Everybody wants to look after them, but the current system will not be fit for purpose and one size fits all blatantly will not work. You could end up with some very perverse outcomes if this goes through, because there will be a lot of landlords who simply have to take their houses off the market, further exacerbating the lack of rental properties available.

Certainly for the National Trust, I just make the point that if this goes through and we are required—of course, we completely support the need to get to net zero, and all of that, and we want to be energy efficient, but the reality is that if this was to go through, it would add about £50 million to the cost of us maintaining just our let estate to get to that level. For us, we cannot just take those houses off the market. We hold them inalienable forever, so we cannot just leave them. You would end up with houses in communities being left to go to ruin, which is not good for anyone.

Our solution is not to try to sit here and say, “Well, this needs to happen.” I think there genuinely needs to be a retrofit strategy that enables the whole of the sector to do this in the interests of everyone, from an economic point of view and also just for the care of the buildings.

Q52 Mr James Frith: Alice, you gave a very powerful take on how we live among heritage, and that is not just to visit. I agree with that wholeheartedly. How do you think the sector develops a better environmental narrative—you talked about narratives in a couple of instances—to help engagement and investment?

Alice Loxton: I do not think visitor numbers, say for young people or general visitors—I do not think the environmental energy levels play into where people visit, so a National Trust House or not. I would not say that that is a major market, but maybe it is if you are living in a historic house yourself. I am sure that lots of people looking to buy houses—especially young people, and I know many examples of this—are put off by the energy costs involved with historic houses. Maybe education is something to think about there. There is definitely a lack of understanding when it comes to young people and knowing how to live in a historic house. Of course, a historic house does not have to be a massive stately home, as we often think about it. It can be something that is very small and very affordable.



Q53 Mr James Frith: You will know that young people care a lot about the environment, don't they? Is there a risk that that becomes an obstacle for younger people to enjoy the heritage, because they care more about the environment and they do not see a consistency with the sector and their care for environment?

Alice Loxton: Possibly. It has never been something that has been raised among my generation. I would not have thought that until you brought it up now, but I could be wrong.

Q54 Mr James Frith: We heard in the previous panel the impact of the changing climate—of flooding and the impact on roofs as a result of the deluge rainfall. To your point, we should not see it as a separate entity, should we? It is among us and therefore should be considered in the round with everything else.

Alice Loxton: Sure, but I do not think that that is a reason that people put off supporting heritage or visiting heritage sites. People see heritage sites as you perhaps supporting age-old structures and supporting nature. It is all wrapped up in the same thing. There are a lot of arguments for heritage and supporting the environment. When you look at, say, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, which focuses on traditional heritage crafts, they are using materials that are natural, local and much more environmentally friendly. That is a major push to what they are doing. They will use mortars that are much more sustainable. In terms of thinking about the overlap of heritage and environmentalism, looking at the original techniques is a very good way to go.

Q55 Mr James Frith: To all the panel, do you think that the sector is telling a strong enough story about its environmental take-up and environmental creds?

Hilary McGrady: I certainly think that the Trust is working really hard on this. We have our own net zero target by 2030. Our let estate is one of the biggest challenges in the middle of that; our farmed estate is one and let estate is the other. It is a very real challenge for us and will continue to be. The area we have not touched on—perhaps we will come on to it—is skills and developing young people's skills to understand how to do this.

Chair: Don't worry, you are not going—

Hilary McGrady: The retrofitting thing will be a big deal, but that definitely plays into the fact that we are just not getting enough young people coming through with the skills, not just from a conservation point of view but in terms of understanding how climate change is impacting on the sector. I think that there is an ever-increasing level of awareness among young people and others that this is an important part to work on.

Ben Cowell: Our philosophy very much is that the best protection for a building in the long term is for it to be occupied, used, utilised, lived in and loved. That is the best protection for any building, and that is where



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we spend a lot of time thinking about how our members can be helped in living in their buildings.

This brings us back to the planning system and to things like VAT. There is a VAT exemption at the moment on energy efficiency installations in properties. The hoops you have to go through to try to get energy efficiency measures into a listed building are too much. We are talking about reversible changes, secondary glazing. It is a big grey area. Ask Historic England when it comes in front of you, "Do you need listed building consent for secondary glazing?" It would probably say not, but the point is that local authority could insist on it if they wish to. Air source heat pumps is another one. I have heard of listed building owners being turned down for an air source heat pump and then only getting it on the second application provided they put it in a little wooden box. I am talking about the pump unit outside.

I think we should get real. You have to live in these buildings. We have to live in them. Humans have to live in them. For reversible changes like that, we should be much more allowing of little changes in the grade II buildings, perhaps. Not the grade Is and II*s—the most important, the cathedrals and so on—but for everyday life, let's just get real and have a bit more flexibility in the planning system.

There are methods there. The listed building consent order route is one, and Historic England flagged that in their evidence, but why has there been no national listed building consent order since they were introduced in 2013? There has been zero—none whatsoever. What is holding people back? Let's allow a little bit more flexibility in the system.

Q56 Mr James Frith: Alice, once a heritage asset has been severely damaged, what value can it still provide?

Alice Loxton: That is about ruins, I suppose. Ruins is an important point because it demonstrates that heritage of all kinds and at all stages is an important part of our wider heritage. That points to the fact that it is not just these big country houses or famous landmarks that are part of our heritage, but it goes to even the smallest detail. A ruined Roman wall in the grounds of St Albans, in the gardens of St Albans, or a particular column outside York Minster, are ruins in their own right, or even the railings that were removed during the second world war, and ARP structures have been put there instead. These are all ruins in their own right. What is interesting about ruins is that they are often in public spaces, so people use them more and they interact with them more. There is not a fee. Bridgnorth castle is a ruin of sorts. It is in this beautiful public space, a garden, and people interact with that heritage a lot more than they do with probably a paid site.

Our history is full of ruins. All these great abbeys have been in ruins for 500 years and have inspired cultural brilliance for many years—Whitby abbey, of course. That is something to be welcomed and cherished, but it is an obvious point that we shouldn't not welcome these ruins to come into our hands and do everything we can to stop any damage to buildings.



Q57 Mr James Frith: Hilary, I will ask you the same question, but just on a specific National Trust issue. Why did the National Trust decide that restoring Clandon Park would be “extremely challenging”?

Hilary McGrady: First, just to build on what Alice said, none of us set out to allow any of our buildings to become a ruin. What happened at Clandon was devastating and we deeply regret it.

Having said that, every site is different, and heritage—whether it is a ruin or a fully lived-in, breathing building—has its own story to tell. In the case of Clandon, through a huge amount of thoughtful consultation—years at this point—and talking to all sorts of different people, from the local community through to the experts, we came to the decision that the right thing for Clandon, specific to Clandon, is that we will restore, and in fact will be restoring fully, the exterior of the building. We will put a roof back on it so it makes it fully accessible and usable, and the interior will be left as this amazing inspirational space that will reveal how these places were built and why. The stories do not go anywhere because the story of Clandon will still be told.

The important thing is that every place is different and you cannot apply one approach to all places. In this case, we are clear that this building will continue to go on into the future and inspire many, many generations. Fundamentally, the public benefit that it will deliver, I believe, will be in the round. It will be different but it will be potentially better than what we have had before. There will be more opportunity for more people to access it in different ways. But, as I say, every site is different and we would take very careful consideration depending on the circumstances.

Q58 Mr James Frith: Ben, let me just remind you of the question. After a heritage asset has been severely damaged, what value can it still provide?

Ben Cowell: The fact is—I agree with all of that—that places have a life after they have ceased to be the original thing that they were. That is undoubtedly the case and we are looking forward with interest to see what happens at Clandon.

Our view is that our 1,400 owners at Historic Houses are the custodians of their properties. They are the ones who make the decisions about a place. It is always tragic when a place is devastated by fire. One of the things we do is provide advice and guidance on how not to let that thing happen, but it does happen. It has happened all through history and we have places that are now operating as ruins very successfully. Lowther castle is a ruin but gets many thousands of visitors every year.

Equally, we have places that have suffered devastating fires in the past and have rejuvenated themselves. Allington castle is one, and Packington House is another. I was at Castle Howard recently. I do not know if you know that they have just reopened a suite of rooms that were burnt in 1940. They have not been repaired since, but they have just put in a



fantastic new decorative scheme and have recreated a baroque suite of rooms at Castle Howard.

This has also happened in history—that places are reinvented and they come back to life, and all of this happens—so it is the diversity of that story. Every place is different and places should be self-determining as to what happens in them.

Q59 Dr Rupa Huq: Hi, everyone. It is interesting on the ruins—isn't there an American sociological theory of broken windows? So what is the impact on a community when heritage sites are left in disuse?

Ben Cowell: We calculate that £2 billion-worth of repairs need to be carried out at Historic Houses places. The fact is that for our members, the houses are simultaneously private places—that is, privately owned—but they also have public aspects. That is the problem at the heart of heritage. That is the market failure. These are largely privately-owned places but they bring public benefit and that is why we say there is market failure in the heritage system.

The broken window point is absolutely right. If a place is well looked after, people feel good about it. There is a definite wellbeing value to heritage. Historic England have calculated it at £29 billion, and you can do that. The DCMS leads the field on this. It has a thing called the culture and heritage capital project, which is all about putting a price on stuff that you cannot otherwise measure in monetary value terms.

It has exciting research that is doing exactly that. We know that in a run-down neighbourhood, where there are broken windows and plants coming out of the roof and all the rest of it, there is a general depression in the mood. It is the opposite when it comes to neighbourhoods that are well looked after and nicely planned conservation areas, where things are kept looking as they as they probably should. That is as much as I can give you on that.

Hilary McGrady: There is endless research on this. DCMS has done it, Historic England has done it, and we have done it. We have a new report out—you referred to it as well, Alice—that absolutely reinforces the importance of heritage. Interestingly, it is very fixed on buildings—actually on physical heritage. Stories really matter, but physical manifestations of people's history, what mattered to them then and what matters to them now, are incredibly important. Seventy-nine per cent of people feel that their local heritage and history made their local area a good place to live; 78% of people feel better because their area is cared for. That translates into, "If you are caring for the buildings, you are caring for me".

There is a statistic on this, which, to be fair, I had to go back to my team several times to say, "Is that true?" Sixty-eight per cent of people said that they would forgo up to £100,000 only to ensure that historic buildings in their area were looked after. I said, "That can't be true," but we went back to it again. There is a huge sense of affection, attachment



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and physical reflection—"How you are treating this place is telling me how you are treating me." That really does matter.

For community assets though—we or the Committee referred to this earlier—individual buildings are one thing, but how you take a place-based approach to treating your buildings in the round and treating an area is the thing that all of us as organisations need to think more about. Coventry is a good example as a case study of where they have thought about heritage in the round and its impact on that place. How we work in partnership to make that place-based approach, as opposed to individual places, makes the difference to how a community feels about itself.

- Q60 **Dr Rupa Huq:** I am just thinking of an example. There is a 1928 stucco, white, chunky block of flats—a low-rise in a new bit of my seat—that was in the Ideal Home exhibition of 1928, apparently. It was women's pioneer housing, but the allocations policies changed, and it has just become a bit of a dumping ground. There are smashed windows and all sorts, and it has gone to rack and ruin, but it looked quite Agatha Christie. Fundamentally the structure was nice and it could be listed, but it has gone down a different route. Anyway, Alice—community and buildings.

Alice Loxton: An interesting thing to think about with heritage is if you imagine that every building built before the last 50 years—say, before 1975—just did not exist. We can take this stuff for granted, but imagine if that did not exist. We would not have all of central London. Most towns, town centres and villages would not exist. All our churches would not exist. When you look at it like that, you suddenly realise—I am thinking even of all those small things, such as street furniture, bollards and telephone boxes—that these are so completely not even a great benefit, but completely central to people's lives.

You would not expect people to live in a horrible way in their bedroom or in their house, but towns and streets are just a greater version of that. When we think about this, the benefits are immense—they have already been mentioned—but I think it is important to keep these stories alive and create beautiful spaces. A key driver of that is that it improves people's lives. It brings joy to people's lives and it is uplifting, and that cannot be emphasised enough.

- Q61 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Hilary—maybe you were going to mention this—I have a couple on the safe harbour scheme. How would that work in practice, because I know you have done this piece of work?

Hilary McGrady: I will speak to that, but I just want to add this. It is important to make the point that access to these places, access to quality heritage, is not equal around the country. There are huge numbers of people who have no access to the beauty we are talking about—no access to green space, which is another aspect of heritage, of course. That unequal access fundamentally needs to be addressed. It is no coincidence that people who live in poorly catered-for spaces can have anything up to 10 to 20 years less life expectancy than places that are beautiful.



On the safe harbour scheme, again, the previous panel referred a lot to how you can find ways to enable smaller organisations to survive into the longer term. Also, in a scenario where a building is put at risk—it currently has public access and people want to retain it—instead of simply selling it off by auction, which is what happens in most cases, you could create a mechanism where a local group could have a fair chance at doing all the planning that they talked about earlier, getting the funding applications in and figuring out can they run it sustainably.

It is not fully formed yet as an idea, but the simple idea is that an organisation, potentially the National Trust or similar—it could be Historic England or a number of different people—would hold these buildings for maybe five to 10 years to enable all that to happen. It could give a lease at a peppercorn rent and, crucially, enable the organisation that has set itself up to have the capacity to figure out if it can do this sustainably.

If it does not work, it goes back out to sale, but it would at least provide breathing space to find solutions that are sustainable. At the minute, either they are going to organisations that, within two or three years, are floundering, and by then the asset has got worse and have to be sold anyway; or there is no future from a public access point of view for these buildings going straight into private ownership. That, of itself, may not be the wrong thing, by the way. I do not think there has to be one or other, but it would provide a mechanism to make it more likely that more of them would survive.

Q62 Dr Rupa Huq: Do we know what the operating costs would be?

Hilary McGrady: As I said, it is in the early stages at the moment. We do not know the detail behind that, but it will need a little bit of resource to be able to do that work properly and figure out what the business case behind it would be like. As I say, the idea is at a very early stage.

We have done something similar in the Trust. We worked with Moseley Road baths in Birmingham. I do not know whether anyone is familiar with that, but they are Victorian baths, where, in effect, the Trust created the conditions to allow them to, over a period of time, do the funding applications, and now the project is up and running. A number of different models out there could be explored.

Q63 Damian Hinds: We are going to talk about people and skills—Hilary, you were very keen to talk about this earlier. Maybe we start with Ben and Hilary. Could you outline the biggest or most pressing skills gaps facing the sector? Could you try to distinguish things that are specific to the heritage sector, as opposed to overall construction, repairs and maintenance, where there are also skills questions? Could you also try to distinguish skills gaps from difficulties with attracting people into this particular part of the economy and society?

Ben Cowell: The issue is a combination of supply and demand. So some important work needs to be done around demand, educating owners and custodians on the skills that are needed to do different sorts of repair jobs on historic buildings. Too many people will use the wrong solution,



and that is ultimately a problem, because if you have non-breathable material, damp builds up in historic properties.

That is part of what our organisation does. It gives technical advice to the custodians on what they should be doing. We have a raft of corporate members who supply services to historic properties. There are some fantastic companies out there who do amazing, wonderful things to cultivate the supply of skills. The other side of the equation is making sure we have enough skilled craftspeople—people that know how to do lime plaster, historic timber work, brickwork and so on.

I do not have figures on that. I have a general sense that, as we heard in the previous session, that there are not enough. Also, there are not enough young people going into these professions. I think I read a figure that only 10% of the people working in this industry are below the age of 25, or something like that, so we are building up a problem for the future. When the heritage sector talks about skills, we are talking about a future problem that we do not have enough skilled craftspeople in particular areas. I do not have anything more specific on that.

Hilary McGrady: This is a whole ecosystem, because you are quite right—there is a supply and demand thing. There is definitely a lack of the specialist skills—so stonemasonry, carpentry—specific to this area. We know that there is no lack of people being interested in it, because when we put out an apprenticeship programme, we are inundated with requests. That is not really the problem. The problem is the opportunity to get into the workplace in the first place. The apprenticeship schemes are quite challenging, even for an organisation like mine. It is quite hard to use the levy to get the funding to support that. You can only use it for training; you cannot use it for employment. It is quite cumbersome. If you take it down to a small organisation, it is almost impossible to get those apprenticeships to work.

There are not enough of them, and because there are not enough of them, you have the other end of it, which is pushing the prices up. It is making the cost of these projects so much greater and adding time because there are not enough of them to go around. It is a fundamental thing that needs to be addressed.

Q64 **Damian Hinds:** I am not sure I quite follow. You said that there was an abundance or an overabundance of people wanting to do the jobs, but it was hard to get in there.

Hilary McGrady: It is difficult to create the apprenticeship rules for any organisation; mine is only one example. It is hard to set up these apprenticeships in the first place. It is a cumbersome process and there are only a few. There is stonemasonry, carpentry and a few others. I am not going to go into the detail of it, but I can supply you with it, because we have endless information on how difficult it is to do that.

I wanted to be clear that the notion that young people do not want to do these jobs is not true in our experience. We are always inundated with



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people who want to do it. There are just not enough opportunities for them to get engaged. We will have 50 apprenticeships in these—

Damian Hinds: Is that not what you—you are the employer.

Hilary McGrady: We are the employer setting up 50 apprenticeships, but I cannot begin to tell you how challenging that has been over three years, and all we will be able to do with that is train them. We are not going to be able to guarantee them jobs, but once they are up and running the sector will benefit from that. We are one of very few that are able to do that. The bigger employers, the construction employers that you are talking about, I think if they had more certainty around the projects that we talked about earlier—longer-term projects—they would be incentivised to put more roles in place to develop the skills.

Q65 **Damian Hinds:** Except leading members of that sector say something different, which is that because in construction you have subcontractors to subcontractors and people working on self-employment contracts, you cannot do that in necessarily the same way, but you can with smaller organisations, where needed, collaborating with each other. In the case of this sector, I thought that is a fairly obvious thing to do.

Hilary McGrady: That is what we are doing across the sector, but that, of itself, is not solving the problem.

Damian Hinds: I have to confess, I am not sure I have quite understood.

Q66 **Chair:** Can I just leap in on this, because this might help amplify the problem? I met a wrought iron worker in my constituency—very skilled work—and he is literally turning away work because his order book is full. He has advertised for someone to come and join his business, but everyone that comes in does not have the requisite level of skills. They do not have what he needs. He cannot take on an apprentice because he does not have the sufficient bandwidth to be able to train them, as well as to then complete the jobs that he has on the books. But even if he could, the apprenticeship levy does not work for someone like him. What is the way forward?

Hilary McGrady: I do not know what the way forward is. I think that the apprenticeship structure needs to be reviewed. The levy is helpful, but it does not support smaller organisations to create apprenticeships. The likes of him exactly would be the sort that you would want to. I would argue that the bigger construction people could do it. I think it is an easy get-out for them to say, “We don’t do it”.

I think the apprenticeship structure needs to be amended. It needs to incentivise employers to employ as well as train for even two years or something to be able to get the experience they really need. I do not know exactly what the answer is, but specifically for smaller businesses like that, they need particular incentives to be able to support this flow of people into the sector. Ben is right—it is not 10%; it is something like 75% or over 50% in these specialist areas. We are facing quite a cliff edge of challenge around this.



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Chair: That is only going to make the cost of employing people to do this work—

Hilary McGrady: Exactly.

Chair: There needs to be some secret solution to the skills challenge somewhere.

Hilary McGrady: Again, I think it needs a dedicated piece of work.

Q67 **Chair:** Who needs to co-ordinate that?

Hilary McGrady: Historic England, I would have thought, and they have done a lot of work around skills. We as an organisation are playing our part. I do not know that we would necessarily want to lead on it, but we certainly would want to be part of it, where we are an employer ourselves, but clearly there is a benefit to the sector.

Q68 **Chair:** Are they co-ordinating it at the moment, or do you think there is more to be done?

Hilary McGrady: I would have to ask my colleagues. I think they are doing some work on this, but it is not clearly—we do not know.

Ben Cowell: There is lots of activity going on, and it is complicated. I would say it is an example of where heritage has a home Department in Whitehall and Westminster. DCMS is the Department that we look to, but so many other Departments have a role to play in making the sector thrive. I do not know if it is the Business Department or which other Departments it might be. There is a thing called the Heritage Council, which DCMS convenes, and it is a way of bringing different Departments together to crack wicked problems like this one.

We are talking about Government intervention potentially in a free market bit of the economy. These companies are privately owned companies. What is the justification for that? There is a clear heritage justification, because there is a public good in having skilled craftspeople in the future. How we do that is for clever heads in Government to work out which levers to pull.

Q69 **Damian Hinds:** Why would it not be Hilary, as the National Trust? Why would you not lead in the sector? I was at a commercial radio operation the other day—Bauer is a media group that runs the Bauer Media Academy. I think there is the Global Media Academy as well. They don't only train their own people; there is a recognition that the sector needs a pipeline. Maybe I am wrong, but are you not the biggest player in that sector?

Hilary McGrady: We are, and we are leading on it, in so far as we are one of the biggest suppliers of specialist skills into the sector. We are leading in that sense. What I am pointing to is something like the levy needing to be changed. We will and have been a voice on that, to say that this needs to become less cumbersome and more user-friendly for smaller organisations. But fundamentally, it will require something at a government level to change how that scheme operates.



Q70 Damian Hinds: A final question from me, and this might also be a question for Alice. Is there a revenue opportunity, given the move, particularly post-covid, to experiential—I do not know what the phrase is, but to people wanting to have that practical thing? There is a facility near me called Butser Ancient Farm, which is brilliant. They have people coming in, not doing a full apprenticeship in stonemasonry, but to learn some of the ancient crafts. For this whole sector, short courses—that sort of thing—could be quite a big revenue opportunity and a way of attracting more people into the sector as the teachers.

Alice Loxton: I definitely agree, but it is expensive. I did a stonemason course for one day on a Saturday—a stone-carving course, even. That was about £90, because it is expensive to put it on. That is just the cost of these things. I agree that getting people on these courses would be an amazing thing.

To add to the discussion we were having before, I have emails all the time from people who are history students who love history, and they do not know what to do with their career. There are a lot of people interested in history at a very young age and they are not following in history careers. That is something that we as heritage could jump on.

When I was a student, which was six years ago, I never saw any advertising or any—you go to these careers fairs and there is nothing about heritage, nothing about a lot of things. It is basically you get this choice, and it looks like it is marketing or joining the Army. It is a very narrow option. It is not just that, but there could be an opportunity to capture people at quite a young age. When we talk a lot about young people going through university and then not having jobs, or whether people should be doing apprenticeship schemes—all of that sort of stuff—I think the heritage industry could be an amazing partner for that, a solution to that problem for lots of young people.

Hilary McGrady: I think there is a commercial opportunity in a lot of these experiences. There has been a huge growth in people wanting to do pottery and carpet weaving—you name it—and there is a big growth in that. This is really serious skills stuff that needs to be addressed, and the two things are very different.

Q71 Damian Hinds: No, sorry—I meant that there is an opportunity, if you are employing people who are very serious craftspeople, who are doing very serious crafts. Then teaching is another way of recouping the investment that effectively you have made in people. I am not suggesting—although I am sure she was brilliant after a day on a stonemasonry course—that we set Alice loose on the stonemasonry in one of your homes.

Hilary McGrady: What it does do is whet people's appetite, and we have had a few people, particularly our volunteers—we have 45,000 volunteers who get involved in all sorts of different skills-based work, who then go on to do some specialist training. There is an opportunity there, but I am not sure it would cover the total cost.



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Ben Cowell: There is a lot going on. Lots of places have schemes or courses they run, and it is all under the radar a bit. Marchmont in Scotland is now a home to makers. They are celebrating the craft of furniture making, and what they have done is wonderful. They brought this place back to life and it has a whole new lease of life. As you say, there is a big, latent interest among people to learn new skills. That is a massive commercial opportunity for the heritage sector.

Another of our places at Historic Houses is Wentworth Woodhouse, which is a massive restoration job employing lots and lots of people. Every company they engage there is required to have an apprenticeship generated as a consequence of the contract. That is an amazing example.

We are trying to do a bit of work on this at Historic Houses at the moment. We have about 12,000 people directly employed, and then there are tens of thousands of other people in ancillary companies providing services. We want to do more to connect the custodians of the properties with the potential people out there who might be interested in working in one of these places. We are building a website that we want to launch next year that will interface between the two and make it easier for people to find work in one of our member houses.

Hilary McGrady: Can I add that it is not just about building and construction though? With the interiors, collections and paintings, there is a massive amount of potential employment out there if we treat it slightly differently.

Alice Loxton: I think that in heritage in general—we all work in heritage—there is a massive disconnect with the general public and knowing about these things happening. Most people have probably never heard of Historic Houses, and lots of the amazing charities and lots of opportunities that happen all the time. Although all the issues we have been talking about today—about funding and everything—are core issues, when I mention social media, it is about publicity and telling the story of what is going on all the time. That is an important thing, and I think that can be a powerful, important tool that we must be aware of.

Chair: That is a perfect way to conclude our session. Thank you all so much for coming in and sharing your thoughts with us. If you think of anything else that we have missed from today's session, please drop us a quick line so that we can include it in our evidence. We are looking very much for solutions as well as problems. With your solutions hats on, we would be absolutely delighted to hear from you. Thank you very much for your time today.