

Written Evidence submitted by Historic England

Historic England is the Government's statutory adviser on all matters relating to the historic environment in England. We are a non-departmental public body established under the National Heritage Act 1983 and sponsored by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. We champion and protect England's historic places, providing expert advice to local planning authorities, developers, owners and communities to help ensure our historic environment is properly understood, enjoyed and cared for.

Summary

For millennia we have shaped our rural landscapes and the remnants of our shared past – the dry stones walls, hedgerows, farm buildings and archaeological sites beneath our feet - are as an integral part of the countryside as its rivers, mountains and valleys.

Since 2006, agri-environment schemes have contributed around £13 million per year towards the conservation and maintenance of our rural heritage. This has helped to remove 1,200 Scheduled Monuments from the Historic England [Heritage at Risk Register](#) (an official statistic).

Much of our designated heritage is on agricultural land is in private ownership and agri-environment schemes represent the only source of funding for their conservation and maintenance.

Culture, nature and landscape are shared, cross-departmental responsibilities. Managing heritage also delivers for other government priorities such as climate change, nature recovery and water quality.

Background

Heritage (like landscape and nature) is a shared governmental responsibility. This has been reflected in successive legislation (from the National Parks Act 1949 through to the Agriculture Act 2020). Heritage has also figured within agri-environment schemes since they began in 1987, the 1986 Agriculture Act imposing a duty upon the Secretary of State to balance agriculture with the conservation of (inter alia) "*any features of archaeological interest*".

The CAP introduced market failure and inefficiencies by incentivising activities that were neither economically viable, nor environmentally sustainable. It massively accelerated change within our landscapes, including the dereliction and loss of the heritage which underpinned its special character. While nature was similarly impacted, once heritage has been lost, it is gone forever.

Agriculture and agricultural restructuring still represent the biggest causes of degradation and loss to our rural heritage, as evidenced by Heritage at Risk, an official statistic. 15% of Scheduled Monuments are vulnerable as a result of agricultural activities, 25% because of a lack of regular management.

Farmers and land managers play a huge role in sustaining rural heritage – 78% of Scheduled Monuments, 100% of Registered Battlefields and 67% of Registered Parks and Gardens are on agricultural land, the majority in private ownership. Agri-environment remains the primary source

of funding for private owners to address Heritage at Risk along with mitigating the ongoing detrimental impacts of agriculture and post-Common Agricultural Policy industry restructuring upon our heritage, rural communities and landscape.

Currently, 42% of Scheduled Monuments are in agri-environment agreements, as are 87% of Registered Battlefields and 41% of Registered Parks and Gardens. A further 45,000 archaeological sites identified as important by local authorities are also being positively managed. Cumulatively, these heritage features cover 330,000 hectares. Having lost 50% of our historic field barns in the last 100 years, 6,500 agreements also include the maintenance of traditional farm buildings.

Through agri-environment investment 1,200 Scheduled Monuments have been removed from the Heritage at Risk Register, halving the numbers being damaged by ploughing and scrub growth. It has been the single biggest driver for KPI progress. By bringing otherwise neglected heritage into regular maintenance or sustainable management, it has also prevented much more from being added.

Inclusion of heritage in Environmental Land Management

The inclusion of heritage within ELM contributes to the government's ability to meet its goals around Net Zero, soil health, biodiversity and water quality. Heritage features cover around 7% of agricultural land and its sustainable management can contribute to all of these outcomes. If heritage were removed from ELM, it could prejudice achieving priority outcomes. It would also represent a devastating funding cut to private owners and the sector, despite it comprising less than 1% of the ELM budget.

DCMS's Taking Part survey (2015) showed that the British countryside is the thing that makes people most proud of Britain (53%) followed by our health system (52%) and our history (35%). Culture and nature are an indivisible part of our countryside, as recognised by the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, the European Landscape Convention and successive domestic legislation for landscapes. The inclusion of heritage in ELM will ensure the ability of protected landscapes to meet their statutory duties towards its conservation.

Heritage and the natural environment cannot be separated as public goods. 19% of Scheduled Monuments coincide with Sites of Special Scientific Interest, as do 24% of Registered Battlefields and 16% of Registered Parks and Gardens. The natural capital, including the welfare benefits gained from sites and areas are often derived from a combination of the heritage, biodiversity and geodiversity.

Culture, nature and landscape are shared, cross-departmental responsibilities, as reflected in existing governmental commitments and HMT's support for inter-departmental investment, which the Green Book considers a prerequisite for efficiency. Decoupling natural and heritage capital investments in landscapes via agri-environment schemes would be inefficient and unsustainable. It would erode the market failure rationale for public sector intervention by not addressing the well-known coordination failures. Ultimately it would lead to higher administrative costs as economies of scale are lost. The eventual costs of remediation to HMT would be higher.

Heritage represents both cultural and natural capital and generates significant economic benefits. Forecasts for the hugely oversubscribed Historic Building Restoration pilot operating in five National Parks suggest that every £1 of the £8m Defra grant aid is likely to result in a total output of between £1.65 and £2.50 for the local economy. In doing so, it will support both tourism and farm diversification, making rural businesses and communities more sustainable and resilient.

October 2021