House of Commons

Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Protecting built heritage

Third Report of Session 2026–27

HC 144

Culture, Media and Sport Committee

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Summary

Built heritage plays a vital role in the United Kingdom's economy, identity and community life. Historic buildings contribute to local pride, tourism, housing supply and social cohesion. However, despite the value of this contribution, many heritage assets are now under significant and increasing strain from financial pressures, workforce shortages and a planning system that is not aligned with the long-term needs of the sector.

Evidence suggests that up to 670,000 homes could be created through the reuse of vacant or under-used historic buildings. However, this potential remains under-realised. Reuse is not treated as a priority within policy or funding frameworks. International examples, including Italy's €1 homes scheme and renovation tax incentives, demonstrate how targeted interventions can bring vacant heritage assets back into productive use, support housing delivery and revitalise communities. We call on the government to adopt a clear "reuse-first" approach, embedding this principle in policy across departments and developing a UK-appropriate heritage-to-housing scheme that draws on lessons from overseas.

The sector also faces a combination of financial and structural challenges that threaten the long-term sustainability of heritage assets. We heard that funding is fragmented, short-term and heavily focused on capital projects, offering limited support for early-stage development or ongoing maintenance. Place-based approaches can also help align funding with local need and strengthen community partnerships, but without adequate capacity and accessible funding they risk being unevenly realised.

Recent changes to support schemes, including the replacement of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme with the Places of Worship Renewal Fund, represent a significant shift in approach. While directing funds towards areas of socio-economic need has merit, reliance on area-based indicators risks disadvantaging places of worship of high historic and architectural significance outside these areas and could overlook the wider community value and reach of such sites. Meanwhile, the current VAT regime discourages repair and reuse by making it more expensive than new construction. Without immediate attention, these pressures could limit investment and support for heritage assets.

Workforce and capacity constraints present a growing risk to the sector. We heard evidence of acute shortages in specialist skills, declining conservation expertise within local authorities and increasing

reliance on volunteers. Without a coordinated approach to training, apprenticeships and workforce development, these pressures will continue to undermine the sector's ability to maintain heritage assets. We therefore call for targeted action to strengthen skills pipelines, expand training opportunities and better support volunteer-led organisations.

Across government we found a lack of strategic oversight, consistent data and effective accountability in the management of heritage assets. Publicly owned historic buildings are at risk of deterioration, while responsibilities are spread across departments without clear coordination or enforcement. The government must lead by example and public bodies should be required to actively manage, maintain and where appropriate, reuse their heritage assets. There should be both incentives for good stewardship and penalties where departments fail to meet minimum standards and allow assets to fall into avoidable disrepair. The planning system is widely perceived as complex, inconsistent and slow, discouraging heritage investment. Although recent reforms are welcome, further action is needed to ensure that planning policy actively supports reuse, energy efficiency and long-term conservation.

Overall, while the UK's built heritage has immense social, cultural and economic value, the current policy and funding landscape does not adequately support its protection or potential. Change is urgently needed to secure the long-term future of the historic environment and unlock its full potential.

Introduction

Our inquiry

1. We launched our inquiry into Protecting built heritage in December 2024. For the purposes of this inquiry 'built heritage' refers to the historic buildings, structures and sites that shape the UK's historic environment, ranging from listed buildings and places of worship to industrial heritage, monuments and conservation areas.

2. We sought to assess whether current heritage funding models are effective and accessible and to explore how the UK Government could address practical and regulatory challenges to the protection of built heritage – including skills shortages, asset decline and net-zero planning pressures. We were also keen to examine the role of built heritage in economic regeneration and community identity, and how communities could be better empowered to manage and protect their local heritage. We published 113 submissions to our inquiry, a full list of which can be found at the end of this report. We held five oral evidence sessions between June 2025 and February 2026, speaking to heritage charity leaders, architects, church officials, local government representatives, funding bodies, senior officials from government departments, and finally Baroness Twycross, Minister for Museums, Heritage and Gambling. We would like to thank all those who took the time to contribute written or oral evidence to this inquiry. We also made several visits as part of this inquiry – to the National Gallery, the Southbank Centre, Buckingham Palace and the V&A East Storehouse. We would like to thank the people who organised these visits and those we met.

Our report

3. Our report is structured around the key challenges and opportunities we identified throughout the inquiry. The chapters explore how the potential of built heritage can be unlocked; the financial framework; consideration of the government's role in managing the public estate; workforce and skills challenges; and finally, an evaluation of impact of the planning system on efforts to protect and make better use of our built heritage.

Box 1: Glossary of frequently used terms

Adaptive reuse – The process of repurposing historic buildings for new uses while retaining their architectural and heritage significance.

Conservation – The process of managing change to historic buildings and sites in a way that sustains their significance.

Heritage at risk / ‘at risk’ assets – Historic buildings, sites or structures that are vulnerable to loss or damage through neglect, decay or inappropriate development.

Listed building consent – The statutory permission required for works that affect the character or historic significance of a listed building, typically granted by local planning authorities.

Managed decline – A situation in which buildings are allowed to deteriorate over time, often due to a lack of funding, capacity or viable use, until intervention becomes difficult or no longer feasible.

Retrofit – The process of upgrading existing buildings to improve energy efficiency, functionality or performance, while retaining as much of the original structure and fabric as possible.

1 Unlocking the potential of built heritage

4. Built heritage presents significant potential to support housing delivery, regeneration and community life. Across towns, cities and rural areas, heritage assets also attract visitors (with heritage tourism contributing approximately £20 billion annually to the UK economy), sustain high streets and create distinctive places in which people want to live, work and invest.[1] However, despite their clear value, many heritage assets are at risk of neglect or managed decline, where a lack of sustained investment has led to "roofs leaking", long-term deterioration of historic fabric and, in some cases, buildings being left to ruin altogether as regulatory and financial pressures mount.[2]

5. We heard that the poor condition of heritage buildings represented not only a loss of cultural and architectural significance but also a missed economic opportunity. Witnesses told us that neglected buildings suppressed confidence and investment in an area, while run-down environments were usually associated with declining wellbeing and local economic vitality.[3] Buildings left vacant or derelict could also undermine local high streets, reduce footfall and weaken the attractiveness of places to residents, businesses and visitors alike. Conversely, heritage-led regeneration had been shown to deliver strong economic returns and act as a catalyst for wider investment.[4]

6. Witnesses consistently emphasised that the most effective way to protect heritage was to keep assets in active use. As Ben Cowell, Director General of Historic Houses, told us, "the best protection for a building in the long term is for it to be occupied, used, utilised, lived in and loved". Camilla Finlay, Director of Clews Architects, noted that our "greenest architecture is the building that exists", highlighting the environmental as well as economic advantages of reusing existing structures.[5]

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1 Dr Eleni Michopoulou (Associate Professor at University of Derby); Dr Iride Azara (Senior Lecturer at University of Derby); Dr Claire Roe (Researcher at University of Derby) (HER0006); Historic Houses (HER0027) and Q44–46
2 Q40 [Camilla Finlay]; Q42 [Hilary McGrady] and Q51 [Hilary McGrady]
3 Q59 [Ben Cowell] and Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) (HER0043)
4 Q25–28
5 Q24 [Camilla Finlay] and Q55 [Ben Cowell]

7. We heard, however, that financial pressures, including rising costs and fragmented funding, had limited the ability of organisations to maintain and reuse heritage assets.[6] Skills shortages had further constrained capacity and reduced the availability of the specialist expertise needed to repair and adapt historic fabric.[7] At the same time, weaknesses within the planning system had discouraged timely investment and innovation.[8] Concerns were also raised about the condition and management of publicly owned heritage assets, where fragmentation of responsibility and weak oversight had contributed to their deterioration.[9]

8. **CONCLUSION**

The deterioration of heritage assets represents a major missed opportunity. Their significant potential to support economic growth and tourism is being systematically constrained by a combination of financial, structural and policy pressures. Without a more coherent and proactive approach, increasing numbers of historic buildings will fall into disuse or managed decline, representing a loss not only to the historic environment but to growth and regeneration. The government must take sustained action to prioritise active use and remove the structural barriers that continue to hold the sector back.

9. Addressing these challenges requires a shift from recognising the risks facing built heritage to actively unlocking its potential. The following sections set out how these opportunities can be realised through a more coordinated and forward-looking approach.

Housing

10. We were told that adaptive reuse of heritage assets could significantly impact housing delivery, community activity and economic regeneration, while safeguarding the assets for future generations.[10] The government has a target to build 1.5 million homes in England by July 2029.[11] Historic England and the government estimate that up to 670,000 of these homes could be

6 Historic England (HER0076); Q4 and Leigh Building Preservation Trust Limited (HER0002)
7 Diocese of Chichester (HER0007) and Q39 [Camilla Finlay]
8 Local Government Association (HER0049); Diocese of Chichester (HER0007); Q32 [Camilla Finlay] and Q31
9 Dr Eleni Michopoulou (Associate Professor at University of Derby); Dr Iride Azara (Senior Lecturer at University of Derby); Dr Claire Roe (Researcher at University of Derby) (HER0006)
10 Q45; Q307 and Dr Eleni Michopoulou (Associate Professor at University of Derby); Dr Iride Azara (Senior Lecturer at University of Derby); Dr Claire Roe (Researcher at University of Derby) (HER0006)
11 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Planning overhaul to reach 1.5 million new homes, 12 December 2024

delivered by repurposing vacant or under-used heritage buildings.[12] We heard that the types of buildings that could be repurposed for housing included:

- vacant heritage buildings in town centres;
- upper floors above shops;
- redundant civic and industrial buildings (such as mills, banks and barracks); and
- surplus public estate assets.[13]

11. However, submissions made clear that this potential remains under-realised.[14] Evidence suggested that many historic buildings that could be brought forward for new uses, including housing, remained vacant with multiple buildings "lying in waste".[15] Witnesses also referred to structural barriers to conversion and noted that it tended to be cheaper to build, rather than adapt, a historic building.[16]

12. Tanya Szendeffy, Senior Conservation and Design Officer for Lewes and Eastbourne Councils, highlighted how council-led refurbishment of pre-1930s buildings could increase housing supply. She cited Italy's €1 house model, where historic buildings were sold cheaply on condition of restoration, as a potential way to meet housing need while preserving heritage.[17] This scheme has helped to bring vacant buildings back into use, attract new residents to depopulating areas and safeguard historic townscapes.[18] However, some reports suggest that it has also presented challenges, including the significant financial burden of renovation, strict restoration timelines and the risk that properties are purchased for speculative or promotional purposes rather than long-term occupation.[19] Ms Szendeffy suggested that a similar model could be adapted for the UK. She said:

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12 Historic England, New Homes from Vacant Historic Buildings, 5 March 2025; Historic Houses (HER0027); Historic England, Historic England Reveals 20 Historic Sites With the Potential to Become New Homes, 19 May 2026

13 Glasgow City Council (HER0061); SAVE Britain's Heritage (HER0083) and Historic England (HER0076)

14 Glasgow City Council (HER0061) and The National Lottery Heritage Fund (HER0085)

15 Q48 and Q188

16 Diocese of Chichester (HER0007)

17 Tanya Szendeffy (Senior Conservation and Design Officer at Lewes and Eastbourne Councils) (HER0100)

18 The Guardian, The life swap dream - or a marketing gimmick? The Italian towns selling houses for €1 [accessed 30 June 2026]

19 The Guardian, The life swap dream - or a marketing gimmick? The Italian towns selling houses for €1 [accessed 30 June 2026]; The Independent, Italy's one euro houses: How you can buy one [accessed 30 June 2026] and The Times, These Americans bought €1 houses in Italy. Was it worth it? [accessed 30 June 2026]

> We should do the same to fit local needs. If given to a private individual/company a company could be formed between local government and the developer which would ideally be the local community who can then rent etc to whomever they wish.[20]

13. Ms Szendeffy also referred to another initiative in Italy undertaken by the 'Centri Sociali' where communities take over abandoned buildings and repurpose them for social, cultural and educational use.[21] Italy has also implemented bonuses for building and energy renovation, providing tax incentives to encourage homeowners, landlords and businesses to improve the energy efficiency and structural safety of their properties. The scheme includes measures for energy-efficient upgrades and renovation and restoration incentives, aiming to reduce carbon emissions and modernise the housing stock.[22] However, while the incentives substantially reduce renovation costs through tax deductions, there have been drawbacks, including complex eligibility requirements, extensive documentation and lengthy reimbursement periods that have created uncertainty for property owners.[23]

14. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend the government introduce a 'heritage-to-housing' scheme to bring vacant and at-risk historic buildings back into residential use. The scheme should draw on lessons from other countries such as Italy's €1 house initiatives and renovation tax incentives, but be adapted to UK conditions. It should combine discounted transfer or leasing of heritage assets with time-limited restoration requirements, financial support for renovation and strong safeguards to ensure long-term occupation and smooth bureaucratic processes.

20 Tanya Szendeffy (Senior Conservation and Design Officer at Lewes and Eastbourne Councils) (HER0100)

21 See reference above

22 Idealista, Homeowners' guide to building and energy renovation bonuses in Italy 2026 [accessed 30 June 2026]

23 See reference above

15. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the government establish and lead a high street repurpose programme as a core intervention within the national reuse-first housing strategy. The scheme should require developers to demonstrate that reuse has been prioritised over demolition, empowering local authorities to designate High Street Regeneration Zones with associated funding and planning flexibilities, enforcing a strengthened use-it-or-lose-it regime for long-term vacant buildings, obliging public bodies to repurpose under-used town centre assets, and ensuring all repurposed homes meet modern standards of space, light and design. This could be implemented as part of the government's upcoming High Streets Strategy, expected to be published later this year.

16. However, while reuse was recognised as essential to the sustainability of historic buildings, evidence emphasised that it must be underpinned by safeguards to protect heritage significance and embedded social value.[24] Without these, stakeholders warned that reuse could restrict public access and displace cultural and commercial activities that sustain high streets, which could undermine local identity and vitality.[25]

17. Baroness Twycross, Minister for Heritage, acknowledged that reuse both preserved heritage and benefitted residents.[26] The minister and Fazima Osborn, Deputy Director for Heritage at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), said that planned changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) would support reuse by recognising it as a public benefit.[27] From April 2026, the National Housing Delivery Fund was introduced as one of several funding streams to support housing delivery, intended to enable larger, more complex schemes; but the impact on heritage-led projects remains uncertain.[28] Given the enormous contribution adaptive reuse of heritage-led housing could make to the government's housing targets, we were surprised that the Heritage minister told us she had not met the Housing minister to discuss the issue.[29]

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24 Urban Vision Enterprise, D2H Land Planning Development (HER0013) and Dr Johnathan Djabarouti (Senior Lecturer & Architect at Manchester Metropolitan University) (HER0009)
25 High Street Story (HER0008) and Association of English Cathedrals (HER0016)
26 Q307 [Baroness Twycross] and Q312 [Baroness Twycross]
27 Q309–312 and Q356
28 Letter from Baroness Twycross, Minister for Museums, Heritage and Gambling, regarding Protecting built heritage oral evidence follow-up, 27 February 2026 and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, National Housing Delivery Fund (NHDF), 31 March 2026
29 Q317

18. **CONCLUSION**
Heritage-led housing is no longer a niche or peripheral opportunity, but a major and under-recognised means of addressing the country's acute housing shortage. Historic England's estimate that up to 670,000 homes could be delivered through the reuse of vacant or under-used heritage buildings is equivalent to almost half of the government's current housebuilding target. However, the government is failing to prioritise the reuse of heritage buildings in a way that will enable its huge potential to be fulfilled.

19. **RECOMMENDATION**
We recommend that the government adopt a reuse-first approach to housing policy, prioritising the conversion of vacant and under-used heritage buildings before pursuing new build. This approach should embed reuse as a clear priority in the National Planning Policy Framework, directing departments to assess reuse options for surplus sites and ensure that major housing funding mechanisms—including the National Housing Delivery Fund and related Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government programmes—actively support heritage-led schemes, with clear criteria and incentives to address viability barriers. Such an approach must be underpinned by clear safeguards to ensure that reuse does not come at the expense of heritage value, public access or the vitality of high streets.

20. **RECOMMENDATION**
The Heritage minister should have regular and structured meetings with the Housing minister to align policy and delivery. This should include joint oversight of heritage-led housing schemes and clear accountability for unlocking reuse at scale.

21. In subsequent chapters, we will look at how adaptive reuse can be funded and incentivised.

Data

22. The potential of built heritage can only be fully unlocked if we have an effective understanding of the current state of the heritage stock. Our evidence revealed significant shortcomings in the availability, consistency and coordination of data on the condition of heritage assets. Historic England's "Heritage at Risk Register" provides an annual snapshot of Grade I and II* listed assets at risk of loss through neglect, decay or inappropriate development.[30] The register currently includes over

30 Historic England, Heritage at Risk [accessed 12 May 2026]

4,000 sites, including a significant number of places of worship.[31] However, Christ Church Lancaster argued that the current approach captured assets only once they were already in serious decline, and proposed the introduction of a pre-risk register to identify buildings at an earlier stage.[32] More broadly, evidence pointed to a fragmented and incomplete data landscape. The Worthing Society reported that it maintained its own heritage risk register, suggesting a patchwork of data systems, rather than a single national approach.[33] Witnesses also questioned whether a comprehensive record of heritage organisations or assets existed at all. Professor Vanessa Toulmin, Chair of Morecambe Winter Gardens, told us:

> 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?[34]

The government accepted that managing and disposing of complex listed assets remained challenging but said that it is improving cross-governmental data to address the issue.[35]

23. **CONCLUSION**
Our evidence points to a systematic weakness in how government collects data on its heritage assets. Without fully understanding the current state of the sector, the government will not be able to unlock the value of built heritage.

24. **RECOMMENDATION**
We recommend that the government establish a comprehensive and standardised national dataset on the condition, ownership and maintenance of heritage assets across England. This should be delivered jointly with Historic England and include asset-level information on condition, risk status and maintenance expenditure. The dataset should be published, updated annually and made publicly available to support transparency, accountability and more effective stewardship across the sector.

31 Churches' Legislation Advisory Service (HER0019)
32 Christ Church Lancaster (HER0004)
33 The Worthing Society (HER0020)
34 Q20 [Professor Toulmin]
35 Q261; Q263 [Mark Bourgeois]

Inclusion and under-recognised heritage

25. As well as concerns about the adequacy of data, we heard that there were weaknesses in the way the government defined built heritage. Several submissions argued that existing built heritage models did not adequately reflect the diversity of the UK's cultural life, particularly in relation to under-recognised forms of heritage such as live music festivals, local traditions and craft skills. Academic evidence pointed to "barriers to inclusion" within existing frameworks and suggested that a prioritisation of tourism over community needs could exclude minority groups.[36] Witnesses also said that intangible cultural heritage (such as traditions, community memory and collective identity) was often undervalued within the listed building system, despite being central to how many communities understood and experienced heritage.[37] In particular, we heard that heritage policy remained overly focused on architectural significance, with insufficient recognition of social and community value.[38] High Street Story stated that the listed building regime was "targeted at preserving the built environment", but had "no bearing on the occupants of the building".[39] We heard that, consequently, contemporary cultural spaces could fall outside existing protection frameworks even where they played a significant role.[40]

26. This point was particularly evident in evidence we received relating to grassroots cultural venues. Witnesses argued that grassroots music venues should be recognised as essential cultural infrastructure and given protections comparable to theatres, including being granted statutory consultee roles (meaning local planning authorities would be required to consult them on relevant development proposals) and greater consideration within planning decisions.[41] Michael Kill, Chief Executive Officer of the Night Time Industries Association, described current funding mechanisms as "limited and inaccessible" and noted that clubs, LGBTQ+ spaces,

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36 Dr Eleni Michopoulou (Associate Professor at University of Derby); Dr Iride Azara (Senior Lecturer at University of Derby); Dr Claire Roe (Researcher at University of Derby) (HER0006) and Dr Johnathan Djabarouti (Senior Lecturer & Architect at Manchester Metropolitan University) (HER0009)

37 Dr Johnathan Djabarouti (Senior Lecturer & Architect at Manchester Metropolitan University) (HER0009)

38 Dr Johnathan Djabarouti (Senior Lecturer & Architect at Manchester Metropolitan University) (HER0009); Q121 [Michael Kill]; Q125 [Michael Kill]; Q126 [Joshua McTaggart] and Letter from Michael Kill, Chief Executive, Night Time Industry Association, regarding Protecting built heritage oral evidence follow-up, 21 July 2025

39 High Street Story (HER0008)

40 Letter from Michael Kill, Chief Executive, Night Time Industry Association, regarding Protecting built heritage oral evidence follow-up, 21 July 2025

41 Music Venue Trust (HER0012) and Letter from Michael Kill, Chief Executive, Night Time Industry Association, regarding Protecting built heritage oral evidence follow-up, 21 July 2025

grassroots music venues and other culturally significant sites had fewer protections than they should have, despite being "living archives" across generations of social and musical history.[42]

27. **CONCLUSION**

Existing frameworks for protecting built heritage do not adequately capture contemporary cultural heritage, leaving many culturally significant spaces vulnerable despite their clear value to communities. Without a broader definition of heritage, there is a risk that important aspects of the UK's cultural life will continue to be overlooked, and in some cases, lost.

28. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the government put in place processes for identifying and protecting buildings with high cultural and social value alongside architectural significance. This should include acknowledging the cultural importance of nightclubs, music venues and activist spaces where a particularly strong cultural significance can be demonstrated.

Place-based approaches

29. Questions of community value also point to the need to involve communities closely in heritage projects. We heard about the importance of place-based approaches in unlocking the potential of built heritage. Successful initiatives such as Heritage Action Zones[43] and the Heritage Enterprise Programme[44] have demonstrated the value of coordinated and locally driven partnerships.[45] Witnesses said these models aligned funding, delivery and skills across the sector and would increase opportunity to deliver long-term benefits.[46] However, we heard that the effectiveness of partnership working varied significantly by place: in rural, deprived or economically underperforming areas, local authorities often faced particular financial strain.[47]

42 Q109; Q105 [Michael Kill] and Q122 [Michael Kill]

43 Historic England programmes that combined capital investment and community engagement to regenerate historic places and bring underused buildings back into use.

44 Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Heritage Enterprise programme provides grants ranging from £250,000 to £5 million to help community and commercial organisations rescue vacant, at-risk historic buildings by bridging the funding gap between the costs of repair and the final value.

45 The National Lottery Heritage Fund (HER0085); Architectural Heritage Fund (HER0033); Historic England (HER0076)

46 Q136 and Q138 [Matthew Mckeague]

47 The National Lottery Heritage Fund (HER0085); Architectural Heritage Fund (HER0033); Historic England (HER0076) and Local Government Association (HER0049)

30. Alongside institutional partnerships, we also heard that early and sustained involvement of local communities helped projects reflect local identity, captured stories, provided community knowledge and fostered stronger connections between people and place.[48] Dr Johnathan Djabarouti, Senior Lecturer and Architect at the Manchester Metropolitan University, emphasised that engagement should move beyond consultation towards shared responsibility, fostering a sense of ownership, pride and connection.[49] Community-led approaches were also said to have provided practical solutions to funding and sustainability challenges. Models such as community ownership, asset transfer and community share schemes were highlighted as ways to secure the long-term use of heritage assets, particularly where traditional funding may be limited.[50] However, these approaches required accessible funding, early-stage support and proportionate safeguards to ensure that community groups were not overburdened.[51]

31. Witnesses supported the development of interim or "safe harbour" approaches, where trusted bodies temporarily take control of at-risk assets to stabilise them and allow time for a sustainable, community-led future to emerge with early intervention measures such as small repair grants.[52] The government expressed interest in measures such as a new Community Right to Buy and interim protection models but stressed the importance of due diligence to ensure community groups could sustainably manage transferred assets, noting that the success of these proposals would depend on how effectively they were implemented in practice.[53]

32. Expanding community ownership models would allow communities to acquire, repurpose and manage heritage buildings. This can be done by providing early-stage funding, technical support and safeguards to prevent overburdening community groups. The success of this would depend on government-led action and implementation within local authorities.

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48 Dr Johnathan Djabarouti (Senior Lecturer & Architect at Manchester Metropolitan University) (HER0009)

49 Dr Johnathan Djabarouti (Senior Lecturer & Architect at Manchester Metropolitan University) (HER0009)

50 High Street Story (HER0008) and Leigh Building Preservation Trust Limited (HER0002). Community ownership involves local people collectively owning and managing assets; asset transfer is the transfer of public assets to community control (often at reduced cost); and community share schemes allow individuals to invest in and co-own community enterprises.

51 Music Venue Trust (HER0012)

52 National Trust (HER0079); Diocese of Liverpool (HER0022); Q61 [Hilary McGrady]; The Worthing Society (HER0020) and Q360 [Baroness Twycross]

53 Q358 [Baroness Twycross]; Q364 [Baroness Twycross]; Q327 [Mark Chivers] and Letter from Baroness Twycross, Minister for Museums, Heritage and Gambling, regarding Protecting built heritage oral evidence follow-up, 27 February 2026

33. **CONCLUSION**

Place-based approaches offer an effective way of aligning investment with local need, strengthening partnerships and embedding community involvement. However, their impact is uneven. Areas with less capacity, particularly rural and deprived parts of the country, face barriers such as limited funding, skills and institutional support, which restrict their ability to deliver support effectively.

34. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the government implement and promote place-based approaches to the protection of built heritage. These approaches should involve models bringing together the whole range of organisations working in the community. The government should also develop mechanisms such as community asset transfer and interim “safe harbour” arrangements to support sustainable community stewardship of heritage assets. In its response to this report, the government should set out how these approaches will be delivered consistently across regions, including those with lower capacity.

35. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the government introduce a local high street assessment tool to tackle the challenge that a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective. This tool can be used to compare the cost and effectiveness of interventions, including planning, engagement, skills and ownership. The government should help local authorities select tailored regeneration packages.

2 Financial support for built heritage

Financial pressures and structural challenges

36. In this chapter, we turn to the question of how to finance efforts to preserve and make best use of our built heritage. Funding for the heritage sector is drawn from a range of sources, including the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF)[54], Historic England, the Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF) and a series of government programmes such as the Heritage Revival Fund for rescuing historic buildings in England. Recent government announcements have introduced a range of funding streams intended to support the heritage sector, as set out below.

Box 2: This timeline sets out key government funding announcements relating to the heritage sector.

February 2025

- The UK Government announced a £270 million "Arts Everywhere" funding package, with the aim to expand access to culture across the UK and support economic growth through tourism and the creative industries.
- This package included the **Heritage Revival Fund**, delivered by the Architectural Heritage Fund in partnership with the DCMS and Historic England. The fund supported community engagement and the renovation of buildings and shop fronts across 67 key high streets.

54 National Lottery Heritage Fund, Funding [accessed 14 May 2026]

January 2026

- The UK Government announced a £1.5 billion, five-year investment package to support the cultural sector in England, incorporating the previously announced £270 million “Arts Everywhere” package (mentioned above), with the aim to prevent the closure of more than 1,000 cultural venues, including museums, libraries, arts centres and heritage buildings.
- Key elements of the £1.5 billion package include:
- £760 million for museums, including:
  - £600 million for national museum infrastructure and essential maintenance;
  - £160 million for local and regional museums, including maintenance funding; and
  - A £13.6 million transformation programme.
- £425 million Creative Foundations Fund to support around 300 capital projects nationwide.
- £230 million for heritage, including:
  - £75 million to repair at-risk historic buildings;
  - £45 million for a renewed Heritage Revival Fund to support community-led restoration and reuse of heritage sites; and
  - £92 million for the Places of Worship Renewal Fund (PWRF).
- £27.5 million Libraries Improvement Fund to upgrade buildings and technology in public libraries.
- £80 million over four years for National Portfolio Organisations, contributing to a 5% uplift in Arts Council England funding to support cultural provision in every local authority.

May 2026

- The PWRF opened for applications, offering up to £23 million this year. A further £69 million will be provided across the next four years.
- The Heritage at Risk Capital Fund opened applications for its second round of Expressions of Interest. Up to £15 million in funding is available to at-risk heritage sites this year, as part of a total £75 million Fund.
- The Heritage Revival Fund opened applications to its second round, with funding doubling to £10 million per year. The fund (as mentioned above) is providing £45 million to help communities rescue and repurpose neglected historic buildings and transform them to meet modern needs.

Source: GOV.UK[55]

37. While these announcements represent significant investment, evidence described financial constraints and structural weaknesses that undermined the long-term sustainability of the sector. 81% of heritage organisations surveyed by the Heritage Alliance cited a lack of funding as a major concern, with financial pressures eroding budgets and deepening maintenance backlogs.[56] A third of those organisations had ended the 2023–24 financial year in deficit.[57] Rising costs were also cited as a critical factor; inflation had significantly increased the cost of materials and skilled labour, with some projects resulting in cost increases between 30% and 50%.[58] Witnesses further noted that unpredictable, short-term funding created demand spikes, inflating prices for skilled labour and materials which added to further instability in project planning.[59]

38. These pressures have had intangible consequences. For example, English Heritage, which no longer receives regular government funding, told us it had experienced reduced income and had forced some sites to cut hours or close, while maintenance backlogs had continued to grow.[60]

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55 Department for Culture, Media and Sport; The Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP and The Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP, Major investment to boost growth and cement Britain's place as cultural powerhouse [20 February 2025] and Department for Culture, Media and Sport; Baroness Twycross; The Rt Hon Ian Murray MP and The Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP, Government announces bumper £1.5 billion package to restore national pride [21 January 2026] and Department for Culture, Media and Sport; Historic England and Baroness Twycross, Leaking church roofs to be fixed and heritage buildings revitalised as applications open for £48 million of heritage funding [20 May 2026]

56 The Heritage Alliance (HER0091)

57 See reference above

58 Q42

59 Historic England (HER0076) and Architectural Heritage Fund (HER0033)

60 English Heritage (HER0084)

Witnesses described this combination of rising costs, constrained funding and growing repair needs as a "perfect storm".[61] The National Trust called for increased revenue funding to support ongoing maintenance, build organisational capacity and sustain benefits beyond individual projects.[62]

39. Alongside these financial pressures, our evidence highlighted significant structural weaknesses in how heritage funding operates. The current model is heavily weighted towards capital funding for discrete projects, with comparatively limited provision for ongoing maintenance, organisational capacity or long-term needs. Historic England told us that this approach encouraged short-term, project-driven business structures that were "unsustainable" and offered little continuity once a project had ended.[63] We also heard about a mismatch between funding timelines and project delivery. Many projects frequently required between five and 20 years to plan and complete, while funding cycles operated on much shorter timescales. This had led to project delays, increased costs and heightened risk for organisations with limited technical capacity.[64] In addition, we heard that grants were often paid in arrears, requiring recipients to cover significant upfront costs, which could place acute strain on smaller bodies.[65]

40. Multi-year funding was identified as preferable to one-off or short-term grants, as it could enable better planning, reduce risk and support workforce stability.[66] We heard that the NLHF had taken steps in this direction by offering funding over longer timescales—sometimes up to ten years—to provide greater certainty and align more closely with the realities of heritage conservation.[67]

41. It has now been over ten years since the separation of English Heritage and Historic England, intended to clarify responsibilities between statutory functions and operational work.[68] While this change has arguably allowed greater focus in each organisation's specific remit, the evidence we received has still described the broader funding and governance landscape as complex and fragmented. We have not yet seen clear evidence that the current system minimises duplication or maximises the use of limited public funding.

61 Q42
62 National Trust (HER0079)
63 Historic England (HER0076)
64 Architectural Heritage Fund (HER0033); Historic Houses (HER0027) and National Trust (HER0079)
65 Historic England (HER0076); English Heritage (HER0084) and Q36 [Professor Toulmin]
66 Q4; Q94 and Q140 [Eilish McGuinness]
67 Q140 [Eilish McGuinness]
68 Historic England, New Era for England's Heritage [26 February 2015]

42. **RECOMMENDATION**

The current funding landscape for built heritage is fragmented, short-term and does not adequately support the long-term nature of conservation. We recommend that the government sets out a clear, cohesive and long-term strategy for funding built heritage, aligning the various funding streams administered by the DCMS, Historic England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and other bodies so that they operate as a more coherent system. This strategy should rebalance provision away from one-off, capital grants towards multi-year settlements and increased revenue funding, including dedicated support for ongoing maintenance and core organisational costs. Funding settlements should, wherever possible, be allocated over a minimum of three years to enable effective planning and support organisational resilience.

43. **RECOMMENDATION**

The government should review the effectiveness of the current institutional landscape for heritage, including the division of responsibilities between Historic England, English Heritage and other funding bodies. It should assess the case for greater streamlining, or even the merging of organisations, and explore the potential for reducing administrative burdens, bringing expertise together, and improving the accessibility and impact of funding. This review should consider whether simplification of funding routes and organisational roles could enable additional resources to be directed towards the front-line protection of heritage assets.

44. Stakeholders also proposed more fundamental reform of how heritage funding is structured, drawing on models used in the wider cultural sector.[69] We heard that the heritage sector would benefit from a model like Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) system, to address fragmentation and short-termism.[70] Morecambe Winter Gardens suggested a regional portfolio approach to replace the current patchwork of overlapping, time-sensitive grants.[71] Similarly, the Heritage Alliance called for a dedicated Heritage Investment Fund, modelled on the NPO system, to provide consistent core and capacity funding alongside project grants across the sector.[72] However, evidence from the Southbank Centre cautioned that, even within the NPO model, funding has been

69 Morecambe Winter Gardens Preservation Trust Ltd (HER0047); Council for British Archaeology (CBA) (HER0054) and The Heritage Alliance (HER0091)
70 See reference above
71 Morecambe Winter Gardens Preservation Trust Ltd (HER0047)
72 The Heritage Alliance (HER0091)

insufficient to support the maintenance of significant heritage assets and highlighted the need for a model to address both operational sustainability and long-term investment.[73]

45. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the government explore the feasibility of establishing a heritage funding model analogous to Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisation system, or a dedicated heritage investment fund to deliver consistent and strategic investment. Any such model must, however, be designed to reflect the specific needs of the heritage sector and ensure that organisations responsible for significant heritage assets are adequately supported to meet the costs of ongoing maintenance, repair and programme delivery.

46. A further gap existed in early-stage development funding. The AHF and others emphasised that relatively small amounts of funding at the start of a project could be critical to its success. Witnesses argued that without this support, potentially viable projects could fail to progress beyond initial stages.[74] The sector also relies, in part, on private income streams such as philanthropy, membership and visitor revenue. However, we heard that private investment was often dependent on an element of public funding as a signal of confidence and stability.[75]

47. **RECOMMENDATION**

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport and its delivery partners should expand the scale and accessibility of early-stage development funding. This should include ringfenced funding to support feasibility work, design development and access to professional expertise. The government should also ensure that early-stage support is aligned with capital funding streams, so that well-developed projects can transition smoothly to delivery.

Listed Places of Worship

48. Of over 370,000 listed buildings in England, around 14,800 are places of worship. 83% of these are owned by the Church of England (C of E), with most of the remainder being churches or chapels maintained by other Christian denominations or charitable trusts.[76] Around 60 (0.4%)

73 Southbank Centre (HER0092)
74 Architectural Heritage Fund (HER0033) and Q11 [Camilla Finlay]
75 Letter from Geoff Parkin, Interim Chief Executive, English Heritage, regarding Protecting built heritage oral evidence follow-up, 27 November 2025
76 Historic England, What are listed buildings? [accessed 2 July 2026] and Historic Religious Buildings Alliance (HER0104)

listed places of worship are owned by non-Christian faith groups.[77] We heard that listed places of worship face a complex combination of financial, demographic and organisational challenges. Witnesses repeatedly stressed that these challenges were interlinked and financial pressures had intensified since heritage lottery grants for places of worship ended in 2017.[78] Emily Gee, Director for Cathedral and Church Buildings for the C of E, told us that English parish churches spent over £1 billion a year on their buildings, including £167 million in 2023 on building works alone.[79]

Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme

49. Since 2001, the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme (LPWGS) allowed historic religious sites to reclaim VAT costs on their repairs and alterations.[80] The scheme was non-discretionary (provided to all churches for all works) and granted in arrears. Initially, the scheme only repaid churches the calculated difference between the standard rate of 17.5% and a reduced rate of 5%. However, in 2004, the scheme was expanded to cover all VAT costs for alteration and repair. The scheme was never made permanent, despite being expanded in 2004 and extended on multiple occasions between 2005 and 2025.[81]

50. In January 2025, the government renewed the LPWGS for another year until 31 March 2026, to allow listed places of worship to apply for a VAT rebate on any repairs over £1,000. Upon this renewal, the government reduced the scheme's total budget from £42 million to £23 million per year and capped each place of worship's annual grant at £25,000.[82] Witnesses argued that this cap left major repair projects with funding gaps of tens or hundreds of thousands of pounds, often after contracts had been signed.[83] Emily Gee told us that more than 200 projects were affected, particularly those involving major repairs.[84] We wrote to Baroness

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77 Historic Religious Buildings Alliance (HER0104) and Historic Religious Buildings Alliance, Number of listed places of worship (POWs) [accessed 18 May 2026]

78 Q84 [Becky Payne]

79 Q83 [Emily Gee]

80 Department for Culture, Media and Sport, The Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme (LPWGS) is closed, 31 March 2026

81 House of Commons Library, VAT and Churches, Research Briefing CBP01051, 11 May 2026, p22

82 Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Sir Chris Bryant MP, £23 million government package to support restoration of thousands of listed places of worship, 22 January 2025

83 Historic Religious Buildings Alliance (HER0104); Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales (HER0106) and National Churches Trust (HER0035)

84 Q87 [Emily Gee]

Twycross to raise concerns about the scheme's short-term and non-permanent funding cycle being incompatible with the timescales of heritage projects, and pointed out that the cap had introduced further instability.[85]

51. The minister, in her evidence, described the scheme as a "pretty blunt tool" and cited evaluation evidence indicating that around 80% of recipients would have undertaken repairs regardless of the scheme.[86] In January 2026, the government announced that from 2026–27 it would introduce a new £23 million per-year capital fund, the 'Places of Worship Renewal Fund' (PWRF).[87] Baroness Twycross said it would be focused on listed places of worship in "areas of greatest need", aiming to support vulnerable congregations, particularly volunteer-led and small faith communities.[88]

52. Concerns were, however, raised about the decision to end the LPWGS. Reverend Paula Griffiths, a retired C of E priest, said:

> LPWGS enabled prompt, certain and automatic support. Without it, many repairs would have taken longer to fund, with the state of the building deteriorating and the costs (both of the extent of the works needed and the cost of building materials and labour) rising meanwhile. Without it, the cost of all repair schemes will increase by 20%, whether or not the parish are successful in any grant application.[89]

The National Churches Trust similarly called for all listed places of worship in the UK to retain the ability to reclaim VAT on repairs and maintenance under the new scheme.[90]

53. The minister told us that funding for the new PWRF would target areas experiencing "double disadvantage", combining measures of deprivation with evidence of community need, although she noted that geographic indicators alone might not fully capture community value.[91] Fazima Osborn, Deputy Director for Heritage at the DCMS, added that decisions would also consider building conditions and their wider social role, with a weighting

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85 Letter from Dame Caroline Dinenage MP, Committee Chair, to Baroness Twycross, Minister for Gambling and Heritage regarding Protecting Built Heritage: Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, dated 24 July 2025

86 Q291 and Q294

87 Department for Culture, Media and Sport; Baroness Twycross; The Rt Hon Ian Murray MP and The Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP, Government announces bumper £1.5 billion package to restore national pride, 21 January 2026 and Launch of new capital fund for places of worship UIN HCWS1268, 22 January 2026

88 Letter from Baroness Twycross, Minister for Museums, Heritage and Gambling, regarding the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, 22 January 2026

89 The Reverend Paula Griffiths (HER0117)

90 National Churches Trust, FACT CHECK: what we know about the new funding for churches and VAT changes, 23 January 2026

91 Q291

towards more disadvantaged areas.[92] The minister confirmed prioritisation would use measures such as the Indices of Multiple Deprivation and the Community Needs Index (CNI)[93], with further detail published on place-targeting methodology.[94]

54. **CONCLUSION**

The government's decision to replace the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme with the Places of Worship Renewal Fund represents a significant shift. While we recognise the rationale for directing limited public funds towards areas of greatest socio-economic need, we remain concerned that reliance on area-based indicators risks disadvantaging places of worship of high historic and architectural significance that fall outside narrowly defined measures of deprivation. There is also a risk that the community value and reach of places of worship may be overlooked, particularly where their activities extend beyond their immediate postcode.

55. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the government ensures that overall funding available through the Places of Worship Renewal Fund is at least as generous in real terms as the level of support provided through the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme prior to its reductions in budget and the introduction of per-site caps, to prevent any reduction in the number and scale of essential repair projects. The government must also ensure that the eligibility criteria for the Places of Worship Renewal Fund strike an appropriate balance between measures of deprivation and the heritage value of buildings. The government should provide an update on the implementation and early progress of the scheme in its response to this report and should write to the committee again on the matter at six and 12 months thereafter.

VAT

56. In addition to market-driven cost pressures, we heard that the tax system—particularly VAT—introduced further structural barriers to funding heritage repair and reuse. Construction works on new residential buildings and some conversions are zero-rated for VAT. However, alterations to listed buildings are subject to VAT at a rate of 20%.[95] In January 2025, Historic Houses published a "VAT rebates" report, highlighting unequal impacts across

92 Q300

93 Letter from Baroness Twycross, Minister for Museums, Heritage and Gambling relating to the launch of the new Places of Worship Renewal Fund (PWRF), 20 May 2026

94 The Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Culture Priority Places, 1 June 2026

95 English Heritage (HER0084) and National Trust (HER0079)

the sector. It found that while VAT-registered owners could usually reclaim most or all VAT on repairs, many heritage properties (particularly those run by charities or offering free public spaces) could not do so (or can only partially recover it), meaning VAT became an additional cost and a disincentive to undertaking high-quality conservation work. Some owners therefore reported using cheaper, non-VAT registered contractors who might lack specialist heritage skills, potentially risking lower-quality repairs and long-term damage. The report also found that VAT could reduce the extent of public access provided, as organisations sought to manage costs.[96]

57. Witnesses discussed how VAT reform could significantly encourage reuse of historic buildings. Camilla Finlay, Director of Clews Architects, told us that after the removal of VAT relief in 2012 and the more recent cap on refund schemes, the VAT burden on major projects had become "catastrophic", with churches facing VAT bills so large that planned works had become financially unviable.[97] Dr Tegwen Roberts, former Heritage Action Zone Lead for Eldon Street (Barnsley) High Street Heritage Action Zone, explained that even when VAT could be reclaimed, the three-month delay in reimbursement could cause severe cash-flow problems for small building owners, where VAT bills exceeded annual turnover.[98]

58. Historic Houses described VAT on repairs and maintenance as the "one significant financial barrier to preserving heritage" and proposed a VAT rebate scheme for listed buildings open to the public for at least 28 days a year. It argued that this would both reduce costs and incentivise greater public access.[99] Its Director General, Ben Cowell, estimated the scheme would cost around £6 million, plus approximately £1 million in administrative costs, while generating benefits of around £14 million.[100] English Heritage similarly called for targeted VAT reform, noting that the 20% VAT discouraged repair and reuse and disproportionately affected organisations managing free-entry sites, where VAT could not be reclaimed. They recommended exploring a VAT reclaim scheme for publicly accessible heritage sites to support sustainability, public benefit and net-zero goals.[101] Several organisations also advocated for VAT equalisation, whereby repairs and retrofits would be taxed at the same rate as new build or demolition.[102] The NLHF said this would reduce regeneration costs and improve project viability.[103]

96 Historic Houses, VAT Rebates [accessed 28 March 2026]
97 Q36 [Camilla Finlay]
98 Q36 [Dr Roberts]
99 Historic Houses (HER0027)
100 Q47
101 English Heritage (HER0084)
102 Historic Houses (HER0027); Architectural Heritage Fund (HER0033) and The Heritage Alliance (HER0091)
103 The National Lottery Heritage Fund (HER0085)

59. The government said that it had “no plans to zero-rate or cover VAT costs for historic buildings”.[104] When asked whether VAT reform could unlock more heritage reuse, Baroness Twycross said she was open to reviewing evidence, but said that some reduced VAT rates already exist (for example, 5% VAT for buildings vacant for over two years or for converting commercial to residential use).[105] She emphasised that VAT decisions ultimately sat with HM Treasury and she had not yet engaged Treasury ministers on the issue.[106]

60. **CONCLUSION**

The current VAT regime creates a structural disincentive to repair, maintain and reuse historic buildings. Sector bodies have told us that changes, such as rebate schemes or equalisation with new-build rates, could unlock stalled housing schemes, prevent managed decline and generate wider economic benefits. The current approach is out of step with the government’s ambition to promote adaptive reuse and safeguard the UK’s historic environment. We understand the government’s reluctance to introduce tax relief in a time of fiscal constraint but given what we have heard about the potentially huge contribution that built heritage can make to meeting housing targets, it is clear that the returns would be more than worth the investment.

61. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the DCMS initiate formal discussions with HM Treasury on the impact of VAT on heritage repair and reuse. The government should introduce targeted VAT relief for maintenance and conversion of listed heritage buildings. This could include reducing or removing the VAT rate altogether for eligible restoration works or establishing a rebate scheme for listed properties open for a minimum number of days each year. Any such measures must also be designed to unlock the delivery of new homes through heritage-led reuse, helping to meet the government’s housing targets.

104 Department for Culture, Media and Sport (HER0063)
105 Q319
106 Q320 and Q323

62. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the government reform VAT rules applying to the repurposing of existing buildings to remove the current disincentive to investment and to support national carbon reduction objectives. The new rules should replace the narrow and complex 5% reduced-rate provisions—which exclude most heritage buildings and energy efficiency upgrades—and end the structural bias towards demolition over conservation. These reforms would be part of a revised regime that reduces the disparity between new-build construction and heritage conversion and promotes reuse and retrofit as the default development pathway.

63. We heard that historic businesses occupying heritage buildings on high streets also faced taxation pressures. High Street Story told us that "the burden of business rates", alongside other financial pressures, presented a significant challenge for high street businesses, many of which occupy heritage assets that contribute to local identity.[107] The closure of businesses could result not only in the loss of an important local employer and service, but also in the loss of heritage value associated with historic high streets.[108]

64. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that HM Treasury review the impact of the business rates system on high street premises and heritage buildings and bring forward reforms that reduce burden on these properties. The reforms should include proposals to shift a greater share of the business rates burden onto retail parks, large distribution warehouses and high-profit logistic sites.

107 High Street Story (HER0008)

108 As above

3 The public heritage estate

65. In this chapter, we look at what the government can do to make the best use of built heritage when it comes to its own estate.

66. The government owns and looks after a large estate of historic listed buildings and scheduled monuments across the country, including some of England's most important and historic sites. Its Historic Estate includes around 6,000 heritage assets and is overseen by the Protocol for the Care of the Government Historic Estate.[109] It incorporates buildings in active use, such as prisons and courthouses, and sites that have been left derelict, including military forts. With this level of breadth and complexity, ownership and maintenance responsibilities are spread across a whole range of government departments. The Cabinet Office oversees the wider government estate through two key bodies: the Office of Government Property (OGP), which leads on strategy, data collection and the setting of cross-government standards, and the Government Property Agency (GPA), which is responsible for the operational management and delivery of property services across the government estate.[110] Historic England provides specialist advice and support to help public bodies care for their heritage assets.[111] Local authorities also play a key role in maintaining historic buildings and can intervene when designated heritage assets fall into disrepair.

67. Witnesses raised concerns about fragmentation across departments, with responsibilities for heritage spread across multiple policy areas and a lack of joined up thinking in government funding approaches.[112] Mechanisms such as the Heritage Council—which brings together government departments and the heritage sector—were described as a "helpful forum" for engagement.[113] However, evidence suggested that existing structures may not yet have delivered sufficient coordination in practice. Major General Andy Sturock, Director of Strategy and Skills Planning for the Defence

109 Historic England (HER0076); Historic England, Protocol for the Care of the Government Historic Estate [8 November 2017]
110 GOV.UK, Office of Government Property (OGP) [accessed 17 June 2026]; GOV.UK, Government Property Agency [accessed 17 June 2026]
111 Historic England, Historic England's role [accessed 17 June 2026]
112 Q68 [Ben Cowell] and Q251 and Q254
113 GOV.UK, Heritage Council; English Heritage (HER0084)

Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), noted the absence of a government-wide pipeline of heritage projects and suggested that such a pipeline could help improve coordination and industry skills planning.[114]

68. We also heard about a gap in oversight and accountability. Mark Bourgeois, Chief Executive of the GPA, explained that although the OGP issued general guidance on managing the government estate, they did not appear to specifically monitor, audit or enforce how departments cared for their heritage assets.[115] Neither the Ministry of Defence (MOD) nor the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) systematically collect detailed, heritage-specific condition or expenditure data at an asset level.[116] We also heard that the MOD did not track spending on heritage separately from broader estate maintenance, but that the figure was likely to be in the hundreds of millions of pounds.[117]

The deterioration of public heritage assets

69. We discovered a growing problem of deteriorating heritage assets owned by the public sector. High Street Story drew attention to derelict Crown-owned properties on high streets and said that communities should be able to bring these buildings back into use rather than face prohibitive purchase costs.[118] Local authorities in particular reported that maintaining historic assets was increasingly beyond their financial capacity.[119] Witnesses called for a more proactive approach to manage public assets, including disposal, leasing, or partnership models and argued that publicly owned heritage required “greater requirements and incentives for finding solutions to secure their reuse and conservation”, including working with private-sector partners or enabling community asset transfer.[120]

70. We heard clear examples of the challenges associated with public ownership of heritage assets, particularly where large parts of the estate remained under the control of central government. The borough of Gosport contains a significant concentration of former MOD sites, including historic fortifications such as Fort Blockhouse, Fort Rowner (which lies within the grounds of HMS Sultan) and other complex brownfield sites, which are underused or vacant and, in some cases, have fallen into disrepair.[121]

114 Q251 [Major General Sturrock]; Q254 [Major General Sturrock]
115 Q257
116 Q236-237, Q247-252 and Q252-256
117 Q235 and Email from Ministry of Defence, regarding Protecting built heritage oral evidence follow-up, 28 January 2026.
118 High Street Story (HER0008)
119 The Worthing Society (HER0020)
120 Urban Vision Enterprise, D2H Land Planning Development (HER0013)
121 Historic England, Gosport [accessed 15 June 2026] and Gosport Borough Council (HER0086)

71. Historic England's own reporting revealed uneven performance across departments, with the MOJ ranked as the lowest-performing department in terms of heritage stewardship, scoring poorly across key indicators such as condition monitoring, maintenance planning and reporting on at-risk assets.[122] The co-CEO of Historic England, Emma Squire CBE, said many departments did not follow her organisation's protocols[123] and that there was no enforcement mechanism that ensured compliance. She said that heritage management was often an "afterthought" with departments prioritising operational budgets and lacking structured processes such as condition surveys and dedicated heritage officers.[124] We were also surprised to hear from the Chief Property Officer at the MOJ that he had no relationship with Historic England.[125]

72. Mark Chivers, Chief Property Officer at the OGP, acknowledged that managed decline was not acceptable and added that the government intended to challenge instances of insufficient maintenance. He also told us that the government was strengthening oversight of estate maintenance by linking HM Treasury funding more closely to departments producing sustainable repair plans, to ensure that money was spent on maintenance.[126] The MOD recommended making repurposing public heritage assets easier by streamlining planning and consent processes, giving greater weight to keeping buildings in long-term use and providing clearer policy support for adaptive reuse across large estates. It also suggested exploring faster internal decision-making mechanisms, using evidence to identify barriers and relaxing rules around de-listing or demolition where assets were obsolete and no longer fit for purpose.[127]

73. **CONCLUSION**

Publicly owned heritage assets are too often allowed to deteriorate, with responsibility spread across departments, weak compliance with existing protocols and no effective mechanism to enforce minimum standards. While the government has acknowledged the need to improve oversight, this must now be matched by a more robust and accountable framework. The government must lead by example by ensuring that the buildings it owns and is responsible for are properly maintained, actively managed and, where appropriate, brought back into beneficial use.

122 Historic England, Biennial Report on the Care of the Government Historic Estate 2021–23, 8 July 2024

123 Historic England's Protocol for the Care of the Government Historic Estate (2017) sets out requirements for government departments and arm's-length bodies to manage, maintain and dispose of heritage assets appropriately.

124 Q206 [Emma Squire]

125 Q239. Baroness Twycross later confirmed that they had subsequently met [Q333].

126 Q331

127 Email from Ministry of Defence, regarding Protecting built heritage oral evidence follow-up, 28 January 2026

74. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that UK Government departments be required to produce and publish asset-level heritage management plans for all listed buildings within their estate, including condition assessments, maintenance schedules and plans for reuse or disposal. These plans should be updated regularly and subject to external scrutiny.

Managing and coordinating the public estate

75. One of the government's primary mechanisms for managing and coordinating its estate is the 'One Public Estate' (OPE) programme.

Box 3: What is One Public Estate?

One Public Estate is a cross-government programme run by the Local Government Association and the Office of Government Property within the Cabinet Office, designed to help public-sector bodies make better use of land and buildings. It provides funding, data and technical support to councils and local partnerships to reuse or release under-utilised public assets. Its core aims are to:

- create new homes and jobs for economic growth;
- deliver more integrated, customer-focused services; and
- generate efficiencies through capital receipts and reduced running costs.

Source: Local Government Association[128]

We questioned government officials on whether OPE amounted to more than a slogan.[129] Richard McSeveney, Chief Property Officer at the MOJ, told us that OPE was an active programme, focused regionally and designed to coordinate the management of the government estate to support economic growth and potentially housing delivery. He added that OPE formed part of a wider effort to manage the estate more coherently, citing the National Audit Office's estimate of a £49 billion maintenance backlog across UK public service buildings and ongoing attempts to 'join up' departments.[130]

128 Local Government Association, One Public Estate [accessed 25 February 2026]
129 Q261
130 Q261

76. On the contribution of the public estate to housing delivery, Mark Chivers, Government Chief Property Officer, said that OPE had already delivered 80,000 homes, including schemes involving heritage assets.[131] Mr Chivers cited the Waltham Forest civic campus scheme as an example, where refurbishment of a listed building was paired with the delivery of over 400 new homes on adjoining public land.[132] When asked whether housing carried special weight in government disposal decisions, he said that housing sat within the wider Green Book assessment of social value rather than having a standalone priority.[133] He noted that with disposals the first consideration was whether a site was still needed for government use and if not, whether it could support regeneration, including housing.[134] He also confirmed that the government had already exceeded its cross-government disposals target and that OPE remained an important mechanism for releasing land in a coordinated way that supported local priorities. [135]

77. **CONCLUSION**

While the One Public Estate programme represents a valuable attempt to coordinate the management and disposal of public assets, heritage considerations are not systematically embedded within its operations. Evidence suggests that decisions are still primarily driven by broader regeneration and housing objectives, with heritage outcomes treated as secondary rather than integral. We therefore see opportunities to reuse historic assets and secure their long-term conservation. Without explicit and consistent integration, the government will struggle to ensure that its own estate is managed in a way that protects and realises the full value of the historic environment.

78. **RECOMMENDATION**

The government should embed built heritage within the One Public Estate programme, making heritage considerations a specific factor to be taken into account when it comes to the management, reuse and disposal of publicly-owned assets. This should be supported by a new robust regime that incentivises public bodies to properly manage their heritage assets or dispose of them where decline is evident, including by exploring financial and performance-based incentives to support good stewardship. Alongside the incentives, the government should also put in place penalties for departments who fail to comply and allow assets to fall into avoidable disrepair.

131 Q304 [Mark Chivers]
132 Q327
133 Q306
134 Q305–306 [Mark Chivers]
135 Q332 [Mark Chivers]

4 Workforce and skills

79. In this chapter, we turn to the workforce and skills challenges facing the heritage sector. We heard about longstanding shortages in specialist heritage skills, an ageing workforce, structural barriers to training and recruitment and a heavy reliance on volunteers.[136] These pressures affect not only the ability to maintain historic buildings, but the financial resilience of organisations responsible for their care.[137] Research suggested that workforce decline was imminent; around 20% of the construction workforce is aged over 55 and likely to retire by 2030, while 49% of young people have never considered a career in the building trades.[138] Local authorities reported a sharp decline in conservation officers and specialist staff largely due to budget pressures, which had led to greater reliance on external consultants and reduced in-house capacity.[139] The Diocese of Chichester also pointed to uncompetitive pay, with salaries in public heritage roles failing to keep pace with inflation (and therefore leading to recruitment and retention challenges), as a major factor in recruitment and retention difficulties.[140]

80. Baroness Twycross warned that these skills gaps posed a real risk to heritage assets. She said:

> If you do not have the skills to adapt or refurbish heritage buildings, you can make the situation worse than it was to start with.[141]

81. **CONCLUSION**

Workforce and skills shortages now pose one of the most serious risks to the long-term protection of the UK's built heritage. An ageing workforce, limited training routes, insecure funding and declining local authority expertise are combining to create a fragile skills pipeline that is unable to meet current demand. Additionally, delivery remains fragmented, short-term and insufficiently coordinated. Without sustained intervention, these gaps in capacity will continue to drive up costs, delay essential works and accelerate the deterioration of historic buildings.

136 Q39; Q338 and Q362
137 Q39 [Camilla Finlay]
138 National Trust (HER0079)
139 Lancaster City Council (HER0094); Sheffield City Council (HER0074); Gosport Borough Council (HER0086) and Worthing Borough Council (HER0078)
140 Diocese of Chichester (HER0007)
141 Q338

Skills and training

82. Many organisations informed us of severe shortages in skills such as stonemasonry, heritage roofing, thatching, flintwork, stained-glass conservation and specialist timber work.[142] The Heritage Crafts Red List is a framework maintained by the charity Heritage Crafts that categorises traditional craft skills in the UK according to their level of risk, assessing their viability and likelihood of being passed on to future generations. It identified several essential skills—such as bell founding and slate working—as endangered.[143] Ben Cowell OBE, Director General of Historic Houses, told us that only around 10% of those working in heritage construction and craft roles were under the age of 25, while Ian Morrison OBE, Director of Policy and Evidence at Historic England, said it was "very rare" to find people under 35 in heritage construction businesses.[144] Historic England's Co-CEO, Emma Squire, added:

> 76% of heritage construction organisations cannot find people with relevant skills when they go out to market and one in six are turning down work due to skills shortages. We are not maintaining the current workforce and, […] we think there is an additional 105,000 jobs in the economy every year between now and 2050.[145]

83. Our evidence suggested that training routes in the sector were limited and inaccessible. The National Trust told us that it received large numbers of applicants whenever it advertised an apprenticeship programme, but stressed the shortage of available training routes and sustained employment opportunities as a principal barrier.[146] Stone Federation Great Britain explained that the "serious skills shortage" was largely driven by the limited number of training providers (just four in England), leading to cost barriers and long travel distances for young people and small businesses.[147] Baroness Twycross noted that many apprentices "happened upon" heritage roles, rather than encountering them through structured careers advice or earlier awareness of these opportunities.[148]

84. An example of best practice which we have noted is the work of the Hopwood Foundation in partnership with HM Prison Service at HMP Thorn Cross. The Foundation launched a heritage skills training programme that delivers training in traditional building and heritage construction skills. By providing participants with practical skills, work-related experience and

142 Diocese of Chichester (HER0007);
143 Heritage Crafts, The Heritage Crafts Red List [accessed 05 April 2026]
144 Q63 [Ben Cowell]; Q223 [Ian Morrison]
145 Q223 [Emma Squire]
146 Q63 - Q64 [Hilary McGrady]
147 Stone Federation Great Britain (HER0116)
148 Q340 and Q344

pathways into employment, the programme supports rehabilitation while helping to address persistent workforce shortages in specialist heritage trades.[149] At a time when the sector faces significant skills gaps, initiatives such as this help demonstrate how innovative training routes can expand access to heritage careers and contribute to the long-term sustainability of the sector's workforce.

85. **RECOMMENDATION**
The government should build on the success of the Hopwood Foundation's heritage skills training programme at HMP Thorn Cross by supporting the expansion of similar schemes across prisons and further education sectors. Such programmes could help address critical shortages in traditional building and heritage trades while also improving employment outcomes.

86. **RECOMMENDATION**
We recommend that the government work with Skills England, Historic England and sector bodies to create protected training pathways for endangered heritage crafts, including the specialist skills identified on the Heritage Crafts Red List. It should establish a "heritage skills hub" to promote careers in the heritage sector and provide advice and guidance to those looking for a career. As a first step, within 12 months, the government should formally engage with and build upon existing sector-led mapping of endangered crafts to identify priority skills gaps in training provision. The government should then set out how this assessment has informed the design of targeted interventions, such as funded placements and accredited training routes and report back to this committee within a further 12 months on progress and delivery.

Apprenticeships

87. In April 2026, the Apprenticeship Levy was replaced by the Growth and Skills Levy, reflecting a shift in government policy. While the mechanism for collection remains unchanged (requiring employers with an annual pay bill over £3 million to contribute 0.5% of payroll), levy funding can now be used for shorter, modular training courses known as 'apprenticeship units' as well as full and foundation apprenticeships. These new units, typically lasting one to 16 weeks and aimed at those aged 19 and over, are designed to support rapid upskilling in priority areas such as AI, advanced manufacturing, construction and net-zero-related skills. However, there is as yet no confirmed funding for units with a clear focus on heritage or

149 Historic Environment Forum, Sector Spotlight: Heritage meets Hope in a New Workforce Pathway, 5th March 2026

conservation skills. The levy also does not generally cover associated costs, such as essential costs like travel, PPE and tools, which may continue to limit participation.[150]

88. Witnesses raised concerns about the effectiveness of current apprenticeship models in addressing skills gaps in the sector. Historic England reported a 43% decline in conservation specialists employed by local authorities between 2006 and 2022, illustrating the scale of skills erosion.[151] They added that the sector was often perceived as unstable, with uncertain funding discouraging long-term investment in training.[152] English Heritage noted that the short-term nature of conservation projects made it difficult for organisations to meet the duration requirements of standard apprenticeships.[153] They argued that a lack of operational heritage-specific apprenticeship standards—and a shortage of training providers and End-Point Assessment Organisations—rendered many approved standards unusable in practice.[154]

89. The operation of the Apprenticeship Levy was also criticised and described as "cumbersome" as the levy funded training but not wages, making participation financially unviable for micro-businesses.[155] Witnesses added that barriers to accessing levy funding affected organisations of different sizes, with smaller businesses struggling to access funding and larger organisations, such as the National Trust, encountering similar difficulties.[156] The Chief Executive of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Eilish McGuinness, said that a more co-ordinated approach, where stakeholders in the industry work together, could help address that.[157]

90. Shared (multi-employer) apprenticeship schemes were identified as a potential solution to enable apprentices to gain experience across multiple organisations.[158] Suggested models included shared placements across sites or regions.[159] Historic England also proposed expanding entry routes, funding training coordinators to support micro-businesses, integrating

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150 Department for Education, The Growth and Skills Levy and Department for Education, Apprenticeship units [1 April 2026]
151 Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, Department for Culture, Media & Sport and Department for Energy Security & Net Zero, Adapting historic homes for energy efficiency: a review of the barriers, 3 January 2024
152 National Trust (HER0079); Historic England (HER0076) and English Heritage (HER0084)
153 English Heritage (HER0084)
154 English Heritage (HER0084), see also Stone Federation Great Britain (HER0116)
155 Q63-64 [Hilary McGrady]
156 Q63-64 [Hilary McGrady] and Q156 [Eilish McGuinness]
157 Q156 [Eilish McGuinness]
158 The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (HER0017)
159 Q155

heritage content into mainstream construction apprenticeships, supporting non-apprenticeship pathways and improving coordination across national and regional bodies.[160]

91. Baroness Twycross accepted that improvements to the levy were needed, including covering essential costs and equipment.[161] She noted growing willingness among organisations to collaborate on shared apprenticeship models, which could help address capacity constraints.[162] She also confirmed that she had engaged with the Minister of State for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, as well as Historic England and Skills England.[163]

92. **RECOMMENDATION**
We recommend that the government, within 12 months of the introduction of the Growth and Skills Levy, review how greater flexibility can be built into the levy scheme to better support the heritage sector. This review should assess whether levy-funded training is sufficiently accessible to small employers, charities and sole traders and whether current provision reflects the sector's need for flexible, shared and non-standard training models. As part of this review, the government should set out how it will measure success, including uptake by heritage employers, completion rates and employer feedback, and report its findings to the committee.

93. **RECOMMENDATION**
We recommend that the government consult on and implement proposals to establish and then promote multi-employer apprenticeship schemes tailored to the heritage sector, enabling small and specialist heritage businesses to pool apprentices, share costs and benefit collectively from sustained skills development.

Volunteers

94. Volunteers play a critical role in preserving built heritage. Rochester Cathedral said that across England's 42 cathedrals alone, 15,400 volunteers contributed over 906,000 hours in 2019.[164] However, witnesses stressed that volunteer capacity was often insufficient for managing complex, large-scale funding programmes or repair and

160 Historic England (HER0076)
161 Q340
162 Q338
163 Q338; Q342 and Q346
164 Rochester Cathedral (HER0057)

restoration projects.[165] Reverend Paula Griffiths, a retired Church of England priest, told us that churches relied heavily on volunteers, who increasingly shouldered responsibilities such as safeguarding, fundraising and building maintenance. These pressures have intensified due to later retirement ages, changing work patterns and competing caring responsibilities.[166]

95. As discussed earlier, the complexity and accessibility of funding processes create significant challenges across the sector. We heard that demands to secure funding were a major source of pressure. Smaller organisations and volunteer-led groups often struggled with the complexity and resource burden of applying for funding and often ended up competing against others.[167] Morecambe Winter Gardens, for example, reported spending £125,000 simply to prepare a major capital application.[168]

96. Volunteer burnout was also said to be a threat to future heritage maintenance. The Churches' Legislation Advisory Service told us that thousands of historic places of worship depended on volunteers. They said:

> If the task of maintaining them proves too overwhelming or becomes financially unsustainable, they may simply walk away.[169]

To tackle this, witnesses argued that structured mentoring, "critical friends" and early-stage feasibility funding could allow volunteer groups to plan realistically and avoid becoming overwhelmed.[170]

97. The minister acknowledged that the sector had two and a half times as many volunteers as full-time employees and acknowledged the concerns about volunteer burnout. She said that the DCMS and its arm's-length bodies were aware that they needed to make processes more accessible for volunteers.[171] She was unable to provide detailed data on the age of volunteers, class or diversity profiles, but noted that this information was collected, with the DCMS intending to publish further data to address this gap.[172]

165 The Church of England Diocese of Hereford (HER0018)
166 Q79 [Reverend Paula Griffiths] and Q82 [Becky Payne]; The Church of England, Festival churches [accessed 05 May 2026]
167 Q129–130 [Matthew Mckeague] and Q14 [Camilla Finlay]
168 Q15
169 Churches' Legislation Advisory Service (HER0019)
170 Q10
171 Q362 [Baroness Twycross]
172 Q363 and Letter from Baroness Twycross, Minister for Museums, Heritage and Gambling relating to Protect built heritage evidence session follow-up, 22 May 2026

98. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and its arm's-length bodies develop a funded support framework that gives volunteer-led organisations access to practical assistance, including 'critical friends', mentoring and shared technical resources. This could include, for example, funded access to short-term professional support (such as surveyors, project managers or conservation architects) to help volunteers develop realistic plans, manage complex heritage projects more effectively and reduce the risk of volunteer burnout.

5 The planning system

99. This chapter examines the planning system and concerns about its operation in relation to built heritage. Listed building consent is required for works that affect the character of a listed building. This includes alterations, extensions or demolition. Applications are usually determined by local planning authorities, often with input from statutory consultees such as Historic England.

100. We heard that lengthy planning and listed building consent processes, and inherent delays in decision-making, actively discouraged owners from carrying out repairs or bringing historic buildings back into use.[173] Grosvenor, a property owner and developer, reported that, while 93% of listed building consent applications were ultimately successful, only around one third were decided within the statutory eight-week timeframe, delaying investment in heritage assets.[174] Professor Vanessa Toulmin, Chair of Morecambe Winter Gardens, provided a vivid example, where a three-month planning delay on her project resulted in a £56,000 cost increase as staff contracts had to continue during the delay.[175] Witnesses called for greater flexibility, particularly for smaller-scale or reversible changes. Ben Cowell OBE, Director General of Historic Houses, noted that modest adaptations (such as secondary glazing or air source heat pumps) often faced disproportionate barriers despite being essential for viable use.[176] While acknowledging that heritage projects were often seen as more complex than new builds, Baroness Twycross said that the government was consulting on reforms better to balance conservation with development and recognised that the current system involved "hoops" that discouraged development.[177]

173 Listed Property Owners' Club (HER0052)
174 Grosvenor (HER0119)
175 Q31-32
176 Q55 [Ben Cowell]
177 Q309 [Baroness Twycross] and Q312

National Policy

101. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the government's guidance to local authorities on preparing plans for how land in England should be used and developed.[178] It also guides decisions on housing, infrastructure, transport, environment, heritage, retail and economic growth. It sits alongside planning legislation such as the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Localism Act 2011.

102. In December 2025, the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) launched a consultation seeking views on a draft revised NPPF. The consultation closed in March 2026 and responses are currently under review.[179] Fazima Osborn, Deputy Director for Heritage at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), told us that developers wanted "certainty, clarity and consistency" in decision making. Proposed changes to planning rules aim to address this by: recognising the reuse of vacant or underused buildings as a significant public benefit; giving substantial weight to improvements in the energy efficiency of heritage assets; and removing the requirement to demonstrate a building's optimal viable use, easing approval for practical reuse proposals.[180]

103. Grosvenor suggested these reforms might not go far enough. In its "Retrofit or Ruin: Planning for the future of heritage" report, it described planning reform as "the most immediate lever" for unlocking large-scale adaptation of historic buildings, but warned that existing frameworks remained too complex, inconsistent and risk averse.[181]

104. We also heard that inconsistencies between local authorities had created uncertainty for applicants and undermined confidence in the system.[182] Witnesses said the planning policies were often applied unevenly at local level, with "a lot of ambiguity, which one local officer can interpret one way and another local officer can interpret another".[183] Stakeholders and the Local Government Association (LGA) called for clearer national policy to support local authorities in consistent decision-making on adapting heritage assets.[184]

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178 Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, National Planning Policy Framework [December 2024, accessed 08 May 2026]

179 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, National Planning Policy Framework: proposed reforms and other changes to the planning system, 16 December 2025

180 Q311 [Fazima Osborn]

181 Retrofit or Ruin: Planning for the future of heritage, Grosvenor [accessed 8 May 2026]

182 Diocese of Chichester (HER0007); Historic Houses (HER0027); The Worthing Society (HER0020) and Urban Vision Enterprise, D2H Land Planning Development (HER0013)

183 Q32

184 Local Government Association (HER0049) and Q17

105. **CONCLUSION**

While the government's proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework are welcome, they must go further to address the persistent delays, inconsistency and administrative burden experienced by developers, owners and community organisations. Without change in how the system operates in practice, there is a risk that well-intentioned policy reforms will fail to deliver the intended outcomes on the ground, leaving historic buildings to deteriorate rather than be brought back into beneficial use.

106. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport work closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure that the revised National Planning Policy Framework delivers tangible improvements for the heritage sector. In particular, the government, within two years of the revised framework coming into force, should publish an assessment of the framework's impact on heritage outcomes, including the number of heritage buildings brought back into use and evidence of greater consistency in decision-making across local planning authorities.

Listed building consent

107. The listed building consent regime was widely described as overly rigid and insufficiently responsive to the practical realities of maintaining historic buildings. Church heritage organisations highlighted instances where modest or sensitive adaptations were resisted by planning authorities and raised concerns that an overly restrictive approach could contribute to the managed decline of redundant churches.[185] Witnesses also suggested that enforcement action was often reactive and punitive rather than preventative, with insufficient use of early intervention or repair notices to prevent decline.[186] At the same time, once a building is listed, the planning system was said to have placed a disproportionate financial and administrative burden on owners, who were often expected to absorb additional costs and delays without corresponding public support, even where works were required by law.[187] Witnesses argued that this risked alienating responsible owners and could ultimately weaken heritage protection.[188] While Smith Jenkins Planning & Heritage

185 Diocese of Chichester (HER0007); Church Buildings Commission for the Diocese of Norwich (HER0015) and Friends of Friendless Churches (HER0026)
186 David Richard Barton (HER0010) and The Worthing Society (HER0020)
187 Historic Houses (HER0027) and Dr Tom Welsh (HER0011)
188 Historic Houses (HER0027)

proposed introducing fees for listed building consent applications,[189] several witnesses warned that such fees could be unfair, discourage proper conservation, undermine volunteer organisations and deter compliance, potentially leading some owners to undertake works without consent.[190]

Listed Building Consent Orders

108. Local Listed Building Consent Orders (LLBCOs), created under the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013, allow local planning authorities to grant permissions for specified works to groups of listed buildings, removing the need for individual applications where conditions are met.[191] We heard that LLBCOs were a potentially important but underused tool for streamlining decision-making, reducing costs and easing administrative burdens.[192] Evidence supported their wider use to clarify permissible works (such as insulation or glazing) and enable more efficient maintenance and retrofit activity.[193] The Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Historic England noted that LLBCOs were already being used in some areas (for example, to facilitate energy-efficiency measures) but could be expanded.[194]

109. Witnesses also highlighted that, since the introduction of National Listed Building Consent Orders[195] in 2013, none had been implemented.[196] Stakeholders, including Grosvenor suggested their use alongside a new national model "Local Development Order" which could be tweaked by local authorities to reflect local circumstances. More broadly, we heard that both local and national orders remained underused despite their potential to streamline permissions, with examples such as the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea permitting solar panels under an LLBCO, demonstrating their practical benefits.[197] The government indicated that it is examining barriers to uptake and signalled openness to national-level action if further intervention proves necessary. [198]

189 Smith Jenkins Planning & Heritage (HER0081)
190 Listed Property Owners' Club (HER0052); Urban Vision Enterprise, D2H Land Planning Development (HER0013) and Q38 [Professor Toulmin]
191 Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013; Historic England, Drawing up a Local Listed Building Consent Order [November 2015]
192 Council for British Archaeology (CBA) (HER0054) and Listed Property Owners' Club (HER0052)
193 National Federation of Roofing Contractors (HER0072); Wales Heritage Group (HER0039)
194 Department for Culture, Media and Sport (HER0063) and Historic England (HER0076)
195 A National Listed Building Consent Order allows certain works to listed buildings to be carried out without individual consent applications, providing a consistent, pre-approved framework for managing changes while protecting heritage significance.
196 Q55 [Ben Cowell]; Grosvenor (HER0119)
197 Grosvenor (HER0119); The Heritage Alliance (HER0091)
198 Q350 [Fazima Osborn]

110. **CONCLUSION**
Where Local Listed Building Consent Orders have been used, they have reduced administrative burdens, lowered costs and provided greater clarity for applicants and authorities alike, enabling straightforward and low-risk works to proceed efficiently. However, their implementation remains uneven and the unused potential of National Listed Building Consent Orders points to a failure to fully utilise existing tools.

111. **RECOMMENDATION**
We urge the government to make both Local and National Listed Building Consent Orders a standard and accessible route for the approval of low-risk and routine heritage works by supporting Local Planning Authorities to consider their immediate adoption. This should also include clearer national guidance encouraging early engagement, informal advice and the use of repair notices and proactive enforcement to prevent deterioration. The government should set out how this approach will be embedded in planning practice and review its effectiveness within two years of its implementation.

Local authority capacity and conservation expertise

112. A major structural issue identified throughout our evidence was the lack of capacity and specialist expertise within local planning authorities. Grosvenor reported that only 16% of local authority staff felt "confident" making decisions about retrofit.[199] Witnesses pointed to shortages of qualified conservation officers, which they attributed to funding pressures and uncompetitive pay, resulting in slower decisions and reduced access to informal pre-application advice.[200] We also heard about a sustained decline in conservation staffing over the past two decades, illustrated by examples such as Sheffield having only one conservation officer for the entire city and Birmingham having one part-time officer for the entire metropolitan area, despite overseeing a total of 2,000 listed buildings and multiple conservation areas.[201]

113. Lack of local capacity was compounded by uneven access to national expertise. Camilla Finlay, Director of Clews Architects, told us that Historic England support was effectively tiered by designation, with its involvement much more readily available for higher-grade listings. She said:

199 Retrofit or Ruin: Planning for the future of heritage, Grosvenor [accessed 8 May 2026]
200 Diocese of Chichester (HER0007); Historic Houses (HER0027) and The Worthing Society (HER0020)
201 Q32-33 [Camilla Finlay, Professor Toulmin]; Q165 [Jennifer Cooke] and The Victorian Society, Heritage skills crisis in local government [accessed 15 June 2026]

> 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.[202]

The Deputy Director for Heritage at the DCMS, Fazima Osborn, told us that the department's statutory consultee review was looking at where it could remove simpler cases from consultation requirements, allowing Historic England to focus on more complex applications.[203]

114. The Minister for Heritage said that £48 million of investment in local planning authorities was intended to support the recruitment of approximately 1,400 additional planning officers by the end of the Parliament, but that the government was not mandating specific conservation expertise.[204] Alongside this, Fazima Osborn highlighted measures included in the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 to improve capability through training requirements for planning committees, including training on the historic environment.[205]

Box 4: The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025

The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 was introduced in December 2025 as an aim to speed up the delivery of housing, energy and major infrastructure projects by simplifying planning approvals and reducing legal delays. It reforms planning committees, streamlines compulsory land purchases and limits repeated judicial reviews for nationally significant projects.

Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, December 2025

115. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government work together to develop targeted and sustained support to increase the number of conservation officers and heritage specialists within local planning authorities. This should include dedicated central government grant funding to increase capacity and resourcing, alongside measures to improve recruitment, retention and access to consistent national guidance – particularly for authorities with large numbers of listed buildings and conservation areas.

202 Q33 [Camilla Finlay]
203 Q352 [Fazima Osborn]
204 Q315-316 [Baroness Twycross]
205 Q352 [Fazima Osborn] and Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025

Net zero and energy efficiency

116. Witnesses emphasised that heritage properties behaved differently from modern constructions. However, current regulatory systems, particularly Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) standards, often failed to reflect this which could lead to unrealistic or inappropriate requirements.[206] Ben Cowell OBE, Director General at Historic Houses, also warned that some short-term let properties might not succeed on the rental market if proposed efficiency standards were applied rigidly. He described a case where a historic holiday cottage had £40,000 spent attempting to improve energy efficiency, but despite this investment, had only achieved an EPC rating of F, which meant that the property was no longer legally lettable as a long-term rental.[207] The LGA also noted that planning restrictions and the need to preserve historic fabric made energy efficiency upgrades difficult to implement. They added that councils lacked centralised guidance to help planning officers navigate the balance between conservation and climate goals.[208]

117. Several witnesses said that planning restrictions frequently obstructed low-impact energy efficiency measures such as solar panels, heat pumps or insulation. These contributors also argued that heritage considerations were often given decisive weight, even when the public benefit of decarbonisation was clear.[209]

118. **RECOMMENDATION**

The government must ensure that planning policy and regulation enable and prioritise, rather than inhibit, climate adaptation and the decarbonisation of historic buildings. This work must include clearer national guidance for local authorities, reform of energy performance certificate methodology to reflect the needs of traditional buildings and greater weight in planning decisions for low-impact retrofit measures that support energy efficiency while safeguarding heritage value.

206 Q50-51
207 Q50-51 [Ben Cowell]
208 Local Government Association (HER0049) and Email from Luke Cannell, Communications Support Officer, Local Government Association, regarding Protecting built heritage oral evidence follow-up, 11 November 2025
209 Historic Houses (HER0027); The Friends of Walpole Old Chapel (HER0024) and Churches' Legislation Advisory Service (HER0019)

Conclusions and Recommendations

Unlocking the potential of built heritage

1. The deterioration of heritage assets represents a major missed opportunity. Their significant potential to support economic growth and tourism is being systematically constrained by a combination of financial, structural and policy pressures. Without a more coherent and proactive approach, increasing numbers of historic buildings will fall into disuse or managed decline, representing a loss not only to the historic environment but to growth and regeneration. The government must take sustained action to prioritise active use and remove the structural barriers that continue to hold the sector back. (Conclusion, Paragraph 8)

2. We recommend the government introduce a 'heritage-to-housing' scheme to bring vacant and at-risk historic buildings back into residential use. The scheme should draw on lessons from other countries such as Italy's €1 house initiatives and renovation tax incentives, but be adapted to UK conditions. It should combine discounted transfer or leasing of heritage assets with time-limited restoration requirements, financial support for renovation and strong safeguards to ensure long-term occupation and smooth bureaucratic processes. (Recommendation, Paragraph 14)

3. We recommend that the government establish and lead a high street repurpose programme as a core intervention within the national reuse-first housing strategy. The scheme should require developers to demonstrate that reuse has been prioritised over demolition, empowering local authorities to designate High Street Regeneration Zones with associated funding and planning flexibilities, enforcing a strengthened use-it-or-lose-it regime for long-term vacant buildings, obliging public bodies to repurpose under-used town centre assets, and ensuring all repurposed homes meet modern standards of space, light and design. This could be implemented as part of the government's upcoming High Streets Strategy, expected to be published later this year. (Recommendation, Paragraph 15)

4. Heritage-led housing is no longer a niche or peripheral opportunity, but a major and under-recognised means of addressing the country's acute housing shortage. Historic England's estimate that up to 670,000

homes could be delivered through the reuse of vacant or under-used heritage buildings is equivalent to almost half of the government’s current housebuilding target. However, the government is failing to prioritise the reuse of heritage buildings in a way that will enable its huge potential to be fulfilled. (Conclusion, Paragraph 18)

5. We recommend that the government adopt a reuse-first approach to housing policy, prioritising the conversion of vacant and under-used heritage buildings before pursuing new build. This approach should embed reuse as a clear priority in the National Planning Policy Framework, directing departments to assess reuse options for surplus sites and ensure that major housing funding mechanisms—including the National Housing Delivery Fund and related Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government programmes—actively support heritage-led schemes, with clear criteria and incentives to address viability barriers. Such an approach must be underpinned by clear safeguards to ensure that reuse does not come at the expense of heritage value, public access or the vitality of high streets. (Recommendation, Paragraph 19)

6. The Heritage minister should have regular and structured meetings with the Housing minister to align policy and delivery. This should include joint oversight of heritage-led housing schemes and clear accountability for unlocking reuse at scale. (Recommendation, Paragraph 20)

7. Our evidence points to a systematic weakness in how government collects data on its heritage assets. Without fully understanding the current state of the sector, the government will not be able to unlock the value of built heritage. (Conclusion, Paragraph 23)

8. We recommend that the government establish a comprehensive and standardised national dataset on the condition, ownership and maintenance of heritage assets across England. This should be delivered jointly with Historic England and include asset-level information on condition, risk status and maintenance expenditure. The dataset should be published, updated annually and made publicly available to support transparency, accountability and more effective stewardship across the sector. (Recommendation, Paragraph 24)

9. Existing frameworks for protecting built heritage do not adequately capture contemporary cultural heritage, leaving many culturally significant spaces vulnerable despite their clear value to communities. Without a broader definition of heritage, there is a risk that important aspects of the UK’s cultural life will continue to be overlooked, and in some cases, lost. (Conclusion, Paragraph 27)

10. We recommend that the government put in place processes for identifying and protecting buildings with high cultural and social value alongside architectural significance. This should include acknowledging the cultural importance of nightclubs, music venues and activist spaces where a particularly strong cultural significance can be demonstrated. (Recommendation, Paragraph 28)

11. Place-based approaches offer an effective way of aligning investment with local need, strengthening partnerships and embedding community involvement. However, their impact is uneven. Areas with less capacity, particularly rural and deprived parts of the country, face barriers such as limited funding, skills and institutional support, which restrict their ability to deliver support effectively. (Conclusion, Paragraph 33)

12. We recommend that the government implement and promote place-based approaches to the protection of built heritage. These approaches should involve models bringing together the whole range of organisations working in the community. The government should also develop mechanisms such as community asset transfer and interim “safe harbour” arrangements to support sustainable community stewardship of heritage assets. In its response to this report, the government should set out how these approaches will be delivered consistently across regions, including those with lower capacity. (Recommendation, Paragraph 34)

13. We recommend that the government introduce a local high street assessment tool to tackle the challenge that a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective. This tool can be used to compare the cost and effectiveness of interventions, including planning, engagement, skills and ownership. The government should help local authorities select tailored regeneration packages. (Recommendation, Paragraph 35)

Financial support for built heritage

14. The current funding landscape for built heritage is fragmented, short-term and does not adequately support the long-term nature of conservation. We recommend that the government sets out a clear, cohesive and long-term strategy for funding built heritage, aligning the various funding streams administered by the DCMS, Historic England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and other bodies so that they operate as a more coherent system. This strategy should rebalance provision away from one-off, capital grants towards multi-year settlements and increased revenue funding, including dedicated support for ongoing maintenance and core organisational costs. Funding settlements should, wherever possible, be allocated over a minimum of three years to enable effective planning and support organisational resilience. (Recommendation, Paragraph 42)

15. The government should review the effectiveness of the current institutional landscape for heritage, including the division of responsibilities between Historic England, English Heritage and other funding bodies. It should assess the case for greater streamlining, or even the merging of organisations, and explore the potential for reducing administrative burdens, bringing expertise together, and improving the accessibility and impact of funding. This review should consider whether simplification of funding routes and organisational roles could enable additional resources to be directed towards the front-line protection of heritage assets. (Recommendation, Paragraph 43)

16. We recommend that the government explore the feasibility of establishing a heritage funding model analogous to Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisation system, or a dedicated heritage investment fund to deliver consistent and strategic investment. Any such model must, however, be designed to reflect the specific needs of the heritage sector and ensure that organisations responsible for significant heritage assets are adequately supported to meet the costs of ongoing maintenance, repair and programme delivery. (Recommendation, Paragraph 45)

17. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport and its delivery partners should expand the scale and accessibility of early-stage development funding. This should include ringfenced funding to support feasibility work, design development and access to professional expertise. The government should also ensure that early-stage support is aligned with capital funding streams, so that well-developed projects can transition smoothly to delivery. (Recommendation, Paragraph 47)

18. The government's decision to replace the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme with the Places of Worship Renewal Fund represents a significant shift. While we recognise the rationale for directing limited public funds towards areas of greatest socio-economic need, we remain concerned that reliance on area-based indicators risks disadvantaging places of worship of high historic and architectural significance that fall outside narrowly defined measures of deprivation. There is also a risk that the community value and reach of places of worship may be overlooked, particularly where their activities extend beyond their immediate postcode. (Conclusion, Paragraph 54)

19. We recommend that the government ensures that overall funding available through the Places of Worship Renewal Fund is at least as generous in real terms as the level of support provided through the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme prior to its reductions in budget and the introduction of per-site caps, to prevent any reduction in the number and scale of essential repair projects. The government must also ensure that the eligibility criteria for the Places of Worship Renewal Fund strike an appropriate balance

between measures of deprivation and the heritage value of buildings. The government should provide an update on the implementation and early progress of the scheme in its response to this report and should write to the committee again on the matter at six and 12 months thereafter. (Recommendation, Paragraph 55)

20. The current VAT regime creates a structural disincentive to repair, maintain and reuse historic buildings. Sector bodies have told us that changes, such as rebate schemes or equalisation with new-build rates, could unlock stalled housing schemes, prevent managed decline and generate wider economic benefits. The current approach is out of step with the government's ambition to promote adaptive reuse and safeguard the UK's historic environment. We understand the government's reluctance to introduce tax relief in a time of fiscal constraint but given what we have heard about the potentially huge contribution that built heritage can make to meeting housing targets, it is clear that the returns would be more than worth the investment. (Conclusion, Paragraph 60)

21. We recommend that the DCMS initiate formal discussions with HM Treasury on the impact of VAT on heritage repair and reuse. The government should introduce targeted VAT relief for maintenance and conversion of listed heritage buildings. This could include reducing or removing the VAT rate altogether for eligible restoration works or establishing a rebate scheme for listed properties open for a minimum number of days each year. Any such measures must also be designed to unlock the delivery of new homes through heritage-led reuse, helping to meet the government's housing targets. (Recommendation, Paragraph 61)

22. We recommend that the government reform VAT rules applying to the repurposing of existing buildings to remove the current disincentive to investment and to support national carbon reduction objectives. The new rules should replace the narrow and complex 5% reduced-rate provisions—which exclude most heritage buildings and energy efficiency upgrades—and end the structural bias towards demolition over conservation. These reforms would be part of a revised regime that reduces the disparity between new-build construction and heritage conversion and promotes reuse and retrofit as the default development pathway. (Recommendation, Paragraph 62)

23. We recommend that HM Treasury review the impact of the business rates system on high street premises and heritage buildings and bring forward reforms that reduce burden on these properties. The reforms should include proposals to shift a greater share of the business rates burden onto retail parks, large distribution warehouses and high-profit logistic sites. (Recommendation, Paragraph 64)

The public heritage estate

24. Publicly owned heritage assets are too often allowed to deteriorate, with responsibility spread across departments, weak compliance with existing protocols and no effective mechanism to enforce minimum standards. While the government has acknowledged the need to improve oversight, this must now be matched by a more robust and accountable framework. The government must lead by example by ensuring that the buildings it owns and is responsible for are properly maintained, actively managed and, where appropriate, brought back into beneficial use. (Conclusion, Paragraph 73)

25. We recommend that UK Government departments be required to produce and publish asset-level heritage management plans for all listed buildings within their estate, including condition assessments, maintenance schedules and plans for reuse or disposal. These plans should be updated regularly and subject to external scrutiny. (Recommendation, Paragraph 74)

26. While the One Public Estate programme represents a valuable attempt to coordinate the management and disposal of public assets, heritage considerations are not systematically embedded within its operations. Evidence suggests that decisions are still primarily driven by broader regeneration and housing objectives, with heritage outcomes treated as secondary rather than integral. We therefore see opportunities to reuse historic assets and secure their long-term conservation. Without explicit and consistent integration, the government will struggle to ensure that its own estate is managed in a way that protects and realises the full value of the historic environment. (Conclusion, Paragraph 77)

27. The government should embed built heritage within the One Public Estate programme, making heritage considerations a specific factor to be taken into account when it comes to the management, reuse and disposal of publicly-owned assets. This should be supported by a new robust regime that incentivises public bodies to properly manage their heritage assets or dispose of them where decline is evident, including by exploring financial and performance-based incentives to support good stewardship. Alongside the incentives, the government should also put in place penalties for departments who fail to comply and allow assets to fall into avoidable disrepair. (Recommendation, Paragraph 78)

Workforce and skills

28. Workforce and skills shortages now pose one of the most serious risks to the long-term protection of the UK's built heritage. An ageing workforce, limited training routes, insecure funding and declining local authority expertise are combining to create a fragile skills pipeline that is unable to meet current demand. Additionally, delivery remains fragmented, short-term and insufficiently coordinated. Without sustained intervention, these gaps in capacity will continue to drive up costs, delay essential works and accelerate the deterioration of historic buildings. (Conclusion, Paragraph 81)

29. The government should build on the success of the Hopwood Foundation's heritage skills training programme at HMP Thorn Cross by supporting the expansion of similar schemes across prisons and further education sectors. Such programmes could help address critical shortages in traditional building and heritage trades while also improving employment outcomes. (Recommendation, Paragraph 85)

30. We recommend that the government work with Skills England, Historic England and sector bodies to create protected training pathways for endangered heritage crafts, including the specialist skills identified on the Heritage Crafts Red List. It should establish a "heritage skills hub" to promote careers in the heritage sector and provide advice and guidance to those looking for a career. As a first step, within 12 months, the government should formally engage with and build upon existing sector-led mapping of endangered crafts to identify priority skills gaps in training provision. The government should then set out how this assessment has informed the design of targeted interventions, such as funded placements and accredited training routes and report back to this committee within a further 12 months on progress and delivery. (Recommendation, Paragraph 86)

31. We recommend that the government, within 12 months of the introduction of the Growth and Skills Levy, review how greater flexibility can be built into the levy scheme to better support the heritage sector. This review should assess whether levy-funded training is sufficiently accessible to small employers, charities and sole traders and whether current provision reflects the sector's need for flexible, shared and non-standard training models. As part of this review, the government should set out how it will measure success, including uptake by heritage employers, completion rates and employer feedback, and report its findings to the committee. (Recommendation, Paragraph 92)

32. We recommend that the government consult on and implement proposals to establish and then promote multi-employer apprenticeship schemes tailored to the heritage sector, enabling small and specialist heritage businesses to pool apprentices, share costs and benefit collectively from sustained skills development. (Recommendation, Paragraph 93)

33. We recommend that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and its arm's-length bodies develop a funded support framework that gives volunteer-led organisations access to practical assistance, including 'critical friends', mentoring and shared technical resources. This could include, for example, funded access to short-term professional support (such as surveyors, project managers or conservation architects) to help volunteers develop realistic plans, manage complex heritage projects more effectively and reduce the risk of volunteer burnout. (Recommendation, Paragraph 98)

The planning system

34. While the government's proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework are welcome, they must go further to address the persistent delays, inconsistency and administrative burden experienced by developers, owners and community organisations. Without change in how the system operates in practice, there is a risk that well-intentioned policy reforms will fail to deliver the intended outcomes on the ground, leaving historic buildings to deteriorate rather than be brought back into beneficial use. (Conclusion, Paragraph 105)

35. We recommend that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport work closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure that the revised National Planning Policy Framework delivers tangible improvements for the heritage sector. In particular, the government, within two years of the revised framework coming into force, should publish an assessment of the framework's impact on heritage outcomes, including the number of heritage buildings brought back into use and evidence of greater consistency in decision-making across local planning authorities. (Recommendation, Paragraph 106)

36. Where Local Listed Building Consent Orders have been used, they have reduced administrative burdens, lowered costs and provided greater clarity for applicants and authorities alike, enabling straightforward and low-risk works to proceed efficiently. However, their implementation remains uneven and the unused potential of National Listed Building Consent Orders points to a failure to fully utilise existing tools. (Conclusion, Paragraph 110)

37. We urge the government to make both Local and National Listed Building Consent Orders a standard and accessible route for the approval of low-risk and routine heritage works by supporting Local Planning Authorities to consider their immediate adoption. This should also include clearer national guidance encouraging early engagement, informal advice and the use of repair notices and proactive enforcement to prevent deterioration. The government should set out how this approach will be embedded in planning practice and review its effectiveness within two years of its implementation. (Recommendation, Paragraph 111)

38. We recommend that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government work together to develop targeted and sustained support to increase the

number of conservation officers and heritage specialists within local planning authorities. This should include dedicated central government grant funding to increase capacity and resourcing, alongside measures to improve recruitment, retention and access to consistent national guidance – particularly for authorities with large numbers of listed buildings and conservation areas. (Recommendation, Paragraph 115)

39. The government must ensure that planning policy and regulation enable and prioritise, rather than inhibit, climate adaptation and the decarbonisation of historic buildings. This work must include clearer national guidance for local authorities, reform of energy performance certificate methodology to reflect the needs of traditional buildings and greater weight in planning decisions for low-impact retrofit measures that support energy efficiency while safeguarding heritage value. (Conclusion, Paragraph 118)

Formal minutes

Wednesday 8 July 2026

Members present:

Dame Caroline Dinenage, in the Chair

Bayo Alaba

Vicky Foxcroft

Rt Hon Damian Hinds

Dr Rupa Huq

Natasha Irons

Liz Jarvis

Jo Platt

Jeff Smith

Protecting built heritage

Draft Report (*Protecting built heritage*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 118 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Third Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No.134.

Adjournment

Adjourned till Monday 13 July at 4.00 pm.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the inquiry publications page of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 17 June 2025

Camilla Finlay, Director, Clews Architects;
Dr Tegwen Roberts, Former Heritage Action Zone Lead, Eldon Street (Barnsley) High Street Heritage Action Zone; **Professor Vanessa Toulmin**, Chair, Morecambe Winter Gardens Preservation Trust Q1-40

Ben Cowell OBE, Director General, Historic Houses;
Alice Loxton, Historian, Author and National Trust Ambassador;
Hilary McGrady, Director General, National Trust Q41-71

Tuesday 15 July 2025

Emily Gee, Director for Cathedral and Church Buildings, Church of England;
The Reverend Paula Griffiths, retired Priest, Church of England;
Becky Payne, Development Director, Historic Religious Buildings Alliance Q72-102

Michael Kill, Chief Executive, Night Time Industry Association;
Andrew Lovett, Director and Chief Executive, Black Country Living Museum;
Joshua McTaggart, Chief Executive, Theatres Trust Q103-127

Tuesday 4 November 2025

Eilish McGuinness, Chief Executive, National Lottery Heritage Fund;
Matthew Mckeague, Chief Executive, Architectural Heritage Fund;
Geoff Parkin, Interim Chief Executive, English Heritage Q128-163

Sarah Buckingham, Director of Historic Properties and Environment, Jersey Heritage; **Jennifer Cooke**, Director, Smith Jenkins Planning & Heritage; **Councillor Julie Jones-Evans**, Chair, Local Government Association's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board Q164-187

Tuesday 6 January 2026

Emma Squire, Co-Chief Executive, Historic England;
Ian Morrison, Director of Policy and Evidence, Historic England Q188-229

Mark Bourgeois, Chief Executive, Government Property Agency, Cabinet Office; **Richard McSeveney**, Chief Property Officer, Ministry of Justice; **Major General Andy Sturrock**, Director of Strategy and Plans, Defence Infrastructure Organisation, Ministry of Defence Q230-281

Tuesday 10 February 2026

The Baroness Twycross, Minister for Museums, Heritage and Gambling, Department for Culture, Media and Sport; **Fazima Osborn**, Deputy Director, Heritage, Department for Culture, Media and Sport; **Mark Chivers**, Government Chief Property Officer, Office of Government Property, Cabinet Office Q282-372

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the inquiry publications page of the Committee's website.

HER numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1	Anthony Grimshaw Associates LLP	HER0028
2	Architectural Heritage Fund	HER0033
3	Association of English Cathedrals	HER0016
4	Ayr Development Trust	HER0060
5	Azara, Dr Iride; Michopoulou, Dr Eleni; and Roe, Dr Claire	HER0006
6	Barton, David Richard	HER0010
7	Bath Preservation Trust	HER0093
8	Board of Deputies of British Jews	HER0105
9	Built Environment Forum Scotland	HER0099
10	CLA	HER0070
11	Canal and River Trust	HER0067
12	Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Alban	HER0082
13	Cathedrals' Workshop Fellowship	HER0113
14	Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales	HER0106
15	Charities' Property Association	HER0071
16	Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society	HER0087
17	Chartered Institute of Building	HER0069
18	Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust	HER0108
19	Christ Church Lancaster	HER0004
20	Church Buildings Commission for the Diocese of Norwich	HER0015
21	Church of England	HER0101
22	Churches' Legislation Advisory Service	HER0019
23	City of London Corporation	HER0109

24	Clark, Celia (Trustee of Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust and member of the Portsmouth Society)	HER0111
25	Council for British Archaeology	HER0054
26	Department for Culture, Media and Sport	HER0063
27	Diocese of Chichester	HER0007
28	Diocese of Liverpool	HER0022
29	Diocese of St Albans	HER0080
30	Samantha Dixon MBE MP	HER0115
31	Djabarouti, Dr Johnathan	HER0009
32	Donald Insall Associates	HER0065
33	English Heritage	HER0084
34	English National Opera	HER0110
35	Environmental Building Group, University of Plymouth	HER0097
36	Friends of Friendless Churches	HER0026
37	Gebreyohanes, Zewditu	HER0107
38	Glasgow City Council	HER0061
39	Glasgow City Heritage Trust	HER0098
40	Gonzalez-Longo, Dr Cristina	HER0068
41	Gosport Borough Council	HER0086
42	Griffiths, The Reverend Paula	HER0117
43	Griffiths, The Reverend Paula	HER0055
44	Grosvenor	HER0119
45	High Street Story	HER0008
46	Historic England	HER0076
47	Historic Environment Forum	HER0120
48	Historic Houses	HER0027
49	Historic Religious Buildings Alliance	HER0118
50	Historic Religious Buildings Alliance	HER0104
51	Historic Towns and Villages Forum	HER0036
52	Hunter, Mr Geoffrey	HER0030
53	Institute of Historic Building Conservation	HER0088
54	Jordan, Dr Kate; and Marsh, Dr Julie	HER0038
55	Lancaster City Council	HER0094

56	Laycock, Professor Liz	HER0034
57	Leigh Building Preservation Trust Limited	HER0002
58	Listed Property Owners' Club	HER0052
59	Local Government Association	HER0049
60	London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies	HER0089
61	Maintain our heritage	HER0090
62	Making Music, the National Federation of Music Societies	HER0029
63	Mann, Mr Peter	HER0044
64	Morecambe Winter Gardens Preservation Trust Ltd	HER0047
65	Museum Sector bodies	HER0102
66	Music Venue Trust	HER0012
67	National Churches Trust	HER0035
68	National Federation of Roofing Contractors	HER0072
69	National Heritage Science Forum	HER0095
70	National Trust	HER0079
71	Norfolk Churches Trust	HER0059
72	Old Royal Naval College	HER0032
73	Oxford House in Bethnal Green	HER0014
74	Prospect	HER0062
75	Proudfoot, Lewis	HER0048
76	Pupils 2 Parliament	HER0040
77	Pylons East Anglia Ltd	HER0003
78	Rescue – The British Archaeological Trust	HER0075
79	Rochester Cathedral	HER0057
80	Save Britain's Heritage	HER0083
81	Scotland's Churches Trust	HER0096
82	Seaside Heritage Network	HER0041
83	Sheffield City Council	HER0074
84	Smith Jenkins Planning & Heritage	HER0081
85	Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings	HER0043
86	Society of London Theatre & UK Theatre	HER0077
87	Southbank Centre	HER0092

88	St Paul's Cathedral	HER0023
89	Standing Conference for Problems Affecting the Coastline and Southern Coastal Group; and Coastal Partners	HER0031
90	Stone Federation Great Britain	HER0116
91	Szendeffy, Tanya	HER0100
92	The Church of England Diocese of Hereford	HER0018
93	The Church of Scotland	HER0053
94	The Diocese of Blackburn	HER0050
95	The Friends of Walpole Old Chapel	HER0024
96	The Gardens Trust	HER0066
97	The Georgian Group	HER0103
98	The Heritage Alliance	HER0091
99	The Methodist Church	HER0045
100	The National Lottery Heritage Fund	HER0085
101	The Presbyterian Church in Ireland	HER0017
102	The Representative Body of the Church in Wales	HER0037
103	The Royal Institution of Great Britain	HER0025
104	The Worthing Society	HER0020
105	Theatres Trust	HER0112
106	Thorngate & Blackwater Benefice	HER0001
107	Urban Vision Enterprise; and D2H Land Planning Development	HER0013
108	Varley, Hilda	HER0114
109	Wales Heritage Group; and Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales	HER0039
110	War Memorials Trust	HER0056
111	Welsh, Dr Tom	HER0011
112	Woodhead, Dr Charlotte	HER0046
113	Worthing Borough Council	HER0078

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

Session 2026–27

Number	Title	Reference
2nd	Business events	HC 335
1st	Cultural touring in the EU	HC 141
1st Special	Game On: Community and school sport: Government Response	HC 462

Session 2024–26

Number	Title	Reference
4th	Game On: Community and school sport	HC 593
3rd	Pre-appointment hearing for the Chair of the Charity Commission	HC 1340
2nd	Pre-appointment hearing for the Chair of the Independent Football Regulator	HC 694
1st	British film and high-end television	HC 328
5th Special	Fan-led review of live and electronic music	HC 1628
4th Special	British film and high-end television: Government Response	HC 1123
3rd Special	Grassroots music venues: Government response	HC 380
2nd Special	Trusted voices: Government response	HC 292
1st Special	Creator remuneration: Government response	HC 293