

Building a Heritage-Led Green Recovery



Broughton Business Park: Converted from abandoned agricultural buildings, this rural enterprise hub in Yorkshire is now home to 50 companies and over 700 employees.

Historic houses were built to last – and they hold the keys to a sustainable future for our historic environment. For the 1,500 independent historic houses, castles and gardens we represent, adaptation and resilience have been in their DNA for centuries. Now, their custodians are taking the lead in reducing their carbon footprint, investing in repair and reuse, generating renewable energy and enriching the natural environment. If given the right support from government, they could do much more.

Historic buildings hold significant untapped potential to provide comfortable homes, business spaces and community hubs. Imaginative and adaptive reuse of our built heritage would boost rural supply chains, support local jobs, and provide a sustainable and desirable alternative to carbon intensive new build. The greenest building is the one already built; on average, constructing a new-build home uses the equivalent of 80 tonnes of CO₂ – ten times as much as refurbishment. Planning reforms, regulatory improvements and funding opportunities will pave the way for our irreplaceable heritage to be part of the solution, as the nation pulls together to tackle the climate emergency.



Castle Howard: Partnerships with local public transport companies encourage visitors to use car-free travel options

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

REPAIR AND REUSE:

Incentivise repair and reuse by reducing VAT on works to listed buildings. Adapting existing buildings is less carbon intensive than demolition and rebuild, and will boost conservation skills, supply chains, economic prosperity and a sense of place in rural communities. Parity on VAT to match new build is essential; 0% equalisation would have the greatest impact.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE:

20% of the UK's housing stock is over a century old, but all homes should be able to play their part in reaching net zero. All too often the planning system stands in the way of making sustainable yet sensitive adaptations to listed and historic buildings. Governments across the UK must use impending planning reforms and the upcoming UN COP26 Conference in Glasgow as an opportunity to establish national policies on carbon reduction in historic buildings so that the rules are clear, decisions can be consistent, and sensible adaptations can be made to ensure historic buildings have a sustainable future.

GREEN ENERGY:

Energy efficiency assessments promote cheap energy over green energy, penalise rural buildings, and can propose harmful measures for historic buildings. Governments across the UK must reform EPCs by considering the specific needs of historic buildings, taking a whole-house approach, investing in conservation skills, and supporting the rollout of heat pumps to off-grid homes.

RURAL CONNECTIVITY:

Rural communities and businesses risk being left behind without modern, sustainable transport options. A subsidy scheme for Electric Vehicle charging at rural SMEs would boost visits to rural destinations, whilst investment in new electric bus routes would address the issue of the 'final mile' (bridging the gap between local transport hubs and rural attractions) and cut down on pollution in rural areas.



Tissington Hall: 24 Solar Panels on the roof provide electricity for the 400-year-old Hall. This sort of environmentally-friendly and unobtrusive adaptation to a historic building should be encouraged and supported in the planning system.

ENVIRONMENTAL RECOVERY:

Our historic environment is inseparable from the natural world, and historic estates have a significant role to play in landscape recovery. Rural historic environments provide important habitats for native species, and careful land management is essential to the maintenance of Britain's moors, forests, and heaths. As the Common Agricultural Policy is phased out, new Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) and other environmental schemes must engage landowners as well as farmers, ensure conditionally exempt land is not excluded, and embed heritage options at every level.



Knepp Estate: Longhorn Cattle graze the lawn as part of the largest rewilding project in lowland Britain

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**HISTORIC
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