



# Heritage is Britain's USP

Our world-beating historic houses and gardens are a unique combination of people and places, culture, and innovation. The nearly 1,500 independently owned houses and gardens that we represent are the backbone of the UK's tourism industry: in 2021, despite the ongoing impact of Covid, they welcomed over 17 million visitors, supported over 33,000 FTE jobs and generated almost £694 million for the UK's economy, two-thirds of which was spent in nearby towns and villages. As well as their economic value, our historic places are also hubs of culture, creativity and community for their local areas, creating vibrant places which people feel proud to live in and tourists want to visit.

The pandemic has devastated heritage tourism: visitor numbers dropped by over one-third in 2021, and this financial shortfall called into question the viability of many historic house businesses. It will be a long, slow road to recovery: our members will need ongoing public and political support to ensure that they can continue to do what they do best — making heritage accessible to

everyone, encouraging tourists to travel the length and breadth of the UK, supporting health and wellbeing and driving regional economic growth.

During the course of pandemic, over 80% of our members reported losing revenue or income, leading to 47% of them delaying or cancelling repair and maintenance projects. With a backlog of repairs and maintenance work already estimated at £1.38 billion in 2019, this added conservation challenge threatens not just the sustainability of the sector, but risks the loss of nationally important heritage.

We propose targeted policies that would provide our heritage attractions and regional economies with the boost they need to ensure a full recovery from the pandemic, but also put them on a more secure and resilient footing for years to come.

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Protect heritage from unintended consequences**
2. **Stimulate investment in repair projects at heritage attractions**
3. **Reform planning legislation to allow listed buildings to pursue net zero**
4. **Unleash the potential of the rural economy**
5. **Provide dedicated support for the UK's tourism sector as it bounces back**
6. **Lift the cap on National Lottery Heritage Funding grants for independent heritage**



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## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Protect heritage from unintended consequences

The survival of our country's world-famous heritage sector relies on a supportive fiscal and regulatory framework. Changes to this framework in particular can have a devastating impact on fragile historic houses, and can make the difference between a viable visitor attraction and an insolvent business forced to close its doors. Government should ensure it considers the potential impact on fragile heritage — and consults with the sector — when considering changes to the fiscal framework.

### 2. Stimulate investment in repair projects at heritage attractions

VAT on structural repairs and maintenance for listed buildings is currently 20%; demolition and new builds are zero-rated. Cutting this rate to 5%, or even zero-rating it would give the tens of thousands of rural businesses based in historic buildings the extra cash and confidence they need to get on top of repair and maintenance backlogs, bring back staff, invest in their businesses and generate supply chain work and economic vitality for rural Britain.



**1** Consulting with the heritage sector when considering changes to the fiscal framework

**2** Cutting VAT rate on structural repairs and maintenance for listed buildings to 5% or even 0%

Photo courtesy of Radbourne Hall

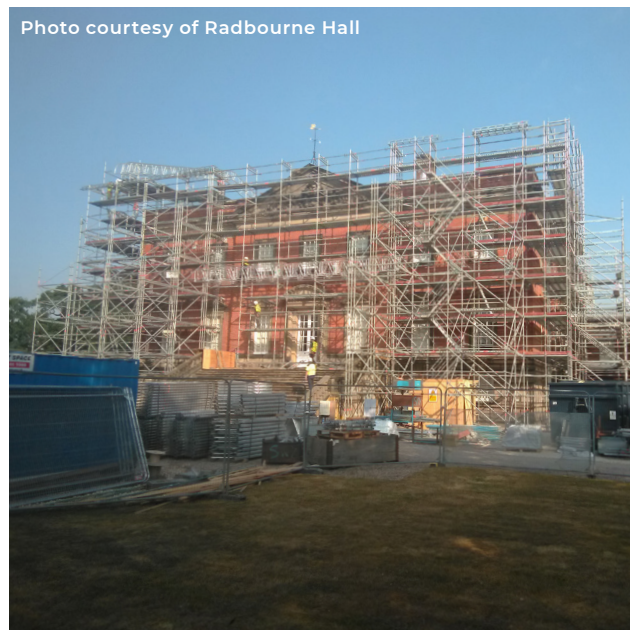


Photo courtesy of Weston Park



**3** Streamlining heritage consent processes to help historic properties increase energy efficiency

**4** Governmental investment in infrastructure and opportunities for rural communities

Similarly, reducing the income tax levied on Heritage Maintenance Funds, from 45% to 20%, would stimulate private sector investment in repair projects at heritage tourism sites. This targeted change would provide a net benefit to rural economies of £85.5 million within 5 years, open up more heritage to the public, and allow historic houses to improve their sustainability and support the government’s ‘build back greener’ agenda.

### 3. Reform planning legislation to allow listed buildings to pursue net zero

Historic houses were built to last, but they need to be allowed to sensitively adapt to the modern world so that they can remain viable and sustainable. The planning system as it currently stands is not fit for purpose. Overstretched and underfunded, the process of obtaining planning permission and listed building consent is time-consuming, expensive and often relies on the whim of local planning officers.

The system needs to be reformed and heritage consent processes streamlined so that the owners of listed buildings are encouraged, rather than put off, to apply for Listed Building Consent — particularly with regards to making changes to increase the energy efficiency of their properties. Cutting the red tape on planning legislation will allow the owners at listed buildings to make all-important changes to future-proof Britain’s remarkable heritage.

### 4. Unleash the potential of the rural economy

Historic Houses properties already provide hubs of culture, creativity and commerce for their communities, but they, like so many others, are hampered by underinvestment in rural infrastructure. With one-third of our members inaccessible by public transport and over half unable to access superfast broadband, it is clear that there are significant barriers to rural development and growth that need addressing as part of the government’s levelling up agenda.



Photo courtesy of Wentworth Woodhouse



**5** Implement the recommendations of the DuBois Review of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs)

**6** Raising the cap on National Lottery Heritage Funding grants for independent heritage to £250,000

Photo courtesy of Bamburgh Castle

We call on the government to recognise the urgent need for investment in infrastructure and opportunities for rural communities — as outlined in the recent Levelling Up and the Rural Economy report — in order to ensure that Britain's countryside can remain dynamic and prosperous place to live and work for generations to come.

## 5. Provide dedicated support for the UK's tourism sector as it bounces back

The pandemic has decimated international tourism, and many historic house businesses have struggled without overseas visitors. As the world opens back up again, the government must ensure that the UK is one of the top destinations for tourists to visit as they embark on international leisure travel once again.



Photo courtesy of Deans Court

We would like to see the government implement the recommendations of the DuBois Review of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) to ensure that visitors travel the length and breadth of the UK, far beyond London. Similarly, the visa process must be simplified and streamlined for international tourists, and the situation at Dover must improve significantly to ensure that continental visitors can make use of the Eurotunnel and ferry crossings without delays, queues and disruption.

## 6. Lift the cap on National Lottery Heritage Funding grants for independent heritage

Independent heritage currently faces a cap of £100,000 on grants it can receive from the National Lottery Heritage Funding: a figure which hasn't changed for the past 10 years. We call on this to be raised to £250,000, which would allow some of the UK's most important historic houses and gardens to start to tackle the enormous — and urgent — backlog of repairs and maintenance work.

Now is the time to give our heritage the tools and framework it needs to ensure it will not just recover from the disruption of the pandemic, but flourish for years to come.

[historichouses.org](http://historichouses.org)