Heritage is our country’s USP

Our world-leading historic houses, castles and gardens are a unique combination of people and places, culture and innovation. The 1,500 independent historic houses and gardens we represent are the backbone of the UK’s tourism industry, welcoming 26 million visits each year, supporting 33,700 FTE jobs and generating £1 billion for the UK economy, two-thirds of which is spent in nearby towns and villages.

These historic places engage hundreds of thousands of education visitors, are home to dynamic rural SMEs, and are hubs for local charities and community groups. There can be few better examples of where culture, creativity, community and commerce unite to create vibrant places in which people want to live, work, study and holiday.

Most historic houses open to the public in the UK are maintained by independent owners, rather than government or charities. This means they can’t benefit from Gift Aid, access to grants, VAT relief or the other advantages of charitable status. We want independent historic houses to be able to do more – encouraging tourists to travel beyond London and the South East, ensuring heritage is accessible to everyone, supporting health and wellbeing, and driving regional economic growth. But these houses face a growing conservation challenge – a backlog of maintenance and repairs totalling £1.38 billion – which threatens the sustainability of the sector and risks the loss of nationally important heritage.

Now is the time to give our country’s unique historic houses and gardens the tools they need to support people, places and prosperity.
SECURE THE FUTURE OF HISTORIC HOUSES AND GARDENS BY ENABLING THEM TO FUND CONSERVATION WORK USING THEIR OWN RESOURCES

Reform Heritage Maintenance Funds. Independent research shows that reducing the income tax rate to the basic rate of 20% could generate a net public benefit of £85.5 million by 2023 – releasing more funding for conservation from owners’ own resources while guaranteeing public access to heritage, generating economic growth and supporting health and wellbeing. This small policy change has widespread support throughout the heritage and tourism sectors, with backing from The Heritage Alliance, The Tourism Alliance and Historic England.

Pilot a grant scheme to refund VAT on repair and maintenance of listed buildings to gather evidence of its impact on productivity and repair, with the aim of setting a 0% VAT rate, which would create a level playing field with new build housing.

Reduce the burden of business rates on the heritage sector, including explicit recognition of the significant and ongoing repairs liability for owners of businesses based in listed buildings.

Ensure the evolving tax system supports the conservation of nationally important heritage open to the public, with heritage exemptions where appropriate.

UNLEASH THE FULL POTENTIAL OF HISTORIC HOUSES AND GARDENS FOR PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES IN EVERY CORNER OF OUR COUNTRY

Streamline heritage consent processes by supporting the holistic package of heritage protection reform proposals developed by the heritage sector’s senior stakeholder group, the Historic Environment Forum. These proposals would strengthen heritage protection while reducing burdens on both applicants and local authorities.

Enable independently owned heritage to apply for National Lottery Heritage Fund grants up to £250,000, rather than the current figure of £100,000.

Maximise the tourism potential of brown tourism signs by ensuring they are used strategically to help promote heritage visitor attractions, especially in rural communities where tourism is often core to local and regional prosperity.

For more information, please get in touch with:
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