



Historic England

A Strategy for Wellbeing and Heritage

2022–2025

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Introduction

I am delighted to introduce our strategy for wellbeing and heritage at Historic England. The product of two years of hard work, this strategy reflects contributions from Historic England colleagues, sector partners and stakeholders, and experts on health and wellbeing.

Whether through visiting, volunteering, learning or creative practice, engaging with heritage can strengthen confidence, resilience, hope and social connections. We can all benefit from the quality of the place we inhabit, especially if its historic environment is cared for and its historic green spaces are accessible.

Historic England's [Future Strategy](#) recognises the power that heritage has to improve people's lives.

By consciously focusing on wellbeing, we can make sure everyone can experience the wellbeing benefits of heritage.

Launching this strategy now signals our commitment to look at:

- our intent (setting people-centred and heritage objectives and priorities)
- our methods (how we choose to deliver and how we collaborate)
- our outcomes (the difference we make to people's lives)

Wellbeing is not 'one size fits all'. As such, we will look at how this relationship between heritage and wellbeing operates, in order to provide practical resources based on what works, how and for whom.

The purpose of this strategy is to improve our own delivery, enhance the social impact of our programmes, highlight inequities that heritage can challenge, and communicate the value of heritage. We want the outcomes to be about enhanced individual and community wellbeing and levelling up inequalities. There is not a single end point at which we have 'achieved' wellbeing, but this strategy marks the beginning of an ongoing commitment to develop new partnerships and approaches to the nuanced and dynamic concept of wellbeing.

Combined with our [Inclusion, Diversity and Equality Strategy](#), it sets us on a path that will take us farther than ever before towards a truly people-centred approach.

Ian Morrison

Director of Policy and Evidence

What do we mean by ‘wellbeing’?

Wellbeing, simply put, is about ‘how we are doing’ as individuals, communities and as a nation, and how sustainable that is for the future.

What Works Centre for Wellbeing

Wellbeing is a ‘threat multiplier.’ If it is left unaddressed it will lead to greater inequality in education and opportunity, more poverty and more social and individual discontentment. These circumstances can have a negative impact on national health costs, productivity and security – and most crucially people’s health.

Wellbeing is complex, values-based, dynamic and multi-faceted – but two relevant aspects are:

- 1 Social determinants of wellbeing.** These are the factors that contribute towards a person’s potential for wellbeing and their ability to flourish. They apply at the individual level (lifestyle factors), the collective level (how well a community is doing) and the population level (wider socio-economic conditions) and can often be objective.
- 2 Subjective wellbeing.** This is an individual’s own cognitive and affective evaluation of their life. It includes our health and emotional resilience, our supportive social relationships and our feeling of relevance and social justice; at the highest level, this is about how well we feel we are doing in our own lives. Wellbeing in this context is personal and subjective, and universally relevant.

There are multiple opportunities within the cultural heritage sector to support these two key aspects of wellbeing. Our role is to show how heritage can be instrumental to national wellbeing.

What will this strategy achieve?

Heritage is everywhere. It is in the buildings, structures and open spaces that surround us. It is in the ground beneath our feet and in the wide-open spaces of our countryside. And it has the power to improve people's lives.

Heritage gives us pride, a sense of connection, and confidence in the places where we live and work. It brings people and communities together and provides the foundation for a thriving future.

Historic England's work already has significant impact and reach, but we know there is more that we can do to address wellbeing inequalities through heritage. We know that people have unequal access to culture and heritage, life satisfaction and mental health as a result of where they live or through varying health needs ([Heritage and Society, 2020](#)). The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated these inequalities and created new ones.



We believe that everyone has an equal right to benefit from heritage, wherever they live and whatever their background.

Through this strategy, we aim to make a positive difference to people's wellbeing by providing more opportunities to bring communities together with heritage and the historic environment:

- We will help people who are thriving, to maintain their health and work with people who need support
- We will address barriers to participation for people who are struggling
- We will build on our current work, consolidating our understanding of its social impacts and moving towards more intentional wellbeing outcomes
- We will diversify our evidence, approaches and projects to embed wellbeing across our work as an organisation

This will ensure we can:

- Support our staff and ensure our work is delivering wellbeing outcomes
- Work creatively with the sector to build the wellbeing power of heritage
- Collect and share evidence to support communities and the sector as they develop approaches to wellbeing and heritage, to the benefit of more people and places
- Model good practice and learn from our experience

This strategy is primarily for our teams at Historic England. It aims to achieve positive wellbeing outcomes for people through engagement with heritage and through our work. It will enable us to collect evidence, model good practice and learn from our experience. We will use the knowledge we create to improve what we do. We will share this learning with our partners in heritage and in healthcare to achieve stronger and more long-lasting outcomes for people.

Vision and aims

Vision

Our vision is that:

Everyone experiences the wellbeing benefits of heritage.

Aims

The strategy includes three aims, each of which is an important part of achieving our vision.

Aim 1: Our work (what difference can we make?)

We will embed wellbeing outcomes in our work; and learn from and collaborate with partners, communities and organisations that share our ambition to deliver improved wellbeing outcomes.

Aim 2: Our people (what can our people do?)

We will develop our own knowledge and expertise, so our people recognise opportunities and are empowered to take forward initiatives to achieve positive wellbeing outcomes.

Aim 3: Heritage potential (what can the heritage sector do?)

We will share the knowledge we gain with heritage organisations and support them to embed wellbeing outcomes in what they do.

Strategic actions

This strategy is a high-level plan for achieving change in both the short and long term. It sets the direction and provides the framework for our response to the broad political, economic, social and environmental context about health and wellbeing in England.

The strategy is therefore about participation and process as much as outputs. It aims to:

- **Consolidate** the great work that is already happening, maximising and effectively evaluating our impact so we can apply action learning
- **Diversify** our reach by building on our unique skills and position in the sector to catalyse innovation and development

We have identified 9 areas for action. Each action includes a way of working and an activity. [The logic model](#) sets this out in more detail. An action plan will be updated on an annual basis.

Aim 1: Our work (what difference can we make?)

We will embed wellbeing outcomes in our work; and learn from and collaborate with partners, communities and organisations that share our ambition to deliver improved wellbeing outcomes.

Strategic actions

1: Work together

- a. We will build on our key existing partnerships, including our productive partnership with the [National Academy of Social Prescribing](#). We will exchange insights on wellbeing issues, work to get heritage on the agenda and build shared activity and outputs.
- b. We will facilitate learning across policy, research, engagement and evaluation teams, enhance our understanding of the sector and its needs, and assess what works.
- c. We will partner as advisory members on research projects and support others to develop projects.

2: Work with intent

- a. We will work with colleagues to make sure our programmes deliver outcomes for people and communities as well as heritage.
- b. We will consider ways to prioritise our work to make sure we address wellbeing inequalities, understanding community needs and supporting co-production.
- c. We will apply the principles of Active Participation from our [Future Strategy](#).

3: Develop evidence

- a. We will use research to make the case for heritage and investigate new ways of working.
- b. We will develop an approach to social impact, including a wellbeing measurement framework.
- c. We will use project specific evaluation tools to understand how to meet wellbeing need.

Aim 2: Our people (what can our people do?)

We will develop our own knowledge and expertise, so our people recognise opportunities and are empowered to take forward initiatives to achieve positive wellbeing outcomes.

Strategic actions

4: Think holistically

- a. We will create a whole-organisation approach to wellbeing and ensure our commitment to wellbeing is reflected in the Corporate Plan.
- b. We will review our current policies and practices to make sure we are encouraging wellbeing objectives where possible.
- c. We will draw connections and share actions with the Inclusion, Diversity and Equality Strategy.

5: Support staff

- a. We will develop a learning space, guidance and training to enable colleagues to embed wellbeing in their work.
- b. We will disseminate and exchange information and engage in mutual learning with people, gaining multiple perspectives and building resilience.
- c. We will host staff forums to share and learn from each other.

6: Learn reflectively

- a. We will work together to review and evaluate our current work to understand its impact and identify areas for improvement.
- b. We will work with colleagues across the organisation to explore how we can deliver more wellbeing outcomes and put this into practice.
- c. We will use opportunities in our work to increase evidence and test proofs of concept.

Aim 3: Heritage potential (what can the heritage sector do?)

We will share the knowledge we gain with heritage organisations, to support them to embed wellbeing outcomes in what they do.

Strategic actions

7: Collaborate actively

- a. We will develop models of good practice and create new opportunities for engagement with heritage from our assets.
- b. We will work with others to publish, co-produce and facilitate guidance for and with the sector.
- c. We will create and run a five nations strategic wellbeing knowledge exchange.

8: Create links

- a. With the Council of British Archaeology, we will facilitate communities of practice for the heritage sector to build capacity and share knowledge.
- b. We will work strategically, both nationally and internationally, to share and build evidence and working practices.
- c. We will develop partnerships with the health and voluntary sectors to create new resources for heritage.

9: Create new approaches

- a. We will create and facilitate innovative pilot projects, through direct commissioning, grant applications and partnership working.
- b. We will collaborate with the cultural sector and the health and voluntary sectors to understand lived experience and the value of heritage to individual wellbeing.
- c. We will ensure timely and productive outcomes for our investment.

Priority groups

To improve wellbeing, we must consider the needs of everyone.

This principle aligns with our [Inclusion, Diversity and Equality strategy](#). By focusing on wellbeing, we will deliver greater social inclusion and more diverse ways to interact with heritage.

We must advocate a ‘people and heritage-led’ approach. To do so, we will listen to people’s needs and experiences, learn from others and build shared approaches. To support this, we have established priority areas of concern based on current social needs.

By connecting people with heritage, we will prioritise the following target groups:

- people with mental health needs
- people who are lonely or socially isolated
- older people, especially those who are coping with age-related challenges or a reduction in their capacity to thrive
- younger people, especially those who need support to counter disadvantage

These are not mutually exclusive groups. Nor do they cover every element of health and wellbeing, or socio-economic group. Yet, we believe this focus will help us and our partners to understand the specific needs of communities, to enable us to make the most difference.

Within each priority group, there are three levels of individual need: thriving, surviving and struggling.

- **Thriving:** when we are thriving, we have the capacity to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. Thriving people have the potential to flourish. Thriving is usually associated with a positive sense of emotional and spiritual wellbeing and personal dignity.
- **Surviving:** when we are surviving, we are managing to continue to exist despite difficult circumstances.
- **Struggling:** when we are struggling, people or things may be making it difficult to succeed despite our efforts. We associate struggling with longer-term, more complex situations. People who may, at some point, struggle are those most at risk of systemic inequity.

Different approaches are needed for different contexts, and awareness of the environments we work in is crucial.

Figure 1: Relating our response to the three levels of need

THRIVING	
Person feeling capable	Our role: supporting
SURVIVING	
Person managing	Our role: developing capacity
STRUGGLING	
Person experiencing disadvantage	Our role: addressing inequity

Priority area one: young people

We will work towards fairer chances for young people through historic environment opportunities.

<p>Vulnerable groups of children are more likely to be excluded from school, with 78% of permanent exclusions issued to children who have special educational needs or are eligible for free school meals</p>	<p>Young people with developmental disabilities are more likely to need medical services and have an increased risk of unemployment and contact with the criminal justice system</p>
<p>There are approx 500,000 more children living in poverty than in 2012, with known impact on wellbeing, social mobility and education outcomes</p>	<p>Almost 40% of young people in the criminal justice system re-offend within 12 months and with a high frequency</p>

<p>THRIVING</p>	<p>Promote opportunities for children to connect with the historic environment</p>
<p>SURVIVING</p>	<p>Develop models for historic environment activities and sense of place to support learning and counter disadvantage</p>
<p>STRUGGLING</p>	<p>Work with those already at risk of severe disadvantages to improve their chances</p>

Priority area two: ageing

We will support those with age-related issues through the opportunities afforded by engagement with the historic environment

We have a rapidly ageing population, the number of people over 75 has increased by 89% in the last 30 years	15-20% of people aged 65 or older have mild cognitive impairment
Loneliness can increase the risk of developing dementia and a diagnosis can increase social isolation	Almost half a million people have dementia in England, a figure set to double in the next 20 years

THRIVING	Promote good cognitive function for those approaching older age through engagement with heritage
SURVIVING	Develop models for historic environment activities and sense of place to address symptoms affecting function
STRUGGLING	Work with others to look at how to address severe and complex age-related issues with the historic environment

Priority area three: loneliness

We will support those who are lonely or socially isolated through the opportunities afforded by engagement with the historic environment

Loneliness and poor social connections are as bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day	9 million people in the UK across all adult ages are either always or often lonely, and 50% of disabled people report feeling lonely on any given day
Loneliness can increase the risk of developing dementia, heart disease and depression	There are links between health and social inequality and social isolation and some groups are more at risk than others

THRIVING	Promote good active social connections at individual and community level
SURVIVING	Develop models for historic environment activities and sense of place to address social isolation
STRUGGLING	Work with others to address severe loneliness and barriers to social connection

Priority area four: mental health

We will support better mental health through connection with the historic environment

Mental illness costs the UK economy £105 billion and 72 million lost work days each year	70–75% of people with diagnosable mental health illness receive no treatment at all
Mental health issues are a leading cause of disability and other problems including coronary heart disease and suicide	Mental health issues disproportionately affect marginalised groups

THRIVING	Promote positive mental health inside and outside the organisation
SURVIVING	Develop models for historic environment activities and sense of place to address common mental health issues
STRUGGLING	Work with others to address severe and complex mental health issues with the historic environment

Relationship with other strategies

This strategy directly supports Historic England's Future Strategy, which focuses on the power of heritage to improve lives.

Our Future Strategy is built around the three pillars: Thriving Places, Connected Communities and Active Participation. All of these are relevant to wellbeing. This strategy therefore cuts across all our work, in the same way as our Inclusion, Equality and Diversity Strategy.

Active Participation is about how we work together with more people, and a more diverse range of people, to champion and protect the historic environment. People's wellbeing improves when they not only engage with heritage but can also shape how they connect to their historic environment through action.

Our work on wellbeing also relates to other organisations' initiatives and strategies.

For example, mental health and having the best start in life are two of the priorities in [Public Health England's five-year strategy](#). The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport recognised the impact of loneliness when it published the [findings of the loneliness task force](#) in early 2022. And the Department of Health and Social Care has set up the National Academy of Social Prescribing, with cultural bodies, including Historic England, as partners in its development.

Duration and scope

This strategy builds on the great work already happening across Historic England and gives us clear direction and priorities for up to the next three years.

Wellbeing is context dependent, specific to individuals and therefore dynamic. There is no specific end point to achieving wellbeing in communities, but we will take stock and reset direction in 2025.

The wellbeing of our people is vitally important to us. This area of work is led by our Human Resources team. While this activity is out of scope for this strategy, which focuses on our delivery to others, the strategy does advocate a joined-up approach – meaning we recognise that employee satisfaction can be supported by meaningful work that feels manageable. For this reason, we propose a whole-organisation approach to wellbeing, as described in Action 4a.

Implementation, impact and accountability

To ensure the success of the strategy, we need to understand the impact of what we are doing, and what can be achieved for both individuals and communities.

A wider issue is how we measure, not just the outputs of the strategy, but whether we are achieving the intended outcomes – that is, the difference we make.

We will consider the impact of the strategy by considering the organisational outcomes of each of its aims, as identified below.

This is a reflective process, not a linear one, as shown by our theory of change.

Assessing impact

We will begin by preparing feasibility plans for those areas with significant potential to affect wellbeing, considering the resources each area would need to help with prioritising and programming.

Part of implementing the strategy is embedding wellbeing into what we do, and this includes thinking about how monitoring and evaluation will work in each area of the organisation.

This is a cross-departmental issue which will focus on measuring the impact of specific projects and programmes, as well as broader social impact framework approaches which we will develop across the organisation.

This means that over time our reporting and evaluation will grow more specific and create a richer set of data.

Reporting

We will deliver an annual report that shares what we have achieved, actions for the year ahead and what changes have been made. This will include examples of good practice drawn from a range of organisations that are exemplifying excellent work in this area, and the results of research and pilots.

Accountability

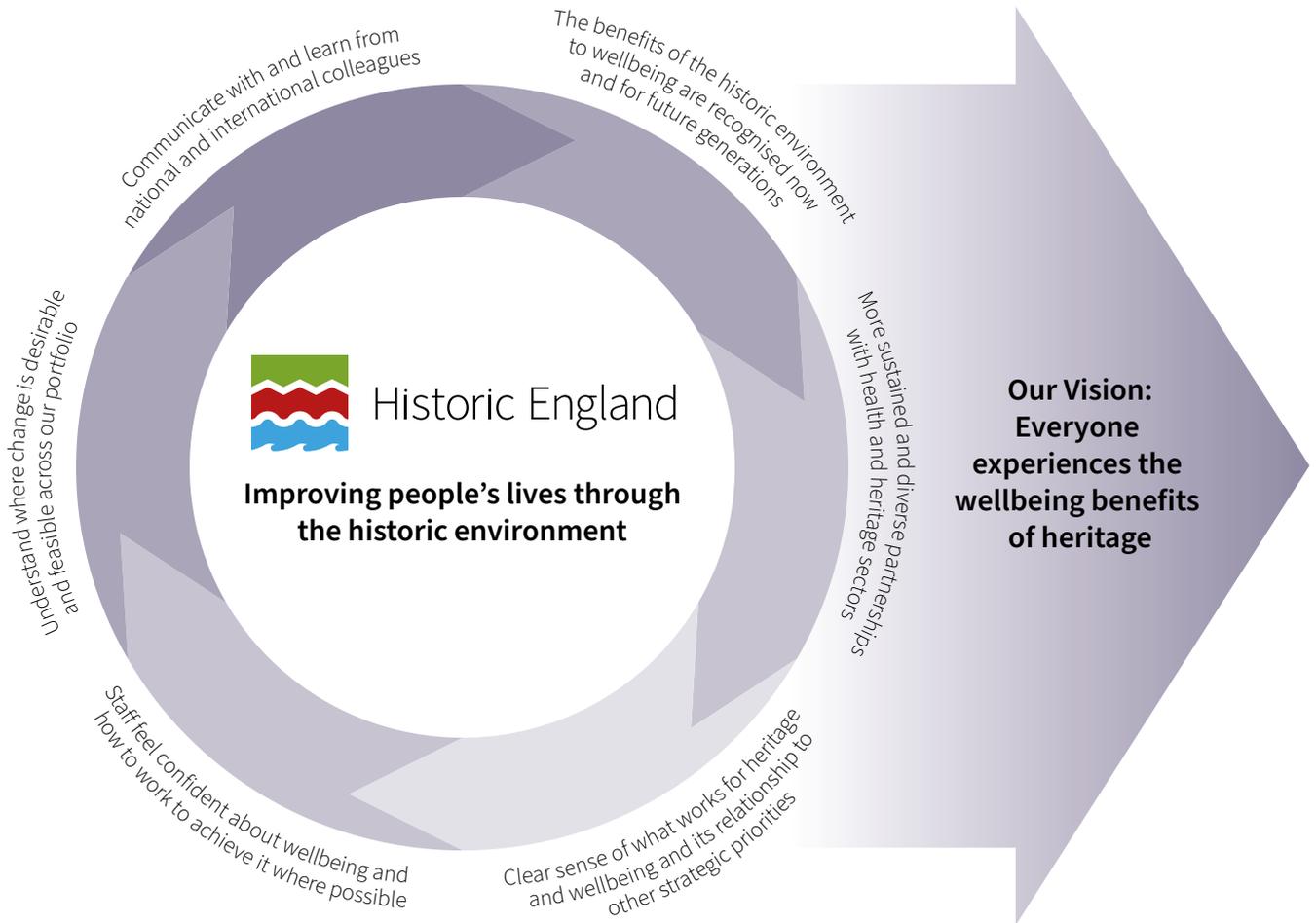
The implementation of this strategy will be monitored and reviewed through the Policy and Evidence leadership team and annual reports to Executive Team.

It will be supported by creating:

- an internal wellbeing and heritage forum and knowledge exchange, open to all, to ensure knowledge sharing and relationship building
- a cross-departmental steering group, drawn from the forum
- a programme board with external members to provide a range of expertise

Theory of change

Figure 2: Historic England's Wellbeing and Heritage Strategy theory of change



Conclusion

Our strategy signals a commitment to placing wellbeing at the earliest stages of our work. This includes our advice, content, policies, projects and programmes, where relevant and possible. We will review our approach as we fill existing gaps and discover more. Implementing wellbeing delivery at Historic England is about uniting the need for positive social change with the tools at our disposal, to maximise our public value.

This endeavour is not one we can or should do alone. People's health and wellbeing needs are personal and varied. Everyone's particular circumstances contribute towards their life satisfaction and opportunities. To work effectively in such a complex area, we must build strong and long-lasting relationships with partners to understand wellbeing needs.

We bring our heritage knowledge and expertise to the table, and we will work together to address inequalities in the nation's wellbeing.

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- [The healing power of heritage – how can we demonstrate the benefits?](#)
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National Academy for Social Prescribing: Thriving Community Ideas Hub – blogs

- [Somers Town Museum – “A space for us”](#)
- [3000 people see that All's Well in historic Exeter through heritage with health benefits](#)
- [Heeley City Farm Community Heritage](#)
- [Monuments Matter to People in Cornwall](#)
- [Forgotten Veterans at Fort Cumberland](#)
- [The Land Girls Project](#)
- [Archaeology on Prescription](#)



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