



Historic England



Consultation response to Draft London Health Inequalities Strategy



Historic England

Our ref: PL00033929

Health Inequalities Strategy Consultation
Greater London Authority
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA

By email: healthinequalities@london.gov.uk

29 November 2017

Dear Sir/Madam

London Health Inequalities Strategy Consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on *Better Health for All Londoners*, the draft London Health Inequalities Strategy.

As the Government's statutory adviser for the historic environment, Historic England is keen to ensure that heritage is properly considered as part of such an important document, particularly given the wider planning and environmental responsibilities of the Mayor and the GLA. Our response therefore seeks to ensure that the relationships between the type of health issues addressed by the Strategy and the historic environment are well understood and that further opportunities to seek mutually beneficial outcomes are clear. We also note that this is one of a suite of consultation documents on behalf of the Mayor, all of which we will be responding to.

Historic England welcomes the overall objectives of the Strategy. As an organisation we are committed to supporting all staff in relation to mental health and wellbeing, and have recently adopted an Action Plan to be able to achieve this. The research and evidence below demonstrates the direct but often under-appreciated relationship between the historic environment and health and wellbeing outcomes. As a result, we recommend that the Strategy should

- set out the benefits that can accrue from the historic environment in terms of health and wellbeing, and encourage public sector bodies and local authorities across London to integrate these in their related strategies and policies;
- be more explicit about the relationship between the quality of the built and historic environment and how successful and well-used London's town centres, parks, open spaces and green infrastructure are as a result;



Historic England, 4th Floor, Cannon Bridge House, Dowgate Hill, London EC4R 2YA
Telephone 020 7973 3700 Facsimile 020 7973 3001
HistoricEngland.org.uk

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- ensure that the Healthy Streets Approach reflects the importance of a character led approach to new development .

We have a number of general comments about the background to the objectives of the Strategy and how London's heritage can support their delivery. These relate principally to aims 2 and 3 – *healthy minds* and *healthy places*.

The most obvious and straightforward relationship between heritage and the aims of the Strategy is that between attractive, well managed historic places and areas providing spaces for formal and informal activity, and the fact they are well-used and so contribute to subsequent health outcomes. Historic England is currently consulting on our updated guidance on public realm works in sensitive historic locations, *Streets for All*, which offers detailed advice on how improvements can be made to public spaces without harming their valued character. In terms of the Strategy, we consider that ensuring that London's historic high streets, town centres, squares, parks and gardens are part of the Healthy Streets Approach referenced as part of objectives 3.2 and 3.3 is particularly important. Consideration of local character is a key element of this, and can be thought of in two distinct ways:

- Ensuring that the principles of the Healthy Streets Approach encompass considerations around local character and existing townscapes can help in the design and delivery of high quality, successful and sustainable places;
- Local communities value the quality of the historic environment – how it appears, is used and managed. We would emphasise recent research from the DCMS that demonstrates this – 95% of people asked agreed that is important that historic buildings and places are well looked after¹.

There is now a significant body of research and evidence that establishes a positive relationship between the historic environment and effects on wellbeing and mental health that we would wish to ensure is part of your considerations. This is particularly relevant in relation to Question 4 in the Strategy. For example, the same DCMS research as above has also found that people who visit heritage sites a few times or more per year have a significantly higher life satisfaction, higher happiness score and lower anxiety levels than those who do not. Research undertaken in 2017 by Age UK also found that engagement with creative and cultural activities (including heritage) makes the highest contribution to an individual's overall wellbeing later in life out of a total of 40 indicators identified, including physical activity, levels of education and pension income².

Perhaps most importantly, the historic environment has also been proven to make a contribution to addressing inequalities in wellbeing. A 2017 report³ has demonstrated that

¹ DCMS 2015 [Taking Part Survey 2014/15](#)

² Age UK 2017 [A Summary of Age UK's Index of Wellbeing in Later Life](#)

³ What Works Centre for Wellbeing 2017 [What Drives Wellbeing Inequality at the Local Level](#)

higher levels of engagement in heritage activity (such as participation in civic societies or volunteering with heritage charities) are associated with lower levels of wellbeing inequality within local authority areas. While there may be challenges in achieving engagement with heritage across all socio-economic groups, this research demonstrates that where this is successful it is likely that the benefits to wellbeing are proportionately greater for those of lower socio-economic status. Other research has identified similar outcomes⁴, while also taking an approach that attaches monetary values to the wellbeing impacts of heritage visits. This concluded that visits to heritage sites had an annual notional benefit of £1,646 per person.

Research undertaken on behalf of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has provided evidence that engagement with the historic environment can make people happy as well offer an opportunity for significant personal development⁵. Volunteers on HLF projects reported levels of happiness and wellbeing far higher than that of the general population and of the general volunteering population. Other HLF research has also identified benefits in terms of new skills, confidence and outlook that come about as a result of such projects.

Heritage therefore makes a significant contribution to addressing issues around inclusivity, social cohesion and engaging with particular groups across society, such as older people and minority ethnic groups. We have recently launched [Another England](#), a project to deepen understanding of the stories and history of people of colour in England. In the context of the relationship between the historic environment, wellbeing and mental health, it is also worth noting Historic England's internationally award-winning Heritage Schools programme. This currently involves 250 schools and has reached approximately 120,000 children across the country since it began in 2012. The aims of the programme include ensuring that

- Children develop a sense of pride in where they live;
- Children understand their local heritage and how it relates to the national story;
- Communities are more deeply involved in the life of the school.

Evaluation carried out by Historic England has shown dramatic increases in levels of knowledge and engagement with the historic environment on the part of all involved (both children and teachers). While it is too early to be certain of the long-term impacts of the programme, previous DCMS research has shown a strong association between childhood exposure to historic sites and the likelihood of this enduring into adulthood. The potential benefits over the lifetimes of all the children involved are huge as a result – not least in health & wellbeing terms as well as educational attainment.

⁴ Fujiwara, D et al 2014 *Heritage and Wellbeing*

⁵ BOP Consulting 2011 [Assessment of the Social Impact of Volunteering in HLF projects](#) and HLF 2013 *Values and Benefits of Heritage*



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We have noted the broad aims and wide range of objectives within the Health Inequalities Strategy, together with the relationship with the upcoming review of the London Plan and the other responsibilities of the Mayor. Earlier in 2017, Historic England published *Translating Good Growth for London's Historic Environment*, a report setting out the benefits of embedding the historic environment in the delivery of new housing, employment, cultural and public spaces. This research, together with the body of evidence set out above, illustrates the contribution that the historic environment makes to good growth in London. There are also links between happiness and good placemaking which we will explore in our forthcoming placemaking strategy.

To quote the Mayor himself, the forthcoming London Plan will 'embed the role of heritage in place-making and help deliver positive benefits from development that sustain and enhance the historic environment, as well as contributing to the economic viability, accessibility and environmental quality of a place, and to social wellbeing'⁶. This is an approach fully supported by Historic England. This is underpinned by understanding what is important about London and what Londoners themselves value about the city before using this as the starting point for new development. It means engaging with the historic environment in its everyday sense – townscapes, parks, open spaces and local landmarks, as well as the iconic heritage sites that are familiar to so many. We would therefore strongly encourage you to integrate heritage considerations in the draft Health Inequalities Strategy - this would be a significant step in capturing the further benefits they can achieve.

I trust these comments are helpful. We would be very pleased to discuss these points further in person and for you to use any of the material directly, but please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information in the meantime.

Yours faithfully

Tim Brennan MRTPI
Historic Environment Planning Adviser
E-mail: tim.brennan@HistoricEngland.org.uk
DD: 020 – 7973 3744

Cover image: Electric Avenue, Brixton © Historic England

⁶ Mayor's Question Time 16th November 2017

