



Historic England

Wellbeing and Heritage Strategy (2022 – 25)

Annual progress report (2022 - 23)

27 June 2023

Strategy Lead's Introduction

In May 2022, Historic England launched its first **Wellbeing and Heritage Strategy**. In the last year, we invested approximately £380,000 to explore how heritage, archaeology and the built environment can best support the health and wellbeing of people and communities across England.

Our work with partners from different sectors helped us to secure £170,000 of funding for – and launch - nine pilot projects. These pilots test concepts generate evidence and improve our understanding of what works well for wellbeing and heritage. Four of the nine pilot projects exclusively focus on social prescribing, supporting our work with the **National Academy of Social**

Prescribing (NASP).

Whilst we share our findings with the sector as we go, we wanted to take the opportunity to share some highlights, provide an impression of the scope of our work and invite you to share your knowledge with us.

The issue is not can heritage help wellbeing – we know it can – but is what works for whom and how. Wellbeing is multi-dimensional and dynamic; it requires a person-centred approach. This cannot be achieved in isolation and our continued progress depends on our committed cross-sector partners, advisors and colleagues, to whom we are incredibly grateful.

- **Dr. Linda Monckton**



A swimmer and lifeguard at Parliament Hill Fields Lido, London. © Historic England Archive

Summary of progress

This section provides an update on the progress made towards our three strategic aims during Year 1 (May 2022- 23).

Strategic Aim 1: Our Work

'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'

Creating social impact

We began to integrate wellbeing into our own policies and approaches: for the first time, wellbeing is embedded explicitly into Historic England's **Corporate Plan**, under our **Levelling Up** priority; it is the driver for a new social impact framework; and is a key factor in active internal reviews, including into our grant-making processes. This means that wellbeing is continuously considered as Historic England reviews its working methods, priorities and approaches.

We have looked at how existing programmes could improve public wellbeing. In Kirkham, we are working with the local authority and Historic England's **High Street Heritage Action Zone (HAZ)** team to deliver **a programme of cultural events** directly linked to local health and wellbeing outcomes.

We also commissioned an evaluation report (written by ERS Ltd) alongside the **HAZ** team in Sunderland. The report showed how

creating spaces for isolated local residents to share memories together increased community-level pride and wellbeing.

Our work with HAZ teams shows that the historic environment can support people with different health needs to address low levels of wellbeing. We have seen how heritage can aide connection and build a stronger sense of pride in both younger and older generations. These learnings will help Historic England to design future programmes with positive health and wellbeing outcomes from the outset.

Embedding wellbeing into our work is also about making the best of our existing assets. The **Historic England Archive** contains 12 million photographs, drawings, reports and publications from the 1850s to the present day. We have been working with **Age UK** in Bristol to see how historic photographs can be used to address loneliness and improve wellbeing among older people and the socially isolated.

Case study: The Missing Pieces Community Toolkit

All over England are places with stories to tell; from buildings to battlefields, some close by, others just a day trip away. In May 2023, *'The Missing Pieces Project'* (formerly known as *'Enriching the List'*) was relaunched.

The project invites the public to share pictures and stories of the unique, places on **the National Heritage List for England** (otherwise known as 'The List'). The List is an index of buildings, monuments, battlefields, parks, gardens and shipwrecks and will be preserved and protected for future generations. Each person's view of a place is as unique as they are, so every snapshot and story that is added is an important piece of the picture.

In the run-up to the start of the project, we researched how 'The List' – as an important existing Historic England asset - could benefit individual and community wellbeing in the UK. The team found that participation in projects like 'Missing Pieces' could provide low-cost and easily facilitated activities that connect people through personal interests and local history, which can bring people real joy.

In response, Historic England commission a new **toolkit** (designed by **MB Associates**) to help community groups, services commissioners and charities to use 'Missing Pieces' as the focus of a wellbeing activity. The toolkit is a practical and evidenced guide for



Schoolchildren's painting of St Pancras Station and Midland Hotel, Edith Neville Primary School. Contributed to the Missing Pieces Project by Michael Gorely"

users, designed to increase wellbeing, engender local pride, play a part in social connectivity and explore personal identity.

With so many listed sites being outdoors, the Missing Pieces Project can get people active as well as thoughtful and creative; one contributor who participated in our research told us *"it exercises your brain as well as your feet"*.

New Partnerships

We built partnerships with new organisations and institutions from the education, VCSE and health sectors. At the same time, we worked with our existing partners to identify new wellbeing-focussed ways of working.

We undertook a short-term fellowship with our new partner **Southampton Institute of Arts and Humanities (SIAH)**, which led Historic England to commission a 9-month multi-partner research project with them and the **NHS Trust at Queen Alexandra Hospital** in Portsmouth. Launched in August 2022, the project evaluates the wellbeing benefits of three different heritage interventions for 80 NHS staff at high-risk of poor mental health.

A new research partnership with the **University of Glasgow** has led to a jointly authored article (*'Is spatial exposure to heritage associated with visits to heritage and to mental health? A cross-sectional study using data from the UK Household Longitudinal Study'*) being published in the **British Medical Journal** (Volume 13, Issue 3, April 2023).

In November 2022, we facilitated a day-long workshop with our longstanding partner, **Forestry England**, to explore potential opportunities for collaborative working on wellbeing in the future. In the same month, we began our pilot **Heritage Buddies** with new partner **Nottingham Community and Voluntary Service (NCVS)** and our long-standing partner **Natural England**. Our knowledge and

potential continue to grow with new and diverse partnerships.

NASP and the creation of heritage pathways

Establishing a strong partnership with **NASP** - supported by a part-time secondment of Historic England's Senior Policy Adviser - has been crucial to strategy delivery. It enabled us to explore and promote how heritage-based social prescribing improves wellbeing and deepened our understanding of the role heritage can play in the public health.

With NASP's support, we commissioned two 9-month social prescribing pilot projects – **Heritage Buddies** and **Heritage Connectors** – that trial NASP's *'whole community approach'* in a heritage context.

We jointly facilitate the **Heritage and Social Prescribing Community of Practice**, which supports the wider heritage sector to learn about social prescribing. **Heritage and Social Prescribing Guidance**, targeting three main audiences – heritage and VCSE organisations, link workers and the general public – is in development.

We published an evidence summary - *'Heritage and Social Prescribing'* – which is an important addition to the growing body of evidence on heritage and wellbeing. We also added much-needed sector-specific knowledge to the *'Arts, Heritage and Culture'* **evidence summary**, produced by NASP's evidence collaborative earlier in the year.

Case study: Heritage Connectors Project

The work of both the VCSE sector and the NHS is crucial to people in need accessing support services, including through social prescribing. To successfully link the wellbeing provision of the heritage sector to these pathways, we need to know how to work well with these partners – and to be able to learn from them.

This year, Historic England partnered with **Frome Medical Practice** in Somerset who, since 2013, have been at the forefront of social prescribing with their creation of the '**Community Connectors model**'.



The Heritage Connectors' project team - Jenny Hartnoll and David Lassman, together with Lisa Kenwright from Frome Heritage CIC

The model trains members of the local community to signpost people to social prescribing access points and information, thus enabling them to get the help and support they need.

In November 2022, Historic England commissioned the Practice to deliver a 9-month **Heritage Connectors** pilot, that tests the “community connectors model” through interaction with the historic environment and heritage in Frome.

The project aims to improve peoples' health and wellbeing through widened availability of and access to heritage organisations and their activities; support of active participation in the historic environment; and strengthened community cohesion and pride of place.

So far, the project team have mapped available local heritage wellbeing activities - from those offered by **Frome Heritage Museum** and the **Frome Heritage CIC** to guided walks, family history groups and church events – and built an initial **Heritage Wellbeing Directory**. Currently the team are raising awareness and training community members as 'Heritage Connectors'. Recently, the project appeared on a training module on **Health Connections Mendip's "Let's Connect"** web pages – the first time heritage found its way onto a local NHS service website.

Strategic Aim 2: Our People

'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.'



Historic England staff at Moseley Road Baths, Birmingham. © Historic England Archive

This year, we launched our first **Wellbeing and Heritage Learning Programme** aimed at staff at Historic England. We worked closely with the **What Works for Wellbeing Centre** and built two modules - *'Understanding Wellbeing'* and *'Wellbeing and Heritage'* – which our staff can access via our internal Learning Management System.

We established a **Wellbeing and Heritage Internal Forum** to bring colleagues from teams across Historic England together to discuss issues, raise questions and share best practice on heritage and wellbeing. Membership is open and meeting recordings are available via the intranet so that staff have the opportunity to build their confidence in wellbeing and heritage concepts around existing commitments.

Alongside the internal forum, we have presented **'Lunch & Learns'**, given talks to regional teams and recorded

webinars on heritage and wellbeing, social prescribing and heritage volunteering. These learning assets are available to staff along with other resources such as *'Guidance on running a digital wellbeing project'* (by Wessex Archaeology and funded by Historic England) and *'Guidance on involving people with mental health issues in heritage projects'*. The latter, a collaborative work with **Solent University**, formed the foundation for their new AMPHORA website with toolkits on delivering mental health benefits through heritage.

We also provided 1:1 advice to colleagues and project teams. Currently, we are advising on two public engagement initiatives: **History in the Making**, which works with young people to co-create projects that increase confidence and connection to local heritage; and **Greening the High Street**, which aims to improve wellbeing by connecting people to their high streets through urban growing.

Strategic Aim 3: Heritage potential

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

Working with the sector

We continue to facilitate collaboration on wellbeing with government, civil society, policy experts and heritage organisations from across the UK.

The **Heritage and Wellbeing Working Group**, jointly administered with the **Council of British Archaeology**, supports sector-wide knowledge exchange on the wellbeing potential of the historic environment. Its **Task and Finish Groups** have collaborated on definitions, monitoring and evaluating heritage and wellbeing projects and research gaps.

We worked with **Bournemouth University** on their **Wellbeing through Archaeology and Heritage Symposium** (March 2023), exploring how the sector can scale-up heritage work to enhance individual wellbeing.

We continue to work with related policy teams in the home nations and the Republic of Ireland. Together we formed a **Five Nations Forum** (comprising **Cadw**, **Historic Environment Scotland**, **the Historic Environment Division at the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland**, **the National Monuments Service** and **the National Heritage Council in Ireland**) which met in May 2022.

Innovation

We are using innovative projects to test new concepts and potential delivery models, providing invaluable insights into our four priorities of: young people, older people, those living with mental health issues and those experiencing loneliness.

In the first year of delivery, we supported 9 pilot projects. Most pilots will complete in 2024, at which point we will update on their findings.

However, in April 2023, the project **Worcester Life Stories** completed. Delivered by **Worcester Historic Environment Record**, **Worcestershire Health and Care Trust** and **the Association of Dementia Studies**, it tested the use of “digital lives” story platforms, using photographs of the local historic environment to support people living with dementia, as well as their carers.

The end-of-project evaluation showed that the digital platforms have value for individuals in care, education and heritage sectors; provide structured but flexible ways to engage with different audiences through heritage; and made users feel more socially connected and knowledgeable about their locality. Through generating stories, carers learned more about the individuals they support.

Case study: Project Rejuvenate

In October 2022, **Historic England**, **Wessex Archaeology** and **Isle Heritage** launched the **Rejuvenate Project** based on evidence gathered by feasibility and test phases.

This pilot project aims to expand the capacity of vulnerable young people where it is suppressed by circumstance or self-belief. Participants build transferable skills such as resilience, critical-thinking and cooperation, all through a stronger connection to the historic environment.

In Wiltshire, young people will be stepping out of the classroom and into prehistoric Britain. Wessex Archaeology, in partnership with **St Joseph's Catholic School** and the **Wiltshire Wildlife Trust**, will support young people to actively participate in the exploration of their local heritage.



Rejuvenate participants sieving a test pit at Coombe Bisset Down Nature Reserve, Wiltshire. © Wessex Archaeology

Becoming archaeologists, they will design and create their own Mesolithic settlement, take part in digs and learn woodland craft activities.

In Kent, children supported by the **Kent Youth Justice Team**, will work with Isle Heritage to discover the coastal historic environment remaining from World War II by exploring cliffs, tunnels and forts, and excavating sites of importance for the defence of Britain.

Rejuvenate is one of the first projects to offer a comprehensive heritage-based wellbeing programme for young people in the UK. It will utilise best practice to assess and monitor the impact of the experience on the lives of its participants, including a longitudinal study. We hope the findings will provoke a compelling conversation on the vital role and potential social impact of the heritage sector on individuals and communities across the country.

Our delivery partners welcomed young people to sites in May 2023.

Leadership and dissemination

We have an expanding publication record in archaeology and heritage books, journals and heritage organisation communications, which total 15 this year. These strengthen our sectoral role ensuring cross sector dissemination and communication to the public and to professionals.

Our new partnerships help generate new evidence. For example, our work with the **University of Glasgow** on spatial exposure to heritage. This, now published in the **British Medical Journal** (Volume 13, Issue 3, April 2023), used data from the **UK Household Longitudinal Study**. It showed that the most deprived areas had fewer heritage sites per 1000 people than the least deprived. And that those with heritage exposure were more likely to have visited a heritage site in the past year. Among those with heritage exposure, visitors to heritage sites had a lower predicted probability of distress than non-visitors.

Not only does this research contribute to evidence for the wellbeing benefits of heritage, it is highly relevant to the Government's levelling-up agenda. The findings demonstrate how tackling inequality in heritage exposure will improve heritage engagement and thereby public mental health and wellbeing.

Building capacity in the heritage sector is not just about working with people already in it, but also with those who aspire to be in it. Our ongoing work with the Institute for **Sustainable Heritage at University College London (UCL)** resulted in wellbeing and the historic environment to feature in UCL's important **Heritage Futures** interdisciplinary

programme and their **MSc in Sustainable Heritage**.

Such cutting-edge research supports us to support others, including Government. We kept wellbeing and the historic environment on the agenda of 3 All Parliamentary Party Groups (APPGs): **the Health and Natural Environment APPG**; **the Arts, Health and Wellbeing APPG**; and **the Tackling Loneliness and Connected Communities APPG**.

We are also part of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) **Loneliness Evidence Group**. This looks at, amongst other things, ways the built environment, cultural heritage and arts interventions can address loneliness.

This year, our work has gained further international influence. We advised the **Social Platform for Holistic Heritage Impact Assessment in Europe**, which developed an impact framework for cultural heritage. We are seeing more international and national interest from places as diverse as China and Canada. Our developing evidence base resulted in eleven formal public presentations in the first year of strategy delivery.

Advisory panel membership is a light-touch means of ensuring multiple sectors and programmes consider the wellbeing benefits of heritage and that we learn from innovative research. As members of 7 advisory panels funded by the **UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)** we explore topics such as pathways to health for young people through heritage; social prescribing, and cultural values; and older people with dementia. Our embedded role will enable us to build our own picture of what works and to share the results, providing new ways of delivering wellbeing through heritage.

Looking ahead

This section looks to our future, including what we have learned and what we hope to achieve in Year 2 of strategy delivery (May 2023 – 24).

Learning

Working with wellbeing is a continuous and reflective process. We are building evaluation into our pilots to ensure we learn what works and to deepen our understanding of their potential. We are creating a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities that working with wellbeing provides.

A selection of our new learnings about the value of heritage for wellbeing this year are:

- the **connecting power of heritage is simply phenomenal**
- **working with at-risk heritage has specific benefits beyond other forms of volunteering** through meaning-making, legacy production and gaining perspectives
- **addressing inequalities in heritage exposure** could be a pathway to improve societal mental health

We have also reflected on the operational challenges and opportunities during our first year of programme delivery. Our reflections include:

- **there is no one-size-fits-all approach to this work**; it must be



The Eleven 'o' One sculpture (or "Tommy") in Seaham, County Durham. © Historic England Archive

- culturally and contextually specific to have positive impact
- **projects contain risks and rarely go exactly as planned**, but this is a positive if it reflects active participation by local people
- **standard data-collection methods for measuring wellbeing impact can't always be successfully applied**, despite aspirations, and it may depend on a cohort's characteristics

Year 2 (2023-24)

From May 2023, we look forward to a step change in our evidence. Seven of our pilot projects will end and we will begin to reflect on the results with stakeholders, including **NASP**. We will begin to disseminate our learnings and make recommendations that aim to inform policies and practice in the heritage, health and VCSE sectors.

We will explore opportunities for the sustainable future of **Project Rejuvenate**, so that heritage can continue to improve the lives of vulnerable young people.

We will investigate new opportunities for research and pilots to fill evidence gaps and enable policy development for us and Government.

We will focus on work to map wellbeing opportunities across departments at Historic England, so that all staff have the

chance to deliver wellbeing outcomes in line with our **Corporate Plan**. This will

focus on developing the potential of our physical assets and core functions to improve individual and community wellbeing. In July 2023, we will publish the third module of our staff learning programme: '**Heritage and Social Prescribing**'.

Heritage as an opportunity to address wellbeing inequalities will form the subject of a series of publicly available evidence reports and tailored guidance. This will focus on our four wellbeing priorities of mental health, loneliness, older people and young people.

Our sector engagement programmes will enable us to do this collaboratively with the **Five Nations Forum** and the **Wellbeing and Heritage Working Group**. We will listen to others and prioritise working with those with lived experience as we move forward.



A dancer performs at Brandenstoke Priory in Wiltshire. © Historic England Archive

Thanks

We are thankful to the many organisations, partners, donors and individuals that continue to support our work.

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England, Nottingham Community and Voluntary Service (NCVS), Queen Alexandra Hospital Portsmouth, Southampton Institute for Arts and Humanities (SIAH), Restoration Trust, Rockthorn, Swire Charitable Trust, University College London, University of Glasgow, University of Southampton, University of Worcester, Wavehill Limited, Wessex Archaeology, What Works for Wellbeing Centre, Worcester Historic Environment Record, Worcestershire Health and Care Trust.

Contact

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A builder sits on the roof of Highbury Hall in Birmingham during a restoration project. © Historic England Archive