



October 2023

Historic Environment Group Terms of Reference

Refer to Generic Role of Advisory Groups for context.

Purpose

The group's purpose is to advise Trust staff as required on matters relating to:

- **strategy and policy,**
- **major/significant projects and those with a high level of risk**
- **major/ significant acquisitions,**
- and to act as a source of **peer review** in relation to all aspects of the historic environment, recognising that advice may be sought from the whole group or individuals, taking an integrated and holistic approach across this and other advisory groups.

In the role of 'critical friend', the group provides strategic and professional guidance to **ensure appropriate standards** of conservation, management, interpretation, engagement and design of Trust properties, landscapes and their setting including new builds and covenants.

As external members of the NT's community of senior/expert volunteers, the group will bring new perspectives into the Trust and support links outside the organisation, **helping staff to connect to new networks and new ideas**. Group members will at times also act as ambassadors for the Trust, sharing their understanding of the Trust's activities with wider communities as appropriate.

Historic Environment Remit

The historic environment remit of the group encompasses 'all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity, whether visible or buried, and deliberately planted or managed flora'*.

It is the space within which our distinct and shared cultural stories are understood and expressed. The 'inherited assets which people identify and value as a reflection and expression of their evolving knowledge, beliefs and traditions, and of their understanding of the beliefs and traditions of others'**.

For the National Trust this includes over 90,000 archaeological sites and ~28,000 buildings and built structures spread over 250,000 hectares of designed landscapes and countryside - the majority of which lies within National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and along 780 miles of coastline. In terms of designated assets, the Trust cares for 1,700 Scheduled Monuments; X listed buildings; all or part of ten UNESCO World Heritage Sites; and 180 Registered Parks & Gardens.

The historic environment is not simply, or even primarily, about the past. In our modern society, it highlights the inextricable link between communities and cultures over time, and between people and the natural world around them and the ways this has shaped, and will continue to shape, our landscapes and lives. Today, it has the power to bring communities together, to help people connect and learn, to contribute to individual and societal wellbeing, and to drive sustainable futures through tourism and growth.

In the twenty-first century it also has a critical role to play for the National Trust, and for the nation, in the face of unprecedented change, whether driven by the need to address the impacts of climate change, tackle nature's decline, or respond to societal shifts and changing values. We believe that an appreciation of the past and the histories of change at our places should inform and inspire the choices we make for the future, to ensure our places evolve and deliver ongoing sustainable public benefit which builds on the foundations of their distinctive character and is accessible to all.

Through collaborative, creative and critical inquiry and innovation, and by committing to both protect and evolve, the aim of HEAG is to support the National Trust to realise this potential, for ever and for everyone.

*English Heritage 2008: *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance*, pp. 71

**ibid

Main Responsibilities

Strategy: The Group's overall remit in this area is to champion and support the contribution of the historic environment to the development and delivery of National Trust's Strategy by:

- advising on developing thinking
- acting as an external reference point and benchmark
- encouraging innovation
- engaging on matters of scholarship and research
- reviewing new policies and frameworks
- and acting as an external advocate and ambassador for the Trust's strategies

In doing so, the group is likely to focus on:

a. Supporting key priority areas including:

- The positive role of the historic environment for climate and nature
- Appropriate protection and adaptation of historic environment in response to development, societal and environmental pressures, including adaptive reuse and release of buildings and landscapes
- Opportunities to improve access and deliver public benefit through the historic environment, including participation and wellbeing

b. Advising on historic environment issues arising from external social, political and economic trends, and how the Trust could best influence public policy.

- c. Acting as a focus for issues relating to World Heritage Sites on Trust land.
- d. Advising on learning and engagement matters relating to the historic environment.
- e. The cross-cutting nature of these priorities means that the group will work closely with members of the NEAG and CIAG to develop holistic solutions and share knowledge and learning

Major/Significant Projects and Acquisitions: the Group's remit is to:

- Offer critical support, challenge and advice to staff working on major/significant historic environment projects and acquisitions, or those which impact on the historic environment.
- Support the National Consultancy and Whole Trust in giving advice to properties and relevant Boards.
- Promote appropriate standards of care, interpretation, presentation, design and sustainability in regard to the historic environment in all its forms.
- Advise, where appropriate, on public benefit and engagement in connection with the historic environment; formal learning; community engagement; audience development; and issues relating to diversity.

Peer review

- Support the Trust in maintaining professional standards, skills and capability within the area of the historic environment.
- Provide professional guidance to staff on operational "business as usual" issues, as well as strategy, projects and acquisitions
- Act as champions for public benefit in dealing with the curatorship; conservation; presentation; learning; engagement and interpretation of the historic environment; and for the promotion of appropriate standards of design.
- Provide an independent and authoritative perspective for the Board of Trustees.