



Making the Most of Your Local Heritage:

A Guide for Overview
and Scrutiny Committees



ENGLISH HERITAGE

This guidance is designed to help Overview and Scrutiny Committees plan and carry out constructive reviews of heritage and the management of the historic environment in their area.

A well managed historic environment can shape and enhance the social and economic life of an area, and a scrutiny review provides your Authority with an ideal means of getting the most out of its local heritage.

FOREWORD

“The historic environment is an ideal subject for examination by scrutiny. Heritage impinges on so much of what local authorities do, and is crucial to reinforcing our sense of place and the distinctiveness which makes an area unique.

English Heritage, through this document, demonstrate how scrutiny of the historic environment can improve services across your Authority and strengthen the management of treasured heritage assets for this and future generations.

On that basis I commend it to you for consideration”.

**Councillor Paul Crossley,
LGA Heritage Champion
Bath and North East Somerset Council**

The historic environment gives our cities, towns and villages a unique sense of identity, and English Heritage exists to champion and care for it through a variety of means. These include regional programmes of advice and grants to support significant elements at risk or proposals to strengthen its management, outreach projects with community groups, pioneering research, and our diverse collection of historic properties which are open to the public.

To maximise its potential, however, local authorities need to incorporate heritage into their mainstream activities as a way of delivering core indicators and objectives. Strong management of the historic environment can have an extremely positive effect on resident satisfaction and community cohesion, and will ensure that important heritage assets receive the best possible protection.

Highlighting a number of case studies from around England, we hope to show how your scrutiny committee can recommend improvements which will help your Authority to enhance the character of your local area, engage more with the public, and protect unique heritage assets for future generations. With further change on the agenda in the guise of Heritage Protection Reform, this is a prescient time to assess your Authority’s approach to management of the historic environment.

WHY SCRUTINISE THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT?

Power of Place (2000), a landmark publication in recent heritage policy, defined the historic environment as that which generations of people have made of the places in which they lived. As such, it is irreplaceable and represents the places we live, the inspirational places we visit, and an incomparable resource for learning about our past and our present.

By undertaking scrutiny of the historic environment, your Committee will be in a position to explore two important questions:

- A** How can the historic environment contribute more toward our Authority’s main strategic aims?
- B** How is our Authority protecting key historic assets for future generations?

The pursuit of these questions will equip your Committee to better place the historic environment at the core of your Authority’s key policies and strategies (see sidebar on page 3) and make the most of this key resource for the benefit of local communities.

HOW CAN THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT CONTRIBUTE MORE TOWARD OUR AUTHORITY'S MAIN STRATEGIC AIMS?

CASE STUDY I, STOKE CONSERVATION: MAKING THE MOST OF WHAT YOU'VE GOT

Stoke City Council has carried out a scrutiny review into the condition of local conservation areas which takes full account of the historic environment's potential to contribute to the Council's mainstream objectives.

Starting from the receipt of a petition highlighting the perceived unfair treatment of people living in conservation areas, the Review examined how the Council could improve its own assets within conservation areas in an attempt both to enhance living conditions for local people and to deliver against government targets.

Following a detailed enquiry, the Improving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommended that a Conservation Strategy be produced which makes clear links to the City's Local Area Agreement. By mapping each of the heritage-relevant National Indicators to their Conservation Strategy, the Committee was able to put forward a number of innovative means by which the historic environment can be used to deliver various facets of Stoke's Local Area Agreement. Based on *Local Area Agreements and the Historic Environment*, published by English Heritage, the Committee identified National Indicators that could be partly delivered by residents' schemes, exhibitions, parks activities and heritage programmes in activity that would bring tangible benefit to the community whilst helping to safeguard the City's unique heritage assets.

The Committee consolidated its work by recommending that officers develop a local indicator for conservation which links into one or more of the City's Local Area Agreement targets, with a view to attracting an increased level of funding.

Suitable questions for your Committee to consider may include:

Does our Authority have a Conservation Strategy and, if so, is it up to date?

Can our Authority produce a local indicator to measure the quality and number of local conservation areas?

If so, how can this be linked to major targets in our Local Area Agreement?

The Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement determine an Authority's strategic vision and set out its immediate targets respectively, and recommendations framed to influence them can have a great impact.

Sustainable Community Strategies are long-term planning documents for improving services in the local area, identifying Local Area Agreement targets and telling the 'story of the place'. The historic environment lies at the heart of our sense of place, and England's most attractive and distinctive environments have always been sensitive to this context. By seeking to embed it in the Sustainable Community Strategy, scrutiny can ensure that the protection and promotion of local heritage features strongly in your Local Development Framework and Local Area Agreement.

Local Area Agreements (LAAs) set out three-year priorities for an area as agreed by the Local Strategic Partnership, 'named partners' at the local level, and Central Government.

The Agreements are based on national indicators established by Central Government and, although the historic environment is not explicitly referenced within them, English Heritage has been listed as a 'named partner' to be consulted in the preparation of LAAs. Making certain that English Heritage are consulted when your Authority refreshes its LAA will allow scrutiny to ensure that your LAA reflects input from the heritage sector which can make a telling contribution toward achieving local targets.

There is significant potential to deliver a number of national indicators using the historic environment, and scrutiny committees may wish to consider how their Council could use local heritage to deliver:

National Indicator 1: To increase the percentage of people from different backgrounds who get on well together in their local area

National Indicator 2: To increase the percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood

National Indicator 3: To increase civic participation in the local area;

National Indicator 5: To increase overall satisfaction with the local area;

National Indicator 6: To increase the number of people involved in regular volunteering;

National Indicator 110: To increase young people's participation in positive activities.

For further information, please consult *Local Area Agreements and the Historic Environment*, available from www.helm.org.uk.



CASE STUDY 2, STOCKPORT AND HERITAGE OPEN DAYS: ENGAGING WITH YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY

There are many ways in which the historic environment can deliver against National Indicator 6, to increase the number of people engaged in regular volunteering, amongst which Heritage Open Days rank as perhaps the most effective. Heritage Open Days celebrate the country's rich history by opening up to free admission interesting properties and attractions for one long weekend in the year which are otherwise closed to the public or subject to an entrance fee. In so doing, they provide the public with a unique opportunity to visit an amazing range of hitherto unknown and hidden gems which help make up the fascinating historic core of towns and villages throughout England.

Most significantly in terms of meeting National Indicator 6, however, is that Heritage Open Days are the biggest and most popular voluntary cultural event in England, for which an estimated 41,000 volunteers gave their time and support in 2008 alone. They represent an excellent means for your local authority to engage with the local community through an exciting programme of events which generate significant opportunities for volunteering and contribute to a number of other national indicators.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council conducted a scrutiny review of its approach to conservation in 2004, since when the Authority has taken strong advantage of the opportunities presented by Heritage Open Days.

With the introduction of a co-ordinated planning and marketing campaign in 2006 the Borough has seen visitor figures rise year-on-year; and Heritage Open Days now represent a rare occasion on which non-users of the Council's services can be consulted in significant numbers.

Alison Farthing, Stockport's Tourism Development Manager, reported that:

"In 2008, there were 30 projects taking part in Stockport's Heritage Open Days and the buildings ranged from churches, a theatre, a cinema, Victorian Market Hall, WWI underground tunnels and a shopping centre!

Our initial headline evaluation showed that 93% of visitors agreed that learning about the area you live in can increase your civic pride, 88% felt that community heritage and cultural events can bring people together, and that 67% of those attending their first Heritage Open Days event were previously non-users of heritage attractions.

A The Caldron Canal, one of twenty-four conservation areas in Stoke-on-Trent. © John Ross.

B Getting Crafty at Heritage Open Days, Staircase House, Stockport. © English Heritage.

C Heritage at Risk: Tynemouth Railway Station, North Tyneside. © English Heritage.

Some pleasing demographic changes from 2007 show that a higher proportion of people from black and ethnic minority communities took part, over a fifth were young people under 14 years of age, and that more people from areas of disadvantage participated”.

By addressing Heritage Open Days, scrutiny can guide your Authority toward fulfilling the requirements not only of NI6 but toward a host of associated indicators. National research has demonstrated that Heritage Open Days make a very positive contribution toward a wide range of social objectives as expressed in national indicators and displayed in the graph at the bottom of the page.

The results show how Heritage Open Days bring people together from different backgrounds to interpret and share their heritage assets in a tangible way that can be reflected against National Indicators 1, 2, 5 and 6.

The following is a series of questions which your Committee may find useful to pursue with officers from your Authority’s Leisure, Culture, or Tourism Departments:

Is there an active Heritage Open Days programme in our area? This will usually be led by the local civic trust or society.

To what extent does our Authority engage with Heritage Open Days?

How many buildings are currently engaged with our local Heritage Open Days programme, and which others may be suitable for inclusion in the future?

How can we develop the programme in order to work toward our key objectives, including National Indicators 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6?

Do we need to allocate a dedicated resource to developing Heritage Open Days in our area?

CASE STUDY 3, WOLVERHAMPTON AND HERITAGE AT RISK: PROTECTING THE IRREPLACEABLE

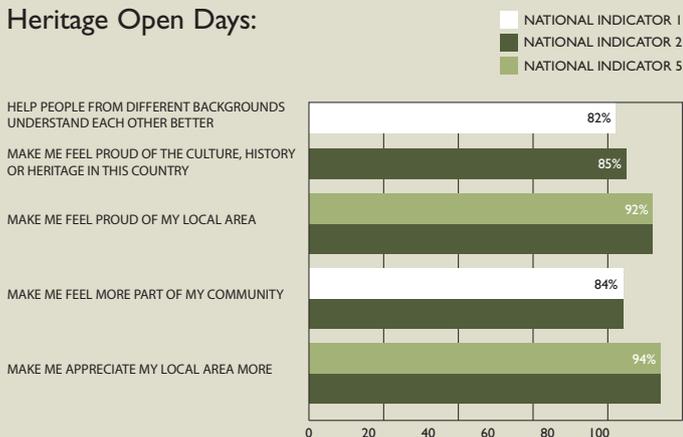
Whilst the Shambles in York, Brighton’s Lanes and the jewellery quarter of Birmingham may be amongst the country’s best known historic areas, each and every town and city in England has its own unique identity built on the activity of previous generations. This forms the bedrock of our sense of place and, although its condition has a direct bearing on the public’s satisfaction with their local area, recent surveys demonstrate that a considerable proportion of our designated heritage assets face a worrying level of risk.

The Heritage at Risk Register compiles listed buildings, scheduled ancient monuments, historic parks and gardens, wrecks, battlefields and conservations areas which are currently at risk, and presents them by region and local authority area. Many of the assets listed need but minor repair work and can be restored to fulfil valuable roles in the community or serve as viable commercial premises.

Wolverhampton City Council recognised the considerable potential of redundant historic buildings when in 2004 a scrutiny panel was established to investigate how an increasingly uninhabited historic environment could be used as an effective impetus for regeneration. The review attracted widespread attention amongst the local press and community as the Panel sought to establish how new uses could be found for a significant number of historic buildings whose redundant status was felt to be inflicting an increasingly detrimental effect upon the City’s image.

The report concluded that the City Council has a crucial role to play in finding viable new uses for historic buildings at risk, and determined that it is dependant on closer partnership working with external agencies, most notably developers. The Panel’s approach recognised the Council’s need to develop a greater understanding of the historic environment and accordingly recommended that Character Appraisals be carried out for important sites and areas considered to be at risk.

Heritage Open Days:



This graph plots responses to a survey carried out at Heritage Open Days in 2008 against the objectives of National Indicators 1, 2 and 5. Please see the sidebar on page 3 for national indicator definitions

Key recommendations from Wolverhampton's review were to:

- introduce a procedure to offer meetings at the start of the development process at which the developer, planning officer, conservation officer, highways officer and the relevant external organisations can discuss initial issues and gauge the level of support for an application;
- appoint a Heritage Champion to co-ordinate the Authority's approach to the historic environment; and
- compile a list of key historic assets in need of restoration, repair or mediation which would be presented to developers with a shortlist of potential new uses.

The approach recommended by Wolverhampton's scrutiny panel is an innovative one which helped the Authority to address the social and economic problems caused by a neglected built infrastructure and turn it to their advantage. By taking the Heritage at Risk register as your Committee's starting point, it may be possible to kick start a process of restoration and regeneration which breathes life back into treasured historic buildings and areas – often transforming a town centre or local community – and helps your Authority to increase the public's overall satisfaction with the local area in accordance with National Indicator 5.

Suitable questions to consider may include:

Has our Authority produced an up to date register of unlisted but locally important historic assets in our area?

Has our Authority set out policies in the local development framework which seek, as far as possible, to protect locally important but unlisted historic assets from inappropriate change?

Could our Authority introduce a local indicator to measure the number of heritage assets at risk, including listed buildings, scheduled ancient monuments, historic parks and gardens, wrecks, battlefields and conservation areas?

Has our Authority consulted the local population on their views of the state of the historic environment?

Have planning staff carried out urban characterisation studies on important historic sites which may be at risk?

The Heritage at Risk Register is available, segmented into local authority areas, on the English Heritage website.

CASE STUDY 4, CORNISH CULTURE: MAKING THE RIGHT LINKS

Cornwall County Council undertook a scrutiny review that sought to establish a positive role for heritage in the County's main policy framework, and which was specifically timed to inform a review of Cornwall's Heritage and Culture Strategy.

The Committee focussed on how the County Council could improve their leadership of historic environment services in order to identify what it contributes to Cornwall's cultural offer. The Scrutiny Panel consequently recommended that archaeology, museum collections, publications and archive services be brought together and operated under a Joint Heritage Plan which would integrate the full range of historic environment services. In so doing, these services could contribute a co-ordinated heritage input to core objectives of the cultural strategy, as well as carrying out the day-to-day work of traditional historic environment services.

Allied to this, the Committee wished to examine the educational potential of their heritage assets, and developed a series of recommendations designed to improve heritage education services across the County. These focussed on the creation of web-based education resources and the employment of a Heritage Education Officer whose role would serve to develop educational resources in the County for the community and schools alike.

Cornwall's Scrutiny Panel produced a piece of work which documented the relationship between heritage and a wide range of Council activities, and set out recommendations for how those relationships could be improved. Whilst the final report was used to inform an imminent review of the Cultural Strategy, such a document could remain on file as a useful tool to inform the production of Sustainable Community Strategies, Local Area Agreements and other important policies as an Authority progresses.

Suggested questions for your Committee to consider may include:

Does our Authority have a clear idea about the benefits which local heritage can contribute to our core aims and strategies?

Is our local historic environment taken account of in key documents such as the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement?



HOW IS OUR AUTHORITY PROTECTING KEY HISTORIC ASSETS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS?

The Draft Heritage Protection Bill, published in April 2008, proposed major changes to the current system of heritage protection, by which we mean the identification of heritage assets, and how they are managed in the planning system. The current designation system, with its mixture of listings, scheduling and registrations, will be replaced by a single, unified approach that will be easier to understand and readily available online.

Heritage Protection Reform has been designed to deliver a more effective way of protecting the nation's historic places. It will introduce a more efficient system than at present; one that is less encumbered with red tape, more engaging, open and inclusive. The reforms aim to place heritage at the heart of planning and, by addressing them now, scrutiny will be in a position to ensure that designated heritage assets receive the best possible protection in years to come.

The three main components of heritage protection reform are to:

- i widen public involvement, inviting the public to contribute to the process of celebrating and protecting important places;
- ii create a more efficient system which removes duplication whilst being easier to use; and
- iii improve heritage protection with a programme of practical and strategic support for local authorities at the front line of heritage protection.

The smooth implementation of Heritage Protection Reform is heavily reliant on local authorities being fully aware of the changes ahead and preparing to adapt.

Some of the changes under Heritage Protection Reform have already taken place, and others will progress through future planning policy statements and primary heritage protection legislation. Consideration of your Authority's approach to Heritage Protection Reform would form a crucial and highly rewarding component of any scrutiny review into the historic environment.

What does my local authority need to do?

The English Heritage website is kept up to date with the latest information about Heritage Protection Reform which, together with guidance available from the HELM website, will equip a scrutiny committee to readily check the progress of your Authority's preparation for the new system.

The role of conservation officers, archaeological officers and planning staff is crucial to the success of Heritage Protection Reform, and English Heritage is running a comprehensive programme of training for local authority staff on the changes ahead, details of which are available on the HELM website.

Recommending that planning staff engage with the training programme and provide regular updates to Members will allow a scrutiny committee to drive the local implementation of Heritage Protection Reform and ensure that much cherished heritage assets receive the best possible protection from future risks and inappropriate development.

REFERENCES

- Heritage Open Days Visitor Research 2008*, English Heritage and BDRC, 2008
- Living in a Conservation Area: Pain or Gain*, Stoke City Council, 2008
- Power of Place*, English Heritage, 2000
- The Past in Cornwall's Future*, Cornwall County Council, 2003
- Towards a Conservation Strategy for Stockport*, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, 2004
- Redundant Buildings Scrutiny Review*, Wolverhampton City Council, 2004

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

- Constructive Conservation in Practice*, English Heritage, 2008 (http://www.helm.org.uk/upload/pdf/CC_DPS_WEB.pdf)
- Heritage Counts (National and Regional Documents)*, English Heritage, Published Annually (<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/hc/>)
- Leader and the Historic Environment*, English Heritage, 2008 (<http://www.helm.org.uk/upload/pdf/Leader.pdf>)
- Local Area Agreements and the Historic Environment*, English Heritage, 2008 (<http://www.helm.org.uk/upload/pdf/LAA2.pdf>)

WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

Your regional English Heritage office can provide you with more information about the work being carried out by the organisation in your local area. Contact details below:

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Contact your local authority conservation and archaeology officers. They understand local issues and most maintain, or have access to, an historic environment record with information on your local area.

Local societies. Tap into local knowledge and activity through civic societies, history societies and other similar groups which can contribute to an effective review of local heritage in your area. Your local civic society may play a key role in organising Heritage Open Days in the area.

THE CENTRE FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY

The Centre for Public Scrutiny promotes the value of scrutiny in modern and effective government and supports non-executives in their scrutiny role through publications, training, events, online services, facilitating networks and projects. Their vision of scrutiny recognises its potential for improving the quality of public services as well as its function in holding executives to account.

www.cfps.org.uk
info@cfps.org.uk

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT LOCAL MANAGEMENT

HELM (Historic Environment Local Management) provides information, training and guidance to decision makers in local authorities, regional agencies and national organisations whose actions affect the historic environment. The HELM website contains the latest English Heritage publications, information on Heritage Protection Reform, details of training events, useful web links and news.

www.helm.org.uk

For more information about Heritage Open Days, please visit www.heritageopendays.org.uk
www.english-heritage.org.uk

If you would like this document in a different format, please contact our Customer Services department:

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