



Department for

Communities

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Historic Environment Policy – Public Consultation

Background to Public Consultation



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Any enquiries regarding this document should be sent to us at:

DfC Culture Division

7th Floor

Causeway Exchange

1-7 Bedford Street

Belfast

BT2 7EG

Email: hccpublicconsultation@communities-ni.gov.uk

This publication is also available to download from our website at www.communities-ni.gov.uk

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT POLICY: PUBLIC CONSULTATION

OVERVIEW

The Department for Communities (DfC) is the Executive department with responsibility for policy on the historic environment in Northern Ireland.

The **historic environment includes 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, buried or submerged, and deliberately planted or managed flora. It is a key contributor to our sense of place, identity, and distinctiveness.

The focus of this consultation is on our **draft vision statement**, and on our proposed **17 policy aims** which will be the basis of a new policy for the support and management of our historic environment.

The intended period covered by this Historic Environment Policy is **10 years** from date of publication (proposed 2027 – 2037), with a **mid-point review**. However, any impacts associated with the proposed Policy may take effect over a period of many decades. For this reason, a longer-term view has been taken on potential impacts.

The **geographical area covered by** the Historic Environment Policy takes in the **whole of Northern Ireland**, including inshore and offshore marine regions. The Policy however also considers existing and

potential transboundary partnerships with the remainder of the UK, the Republic of Ireland and relevant international partners.

The Policy vision and aims have been prepared after extensive **engagement**.

The work to develop this policy forms part of the Heritage, Culture and Creativity (HCC) Programme which is also developing policies for museums, public libraries and the arts. The HCC was established by the Minister for Communities in July 2024 and seeks to ‘address actions to conserve, protect and promote our cultural heritage and historic environment; and to encourage, support and develop the curiosity, active engagement and creativity it helps to inspire’.¹

The programme followed the Culture Arts and Heritage Taskforce’s ‘A Way Forward’, ‘Art of Recovery’ and ‘Investing in Creative Delivery’² reports, and the department has used the work of the Taskforce as a key basis for its policy development. The sector told us to **Strengthen, Connect, and Innovate** to sustain our culture arts and heritage into the future.

Your views about the future management of the historic environment through the **Historic Environment Policy are important to us** and will **inform the new policy**. A questionnaire on the draft vision and the policy aims is available at the link below and we would welcome your response by **23rd October 2026**.

¹ See Heritage, Culture and Creativity (HCC) Programme | Department for Communities

² Culture, Arts and Heritage: A Way Forward | Department for Communities; The Art of Recovery Survive: Stabilise: Strengthen | Department for Communities; Investing in Creative Delivery – A report from the Culture, Arts & Heritage Strategy Taskforce | Department for Communities

ABOUT THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

Following on from the work of the Culture, Arts and Heritage Taskforce, the department has carried out extensive engagement.

HED's Listed Building and Historic Monument **Owners'** surveys³ told us about the conservation deficit, the need to invest in skills, access to advice, expertise and information.

We met with each of the 11 **District Councils and all central Government Departments**. We found potential partnerships, connections, shared aims and new ideas which could connect and amplify the actions across a joined-up HCC Programme and within an Historic Environment Policy which is linked to the Programme for Government – a policy which supports People, Places, the Planet and Peace.

We met within our own department and we sought the views of the **Historic Environment Stakeholder Group⁴, The Heritage Skills Core Group,⁵ The Historic Buildings Council and the Historic Monuments Council**, who asked us for better partnerships and for people and place to be uppermost. We looked at how we could jointly meet the Department for Communities' common purpose: **'Supporting people, Building communities, Shaping places'**.

We carried out **Rural Impact, Equality and Strategic Environmental Assessment**

Screening – to make sure that the policy is inclusive, improving the lives of people and our environment.

The results of our engagement have shaped the policy, telling us about the 'ecosystem' needed to sustain our historic environment and to maximise the impact it can make on Northern Ireland.

This public consultation is an opportunity to **have your say**.

If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, we would ask that only one person from each organisation submits a response. A paper-based questionnaire is available on request from **HCCpublicconsultation@communities-ni.gov.uk**

For this consultation, we may publish all responses except for those where the respondent indicates that they do not wish for their responses to be published. All responses from organisations and individuals responding in a professional capacity may be published. We will remove any personal data, including email addresses and telephone numbers, from these responses; but apart from this, we may publish them in full. For more information about what we do with personal data please see our **consultation privacy notice**.

³ Market failure in heritage | Department for Communities

⁴ The Northern Ireland Historic Environment Stakeholder group consists of an alliance of representatives from key stakeholder organisations including heritage NGO's, universities, district councils, and government agencies. It is convened by the Historic Environment Division of the Department for Communities.

⁵ The Heritage Skills Core Group is a body set up by DfC of key partners interested in tackling the issue of heritage skills.

Your response, and all other responses to this consultation, may also be disclosed on request in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR); however, all disclosures will be in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (UK) 2016/679.

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential, so that this may be considered if the Department should receive a request for the information under the FOIA or EIR.

In order to facilitate the survey, Citizen Space, which is not operated by the Department, is used as a data processor. Details of Citizen Space's privacy policy can be found online at **Citizen Space Privacy Policy**.

MINISTERIAL FOREWORD



In July 2024 as part of the Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme, I made a commitment to deliver the first policy for the historic environment in Northern Ireland. The consultation being launched today marks an important step in that process.

The draft policy presents us with an opportunity to appreciate and maximise the positive contribution that this part of our environment makes to each of us, to our communities and to our wellbeing. We have an asset that is found in every corner of Northern Ireland, a product of a rich and complex history that has made our landscape, villages, towns and cities unique and special. Our historic environment belongs to all of us.

My department aims to support communities at all levels. We want to ensure that the historic environment, which is at the heart of every local community, is part of decision making and is used, cared for and adapted sustainably. I recognise that a framework of support will be needed, with priorities for funding identified across this policy, so that it can contribute to a promising future – one where heritage assets, places and activities continue to have positive impacts for the people they connect.

This policy has been developed in partnership with all our stakeholders. Their honest and informed participation emphasised not only what the historic environment means to people, but that there is a real need to improve the way we are managing this resource.

This is your chance to contribute your views on how our historic environment should be identified, protected, managed and celebrated to maximise the contribution it makes to how we live, now and in the future.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this consultation.

Gordon Lyons MLA,
Minister for Communities

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT POLICY: CONSULTATION

Introduction and Context

1. Our historic environment includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and place over time. This includes all surviving physical remains of past human activity, whether visible, buried or submerged, and deliberately planted or managed flora.
2. The Department for Communities and District Planning Authorities record the ‘heritage assets’ that make up our historic environment in a range of ways. DfC designates the best of these for protection as either Scheduled Historic Monuments or Listed Buildings. District Planning Authorities bring controls to area designations such as Conservation Areas and Areas of Townscape/ Village Character.

As of March 2024, we have recorded tens of thousands of heritage assets in Northern Ireland. These can be listed as follows:

- 1 Transboundary Cultural World Heritage Site
- 18,222 Sites and Monuments
- 2,053 Scheduled Historic Monuments
- 187 Monuments in State care
- 16,321 Historic buildings worthy of recording
- 9,124 Listed Buildings
- 16,648 sites on the Industrial Heritage Record
- (24% protected by formal designation)
- 663 Historic Parks or Gardens (HPGs)
- 4,592 Defence Heritage Sites
- 324 battle sites
- 60 conservation areas
- 205 Areas of Townscape Character (ATC)s
- 130 Local Landscape Policy Areas (LCAs)
- 11 Areas of Significant Archaeological Interest
- 403 Historic Nucleated Settlements
- 832 Maritime Heritage Sites (inc in SMR)
- 384 known wreck sites
- 4 protected wrecks

3. Cultural traditions, folklore, festivals, oral traditions and storytelling play a part in our experience of the historic environment, but this policy focuses predominantly on physical assets.
4. There has never been an historic environment policy in Northern Ireland.
5. During the development of this policy we have engaged with a wide range of stakeholders including the Culture Arts and Heritage Taskforce, district councils, government departments and the heritage sector. We have also carried out surveys of owners to understand their views in detail.
6. As a result, we have developed 17 aims which we are proposing should form the basis of the Historic Environment Policy. We want your views on these proposals.
7. Although the Department for Communities is leading the implementation of the Policy, the consultation describes actions that any organisation and even individuals can take to effect meaningful change. We will rely on multiple organisations and partners to achieve our ambition. For example:
 - We propose that Charities, volunteers and heritage organisations, networks or individuals should be supported by high-level activity like the provision of funding or advice and guidance;
 - We intend that District Councils will use this Policy to direct Local Development and Community Planning for place-making, heritage plans, environmental plans and tourism, and to consider how to use the historic environment to achieve social cohesion and good relations;
 - We have also identified significant ways that the Northern Ireland Executive and government can deliver more through the historic environment.

CONTEXT

The Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme

8. The work to develop Historic Environment policy forms part of the Heritage, Culture and Creativity (HCC) Programme. HCC was established by the Minister for Communities in July 2024. It will see the development of new policies for the arts, historic environment, public libraries and museums and will give each of the policy areas the status they merit, providing each of the communities of interest with their own focus. More information about HCC can be found at **Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme**.

Guiding Principles for Policy Development

9. The Heritage, Culture and Creativity (HCC) Programme is built on a shared set of guiding principles . They are that the Heritage, Culture & Creativity Programme policies will:
- be **valued** by all
 - be **inclusive**, recognising and respecting the diversity of our society
 - bring **equitable** access to opportunities and experience
 - **enhance** the lives of people and communities
 - be economically sustainable

10. As part of the HCC Programme, the Historic Environment Policy will contribute to a greater whole – that of the shared impact that our Heritage, Culture and Creativity can make to people and places.

Challenges

11. The historic environment in Northern Ireland is in decline. We know this because surveys to monitor the condition of listed buildings⁶ and monuments⁷ have given us this data. A further survey of listed building and scheduled monument owners⁸ identified specific problems and opportunities for people who own heritage assets.
12. In the Listed Buildings and Monument Owners Surveys, people told us:
- With the economic downturn there is less money to invest
 - It takes too long to get permissions
 - Condition is getting worse
 - Heritage at Risk has doubled
 - There is a lack of digital access to information, guidance and resources
 - There is a lack of evidence and visibility of the sector
 - There is a lack of skilled people
 - There is a lack of measurable metrics for the benefits of heritage
 - It's hard to get the right advice

⁶ Survey on the Condition of Listed Buildings | Department for Communities

⁷ Survey of the condition of scheduled historic monuments (internal DfC research based upon monitoring, 2024)

⁸ Market failure in heritage | Department for Communities

- The non-monetary benefits of heritage are poorly understood
- There is a lack of funding for heritage
- Heritage projects are seen as too difficult
- Heritage is seen as elitist
- Heritage is seen as not adaptable
- Heritage is seen as too expensive
- There is a misunderstanding of regulation versus protection

13. While all of the historic environment is vulnerable to climate change, many historic monuments occupy exposed or rural settings and are particularly vulnerable to climate-related pressures such as more frequent storms, high winds and intense rainfall, which accelerate decay in high-level masonry and

destabilise earthworks. Without targeted intervention, losses that have survived famine, war and industrial change risk becoming irreversible within a generation.

14. As shown in Figure 1, below, in the 2024 Listed Building Condition Survey the overall condition of the majority of buildings was rated as Very good/Good or Average (61.3%). However this appears to be a 24.4 percentage point worsening in 20 years when compared to the 2004/05 figure. The rate of decline is accelerating there was an 8.8 percentage point reduction between 2004/05 and 2014/15, a 15.6 percentage point reduction over a similar ten year period between 2014/15 and 2024 (note there are differences in survey methodology between the 2002-2005 survey and subsequent surveys).

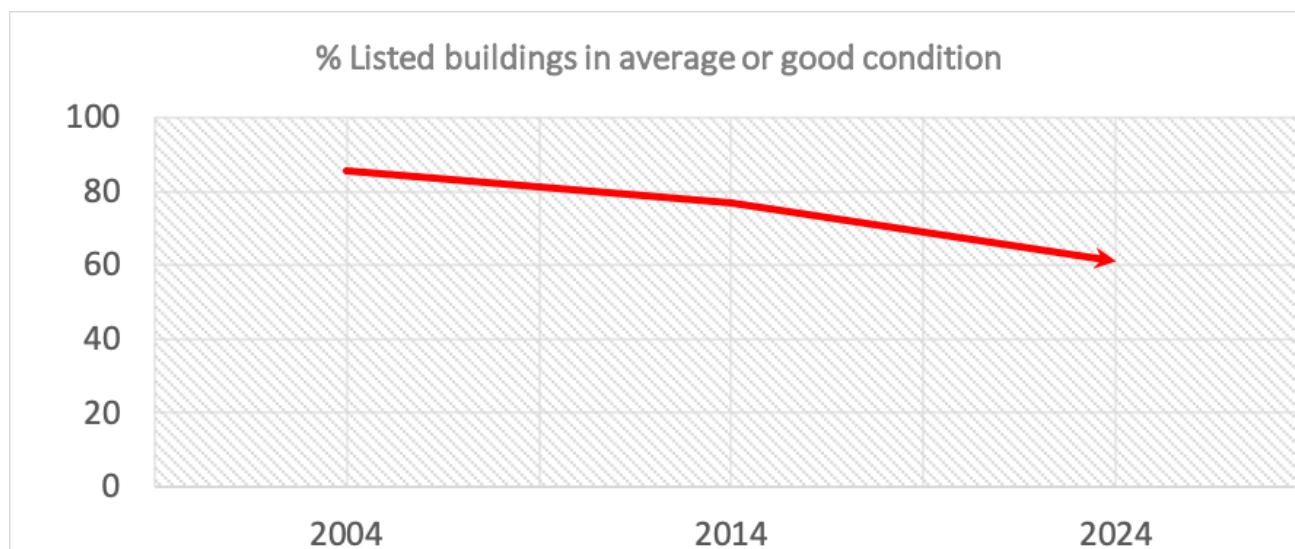


Figure 1 - showing a downward trend in condition of listed buildings over a twenty year period; Note there are differences in survey methodology between the 2002-2005 survey and subsequent surveys.

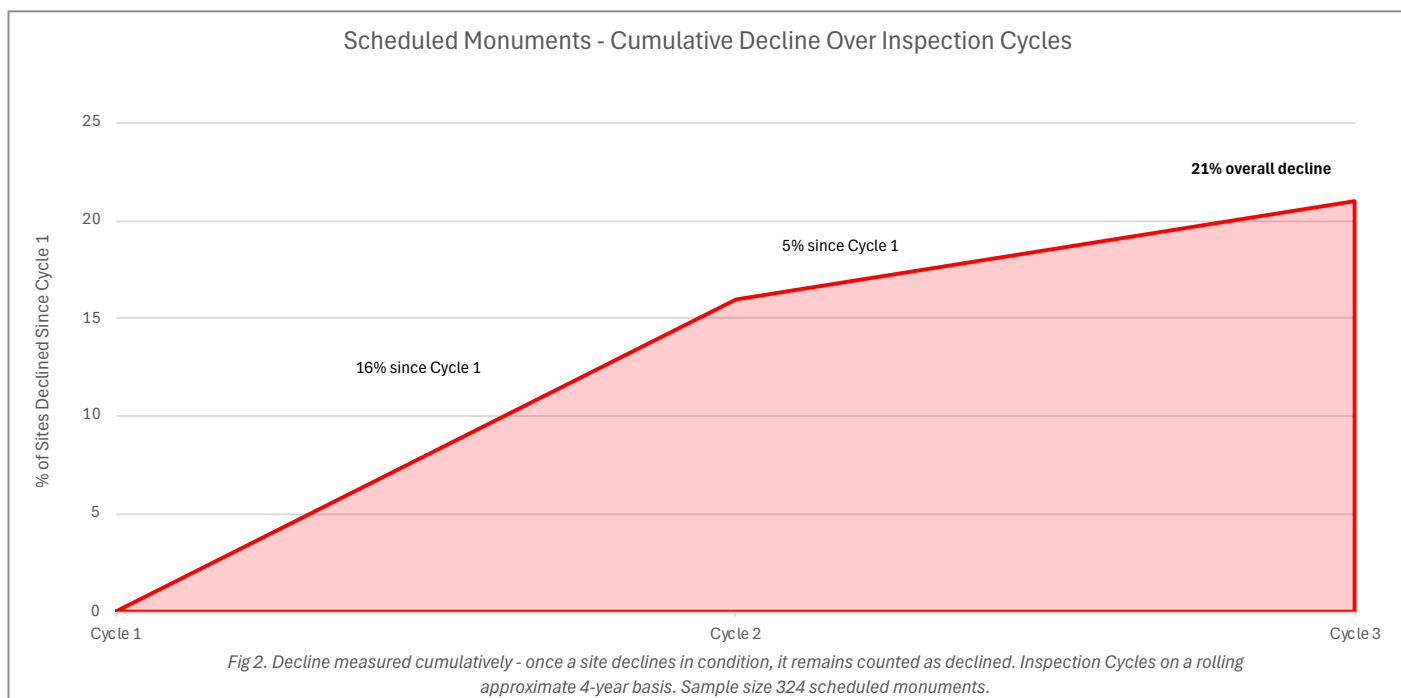


Figure 2 – showing Decline measured cumulatively – once a site declines in condition, it remains counted as declined. Inspection Cycles on a rolling approximate 4-year basis. Sample size 324 Scheduled Historic Monuments.

15. As shown in Figure 2, in the Monument Condition survey a sample of 324 Monuments across three maintenance cycles shows that over 20% of sites have declined in just over a decade.
16. In 2024/25, there were 1,148 historic buildings and structures on this database, just over double the 527 structures recorded in 2018/19. This survey is not comprehensive, and no claim is made to full coverage, but it provides an indication of trends and need. The survey points to a very stark figure. It is also a growing inventory of untapped potential.
17. There were a further 33 monuments on the HARNI register (HARNI Register as of March 2024).
18. There have been a number of high profile incidents at Heritage at Risk buildings over recent years. Evidence has shown that long term neglect can result in collapse or concerns of collapse without timely intervention. In an era of changing climate such incidents are likely to increase as heavier rain and stronger winds will take a greater toll on buildings that are not well maintained.
19. There is also unequal access to the historic environment. In (NISRA)'s annual **Continuous Household Survey 2024-25** adults with a disability were found to be less likely to have visited a place of historic interest than those without a disability (56% and 67% respectively). Analysis by deprivation level showed that adults living in the least deprived areas were more likely to have visited a place of historic interest than those living in the most deprived areas (80% and 51% respectively). In 24/25 a higher proportion

of adults from the Protestant community had visited a place of historic interest within the previous year (69%) than those from the Catholic community (55%).

Funding and investment in the historic environment

20. Overall investment in the historic environment is hard to estimate. Most funding comes from asset owners, but official statistics do not isolate the amount of work that is spent each year on heritage assets. The NI Statistics and Research Agency records that between October and December 2025 £460m was spent on repair and maintenance work in Northern Ireland. This equates to 36% of total output by contractors and public sector labour organisations in that quarter. A proportion of this will have been on heritage assets.

21. The heritage sector also invests in heritage assets. The Historic Environment Stakeholder Group have published research⁹ to show that in 2023/24 £24,791,723 was invested by its members including DfC, Architectural Heritage Fund, National Churches Trust, National Trust, Maritime Belfast Trust, and the National Lottery Heritage Fund in heritage assets. The vast majority of this (96%) was from the Lottery. In addition, DfC invested £864,706 in the maintenance and display of State Care Monuments in the same year.

22. The Department for Communities' Historic Environment Fund (HEF) has been running since 2016. Through four streams: Repair,

Regeneration, Research and Revival the fund has financially supported the care, repair, use, and enjoyment of the historic environment as well as exploring its future potential. Supported projects include the repair of listed homes, businesses and cultural venues, historic monuments and buildings at risk; places of worship have been supported through partnership with National Churches Trust. HEF has contributed to regeneration partnerships like Harnessing Heritage and the Heritage Impact Fund with the Architectural Heritage Fund, the Heritage at Risk Project with Ulster Architectural Heritage, whose officers also partner with DfC, DAERA and the NI housing Executive on the Village Catalyst project.

23. HEF research and revival streams help to demonstrate the huge potential the the historic environment has beyond physical assets. HEF funding has led to new archaeological discoveries and projects like an intergenerational event between primary school children and their grandparents to talk about their vernacular buildings.

24. The statistics quoted earlier recording the significant rise in heritage at risk since 2019 indicate that, despite some high-profile successes, this investment is not enough. There is clearly market failure in addressing the extent of the need currently faced by our heritage assets.

25. Research carried out in 2020 for DfC which compared heritage at risk figures across the UK to house prices demonstrated that this market failure

⁹ NI HERITAGE DELIVERS 2026 CASE STUDIES AND STATISTICS ON HOW HERITAGE BENEFITS NORTHERN IRELAND | Heritage Delivers

is greater in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the UK with the exception of Wales. This appears to equate to property price differences where property prices are lower here, but construction costs are not significantly different.

26. This is important for all of us because research has shown that heritage assets are a public good i.e they bring benefits to society beyond the economic benefits that an owner may receive. Heritage assets can deliver authentic and attractive places which increase our understanding, pride, character and identity, leading to improved wellbeing and community engagement, and delivering prosperity through tourism, investment, skills, regeneration and creativity. Places which are not well cared for can have the opposite effect, creating an air of neglect and reduced community confidence.

27. Responses to this consultation will assist in prioritising funding within the context of the challenges and the potential offered by the historic environment and the greater budgetary context. Work is underway to consider how future funding can support the opportunities that our historic environment presents into the future:

- Support Heritage-led regeneration.
- Tackle Heritage at Risk.
- Address market failure in heritage investment.
- Support town centres, housing and economic development.

- Build heritage skills and employment.
- Deliver on the policy's "Strengthen, Connect and Innovate" principles.

Opportunities

28. In May 2026 the NI Historic Environment Stakeholder Group published 'Heritage Delivers: Case Studies and Statistics on how heritage benefits Northern Ireland'¹⁰. This was organised into four areas where heritage is and can make a positive difference:

- a. Driving economic and social regeneration.
- b. Helping to deliver net zero and sustainable development goals.
- c. Acting as a key resource for health and wellbeing.
- d. Acting as an important resource for learning and developing skills.

26. The document shows how heritage assets are a key resource that can be utilised to attract visitors and inward investment, retain population and aid development right across Northern Ireland and that it has potential to become an important tool in delivering solutions to the housing crisis and the decline of town centres.

27. As they often are existing structures that can be adapted and reused, heritage assets can reduce the use of carbon intensive construction techniques. Protected historic monuments on farmland are also an important repository of biodiversity and of carbon capture on peatland.

¹⁰ NI HERITAGE DELIVERS 2026 CASE STUDIES AND STATISTICS ON HOW HERITAGE BENEFITS NORTHERN IRELAND | Heritage Delivers

28. Engaging with heritage has been statistically proven¹¹ to have significant positive physical and mental health impacts. This can be enhanced if heritage sites are used creatively and actively promoted. There are also significant opportunities for volunteering associated with heritage sites.
29. Heritage assets also remind us that history is not as straightforward as sometimes portrayed, and archaeology continues to reveal new stories. Taken together, this stimulates interest and unlocks learning. The 2023 Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland recommended that ‘Local heritage should be formally integrated throughout the curriculum (a new policy is required). This may engage more learners including disadvantaged learners and allow them to connect with their local community.’
30. Heritage skills are often specialist and attract increased remuneration. There is strong potential for a society that values its heritage to develop a robust skills base that contributes to its economy and its exports.
31. Policy which builds on this energy, by reaching out to people who don’t normally get involved, could widen our understanding and therefore amplify public interest in caring for our heritage. There is also potential to capitalise on the trend towards heritage activity which is growing through the next generation – in 2022 70% of young people had engaged with heritage¹².
32. Research has also shown that increasing the value that owners, and the public, place on the historic environment can lead to increased investment by both owners and other bodies¹³. Targeted investment to encourage this change, as well as initiatives to leverage additional support to the sector, holds out an opportunity to address decline and to realise the potential that this resource holds for us.
33. Ultimately, the aim of any historic environment policy must be to bring the management of heritage assets onto a more long-term sustainable footing and ensure that their potential to deliver for our people, planet and prosperity can be fully realised.

11 Wellbeing and Historic Environment: Why Bother? | Historic England

12 Experience of culture, arts and heritage by young people in Northern Ireland 2022 | Department for Communities

13 Market Failure Analysis of the Heritage Sector in Northern Ireland

The matrix below sets out 17 draft aims proposed for Historic Environment Policy. The new policy will rest on these aims, and you are invited, in your consultation response, to offer your views on them.

		1. People and Communities	2. Places	3. Partnerships
Historic Environment	Strengthening: A well-cared for historic environment where best practice is universal.	1. Developing best practice to identify and safeguard our historic environment 2. Developing a highly skilled workforce to conserve and sustainably develop our historic environment	3. Investing in the capacity of owners, volunteers and organisations to care for and use local historic assets to meet their needs 4. Empowering communities to adapt, enhance and re-use historic assets, drive regeneration and shape distinctive places	5. Using heritage assets to contribute to Programme for Government including the Wellbeing Framework: Stronger Economy, Better Homes, Healthier Lives and Brighter Futures 6. Maintaining and managing the historic environment in the face of environmental problems
	Connecting: Thriving places - where the unique value of heritage is understood and enjoyed.	7. Supporting inclusive and diverse access to historic places for everyone 8. Exploring the potential for historic places to support wellbeing, and quality of life	9. Aligning the care of heritage assets with distinctive places, landscapes, and seascapes, supporting biodiversity 10. Proudly showcasing, promoting and marketing our unique historic environment locally and internationally 11. Embedding transboundary and international cooperation into the historic environment sector	12. Partnering with government departments, public bodies, and agencies, as well as asset owners, land owners and volunteers, to use the historic environment creatively 13. Reaching out: supporting heritage education and activity for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. 14. Evolving our shared understanding through accessible research, surveys, records, artefacts and archives
	Innovating: A flourishing historic environment sector which is protected, sustained, accessed and used to its full potential .	15. Emphasising the contribution of our historic places to peace - community cohesion, good relations and healing through heritage	16. Collaborating with others to magnify an evidence base for the catalytic effect of heritage investment	17. Driving innovation and enterprise in the historic environment sector towards research, new technologies and new ways of working

Our People. Our Past. Our Place: an inclusive and valued historic environment that delivers for Northern Ireland.

POLICY DIRECTION

How does Historic Environment Policy propose that we meet these challenges and take forward these opportunities?

Strengthening

Protection

34. We will continue to safeguard our historic environment. However, to realise this aim, action like reviewing and evolving

our legislation or designation in line with international conventions is needed. Any changes we make will accord with our own Conservation Principles. The Listed Building and Scheduled Monument Owners' Surveys¹⁴ suggest that building owners agree with this ethos.

The six key conservation principles are:

- Principle 1 - The historic environment is of value to us all
- Principle 2 - Everyone should be able to participate in sustaining the historic environment
- Principle 3 - Understanding the significance of heritage assets is vital
- Principle 4 - Heritage assets shall be managed to sustain their significance
- Principle 5 - Decisions about change shall be reasonable, transparent and consistent
- Principle 6 - Documenting and learning from decisions is essential.

35. Owners want policy to be strong on protecting important buildings and features for people now and for future generations; however, they also want it to be applied in a reasonable way so heritage can be safeguarded whilst making it functional.

36. For some there is a perception that designation means a halt to progress. This is not the case. Legislation, policy and international charters are about respecting historic character in tandem with managing change - not preventing it.

37. In a future where the historic environment is key to our way of life, we will promote a better understanding of protection along with better access to information, advice and support to help people make optimal use of their heritage assets. With the tools to do this accessible to everyone, education and understanding about our historic places and about what conservation means will safeguard the historic environment. Pride in our places will mean that we care about them, understanding their significance¹⁵ and will help towards making sure they are there for future generations.

¹⁴ Listed Buildings Survey

¹⁵ Glossary of conservation terms | Department for Communities

Upskilling to meet demand

38. We will respond to the need to build up skills across the many sectors which feed into and sustain our historic environment. This human resource is fundamental to ensuring that future generations also benefit from our heritage assets. The Owners' Survey identified a key obstacle to owning a listed building was difficulty finding skilled contractors and/or sourcing suitable materials.
39. Skilled and heritage experienced contractors and professionals to discover, maintain, conserve, enhance, study and manage the historic environment are needed to secure a positive future for our places. A thriving, multi-sector heritage skills landscape could offer life-long careers, attract people through established learning pathways, with upskilling and apprenticeship training which includes heritage experience and certification resulting in good jobs and qualification¹⁶ – attracting talent. This need is shared with Northern Ireland's Construction Sector as a whole. Most heritage-relevant skills are transferrable to other parts of the construction industry¹⁷ - which could make an even bigger contribution to a sustainable 'green' economy here. Heritage skills also underpin the success of other sectors such as the museums, film and tourism industries.

40. But skills springing from the historic environment are not unique to heritage – our cultural, tourism and creative sectors also rely on the historic environment for employment. To further this aim, we want to make the most of the potential our historic environment offers because it can spark creativity and imagination - and also be a profitable asset ¹⁸.

Connecting

Engagement, Access and Inclusion

41. Many people living and visiting here already enjoy their historic environment. European Heritage Open Days a free event which take place every September in Northern Ireland is the most widely celebrated cultural event shared by the people of Europe. In 2024/25, 64% of adults here had visited a place of historic interest, the same figure as in 2023/24. District Council, voluntary and community driven initiatives, cultural festivals, and heritage organizations who host talks, tours, exhibitions and events currently embrace and enjoy their local heritage. We will continue to support and amplify people's access to and enjoyment of this part of our environment.
42. Work that can be done by the heritage sector to be more 'outward-facing', removing barriers to advice, representing and addressing the needs and concerns of society and having information which is accessible across all users of the historic

¹⁶ Skills Barometer 2021 update | Department for the Economy

¹⁷ Construction Survey published by the Construction Employers Federation (CEF) – the top four priorities:

- Attracting new entrants by promoting construction careers in schools and communities
- Identifying skills needs and providing specific training tailored to the industry
- Development of entry-level skills programmes
- Enhancing the understanding of routes into the construction industry

¹⁸ Cultural Heritage, Creativity and the Creative Economy | Heritage Counts | Historic England

environment will support people and communities to better understand and care for their assets. A common question is ‘who decides what is ‘significant’? Historic places aren’t always viewed in the same way by everyone. Different people place more importance on different aspects of heritage that are personal to them. Some people connect to their heritage through traditions, music and language. Some place more emphasis on tangible structures; there are different definitions of ‘heritage’. Northern Ireland’s heritage is in some cases contested. There can be a reluctance to engage with some aspects of our historic environment because of those associations. To work towards this aim, we will support a future where our historic environment is strongly associated with building connections.

- 43. Not everyone can access historic places, but it is relevant to us all. And so, a fully documented and cared for historic environment should deliver rewards equally for people from all walks of life. Contemporary presentation and interpretation of heritage could include the better use of technology, bringing heritage to new audiences.
- 44. In many cases, it’s only when people enjoy learning what is distinct and relevant about their own place that they begin to consider its value. And usually then, they also want to look after it.

Landscapes and Seascapes and biodiversity

- 45. The distinction between natural and built environments is often blurred; these places must be managed in ways that reflect the interconnected character of natural and cultural values. With 80% of our 1.4 million hectares of land in agricultural use, it is unsurprising that the majority of archaeological and heritage features are found on farmland. To meet this challenge, we will support people to care for their special landscapes, while recognising the need for them to use their land productively.
- 46. Surrounded by the sea and home to Lough Neagh, the UK’s largest freshwater lake, our freshwater, marine and coastal environments are rich in cultural significance, both above and below the waterline. These areas contain a wealth of underwater cultural heritage, including shipwrecks, submerged landscapes, and coastal structures that reflect centuries of human activity, conflict, and industry. These underwater cultural heritage assets are irreplaceable and increasingly vulnerable to environmental change, development pressures and rising sea levels.
- 47. The Historic Environment Policy will support work to identify, conserve, and protect both terrestrial and underwater heritage. Historic urban and rural places can support nature recovery networks, biodiversity net gain and habitat connectivity.

Places and Tourism

48. Our coasts, landscapes and waterways are vital not only for biodiversity and climate resilience, but also for tourism, recreation and cultural understanding. The safeguarding of these environments, both terrestrial and marine, facilitates enduring public engagement with heritage, ensuring that future generations can continue to access, understand, enjoy and use heritage assets above and beneath the waterline.
49. Our historic environment has value to people here, but it also has wider shared island, pan-UK and in fact has global value. This policy will recognise that, having been shaped by globally important historic events, our historic environment offers opportunities to relate with others internationally who feel connected to us. In the nations Brand Index 2025, Northern Ireland's top two Attributes were Natural Beauty (21st out of 50) and Environment (20th). Since 2016, all 23 Attribute scores have shown improvement. The most notable increases were in respondents' willingness to work and live here (+0.35) and perceptions of Northern Ireland as being rich in historic buildings (+0.29). In terms of ranking, historic buildings (along with natural beauty) achieved the largest improvement, each rising three places.

Innovating

50. Historic environment policy will support the protection of our heritage assets. But a key focus of our Historic Environment Policy is a departure from historic environment protection and designation being seen as restrictive.

Instead, the policy will demonstrate how the historic environment is an enabler.

51. The policy aspires to collect and use evidence which is specific to here to demonstrate the relationship between our heritage and culture and their ability to contribute to nearly all wellbeing indicators within the Programme for Government.
52. Creating an evidence base will connect potential to action, supporting activity and investment to contribute much more broadly to people's specific needs: quality of life, to good places to live and to sustaining and to improving the environment. Through a more thorough understanding of how heritage assets act as springboards to stimulate positive social, economic and environmental impacts, investing in our historic environment will more visibly be common sense. This potential impact has been explored in the Strategic Environmental Assessment of this policy. (This document can be found alongside this Background Document on the Historic Environment Policy Consultation page).
53. As such, the policy will provide the basis for the investment of public funding of the historic environment and serve as a guide for the strategic planning of government departments, District Councils, and for individual organisations, owners, users and visitors.
54. Much more broadly than this, the policy sets out the basic principles needed to sustain the historic environment into the future. The principle of 'Strengthening, Connecting and Innovating' our

historic environment, identified by the Culture, Arts and Heritage Taskforce, fits with this concept which relates to sustainable development: boosting any one part of this ecosystem will produce benefits for the others. Equally, a decline in any one part can have a detrimental effect on the others.

55. In reality, the Historic Environment is not a single ‘entity’ in itself – it is so widely distributed and so much a part of our day to day lives that it contributes to, affects and is affected by multiple other strategies, policies and ambitions like:

- Programme for Government 2024-2027
- The Green Growth Strategy
- Architecture and Built Environment Policy NI
- Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10-year plan – Department for Economy

Joint Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme-wide Actions

56. Engagement across the areas covered by the first phase of the Heritage, Culture and Creativity (HCC) Programme has generated a number of common themes and issues which address many of the challenges and opportunities that our research has uncovered. These themes may be considered for action on a **programme-wide basis, applied to the historic environment sector, but also arts, public libraries and museums**. These include:

- a. A desire to address the capital needs of the sectors, in terms of routine maintenance, investment to address access, environmental

and health and safety requirements and a coherent approach to strategic capital development;

- b. Growing evidence of the social and economic value of the sectors and their intrinsic importance to individuals, communities and society more generally; the contribution and value of the work of the museums sector to, for example, the priorities established in the Programme for Government might also be included as part of a wider research initiative under the aegis of the Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme;
- c. The benefits that might be brought through a programme of skills development to include provision in terms of organisational governance, management, investment and fund-raising; in digital potential and skills; supporting professional development and so on, to strengthen the skills base and support sustainability;
- d. The potential to develop networks, within and across sectors, with a view to catalysing new potential and innovative projects and partnerships;
- e. Recognising that public funding is likely to continue to be constrained, the potential to maximise existing funding sources should be explored along with approaches to generating new income streams and funding options.

POLICY ACTIONS – HAVE YOUR SAY

57. Your views on our proposed vision, aims and suggested sector-wide actions will contribute to a Policy which will demonstrate government’s approach to realising the potential of Northern Ireland’s historic environment; will be a material consideration in decision making at high-level; and will provide a long-term vision, clear aims and measurable metrics which are monitored to ensure it is the most effective tool to help the historic environment deliver for people in Northern Ireland.

The Draft Vision for Historic Environment Policy

In the consultation questionnaire you are also invited to offer your views on the draft vision for the policy, which is intended to describe succinctly what the policy is aiming to achieve.

We propose the following vision:

“Our People. Our Past. Our Place: an inclusive and valued historic environment that delivers for Northern Ireland.”

The Draft Policy Aims

58. In developing the draft policy aims, the Department has taken account of:

- Legislative duties and Policy for the protection and management of the historic environment
- International conventions, charters and declarations
- Government policy priorities, including the Programme for Government
- Stakeholder engagement
- Literature review and best practice from the UK, Ireland and internationally
- The Strategic Environmental Assessment consultation developed as part of this process

59. At the heart of each of the policies developed under the Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme are three shared drivers: to strengthen, to connect and to innovate, and three common focusses: People & Communities, Places, and Partnerships. When brought together these form a matrix (shown on page 15) which is the basis for the presentation of the policy aims.

OTHER DOCUMENTS RELATING TO THIS CONSULTATION

60. The screening assessments listed below are available for you to consider alongside the Historic Environment Policy vision and aims. There is opportunity to comment on these assessments and how they have shaped this Policy as part

of this consultation. This is because they are relevant to Historic Environment Policy, having been created to consider specific aspects of the Policy around the environment, equality and rural needs.

Strategic Environmental Assessment for Historic Environment Policy

61. In Northern Ireland, Plans and Programmes which may have an impact on the Environment are assessed through the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004.

from the implementation of the Policy. Any potential adverse effects, and methods to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset significant adverse effects have been considered and are also described within this report.

62. In March 2025 the Department for Communities submitted an Historic Environment Policy for Northern Ireland Screening Document to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), who confirmed the requirement for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Report to be carried out.

64. You can find a copy of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Report (SEA) for Northern Ireland Historic Environment Policy alongside this Background Document on the Historic Environment Policy Consultation page.

63. Historic Environment Policy is likely to have a significant effect on Northern Ireland's Environment over the next 10 years and beyond. Much of that impact will be positive impacts on the historic environment. This report demonstrates that there are many complementary positive effects on other aspects of the environment which will result

65. You or your organisation may wish to comment on the SEA Environmental Report for Historic Environment Policy. Questions on the SEA are included in the online Citizen Space survey. Alternatively, responses may be sent by email or by post, and/or included in your Historic Environment Policy response as described in the 'How to respond' section of this document.

Equality Impact Assessment for Historic Environment Policy

66. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires that public authorities have due regard to equality issues in carrying out functions relating to Northern Ireland. We have completed an equality screening of the document being consulted upon and have concluded that it does not negatively impact on equality of opportunity for any of the nine categories

specified in Section 75 (religious belief; political opinion; race; age; marital status; sexual orientation; men and women generally; disability; and dependants).

67. You can find a copy of the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for Northern Ireland Historic Environment Policy **here**.

Rural Needs Impact Assessment for Historic Environment Policy

68. The Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) is a process to ensure that all relevant government outputs are examined carefully and objectively to determine whether they have a different impact in rural areas from that elsewhere, because of the characteristics of rural areas. Where necessary the process should also examine what adjustments might be made to reflect rural needs and to ensure that, as far as possible,

public services are accessible on a fair basis to the rural community.

69. The department has considered this policy in relation to the rural community and has found no potential differential impacts.

70. You can find a copy of the Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) for Northern Ireland Historic Environment Policy **here**.

CONCLUSION

71. Thank you for taking the time to share your views on the draft vision, policy aims and other matters relating to Northern Ireland's historic environment.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - Northern Ireland has legislation and policy in place to protect and manage heritage assets:

- The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011¹⁹
- Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (Northern Ireland) Order 1995²⁰
- Protection of Wrecks Act 1973²¹
- Protection of Military Remains Act 1986²²
- Merchant Shipping Act 1995²³
- The Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966²⁴
- UK Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009²⁵
- The Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013²⁶
- Nature conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985²⁷
- Treasure Act 1996²⁸
- The Finance Act 1976 – (Conditional Exemption)

Changes to heritage assets and their wider environments are managed through existing plans, policies and programmes like:

- Regional Development Strategy²⁹
- Strategic Planning Policy Statement³⁰
- The Environmental Improvement Plan for Northern Ireland 2024³¹
- NI Executive Sustainable Development

A detailed consideration of how Historic Environment policy might support or be supported by this **legislation** is included in the Strategic Environmental Assessment of Historic Environment Policy here.

19 Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

20 Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (Northern Ireland) Order 1995

21 Protection of Wrecks Act 1973

22 Protection of Military Remains Act 1986

23 Merchant Shipping Act 1995

24 Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966

25 Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 - Explanatory Notes

26 Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013

27 The Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985

28 Treasure Act 1996

29 Regional Development Strategy 2035 | Department for Infrastructure

30 The Strategic Planning Policy Statement | Department for Infrastructure

31 Environmental Improvement Plan for Northern Ireland 2024 | www.the-ies.org

APPENDIX B

The UK has signed **international conventions, charters and declarations**

which protect heritage assets like:

- The Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments (ICOMOS) (1931)
- The Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (The 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in Event of Armed Conflict and its two (1954 and 1999) Protocols)³²
- The Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) (1964)³³
- The UNESCO World Heritage Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural³⁴ and Natural Heritage (1972)³⁵
- The Declaration of Amsterdam (1975)³⁶
- The Florence Charter 1981 (ICOMOS) (Historic Parks and Gardens)³⁷
- The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance (The Burra Charter 1979, 2013 Revision)³⁸
- The Granda Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage (1985)³⁹
- The Valetta Convention on Protection of Archaeology - 1992)⁴⁰
- The UNESCO Nara Document on Authenticity (1994)⁴¹
- The ICOMOS Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage (1999)⁴² (cont'd)
- The European Landscape Convention (Florence, 2000)⁴³
- The ICOMOS Charter – Principles for the Analysis, conservation and structural Restoration of Architectural Heritage (Victoria Falls 2003)⁴⁴
- The Leeuwarden Declaration 2018⁴⁵
- UNESCO Convention on Underwater Heritage (2001)⁴⁶
- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea⁴⁷
- UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)⁴⁸

32 The_1954_hague_convention_for_the_protection_of_cultural_property_in_the_event_of_armed_conflict_and_its_two_-_1954_and_1999.pdf

33 https://openarchive.icomos.org/id/eprint/432/1/Monuments_and_Sites_1_Charters_Petzet.pdf

34 Cultural heritage | UNESCO UIS

35 1972, Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage – ICOMOS CIVVIH

36 Declaration of Amsterdam.doc

37 Microsoft Word - Engl. Florence Charter.doc

38 Burra Charter 2013 (Adopted 31.10.2013)

39 Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada, 1985) - Culture and Cultural Heritage

40 Convention for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage of Europe (revised) (Valletta, 1992) - Culture and Cultural Heritage

41 Nara Document on Authenticity, Report of the Experts Meeting, November 1994

42 Microsoft Word - Engl. Vernacular Heritage.doc

43 The European Landscape Convention (Florence, 2000)

44 Microsoft Word - Engl. Structures.doc

45 Europa Nostra endorses Leeuwarden Declaration on Adaptive Re-Use of Built Heritage - Europa Nostra

46 Underwater Cultural Heritage 2001 Convention | UNESCO

47 UNCLOS+ANNEXES+RES.+AGREEMENT

48 Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage - UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage

A detailed consideration of how Historic Environment policy might support or be supported by these signed **international conventions, charters and declarations** is included in the Strategic Environmental Assessment of Historic Environment Policy. You can find a copy of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Report (SEA) for Northern Ireland Historic Environment Policy alongside this Background Document on the Historic Environment Policy Consultation page.