



PART 1: POWER OF PLACE

What is the historic environment? Why does it matter?

01 Power of Place is about the future of England's historic environment, its role in people's lives, and its contribution to the cultural and economic well-being of the nation. It demonstrates that, with proper understanding and sensitive and open management, there can be desirable change without losing the places we value.

02 The historic environment is what generations of people have made of the places in which they lived. It is all about us. We are the trustees of that inheritance. It is, in every sense, a common wealth. Most of our towns and cities, and all of our countryside, are made up of layer upon layer of human activity. Each generation has made its mark. And each makes its decisions about the future in the context of what it has inherited. That context is irreplaceable. Once gone, it is gone forever.

03 For most people the historic environment represents the place in which they live. They value it for the quality of life it can afford them. For others, it is the place they visit and value, for the inspiration and enjoyment that it offers. For the people that welcome and serve those visitors, it is a source of livelihood, a powerful generator of wealth and prosperity.

04 The historic environment is an incomparable source of information. For peoples in the distant past, and for more recent generations whose history was never recorded,

it offers the only route towards an understanding of who they were and how they lived. Virtually everyone in England – some 98% – believe that the historic environment is a vital educational asset, a means for the understanding of history and of their origins and identity. It is the most accessible of historical texts.

05 Although people value the historic environment, this does not represent resistance to change. On the contrary, most people believe change is necessary and desirable. But, they see that change taking place in the context of the historic environment. Keeping the best from the past provides a powerful justification for gracing our surroundings with the very best of the new. Good new building, high quality design, thoughtful planning, intelligent land use, are desirable objectives in their own right. With proper understanding of the historic environment, clarity of purpose and sensitivity to the quality of place, excellent new building and design will both complement and enhance the historic environment.

06 Decisions about the future of the historic environment largely rest upon value judgements. These decisions must be consistent, transparent, and never arbitrary. They need to be widely accepted. This means that they need to be understood. They must be made openly, tested and refined by continuing debate. This debate must not be exclusive; everyone should be able to participate easily.

07 Above all, people care about the historic environment. They value its meanings, its beauty, its depth and diversity, its familiarity, its memories, the quality of life it affords, and the opportunities it offers. And people feel strongly that children should be encouraged to understand and value the historic environment as they do the natural world.

People care. MORI's survey of a representative 3,000 people in England found that:

98% think that all schoolchildren should be given the opportunity to find out about England's historic environment

96% think that the historic environment is important to teach them about the past

88% think that it is important in creating jobs and boosting the economy

87% think that it is right that there should be public funding to preserve it

87% think that it plays an important part in the cultural life of the country

85% think that it is important in promoting regeneration in towns and cities

77% disagree that we preserve too much

76% think that their own lives are richer for having the opportunity to visit or see it

75% think that the best of our post-war building should be preserved, rising to 95% of the 16-24 age group

What are the issues?

08 The future is not secure. In the past 50 years, much development simply ignored or trampled through its context, in city, town or countryside. Agricultural policy has taken little account of its impact on the rural landscape. The development of new transport links is destroying the tranquillity of the countryside, while both

traffic and measures to control it seriously damage the appearance of historic towns and villages and thus the quality of life of the people who live in them. Poorly designed housing and commercial development have degraded the places where many people live. Good new architecture, especially in the context of historic areas, is often watered down through fear or ignorance on the part of decision-makers.

A sense of continuity does not have to stop new ideas – just the opposite. The deeper the root, the greater the range of nutrients... Redevelopments which are inspired by the identity of an area can capture a uniqueness which draws people long after the fizz of new buildings has passed.

Kim Wilkie, Indignation!

09 Like people, places have to evolve, react and grow. We must balance the need to care for the historic environment with the need for change. But to succeed, our approach to the conservation of the historic environment must stop being piecemeal – a token facade, an earthwork isolated in arable. As in the natural environment, the overall health of the habitat is as important as that of individual species.

10 We need to understand better the character of places and the value and significance people ascribe to them. Character assessments are the key. They may be large or small scale, carried out on a regional basis or for an individual conservation area, building or historic garden. They are certainly not intended to fossilise or to increase existing controls. They afford the information to make the whole spatial planning system a better and more creative process. The most significant elements of the historic environment will always need individual designation, combined with careful and detailed control.

11 Heritage organisations must work more in partnership. The National Trust, the Council for British Archaeology, the Civic Trust, Save, the national amenity societies and their local counterparts have done much to build public consciousness of the issues as well as providing an unrivalled source of specialist knowledge and detailed local scrutiny. Groups of specialist owners provide invaluable forums for discussion, advice and lobbying. The Heritage Lottery Fund has made substantial new

resources available, promoted a wider view of heritage and placed a new emphasis on education and improved access. However, the sector is fragmented. Government departments, agencies, owners and developers can all achieve more by working closely with each other and with other environmental agencies and organisations.

12 Before we do anything, we need knowledge. Without understanding what exists today, its value and its condition, we cannot take sound decisions about its future. We need targeted, integrated research and regular 'state of the historic environment' reports to identify priorities and provide the basis for informed decisions.

13 Secondly, we need leadership. This report looks forward well into the new century. If its recommendations are adopted, local authorities and government agencies will be working in partnership with well-informed owners, developers and local people. Comprehensive information about the historic environment will be readily and widely available. There will be financial and other support for owners to complement a new statutory duty of care. The law will be streamlined and brought up to date. The result will be an historic environment in better condition, more widely understood, increasingly valued, and able to make an even better overall contribution to society. To achieve this requires vivid and forthright leadership, at all levels, commitment and consistency.

14 We do not expect this to happen overnight, but many of our recommendations can be acted on immediately. Additional resources, though difficult to find, are essential. But we know that the historic environment is of enormous importance to this country, valued by everyone, and that investment in it will be well rewarded. We look forward to the Government responding quickly and positively to the recommendations we have made.