



Historic England

Wellbeing and Heritage Strategy (2022 – 25)

Annual progress report (2023 - 24)

30 July 2024

Strategy Lead's Introduction

We have had a busy year bringing to completion a range of pilots providing resources and evidence on community building, social prescribing and mental health through heritage.

Heritage works for health and wellbeing in two ways: quality of place and active participation. Protecting quality place, green space and public realm provide places and spaces to connect and local confidence. Heritage-led activities, whether archaeological, archival or place-based are the ultimate mediator for individual and community change. Providing access to this catalysing power, especially to those with unmet health and social needs, has been a key part of our agenda this year and will continue to be moving forward.

The range of evidence for what works was evident at our **Wellbeing and Heritage conference**, a clear highlight for us and our organising partners this year; the event showed the array of active work in all kinds of organisations in using heritage-led approaches to make real improvements in the lives of local people and communities.

Dr. Linda Monckton



Greening the High Street. Union Street, Wednesbury, West Midlands. Community group planting raised beds as part of Greening the High Street, a wellbeing project supported by Historic England.

© Historic England Archive

Summary of progress

This section provides an update on the progress made towards our three strategic aims during Year 2 (May 2023- 24).

Strategic Aim 1: Our Work

‘We will embed wellbeing outcomes in our work; and learn from and collaborate with partners, communities and organisations that share our ambition to deliver improved wellbeing outcomes’

Capturing how our work improves people’s lives

For the first time Historic England has reported our impact on individual and community wellbeing through its key performance indicators. Understanding wellbeing outcomes has become part of projects from **Everyday Heritage** grants to **History in the Making**. We continue to embed wellbeing as we work towards a new Social Impacts Framework.

One example is from our **Greening the High Street** project: a wellbeing project that took place in Wednesbury, Kirkham and Weston-super-Mare.

These pilots aimed to address the demand for community-based cultivation endeavours along England's high streets – seeking to experiment with strategies to enhance green space accessibility and develop a national best practice toolkit for forthcoming urban growing initiatives.

We can show through this and other programmes that contact with the historic environment has a direct impact on people’s **sense of belonging**. Heritage acts as a catalyst for community building: 78% of people who attended cultural activities delivered through our High Street Heritage Action Zones (HSHAZ) reported that they feel they are more part of their community than before.

Heritage impacts wellbeing

YouGov polling shows that 69% of people believe that having heritage in their local area contributes positively to their life - a 5% increase on the last year. This wellbeing benefit may be provided by living in a place with heritage or engaging in activities relating to heritage and/or local place.

Our recent research carried out as part of the [Heritage Capital programme](#) has shown that living near heritage has a positive impact on wellbeing: it estimates the average individual benefit of cultural heritage near individual residences to be £515, with a collective WELLBY

(Wellbeing Adjusted Life Year) value of **£29 billion across England**. This quantification illustrates the significant aggregate economic and wellbeing benefits of cultural heritage.

Emerging data suggests that 83% of people feel a greater sense of pride than before after taking part in activities associated with HSHAZ showing how heritage and culture programmes foster belonging and place attachment for communities.

Social Prescribing partnership

Through our continuing partnership with the National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP), we found further evidence on how heritage can be embedded in social prescribing pathways through volunteering and community engagement. Two pilots– **Heritage Connectors**, delivered by Frome Medical Practice, and **Heritage Buddies** (see page 6), provided data, learnings and toolkits all shared in webinars with the NASP.



High Street Heritage Action Zone. Bedford, 'Reflections of Bedford' sculpture by Rick Kirby. Patricia Payne © Historic England Archive.

Historic England endorsed **NASP's Shared Investment Fund project proposal**, which is looking to develop cross-sectoral partnership to support long-term and sustainable investment for local social prescribing delivery by the Voluntary, Charity, Faith and Social Enterprise sector (VCFSE).

Collaborating to achieve more

Wellbeing work is a collaborative venture and we need to keep expanding our vision of partnership in order to meet the needs of local communities.

At a sector level, our collaboration with the **Wellbeing and Heritage working group** enabled a major conference (see page 5). Its 'task and finish groups' developed into **Communities of practice** on evaluation and research gaps, and heritage and social prescribing. In combination these share evidence and seek to fill gaps in knowledge.

In places, collaborative effort means historic buildings work better for community wellbeing – such as in Sowerby Bridge where a disused fire station and swimming pool – are being transformed into "a vibrant, dynamic cultural space supporting community growth and learning."

Wellbeing and Heritage Conference



Wellbeing & Heritage Conference participants talking at Delapre Abbey, Northampton.
© Linda Monckton

The first UK Wellbeing and Heritage conference came together on the initiative of the Wellbeing and Heritage Working Group. Historic England, the Council for British Archaeology (CBA), Southampton Institute for Arts and Humanities and Delapre Abbey delivered the event in Northampton on the 20-21 March 2024.

140 practitioners and partners gathered from the health, arts, nature, and other sectors, including VCFSE and government. Professionals and participants from [70 heritage wellbeing projects](#) discussed themes of evaluation, policy, social prescribing, mental health, equality, diversity and inclusion. Workshops and networking events helped colleagues and people with lived experience to learn from each other's involvement in heritage wellbeing programmes. Most presentations were live-streamed and recorded; these are available via the [CBA website](#); some papers will be published.

Feedback was positive and will inform further improvement: Almost 90% of survey respondents shared they would incorporate learnings and new approaches into their work. The contribution of the lived experience participants was highly valued and something attendees wanted to see expanded. The issues most affecting the sector's ability to deliver wellbeing benefits were identified as access, inclusion, evidence, evaluation and funding. Delapre Abbey is itself a strong example of delivering [wellbeing through heritage](#), and so was the perfect setting for the conference. The event attracted a lot of interest and helped further the case for the wellbeing potential of the heritage sector.

Heritage Buddies

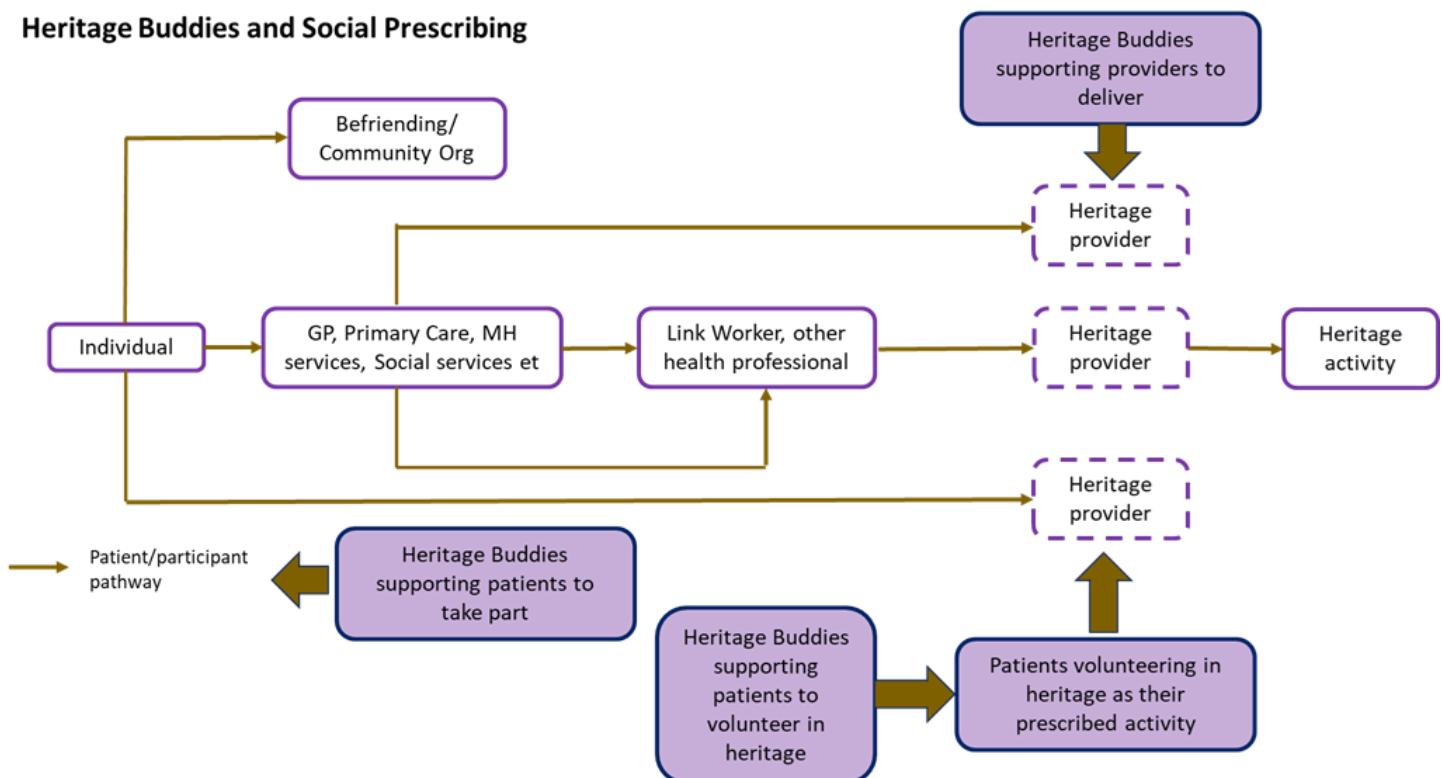
In November 2022, Historic England commissioned Nottingham Voluntary and Community Service (NCVS) to deliver the Heritage Buddies pilot. Its goal was to test and trial the use of existing volunteers to link people in need, through social prescribing, to engagement with local heritage and the historic environment locally.

Introductory and follow up training was completed by existing volunteers at Nottingham Castle and Newstead Abbey, and offered to new ones at the National Justice Museum; heritage awareness sessions were delivered for befriending and community groups to encourage them to support their clients with visits. The sessions revealed the challenges involved in establishing buddy schemes and the barriers for accessing heritage. These findings were used in the development of the [Heritage Buddies toolkit](#) and recommendations for scaling up the scheme elsewhere.

All heritage organisations which took part in the project are committed to developing and embedding this role into their service delivery and will be supported by NCVS and the Integrated Care Board Personalised Care services to connect into local social prescribing services and support referrals.

The Heritage Buddies scheme proved useful both in helping people access and benefit from heritage activities, and for improving the wellbeing of Buddies themselves, thus offering two levels of application in a potential social prescribing pathway. In addition, the approach can help heritage organisations widen access and diversify audiences and volunteer pools, and health professionals and social prescribers – to appreciate the wellbeing benefits of engagement with heritage.

Heritage Buddies and Social Prescribing



Strategic Aim 2: Our People

‘We will develop our own knowledge and expertise, so our people recognise opportunities and are empowered to take forward initiatives to achieve positive wellbeing outcomes.’

Internal partnership

We are working closely with colleagues to explore ways wellbeing can be brought to bear within core projects and develop ways to expand wellbeing provision.

We are working with our Analytics team on evaluation measures used to capture and measure wellbeing and the contexts in which they can be used and are supporting the development of the Social Impacts Framework.

Our Archaeological Investigation Team and our regional office for London and the South East are working with us to develop specific flagship projects. One of these is the Ridgeway National Trails project. Launched in October 2023 during **The Ridgeway’s 50th anniversary year**, the project will seek to expand the Trail’s Queen’s Award-winning volunteer scheme. Boosting mental and physical well-being, the volunteer activities will enable the development of new skills and increase confidence to enjoy the countryside.

We continue to provide staff resources such as the third learning e-module on **Heritage and Social Prescribing**; which will also be repurposed for external use on the [Historic England Advice Hub](#).

New talent and perspectives

Historic England has been working hard to improve diversity both in and beyond its workforce. We have pro-actively worked to host Emerging Talent and Step-Up placements over the course of this year (see page 8).

In addition, we also work part time with an Historic England apprentice Jackie-Ann Judge whose background in psychology and developing experience in archaeology are valuable assets.

Emerging Talent and Step-Up Placements

Historic England has been working hard to improve diversity both in and beyond its workforce. Two ways this has happened is through the 2023 Emerging Talent Placements Programme, which offered up to 12-week placements for 18 to 30-year-olds and the new Step Up Placements: six-month salaried placements for those who have undertaken an Emerging Talent Placement.



Chloe in the library at Historic England's London office © Bob Fallon Photography

These are in line with the actions of our [Inclusion, Diversity and Equality Strategy](#) and our model for skills and employability in the sector. They are an important factor in opening up careers in the heritage sector to audiences that are currently under-represented in the workforce. The programme is generously support by The Mercers' Company.

The wellbeing team has been fortunate to benefit from placements within both these initiatives. Alina Gangotra, an architecture student, worked with us in the summer of 2023, writing a forceful case study on the reasons young girls withdraw from education. Chloe Tayali has been our Step-Up placement working on the 2024 Wellbeing and Heritage Conference and its evaluation; analysing the wellbeing work that sits within Historic England's many projects and programmes and co-authoring our impact evaluation on Rejuvenate. Chloe says "this placement has brought me to a point that fascinates me: how theory can be practically applied to improve people's daily experiences, and how research based on those results can lead to further improvements. This is exactly the place where I hope to build a career."

We have been fortunate to benefit from the insight and talents of these two young women over the course of this year. The advantages have gone beyond their initial placement – with Alina working on assessing the residential reuse of redundant infrastructure, such as former gasholders, for a heritage-inspired university dissertation project, and Chloe being part of a newly funded project on development-led archaeology and wellbeing through a partnership with Museum of London Archaeology, meaning she will be with us part time for a further six months. We are happy to see the placements provided with the resources and skills to pursue their heritage interests beyond the placement period.

Strategic Aim 3: Our Future

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

Innovation

In the last year, most of our innovative pilot projects testing new concepts and potential delivery models in wellbeing and social prescribing through heritage completed. They provided invaluable insights into our four priorities of: young people, older people, those living with mental health issues and those experiencing loneliness.

New partnerships were initiated with the faith sector, because of Historic England’s lead on linking Places of Worship with social prescribing through our collaboration with NASP. **Churchworks** are currently developing research around demonstrating the role of heritage in the wellbeing impact of their Warm Welcome initiative, while we continue working with partners, such as the Good Faith Partnership, the Bishop of London and Places of Worship Forum to share good practice and evidence on the potential of faith communities to support communities and connect with social prescribing.

Creating new opportunities

We have managed to complete seven pilots this year and are close to completing one more.

Worcester Life Stories shows how local heritage resources can act as a catalyst for connecting more with a local place and a personal life story linked to that place (see page 10).

We piloted new approaches in using engagement with heritage to support workforce wellbeing through our partnership with University of Southampton and Queen Alexandra Hospital in Portsmouth in our pilot project **Heritage and wellbeing for NHS staff (HerWellNHS)**; the project shows how providing access to historic sites increased positive emotions in NHS staff and increased their engagement with their work with the potential to increase retention.

The Restoration Trust completed the Historic England-funded social prescribing pilot project **Heritage Link worker (Heritage for Wellbeing)**, which provided data on how heritage can address social isolation and loneliness and how heritage activities can be used for social prescribing in a local context.

Project ‘Rejuvenate’ was completed and evaluated by our delivery partners **Wessex Archaeology** and **Isle Heritage** and more details are available in the below case study (page 11). Heritage Buddies and its sister project Heritage Connectors along with the Kirkham High Street Heritage Action Zone health and wellbeing programme also came to fruition.

Worcester Life Stories

Heritage-based initiatives using artefacts can be beneficial for people with dementia and carers as they help to prompt retrieval or memories and previous knowledge. Sharing memories and oral histories also has societal and cultural importance. Two new online platforms, using images, video and audio clips, encourage users to engage with heritage-based resources and local archives. The Know Your Place Worcester platform uses a map-based approach, showing how Worcester has changed over time. Life Stories Herefordshire and Worcestershire encourages people to create an online life story and capturing their stories in their own words.



The Life Stories Herefordshire and Worcestershire Platform: an image of the digital interface with historic photographs

The project (funded by The National Heritage Lottery Fund) was led by Dr Natasha Lord, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (previously Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care Trust) and Sheena Payne-Lunn Historic Environment Record Officer at Worcester City Council.

Jennifer Bray and Dr Shirley Evans (Association for Dementia Studies, University of Worcester) undertook the Historic England funded evaluation which found that both platforms were flexible and versatile making them widely applicable and the multimedia aspect improved accessibility and different opportunities for engagement. Focusing on heritage-based resources created a more positive experience as people feel part of a bigger initiative beyond themselves instead of focusing on reminiscence and how it relates to their dementia.

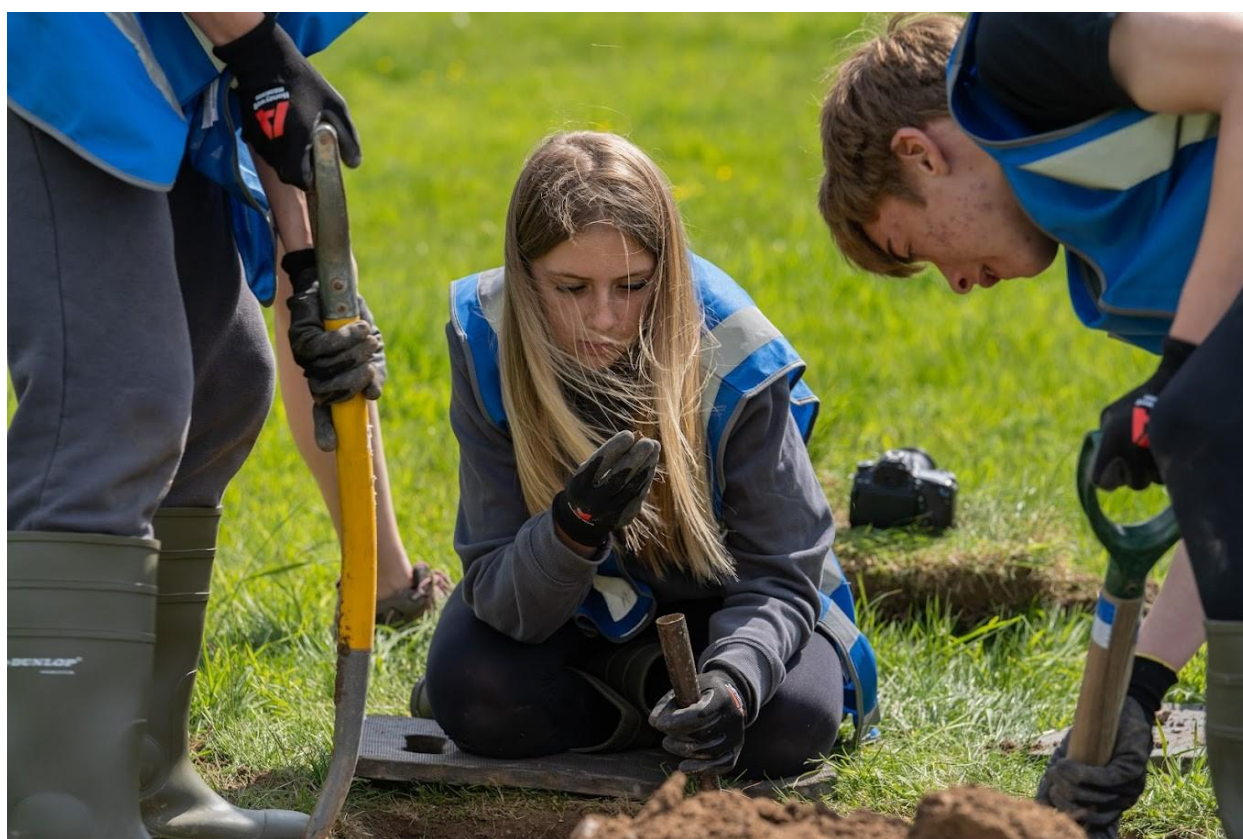
People can choose to share their stories and their own knowledge for the benefit of others, and everyone is valued as an individual with their own experiences, both of which can contribute to their own sense of wellbeing and put people with dementia at the heart of conversations.

'Rejuvenate' Works

In 2023 Wessex Archaeology and Isle Heritage delivered Historic England's Rejuvenate project with a School and Youth Justice team respectively, with powerful results.

Youth Justice: described by a youth justice worker as the best reparations project they had seen in a 40-year career. Children showed an increase in positive attributes such as perseverance and openness to learning; ability to complete tasks and follow instructions. Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) modules gave formal recognition to their learning. The programme helped them change perspective on life, moving away from negative thoughts, and they had enhanced motivation to build a positive future.

School: 89% of participants showed signs of being more in control of their behaviour at school. School attendance increased by 4.5% (and 6.9% more than comparable students); with a 10% improvement in those with the lowest starting point. For 67% engagement within lessons had increased. The cohort recorded increases in wellbeing measures with an uplift of 28% in their feelings of being proud, a 22% increase in feeling recognised for their achievement, and a 24% increase in feeling their voice heard.



Examining finds from the test pit © Wessex Archaeology

The project demonstrated the specific power of a heritage-led approach incorporating skills, outdoor activity, creativity and archaeology in a non-didactic environment and a person-centred design. The youth justice pilot is continuing in 2024 with the support of a *Benefact Trust Movement for Good* Award and Historic England is actively working to expand the programme.

Looking ahead

This section looks to our future, including what we have learned and what we hope to achieve in Year 3 of strategy delivery (May 2024 – 25).

Learning and products

Our work collectively highlighted a number of issues as follows:

- Addressing access and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion issues is a priority task for developing wellbeing and social prescribing.
- Place-based projects need to focus on local needs and co-produce with beneficiaries.
- Raise awareness of the wellbeing benefits of heritage locally before the start of any project.
- Building trust takes time when meaningfully engaging local communities.
- Systematic, longer-term evaluation for wellbeing impact is needed.

Toolkits and reports

For more information on maximising wellbeing outcomes of heritage see:

- [Heritage Buddies toolkit](#)
- [Community Connectors toolkit with Heritage Connector case study](#)
- [Heritage Buddies closure report](#)
- [Heritage Buddies and Heritage Connectors Evaluation report](#)

And see these recorded **webinars**:

- [A whole-community approach to social prescribing, and what's new at NASP](#)
- [Nature and Heritage Buddying](#)
- [Who are the Connectors in your community?](#)

National and International reach



Sustainability and Wellbeing workshops with the National Heritage Board (NHB) in Singapore led to new relationships and learning. © Singapore NHB

Working with New London Architecture enabled wide ranging discussions and allowed us to contribute to their 2023 [Expert Panel Whitepapers](#).

The University of Exeter's international (AHRC-funded) workshop *Renewing Relations: Indigenous Heritage Rights and Re-conciliation in NW Canada*, created opportunities to consider Indigenous rights in heritage and its' links to wellbeing, equality, diversity, inclusion, and de-colonisation.

Year 3 (2024-25)

From May 2024, we will focus on:

Working across the organisation to better capture our social impact. The **Social Impact Framework** will help us, and the wider sector, understand how what we do shapes people's lives.

We will produce **guidance for Social Prescribing Link Workers** to flag the potential of heritage to support health.

A focus on consolidating wide-ranging evidence will help policy development and **add resources** to the Advice Hub. With the **National Monuments Service in Ireland**, we will commission a research review to prioritise future work.

We look forward to reviewing **evidence on therapeutic archaeology**, and completing our Kent Rejuvenate work with **Isle Heritage** and our **pilot Heritage project** with **Age UK** in Banbury.

In partnership with **Museum of London Archaeology** and the **Greater London Archaeology Service** we will look at ways to embed wellbeing into developer-led archaeology in the planning system.

We will commence a new webinar series '**Wellbeing Wednesdays**'. We will continue to work with our sister Arms-Length bodies to make the case for culture, heritage and sport as a force for wellbeing.



Greening the High Streets. 13 Market Place, Wednesbury, West Midlands. Portrait of shop owners with planted raised beds as part of Greening the High Streets, a wellbeing project supported by Historic England. © Historic England Archive.

Thanks

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

We are fortunate in benefitting from the enthusiasm and skills of many Historic England colleagues.

Special thanks go to:

Alina Gangotra, Analytics Team (Historic England), Archaeological Investigation Team (Historic England), Arts Council England, Association of Dementia Studies, Age UK, Benefact Trust Movement for Good, Cadw, Chloe Tayali, Churchworks, Council for British Archaeology (CBA), Delapr  Abbey, Edward Vinson 1957 Charity, Faith Forum, Frome Medical Practice, Fylde Borough Council, Good Faith partnership, Greater London Archaeology Service, Historic England Foundation, Historic Environment Division at the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland, Historic Environment Forum, Historic Environment Scotland, Isle Heritage, Jackie-Ann Judge, Kent County Council Youth Justice Team, London and the South East office (Historic England), Museum of London Archaeology, National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP), National Health Service Trust; National Heritage Board Singapore; National Heritage Council in Ireland, National Monuments Service Ireland, Natural England, New London Architecture, Nottingham Community and Voluntary Service (NCVS), Phoenix Rising, Places of Worship Team (Historic England), Places of Worship Forum, Queen Alexandra Hospital Portsmouth, Southampton Institute for Arts and Humanities (SIAH), Sport England, Supersum, The Restoration Trust, Rockthorn, Swire Charitable Trust, University of Exeter, University of Southampton, University of Worcester, York Archaeology, Wavehill Limited, Wessex Archaeology, Worcester Historic Environment Record, Worcestershire Health and Care Trust.

Contact

If you would like to learn more about Historic England's Wellbeing and Heritage work or if you have any questions, please contact Dr. Linda Monckton:

Linda.Monckton@historicengland.org.uk