

THE HERITAGE AT RISK REGISTER

Reducing the Risks

English Heritage is committed to securing a year-on-year reduction in the number of heritage sites at risk. This will be challenging given the number of assets now on the register and the different kinds of risk they face. Each asset type and individual case will require its own approach and solution.

There are, however, some general approaches that are relevant to all assets at risk. Resolving cases requires working in close partnership with owners, local planning authorities and other relevant organisations and partners. Advice and understanding are essential. Historic Environment Records, maintained by local authorities, are repositories of information on local historic assets. They underpin the work of local authority historic environment services and can help improve the protection, conservation and management of heritage assets.

Maintenance of heritage assets is essential if they are not to become 'at risk', and to prevent those that are already at risk from decaying further and thereby escalating the cost of their repair and consolidation. Buildings, for instance, decay rapidly when left empty. Avoiding vacancy through short-term lets or schemes that provide protection through residential occupation are low-cost ways of maintaining buildings until permanent solutions can be found.

English Heritage provides on-line advice and guidance to local authorities, owners and managers of sites through the Historic Environment Local Management (HELM) website www.helm.org.uk.

Buildings at Risk

English Heritage's role in securing the future of buildings at risk is primarily to provide practical advice, guidance and resources to local authorities and owners. Our involvement in cases is determined by the importance of the building and the complexity of the issues. We can help with analysis of the issues, investigation of the feasibility of options and brokering solutions. Although buildings at risk will continue to be a priority for English Heritage repair grants, grant-aid is limited in relation to demand. Grants from other public sources, notably the Heritage Lottery Fund, continue to be essential in helping secure the future of buildings at risk.

In very exceptional cases, English Heritage may acquire and repair a particularly important building at risk, where it is clear that the scale and complexity of problems are such that direct involvement is the best way of securing the building's long-term future.

Local authorities have a primary role in protecting the historic environment. The creation of a local 'at risk' register is the first step in tackling neglected buildings in order to assess and monitor the scale of the problem and prioritise resources and action. Local authorities can also take action to secure the preservation of historic buildings through the use of statutory notices.

Some councils have a successful track record, but generally these powers are under-used. It is essential that local authorities make best use of their powers to secure buildings at risk, to 'stop the rot' and prevent the costs escalating beyond the point where it is economic to repair.

To help local authorities make more frequent and timely use of their statutory powers, English Heritage runs a grant scheme to underwrite a significant proportion of the irrecoverable costs involved in serving Urgent Works and Repairs Notices.

Building preservation trusts can be the key to saving many buildings at risk. Some trusts cover geographical areas; others specialise in particular types of building or are formed to save just one building. Determined individuals and trusts have saved numerous buildings at risk, working in partnership with other organisations such as local and national amenity societies, including SAVE Britain's Heritage, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, The Victorian Society and the Georgian Group.

Scheduled Monuments

Although a significant proportion of scheduled monuments remain at risk, in many cases the problems can be reduced by either small changes to land management or better-informed decision-making. This is reinforced by the success in reducing the number of monuments at risk since the release of the interim figures in 2008, which shows how the simple act of disseminating information and advice can go a long way towards improving conditions. English Heritage provides on-line advice to the owners and managers of sites via the Historic Environment Local Management website www.helm.org.uk; through its Historic Environment Field Advisers and through the network of local authority Historic Environment Countryside Advisers that we have co-sponsored with local authority partners.

While most owners and managers of scheduled monuments address their long-term care on a regular basis, some monuments do require significant resources to stabilise their condition, to carry out repairs, or to change the way in which the land on and around them is used. English Heritage therefore works closely with Natural England who delivers the Environmental Stewardship agri-environment scheme on behalf of Defra and who are active in helping develop management regimes which include scheduled monuments. We also help the Heritage Lottery Fund to identify important sites deserving grant-aid.

The English Heritage National Monuments Record and local authority Historic Environment Records have increased the information available to land managers and we are continuing to develop their services. A new Selected Heritage Inventory for Natural England (SHINE) will soon allow owners to view online information on scheduled monuments and other archaeological features on their holdings.

In all cases – whether for rural or urban monuments – close co-operation with owners and land managers is the key to making further progress.

Registered Parks and Gardens

Inclusion on the Register brings no additional statutory controls, but there is a presumption in favour of the conservation of all designated assets in the planning system. The Government's new Planning Policy Statement 5 *Planning for the Historic Environment* (PPS 5) and its supporting Practice Guide will help planning authorities to assess and mitigate the impact of development on our irreplaceable heritage of designed landscapes.

English Heritage can engage only with the proposals for change to the highest graded designed landscapes and where the impact on historic significance is greatest. We will continue to tackle the skills crisis facing historic parks and gardens through sector-wide initiatives.

English Heritage encourages the development of conservation management plans for registered historic parks and gardens, especially those in multiple ownership. We are also keen for bursars and estate teams to use management plans to help conserve important but fragile landscapes in the care of schools, hospitals, hotels and other institutional owners.

Registered Battlefields

As with registered parks and gardens, this designation brings no additional statutory controls, but there is a presumption in favour of conservation of registered battlefields in the new PPS 5.

English Heritage will continue to work with owners to develop management plans for registered sites and, in appropriate cases, contribute towards the cost of management plans. We will develop positive landscape strategies with owners and partners such as Defra. In some circumstances, we may encourage the conversion from arable to pasture of especially sensitive locations to protect battlefield archaeology from the effects of ploughing and as part of a wider drive to prevent unauthorised or damaging metal-detecting.

English Heritage will also continue to encourage greater access to battlefields and improve their amenity value and visitors' appreciation of the impact these historic events had on our development as a nation.

Local authorities can help reduce the risk to battlefields by designating registered battlefields as conservation areas. This provides further protection and makes sure that registered battlefields are explicitly taken into account in Local Development Frameworks. Local authorities can also invite comments from the Battlefields Trust on planning applications affecting the setting of registered sites.

Protected Wreck Sites

At the strategic level, the major sources of risk to designated wreck sites have now been identified. In terms of high-priority sites, practical requirements have also been identified in conservation management plans.

Risks to protected wreck sites can often be reduced through education, provision of marker buoys, or planning policies that take full account of their national importance. However, some sites require significant resources to stabilise their

condition or to carry out detailed archaeological assessments of their conservation requirements. Although English Heritage has statutory power to allocate funds to promote the preservation and maintenance of protected wreck sites, its financial resources can solve only a small proportion of the problems.

In spite of the inherent difficulties with caring for this type of site, careful management must be maintained if we are to avoid the loss of wreck sites. It is therefore close co-operation between the owners of protected wreck sites (where known), authorised divers and all organisations charged with care for the marine and coastal environment, that will make the real difference to their long-term survival.

Practical advice on the management of historic wreck sites, whether at the coast-edge or under water, is available from English Heritage's Maritime Archaeology Team (maritime@english-heritage.org.uk) and from www.helm.org.uk.

Conservation Areas

The risks to conservation areas are difficult to address as they cover large areas of land and involve many different owners. Looking after them is thus a responsibility we all share – those of us who visit them to work or for enjoyment, those of us who own homes and businesses in them, those of us whose job it is to manage the spaces between the buildings and make decisions about their future.

Overall understanding of their character, development of a robust management regime and engagement by the public are therefore the keys to providing them with sustainable long-term futures. A conservation area is more likely to improve over time if the local authority commits itself to employing a dedicated conservation officer and to appointing an elected member as a heritage champion to promote the historic environment within the council. It also depends on members of the local community engaging either individually or through some form of conservation area advisory committee.

Armed with the information provided by the survey, we and our regional partners will have the evidence to direct resources and investment much more accurately towards those conservation areas at greatest risk. We will also want to target those with the greatest potential to improve the quality of life and economic prospects of people in the villages, towns and cities of which they are such crucially important components.

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