



Historic England

Historic England – Listing Strategy: Wider Audience Reach Events

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This report has been produced by Kanda on behalf of Historic England

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Executive summary

Purpose of the exercise – why we did it and what we hoped to achieve

The Wider Audience Reach Events engagement programme was designed to gather opinions from three communities regarding the NHLE, targeting a wider and more diverse audience than might usually engage in this topic.

Where we chose and why

To ensure that a broad and diverse audience was invited to participate, we selected three communities – one urban, one suburban and one rural. It was also important to ensure that across the three communities, we had good opportunity to engage with Historic England's identified priority audiences.

Leeds was selected as a city location, specifically the areas of Harehills and Chapeltown, because Leeds has a diverse population (particularly reflected in Harehills and Chapeltown), a wide range of community and interest groups, and lots of heritage assets.

Boston was selected as a suburban town, because it has a large Eastern European community, with pockets of deprivation. It also has one of the oldest conservation areas in the country, which had fallen into disrepair, but work is ongoing to improve this. They also have a lot of community groups.

Finally, we chose the Isle of Wight as our rural location because it has a distinct culture and lots of heritage assets. It is considered a tourist destination, adding something different, and possibly influencing the consideration of heritage in the area.

Methodology and why

It was decided that the majority of engagement, both in terms of promotion and consultation, would take place online. This was due to the ongoing questions about safety in a pandemic, availability of personnel at Historic England who could travel to the chosen locations, and the associated cost.

Social media advertising was used to promote the exercise as is a cost-effective which also makes it possible to target many of Historic England's priority audiences directly, such as the LGBTQ+ community. Targeted posts did not explicitly mention priority group status, but simply noted how much Historic England wanted to hear from the whole community, with a relevant image. The targeted campaigns meant that priority audiences saw the adverts more frequently than other residents. 4,279 people engaged with the social media adverts across the three locations.

The other main strand to our promotion was local community groups. Over 270 groups and stakeholders were contacted across the three locations, targeting local representatives, community groups and advocacy organisations who represented priority audiences. Although there were fewer people to target with this method than with social media advertising, we found this to be very effective as leaders of these community groups then encouraged their members directly to engage with the exercise. They also promoted the consultation more widely – this was particularly effective on the Isle of Wight.

We later supplemented these two promotion methods by producing a physical handout that local representatives could use to promote the survey, as requested by members of

the Isle of Wight Council. This handout was also used for the in-person Leeds activity covered below.

As noted, our primary means of collecting feedback were online workshops and an online survey. Five workshops were held on Zoom, focussed on each of the locations (two for Boston and Leeds and one for the Isle of Wight). 91 people signed up for an online workshop and 34 people attended across the five sessions. Those who attended were engaged and interested and provided useful and constructive feedback.

We did see a large drop off rate, which can be attributed to unseasonably good weather for some of the evening sessions, and the low commitment required to book into an online workshop. That said, the workshops did provide us with informal and unrestricted feedback on the topic and these conversations have enriched the quality of the responses significantly.

We also held a workshop with the Isle of Wight Council. This was because our experience is that rural communities who are engaged less frequently on topics such as this can sometimes feel uncomfortable about perceived outsiders coming in and speaking to them without first going through more formal channels. Our in-person meeting was rescheduled to be online due to self-isolation requirements. This session generated lots of interesting and constructive feedback and built a positive relationship with the IOW Council.

In addition, an online survey was developed to cover the same topics and was hosted on the Historic England website. This provided respondents with a far quicker way to respond to the consultation in their own time. We received 98 responses to this.

Finally, although the original strategy was to have primarily online engagement, we realised that we were receiving fewer responses from Leeds than elsewhere. The Historic England team were flexible and responsive to this and a face-to-face engagement exercise was held in Leeds town centre on 29th November 2021. This activity was successful and across the day, feedback was collected from 42 people from a number of locations. The respondents also reflected the demographic profile of the area more accurately than the feedback received previously.

Key themes and what we learnt

Overall, we engaged with **231** people over the course of the engagement – **98** people took part in the online survey, **91** people completed the online workshops sign-up survey (although only 34 of those people attended the online workshops) and **42** people took part in the in-person pop-up event in Leeds. This is a positive response rate across the locations and is reflective of the topic.

A number of key themes were identified through the feedback. A summary of these is as follows (more information is included in section 4.2)

- **Heritage as a shared experience** – Many people referred to the concept of a shared history, whilst others highlighted community groups, families and nations. The vast majority of these stories concerned childhood, showing the importance that education and early introduction to heritage assets can have, and what a significant impact these early experiences can have.
- **Knowledge of and understanding of Historic England** - Many people who took part in the engagement process had a good basic understanding of Historic England's role, generally in relation to the List, but those who we engaged in the face-to-face activity

in Leeds has less awareness. The distinction between Historic England and English Heritage was also raised as a point of confusion for many. Respondents felt an increased presence on social media would be an effective method to communicate the work of Historic England.

- **Importance of community histories** - There was a lot of discussion about community histories present in the three locations, but in particular on the Isle of Wight. The importance of remembering these and passing them on to later generations was highlighted by a number of people.
- **Understanding of listing** - Most people understood what it meant for a building to be listed, but there was some confusion about the purpose and value of this. There was confusion that listing is seen as a barrier to innovation.
- **Learning more about Historic England** - Overall, the most popular methods to learn more about Historic England and listing were: social media (61%); information on the Historic England website (54%); partnerships with local groups (42%); and partnerships with local councils (38%). Other suggestions included information boards at sites of interest, more information on TV and work with schools and young people.
- **Importance of protecting a place as a whole** - It was clear that protecting heritage and historic assets was important to communities, but there was frustration about how different policies interacted with each other and left some areas and buildings more exposed than others. It was felt that the levels of protection afforded was not always obvious or consistent. It was suggested that Historic England need to consider how to protect larger areas which are of importance to the local community, such as the town centre and nature areas.
- **Relationship between use of a place and listing** – The use and function of spaces and buildings was a popular topic. Although it was not felt (overall), that use should determine whether a listing exists, a building's function was considered to determine its importance to a community. It was recognised that the List has a specific function which does not recognise use or function as part of a building's importance, but it was felt that recording these uses is an important part of preserving community histories, and that the List could support this.
- **What should we be listing?** – Many respondents listed specific assets they wished to be protected. Others considered this question more holistically, noting the types of spaces they thought were important. These people talked about the relationship that a place has with the community or buildings and places that don't necessarily have an immediately obvious architectural value. More unusual suggestions such as 'quirky' buildings and bars came largely from respondents in Leeds, where we had a significantly younger and more diverse audience.
- **Specific locations of importance** – A number of assets were specifically noted by respondents across all the locations, plus some others which were not specifically targeted. In Boston, particular emphasis was placed on the need for restoration, protection and preservation of the town's buildings, perhaps reflecting that some of these spaces have fallen into disrepair.

Summary of recommendations

This report sets out a number of recommendations for ongoing engagement based on the outcomes from this exercise. These are summarised below.

- **Expanding the current exercise** - Reflecting on the current exercise, we would recommend expanding this in the following ways: offering meetings with local representatives in Boston and Leeds; offering 121 meetings with community groups, particularly those representing priority audiences; further face-to-face activity; and asking specifically about personal stories and histories to add nuance to responses.

- **Use of in-person engagement** - Communities particularly value face-to-face engagement and this can quickly increase responses and variation in those who are engaging. Face-to-face activity, particularly pop-up events where respondents do not need to register in advance, should be considered for all engagement programmes going forwards from the outset.
- **Reconsidering how Historic England engages going forwards** - The Historic England team were responsive and flexible and open to considering new methods of engagement. To maintain this, it would be useful for further staff to receive training to build capacity to deliver more in-person events. We would also recommend considering the production of a community charter as a public commitment to effective engagement.
- **Further stakeholder engagement** - Meeting with local representatives when first engaging in a new location or on a new exercise is an excellent way to get buy in from a community and promote your engagement. This should be considered to be best practice going forwards.
- **Development of strategic engagement panel** - Consultation and engagement can often happen in specific periods of time, with little activity at other times. Working strategically with partners and stakeholders would help to increase coordination between organisations, therefore increasing engagement and widening participation.
- **Different methods of engagement** - This exercise has demonstrated that having a varied engagement strategy with both in-person and online activities will generate the highest and most diverse response rate.
- **Use of social media** - Social media is already being used successfully by Historic England on their organic feed. Creating as much engagement as possible through stories, polls and targeted adverts would help to demonstrate that HE is open to a two-way conversation and interested in views. Considering how communities see heritage, it would also be useful to add more faces and people to the social media feed, allowing the profile to reflect the diverse audiences HE wishes to speak to, not just the buildings that the List protects.
- **Education through promotion** - Promoting the work of Historic England and the List will increase awareness and how many people feel that this work is relevant to them, increasing diversity of engagement in future exercises. Many suggestions were made about simply making Historic England and the NHLE more visible to communities as they engaged with spaces. Engagement should also be made with English Heritage to ensure that the difference between the two bodies is described in a clear and consistent way.
- **Supporting local community history** - The recording of community histories was important to all respondents and is not something which is done consistently in different places. Many felt that this is something Historic England should take a greater role in, even if this fall outside of the NHLE. Historic England should invite local community historians to take a more active role (as volunteers) and set up a specific programme for communities to record their community stories. This might include a free guide on how to run a local workshop with adaptable resources, allowing local groups to run their own sessions without the need for Historic England input.
- **Relationship between use and value** - The use and function of buildings and spaces influences the value communities attribute to them. Although this is not expected to influence whether or not something is listed, it is something which should be recorded. Historic England need to find a way for function and use to be recorded consistently across buildings and spaces, even where there is no official listing.
- **Effectively targeting diverse audiences** - Targeting priority groups proved to be an effective way to promote the exercise to more diverse audiences. However, to ensure more diverse responses, the activities, as well as the promotion, should be targeted. Creating activities and programmes which specifically relate to the audience Historic England is trying to speak to will make the exercise and activities feel relevant and

worth investing time in. Increasing your reach with priority audiences won't happen with one exercise – the other key is consistency, slowly building confidence in these communities that Historic England is interested and will listen.