



Race the Tide, photo courtesy of Muncaster Castle © Mike Andrew

## 1. Protect heritage from unintended consequences

The survival of our country's world-famous heritage sector relies on a supportive fiscal and regulatory framework. Changes to this framework in particular can have a devastating impact on fragile historic houses, and can make the difference between a viable visitor attraction and an insolvent business forced to close its doors. Government should ensure it considers the potential impact on fragile heritage — and consults with the sector — when considering changes to the fiscal and regulatory framework.

# Heritage means business

Our world-beating historic houses and gardens are a unique combination of people and places, culture, and innovation. The nearly 1,450 independently owned houses and gardens that we represent are the backbone of the UK's tourism industry. In 2023, they welcomed over 17 million visitors, supported 5,500 FTE jobs and generated almost £694 million for the UK's economy.

Most historic houses open to the public are maintained and funded by independent owners, rather than by the state or by charities. The landmark Gowers Report found this to be, and it remains to this day, the most cost-effective way of looking after the nation's heritage.

Our places are hubs of creativity, culture, commerce, and community across many of the most rural parts of the UK, and act as lynchpins of the UK's thriving tourism and creative industries sectors. The enormous public benefit these places provide to twenty-first century audiences fifty years on from Historic Houses' foundation is a result of the tireless hard work and dynamism of independent owners over many years.

However, the pandemic showed how fragile these unique small businesses can be. They need a supportive fiscal and regulatory framework from government to continue doing what they do best: welcoming people through their doors, driving heritage-led prosperity in rural economies and communities, and showcasing Britain on the world stage.

The UK is rightfully proud of its unique heritage, and we are proud to represent some of our nation's most treasured historic houses. Our policy proposals would ensure the longevity and ongoing relevance of these remarkable places in the centuries to come.

### OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Protect heritage from unintended consequences
2. Stimulate investment in repair projects at heritage attractions
3. Reform planning legislation to create a smarter system of heritage protection
4. Unleash the potential of the rural economy
5. Unlock the growth potential of the UK's tourism sector

## 2. Stimulate investment in repair projects at heritage attractions

VAT on structural repairs and maintenance for listed buildings is currently 20% whilst demolition and new builds are zero-rated. Introducing a VAT relief scheme for repairs and maintenance on heritage buildings open to the public would give many heritage attractions the confidence they need to get on top of repair and maintenance backlogs, invest in their businesses, generate supply chain work and economic vitality for rural Britain and keep our heritage alive for centuries to come.

Similarly, improving the way Heritage Maintenance Funds are taxed would ensure that they are used as was intended, stimulate private sector investment and benefit rural economies.

Photo courtesy of Haddon Hall © Peakclass



### 3. Reform planning legislation to create a smarter system of heritage protection

Historic houses were built to last. However, they need to be allowed to sensitively adapt to the modern world so that they can remain viable and sustainable. The planning system as it currently stands is not fit for purpose:

**87% of our members say they actively want to decarbonise but the planning system is a barrier to them doing so.** With local authorities overstretched and underfunded, the process of obtaining planning permission and listed building consent is time-consuming, expensive and often relies on the whim of local planning officers.

The system needs to be reformed and heritage consent processes streamlined so that the owners of listed buildings are encouraged, rather than put off, to sensitively adapt them for the modern world. Cutting the red tape on planning legislation — by introducing Listed Building Consent Orders on energy efficiency and decarbonisation measures, for example — will allow the owners at listed buildings to make all-important changes to future-proof Britain's remarkable heritage.

### 4. Invest in infrastructure to support the rural economy

Historic Houses properties already provide hubs of culture, creativity and commerce for



Photo courtesy of Knebworth House

their communities, but they, like so many others, are hampered by underinvestment in rural infrastructure. With **one-third of our members inaccessible by public transport** and **over half unable to access superfast broadband**, it is clear that there are significant barriers to rural development and growth that need addressing. Introducing a subsidy scheme for electric vehicle charging at rural SMEs would boost sustainable visits to rural destinations and investment in electric bus routes would bridge the gap between local transport hubs and rural attractions. Combined, these measures would decarbonise rural transport, reduce pollution and encourage more people to visit rural heritage attractions.

The government must recognise the urgent need for investment in infrastructure and opportunities for rural communities in order to ensure that Britain's countryside can remain a dynamic and prosperous place to live and work for generations to come.



### 5. Unlock the growth potential of the UK's tourism sector

The tourism sector has faced severe challenges in recent years — the pandemic, rising energy prices and the cost of living crisis — but the sector has potential as a vehicle of growth across the UK, especially in rural and coastal areas. The government must ensure that the UK is one of the top destinations for tourists to visit by investing in international marketing campaigns and treating the creative industries, tourism and hospitality as interconnected sectors.

Heritage is at the heart of the UK's tourism offering, and our world-renowned historic houses entice visitors from all corners of the globe to visit the UK. Ensuring that these historic house businesses can operate under favourable trading conditions, and that they are not hampered by excessive red tape and administration is vital in allowing them to flourish.

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Filming Peaky Blinders, photo courtesy of Arley Hall