



Wellbeing and Heritage Strategy (2022 – 25)

Annual progress report (2024 - 25)

30 July 2025

Strategy Lead's Introduction

From the extraordinary, to the everyday, our historic places and spaces matter – to you, to us, to the nation. They are the legacy we want to pass on and the stories we continue to tell. These stories are at the heart of how heritage positively impacts wellbeing – they enable connection and discovery.

This report shows how we know that the presence of the historic environment supports life satisfaction, that connecting with heritage has tangible health and wellbeing benefits and that heritage can be a catalyst for addressing loneliness and supporting mental health, identity and belonging as well as building capacity and resilience.

However, everything we do, as a team and as an organisation, is about partnership and collaboration. We benefit from partners and supporters keen to explore with us how society can be supported to be more equitable, how quality of life can be improved through the life course and how barriers to opportunities can be reduced. We work towards these goals through the power of the historic environment and active participation with heritage.

Exploring how to capture these benefits and learn from experience is crucial to both showcase the potential of heritage and for us collectively to improve and extend our work to enable everyone to experience the wellbeing benefits of heritage.

Dr. Linda Monckton

Summary of progress

This section provides an update on the progress made towards our three strategic aims during Year 3 (May 2024- 25).

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’

The Wellbeing and Heritage team works with a variety of Historic England’s departments, supporting their learning and adoption of wellbeing as an aim and objective for heritage projects. For example, as a continuation of our collaborative work with Inclusion, Analytics and Communities, we have advised on the development of the participation survey for the **Everyday Heritage programme**, the creation of the **Social Impact Framework** and the evaluation of the **High Streets Heritage Action Zones programme**. This is because evidence really matters for advocacy and continued improvement.

Further evidence on the wellbeing impact of heritage

We now know that engagement with culture and heritage delivers £8bn a year worth of improvements in people’s quality of life and higher productivity, as explained in the [evidence report](#), published by the UK Government in December 2024. This strengthens our evidence base for showing the wellbeing potential of engagement with heritage and helps us make the case for the role heritage plays in supporting Government missions around growth, rebuilding the health system and supporting communities.

In 2024-2025, in partnership with the National Monuments Service in Ireland, we commissioned the University of Gloucestershire to undertake a research gaps review on wellbeing and heritage to inform our future priorities. Headline findings demonstrate heritage’s significant role in mental health, social cohesion, and community identity, whilst highlighting the need for longitudinal research and policy recognition to ensure that heritage is positioned as a key contributor to individual and community wellbeing.

Productive Collaboration and Partnerships

We continued to develop our existing partnership with NASP further, with the delivery of significant commissions, such as the [Heritage and Social Prescribing Advice Hub](#) and the [Heritage for Wellbeing film](#), featuring the Historic England-funded project Heritage Link Worker (see case studies on page 5 and 6) and through supporting the organisation of the International Social Prescribing Conference in June 2024. We worked together to further the work on Faith and Social Prescribing through a [second round table in November 2024](#) at Westminster, with representatives from Government and the NHS, and the organisation of a second multifaith webinar in February 2025.

Historic England's CEO took part in the launch of the **NASP's plan *Envisaging a Social Prescribing Fund*** in December 2024, as a partner and a signatory, in support of the proposal 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). He also attended the **Round Table on the future of Social Prescribing** in March 2025 to discuss the new opportunities for utilising social prescribing in supporting the Government achieve its core missions.

Through the work of the sector-wide **Wellbeing and Heritage Group**, co-facilitated by us and the Council for British Archaeology (CBA), we have progressed the development of two communities of practice (CoPs) (Research Gaps and Evaluation and Heritage and Social Prescribing); we organised two workshops on working with vulnerable people and on evaluation of wellbeing and heritage work. The CoPs actively participated in the creation of guidance on heritage and social prescribing, the development of the Historic England's Social Impact Framework, and are helping create a policy statement and a collection of evidence and case studies on Wellbeing Archaeology.



Heritage for Wellbeing participants at an archaeological excavation of a neolithic timber henge, Arminghall Henge, Norfolk
© Restoration Trust

Case Study: Heritage for Wellbeing

Winner of first Heritage Social Prescribing Award

The Heritage Link Worker project, known as "Heritage for Wellbeing," showed how heritage can be used in social prescribing by linking people with mental health challenges and social isolation to heritage-based wellbeing activities. Delivered by the Restoration Trust and funded by Historic England, the two-year pilot (2022 to 2024), served over 70 people facing issues like depression, anxiety, loneliness, and limited mobility. [A 2025 film](#) highlights its approach and impact.



Heritage for wellbeing – Heritage Link Worker Group participants enjoying various activities throughout the duration of the project, collage by Robert Faircloth (participant and trustee), © Restoration Trust

The project helped to bridge the gap between heritage and healthcare, enabling GP practices, mental health teams, and social services to refer people to heritage-based activities that promote mental and physical wellbeing. The “Heritage for Wellbeing Groups” in Great Yarmouth, Gorleston, and Lowestoft introduced participants to local history through hands-on experiences, from photography and art to archaeological digs and historical site visits. The results were significant: Participants reported measurable improvements in mental health and a sense of connection. More than 60% of participants showed improved wellbeing scores, 26% reduced their reliance on health services, and 28% decreased medication usage. The project raised awareness of the benefits of heritage engagement within healthcare networks, leading to new referral pathways and stronger relationships.

All learnings from the Heritage for Wellbeing – Heritage Link Worker project were used for the creation of guidance on heritage and social prescribing, published in March 2025. The pilot's achievements have inspired the participant group to continue as a self-sustaining, voluntary-led community group, thanks to additional funding.

In June 2024, the Heritage for Wellbeing project was honoured with the "Best Heritage Social Prescribing Project" award at the International Social Prescribing Conference in London, cementing its place as a trailblazer in using heritage to support community health.

Case Study: Heritage and Social Prescribing Advice Hub

With the Government's focus on re-building the NHS and tackling young people's mental health, and in alignment with their effort to promote neighbourhood health and community care, the role of social prescribing is becoming even more pertinent.

Evidence shows that heritage engagement can be used successfully for both prevention and as a part of a treatment for a variety of conditions, especially those linked to ill mental health, dementia, loneliness and isolation. Projects such as [Heritage Connectors](#) and [Heritage Buddies](#) showed how volunteering can promote heritage social prescriptions, while initiatives like [Project Rejuvenate](#), [Archaeology on Prescription](#), [Kirkham's Heritage Health and Wellbeing Programme](#) and the [Heritage Link Worker](#) demonstrated the potential of wellbeing archaeology and local heritage to support those who struggle most.

Heritage and community sites across the country, such as [Delapré Abbey](#), [Bramley Baths](#), [Gorton Monastery](#) and [GL11](#) offered excellent examples of how heritage can host, support and be integrated in the development of neighbourhood health centres, under the shape of wellbeing community hubs, offering wraparound health and support services for local people.

The results of all this work informed the development of the [Heritage and Social Prescribing Advice Hub](#), launched in March 2025 on NASP's website through the [Prescribe Heritage webinar](#). This is a result of a wide-ranging collaboration and partnership work with the wider heritage sector - through the Heritage and Social Prescribing Community of practice (facilitated by Historic England and the Council for British Archaeology), as well as with a range of other sector colleagues and organisations, including health, such as the Social Prescribing Link Workers Advisory Group, which is co-ordinated by NASP.

The Heritage and Social Prescribing Advice Hub includes two practical guides on Heritage and Social Prescribing [for health practitioners](#) and [for heritage organisations](#), alongside a plethora of further resources, such as categorised case studies, films, evidence, toolkits and more. The Hub will form the basis of further learning on heritage and social prescribing for health and heritage professionals, as well as for the wider VCFSE sector, and will support new innovative research and collaboration in integrating heritage wellbeing in wider policy and practice.

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 collaborations

We continued to work with teams actively developing wellbeing projects and keen to maximise the wellbeing outcomes of their work.

The collaboration with Analytics and Communities teams on the development of the **Social Impact Framework** ensured consultation with the heritage sector’s heritage and wellbeing working group by organising consultations and a collaborative workshop.

We have worked with our North Regional colleagues and Archaeological Investigation team to support the **Yorkshire Wolds** project (which will survey part of the Wolds to better understand its’ character and significance) by undertaking a stakeholder VCSE exercise and local health and wellbeing needs assessment for the project’s community elements.

We regularly collaborated with policy colleagues to support the work of the **Better Places Partnership**, as well as presented with other Arm’s Length Bodies in the webinar marking the programme end in September 2024.

Together with colleagues from the wider Policy Development Team and Public Engagement, we organised a visit to **Stroud and GL11 project / community hub** with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in February 2025. The GL11 Community hub has previously received Historic England funding for an Everyday Heritage grant and is now exploring extending this into a wider wellbeing offer, linking up local heritage with the existing community support.

The **High Streets heritage Action Zones (HSHAZ) programme**, published in March 2025, showed that many wellbeing-related outcomes resulted from the programme, including the cultural consortium element which worked with local partners and communities. Some schemes, such as that in **Kirkham**, had a particular focus on health outcomes. The project’s evaluation reported significant benefits for participants in the health and wellbeing, including improved mental and physical health, greater confidence, new skills, and a stronger connection to Kirkham’s history. Life satisfaction and community wellbeing scores increased,

and some participants reported a decrease in healthcare usage. Stakeholders echoed the positive impact, noting that engaging with heritage had deepened local pride and belonging.

An independent evaluation, using a different methodological approach, of the **Redruth** HSHAZ also suggested a positive relationship between the scheme and good health and wellbeing (valued at almost £1 million per annum) linked to therapeutic benefits from art, heritage and health benefits from participating in learning.

We shared learnings from Historic England's projects and wellbeing pilots with our staff via the regular sessions of the **Internal Wellbeing Forum** - and with local authorities' partners via the **Wellbeing and Heritage webinar** delivered as part of the Historic Environment Management Webinars programme in October 2024.

We also proactively sought the contribution and advice of young professionals into our work, by consulting the Historic England **Youth Panel** on priorities for young people on wellbeing and discussing the wellbeing agenda, and by continuing to offer placements and development opportunity to new talent, via our participation in the Step-Up Placements and the Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships Programme.

New talent and perspectives

Our 'Step-Up Placement', Chloe Tayali, completed her time with us as a Wellbeing and Heritage Officer in December 2024. Chloe contributed significantly to the successful organisation and evaluation of the 2024 Wellbeing and Heritage Conference and its evaluation; she led on the internal survey to assess how wellbeing is embedded in our work and co-authored our impact evaluation on project Rejuvenate. We had been fortunate to extend her contract through grant funding via the Museum of London of Archaeology's AHRC Impact Accelerator Award to enable her to support a joint project with the Museum looking at planning conditions, social value and archaeological conditions within the planning system. Chloe now works at the V&A.

In 2024, we also benefitted from a PhD placement. Emma Bryning, who joined us for 6-months and made a huge difference to our whole programme delivery. Emma helped us by providing an evidence summary on wellbeing, heritage and older people, supported colleagues from regions with stakeholder analysis, led on the management of Wellbeing Archaeology sector-wide workshops and helped with the publication of the Loneliness review - all while finalising her PhD on Modern and Historic graffiti at University of York. Emma left us in March 2025 but has since joined the National Trust as a Visitor Operations and Experience Manager.

Case Study: Social Impact Framework

Historic England has recently published work on how to better understand the [social impact of heritage projects](#). Its' purpose is to support any organisation wanting to demonstrate the impact of a heritage site or activity, and we have brought together:

- Existing research that shows the value of heritage to society
- A set of indicators that can be used to explore the social impact of o project
- Data collection methods for gathering evidence of a project's social impact
- Case studies that illustrate how to use this resource

When understanding the impact of heritage on people's lives, we consider 6 areas where heritage sites and activities make a difference. For each area, we have outlined:

- What we already know from existing research
- What you could find out about the impact of an organisation's work

By recognising the unique role that heritage plays in shaping individual and collective wellbeing, we have identified outcomes as evidence by past work. The areas of work where social impact can be determined are identified as: participation, identity, feelings about place, community, knowledge and skills, health and wellbeing.

The framework has emerged through cross-disciplinary collaboration, bringing together expertise of teams working in community engagement, evaluation, analytics, and wellbeing to create what we hope is a pragmatic and practical approach.

We hope this will help further mainstream the understanding of heritage's wellbeing impact by translating research and policy into accessible, actionable resources for use across the sector. It is designed to build confidence and capability across a wide range of organisations—including volunteer-led groups with limited evaluation expertise—by supporting a consistent, sector-wide approach to evidencing the social impact and public value of heritage.

Our ambition is that this work will strengthen both the *practice* of impact measurement and the *evidence base* for heritage and wellbeing, equipping the sector with the tools, language, and confidence to demonstrate its' relevance and public value more clearly and consistently.

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 this last year we completed two pilots working with older people in Banbury and young people in Kent which show how heritage and archaeology can support people across the life course and be flexibly adapted to suit different needs (see case studies p 12 and 13).

A partnership with The Good Faith Partnership and Churchworks led to the successful initiation of a new 12-month research project “***Heritage Assets in the Mental Health of Communities/ Individuals of Warm Welcome Spaces in Churches***”, supported by our grants, and which looks to evaluate the role of heritage in the wellbeing impact of the Warm Welcome spaces programme.

Sharing learnings

We have focused on dissemination and sharing all pilot projects results and findings through publications, webinars and talks at various events.

Our wellbeing work is included in the **Historic Environment Forum (HEF) Overview** for 2024-2025 with pieces on the heritage and social prescribing guidance and the Banbury project supporting older people with visual impairment. Various articles in the March issue of Context, the magazine issued by the Institute of Historic Building Conservation contributed to a **Wellbeing special edition**, which summarised wellbeing approaches and the life satisfaction research.

Webinars such as [Prescribe Heritage](#) (NASP, March 2025) for social prescribers and [Wellbeing and Heritage, an introduction](#) (Historic Environment Management Webinars - formerly HELM, October 2024) for local authorities, have aimed to focus on heritage-led wellbeing opportunities.

We have showcased our learnings internationally through a paper for the [Singapore National Heritage Board](#) and presentations at the European Archaeological Conference in Rome.

Understanding more with others

We continue our alliance with the devolved nations of the UK and with Ireland through a policy level forum on wellbeing. This year we and the National Monuments Service Ireland jointly commissioned **research to review the state of wellbeing research**. The [review into wellbeing and heritage](#) assessed the change and development of the research and policy landscape since we published our first Assessment in 2018.

We worked with 40 participants from 33 sector organisations to bring together evidence on the **power of archaeological practice for wellbeing**. A research report and policy briefing will be produced in 2025, showing how archaeological practice with communities can provide access to opportunities, physical benefits, skills development, connectedness and confidence, while fostering inclusion, enabling discovery and creating a sense of place, purpose and meaning.



Participants of the Banbury Heritage Project creating a tactile mosaic with local artist Tom Cross. Reproduced courtesy of Age UK Oxfordshire.

Case Study: Banbury Age UK project

Banbury Heritage project was devised by Age UK and funded by Historic England. It looked at how co-creation amongst older people using heritage could help meet their needs and enhance their wellbeing. It began with community mapping and recruitment, resulting in a group of participants of older people, largely with visual impairments and mobility challenges.

Using place and community as a starting point, this project explored formal and informal local heritage, identified by the group as of common interest. Group members researched aspects of historical interest with input from local heritage experts and archives, visited heritage sites, shared experiences and undertook creative practice. Meetings took place at a local Arts Centre, museum and heritage assets. The physical barriers to access experienced by participants demanded a creative and iterative approach as well as a bespoke evaluation.

The group identified stories and images to contribute to final project outputs. Ideas for which were co-created and included an audio-recording of a book on local heritage in Banbury (which had been illustrated by a participant's mother and is now held in local hospices and libraries); the construction of a tactile mosaic which represented Banbury (which has been found a permanent home in a local Arts Centre); a legacy film with contributions from participants and AI digital postcards which represented stories of participants and their memories of Banbury.

These and more is available through a legacy resource archive which will help to form a 'blueprint' for other heritage practitioners to use via the [Creative Later Life website](#). This includes including dedicated webpages, a series of podcasts on co-production, a recorded learning event on a radical approach to evaluation and an evaluation report.

Research by Age UK shows that older people themselves believe 'creative and cultural participation' to be the number one positive influence on their own wellbeing when ranked against other determinants. The results of this project showed how connection was a key to unlocking many doors to wellbeing; that it was a resource for coping with the past, present and future; that it created confidence and enabled valuable shared experiences and moments of discovery.

Case Study: Rejuvenate develops

In 2024 Isle Heritage delivered a second year of the Rejuvenate project, in partnership with the Youth Justice service in Kent and the National Trust. The program was designed to be responsive to the needs of the reparation context for the Youth Justice team and the participants and ensured a flexible approach to allow agency amongst the young participants. It was delivered over 8 weeks in June-July and a further shorter session in October to November. It was generously supported by a Movement for Good Award.

Six young people took part in the summer offer and an additional 6 in the autumn. Attendance was greater than the 2023 season with 12 young people taking part across 15 sessions and included some young people who lived with autism. A common thread of twentieth-century military archaeology united the sessions: six of the main sessions were held at the National Trust-owned range of military remains at the White Cliffs of Dover, complimented by a visit to the Battle of Britain Museum at Hawkinge, the nearby cemetery and Fort Burgoyne as new locations for the cohort.

[Quantitative and qualitative evaluation](#) was undertaken in line with last year's programme. Engagement, reflection and improving soft skills were all developed and a total of 35 AQA certificates to 7 participants were awarded through the AQA Unit Award Scheme.

Taking Rejuvenate further is an important part of our work – the announcement by Isle Heritage that they would be continuing with Rejuvenate as part of their contribution to the local community is to be welcomed; the inclusion of 2 years of Rejuvenate in a second location in Kent within work at Bradbourne Lakes near Sevenoaks, run by the Council and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, is also exciting. We want to work together to increase the evidence base and expand the offer to more young people.

We also received evidence of lasting impact of the Rejuvenate schools programme which was delivered by Wessex Archaeology in 2023: 2 years after the programme 100% of Rejuvenate participants had improved attendance compared to 42% off the control group; attendance gains reached over 14% for some children (averaging 7%), which shows improved resilience and substantive behaviour change – helping young people overcome barriers and create opportunities for their own futures.

Looking ahead

This section looks to our future, including what we have learned and what we hope to achieve in the next phase of the Wellbeing and Heritage Strategy (2025 – 2030).

Learning and products

An increasing number of wellbeing projects are being delivered across the heritage sector. This expansion is welcome, as it provides more evidence of what works for whom and how, making it possible to advocate for the public benefit of heritage and archaeology.

It needs to be acknowledged that most projects rely on project based funding and long-term sustainable offers are still a challenge.

Community work can be the first things to go in phases of fiscal uncertainty, despite their need being even greater during such times.

We are keen to build on existing achievements and learn from new evidence, but we are already confident that heritage supports health and wellbeing – we have seen first-hand how heritage fosters identity and belonging, increases life satisfaction, builds mental resilience and skills, support creativity, movement and reflection. It strengthens connections within communities and links us to our collective stories and inspires pride of place.

As a result, we believe that

Heritage is opportunity – for creativity, connection and personal growth

Heritage is personal – it meets individuals where they are

Heritage is universal – everyone can benefit from engagement with place and the past

Publications

[For more information on maximising wellbeing outcomes of heritage see:](#)

[Wellbeing and heritage: making a difference](#), Linda Monckton and Desi Gradinarova, IHBC Context Magazine, issue 183, March 2025

[The economics of heritage and wellbeing](#), Thomas Colwill and Adala Leeson, IHBC Context Magazine, issue 183, March 2025

[Heritage and Social Prescribing Advice Hub](#) (NASP website) – guidance, evidence, case studies, films, toolkits and further resources

[Heritage Link Worker – Heritage for Wellbeing film](#) (NASP), Feb 2025

[The Banbury Heritage Project – film](#) (Creative Later Life), April 2025

[Project Rejuvenate, Final Report of Kent Implementation Stage 2024](#), Historic England Research Report Series 6/2025 (Isle Heritage), Feb 2025

[Heritage and Loneliness Evidence Review](#), Historic England Research Report Series 84/2024 (Jessie Clark), Oct 2024

[Evidence Enquiry for Wellbeing and Heritage](#), Historic England Research Report Series 51/2025 (University of Gloucestershire), June 2025

[Creative Later Life](#) for wellbeing stories, outputs and learnings from Banbury Heritage

And see these recorded **webinars**:

[Prescribe Heritage](#) (NASP), March 2025

[Wellbeing and Heritage, an introduction](#) (Historic Environment Management Webinars (Formerly HELM)), October 2024

Wellbeing and Heritage Strategy (2025-2030)

The end of the Strategy period has enabled us to reflect on our learnings and look forward to the future. We are now issuing an updated Wellbeing and Heritage Strategy for the next 5 years to focus on the following aims:

1. Amplifying and expanding wellbeing impact for communities through our work
2. Understanding and exploring what works for people and places and how to build data
3. Creating impact through advocacy and facilitating cross-sector partnerships

There is so much potential here but included in our priorities will be:

- Exploring people-centred approaches to working with communities and in place
- Testing and embedding a social impact measurement approach
- Workforce development on the role of heritage in social prescribing
- Creating exemplars through proof-of-concept projects
- Researching connection to and character of place
- Heritage for health at neighbourhood level or for specific conditions or contexts
- Wellbeing Archaeology as a strand of the public benefit of archaeology.

- Supporting the heritage sector to maximise our collective offer
- Building new partnerships to build appreciate of the potential of heritage for wellbeing

We will consider how the historic environment, archaeology and active participation in heritage can work as protective factors for health and wellbeing and as responses to community needs addressing geographical and wellbeing inequalities. We are particularly interested in looking at this within the areas of mental health and loneliness, for young people, and working to address health and wellbeing inequalities and community cohesion.

Thank you

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:

Analytics Team (Historic England), Archaeological Investigation team (Historic England), Age UK, Chloe Tayali, Communities and Inclusion Team (Historic England), Churchworks, Council for British Archaeology (CBA), Creative Ageing Development Agency, Emma Bryning, Good Faith Partnership, Greater London Archaeology Service, Historic England Wellbeing and Heritage Forum, Historic Environment Forum, Institute of Historic Building Conservation, Isle Heritage, Kent County Council, Kent Youth Justice Team, London and the South East office (Historic England), Museum of London Archaeology, National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP); National Heritage Board Singapore; National Heritage Council in Ireland, National Monuments Service Ireland, North England Office (Historic England), Phoenix Rising, Places of Worship Team (Historic England), Supersum, The Benefact Trust (Movement for Good Award), The Heritage and Social Prescribing Community of Practice, The Social Prescribing Link Workers Advisory Group, The Research Gaps and Evaluation Community of Practice, The Restoration Trust, The Wellbeing and Heritage Working Group, University of Gloucestershire, York Archaeology, Wessex Archaeology.

Contact

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