



SOCIETY OF  
ANTIQUARIES  
OF LONDON

Burlington House  
Piccadilly  
London  
W1J 0BE

Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport  
100 Parliament Street  
London  
SW1A 2BQ  
United Kingdom

8 May 2019

Dear Sir or Madam,

### **Tailored Review of Historic England**

Historic England performs a vital function in safeguarding and providing advice to central and local Government about the care and preservation of, and advocacy for, the historic environment in all its forms. This is clearly a function for Central Government itself, or for a body tasked by Government to deliver these functions and properly resourced to do so.

Its staff have individual expertise, which is well deployed in many areas. HE needs to foster this professionalism, since through its deployment it gains credibility, authority, and should define the leadership for the sector which is needed. A grinding round of cuts in Government expenditure in recent years has, however, reduced the influence which HE can exert in this area; it has lost some of its functions (for example the ability to offer substantial repair grants for historic buildings), and has found others significantly reduced. Those reductions in service are continuing. The result is, unsurprisingly, an organisation which is beginning to lose confidence, and to find that its careful advice is less highly regarded by Government, Local Authorities and building owners.

In the circumstances, HE performs well in most areas, and excellently in some. The range of what the organisation does, and the amount of influence and persuasion which its staff manage to bring to bear on the preservation of the historic environment, is very difficult to quantify, as is shown by the problem of producing metrics in the KPIs. But if the careful and preferably independent advice and reasoning which HE can offer to a wide range of users did not exist, the country would be considerably poorer, and less attractive to those who live here and to those who visit.

The questionnaire, which we have filled in in parallel with this response, is a blunt instrument, and allows no explanation of what works well, the format requiring comment only where the answer is negative. We do have particular concerns about the future for HE and the historic environment:



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- The future of the English Heritage Trust post 2023, when support funding is due to cease, is a major concern, and must also be so for HE as the sole current member of the Trust.
- In order to give Government professional advice about the historic environment and continue to champion it, HE cannot be continually starved of funding.
- HE must have the ability to stand up to Government where there is clearly an issue of principle, and not be penalised for their honesty.
- HE needs to be more effective in championing the value of the historic environment as a whole, including non-designated assets.
- The leadership of HE, Commission and staff, must be sufficiently distanced from government and the threat of reduced funding, so as to build greater confidence across the sector.
- The need for HE to provide elements of their advisory services (particularly confidential pre-application advice on, or likely to lead to, statutory applications) for a fee could be seen as inappropriate.

If you require any further information please contact the Society's General Secretary John Lewis at [jlewis@sal.org.uk](mailto:jlewis@sal.org.uk).

Yours faithfully

Paul Drury FSA, President