

Society of Antiquaries

Response to HE's Draft Industrial Heritage Strategy

The Society of Antiquaries welcomes the intent and aspirations in Historic England's draft Industrial Heritage Strategy and is broadly content with the scope of the issues and themes set out.

We do, however, have a number of concerns about whether Historic England (HE) has sufficient capacity, commitment (given competing demands) and financial resources to deliver on such ambitious aspirations across so many issues and themes. Indeed, the draft refers to a knowledge and skills deficit. It is perhaps a reflection of the gap between capacity/resources and the scale and complexity of the industrial heritage that the draft focuses largely on enabling processes - mechanisms, partnership, influence, review and guidance. Although those are, of course, valuable levers, we would, nonetheless, expect any strategy to include -

- some reference to **the financial resources needed**, from whatever sources, to achieve the expected outcomes, even if only a ball-park figure over x years; linked to
- an action plan and programme of work which **essentially include clear prioritisation and timescales for implementation, not least in relation to specific sites.**

These are lacking in the current draft and it not clear whether the promised scoping documents for each issue/theme will provide this sort of information.

The Society acknowledges that the expenditure required to address the needs of many of the most important sites (for example, Bowes Railway and Chatterley Whitfield Colliery) is daunting and that HE does not see itself taking on properties directly. In that context, the Shrewsbury Flaxmill project, an undoubted success, may be difficult to replicate. Even so, identifying a small family of key projects (say, 3 or 4) to be taken forward over several years would both spread the load and serve to embed industrial heritage more firmly as part of the day-to-day life of HE. This could also be an approach which would find favour with the Government as part of the 'levelling up' agenda.

We note that Neil Cossons' report for English Heritage in 2008 – Sustaining England's Industrial Heritage – put forward an evidence-based framework for protection, conservation and public display/access. The report defined sites according to their evidential value, providing a list of sites for each category and a portfolio of sites that were priorities for preservation. Although there is reference in HE's draft strategy to Industrial World Heritage Sites and industrial sites in Heritage Action Zones and on the Heritage At Risk Register, it would be helpful if the draft strategy included a list of sites along the lines of that in the 2008 report, as a basis for an action plan and programme of work.

We also note in passing that only one of the recommendations in the 2008 report – the appointment of an Industrial Heritage Support Officer – appears to have been implemented. The current draft strategy provides a further opportunity to deliver positive outcomes, but only if the aspirations are supported by some ‘real teeth’.

4 June 2021