



Historic England

## Technical Consultation on Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan

### Historic England Consultation Response

Historic England is the Government's statutory adviser on all matters relating to the historic environment in England. We are a non-departmental public body established under the National Heritage Act 1983 and sponsored by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). We champion and protect England's historic places, providing expert advice to local planning authorities, developers, owners and communities to help ensure our historic environment is properly understood, enjoyed and cared for.

We welcome the opportunity to submit a response to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan, which is focused on the questions most closely related to our statutory remit.

#### **Chapter 1: How can we all promote positive mental wellbeing?**

Mental Health is one of the four priority areas of Historic England's [Wellbeing & Heritage strategy](#) which was published on 19 May 2022. We will support better mental health through connection with the historic environment by:

- 1) Promoting positive mental health inside and outside the organisation
- 2) Developing models for historic environment activities and sense of place to address common mental health issues
- 3) Working with others to address severe and complex mental health issues with the historic environment.

We developed our [Wellbeing & Heritage strategy](#) as we believe that heritage has the power to improve people's lives. Heritage gives us pride, a sense of connection, and confidence in the places where we live and work. It brings people and communities together and provides the foundation for a thriving future. Historic England's work already has significant impact and reach, but we know there is more that we can do to address wellbeing inequalities through heritage. We know that people have unequal access to culture and heritage, life satisfaction and mental health as a result of where they live or through varying health needs<sup>1</sup>. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated these inequalities and created new ones. We believe that everyone has an equal right to benefit from heritage, wherever they live and whatever their background. Through this strategy, we aim to make a positive difference to people's wellbeing, including their mental health, by providing more

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<sup>1</sup> Heritage and Society, 2020 - <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/heritage-counts/heritage-and-society/>

opportunities to bring communities together with heritage and the historic environment:

Our Wellbeing and Heritage strategy enables us to help people who are thriving to maintain their health, work with people who need additional support and address barriers to participation for people who are struggling.

### **Question - How can we help people to improve their own wellbeing?**

Through implementing our Wellbeing and Heritage strategy, we are aiming to achieve positive wellbeing outcomes for people through engagement with heritage. We believe that if people have more opportunities to access and participate in heritage activities and sites near them, this will help them to feel better connected with their local community, proud of the places they live in and more satisfied with their own role in those. This will lead to improved feelings of belonging, identity and purpose and decreased feelings of loneliness and isolation – all crucial factors for maintaining good mental health on individual and community level.

### **Question - Do you have any suggestions for how we can improve the population's wellbeing?**

Improving people's lives (including their wellbeing and mental health) is at the core of Historic England strategic directive, as outlined in our [Future Strategy](#). We are working to achieve this by 1) embedding wellbeing in our own work as heritage professionals 2) by adopting approaches, such as social prescribing, through cross-sector collaboration and in support of the health and the voluntary sector.

In the heritage sector, we already know that heritage benefits people's wellbeing. Engaging with or living near heritage leads to higher life satisfaction and quality of life<sup>2</sup>. The historic landscapes, 'blue' spaces (such as canals, rivers) and 'green' spaces (such as historic parks) have definite therapeutic effects and promote shared identity and connection. This helps both the NHS and the economy - visiting heritage sites save the NHS over £193.2 million through reductions in GP and psychotherapy appointments, with a further contribution of £105.1 million from museums<sup>3</sup>, while a heritage site visitor has a 0.23 % lower probability of visiting psychotherapy services<sup>4</sup>. More frequent cultural engagement is linked to better memory and ability to perform cognitive tasks<sup>5</sup>. Heritage and creative activities have a role to play in increasing creativity and stimulating brain health and imagination.

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<sup>2</sup> *Heritage and Society*, 2020, <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2020/heritage-and-society-2020/>

<sup>3</sup> Fujiwara, D., and MacKerron, G., *Cultural Activities, art forms and wellbeing* (Arts Council England, 2015), accessed Aug 2021 [https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Cultural\\_activities\\_artforms\\_and\\_wellbeing.pdf](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Cultural_activities_artforms_and_wellbeing.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Fujiwara, D., Kudrna, L., Cornwall, T., Laffan, K., Dolan, P., *Further analysis to value the health and educational benefits of sport and culture*, DCMS, 2015, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/446274/Health\\_and\\_educational\\_benefits\\_of\\_sport\\_and\\_culture.docx](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/446274/Health_and_educational_benefits_of_sport_and_culture.docx)

<sup>5</sup> Fancourt, D., Steptoe, A. Cultural engagement predicts changes in cognitive function in older adults over a 10 year period: findings from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing. *Sci Rep* 8, 10226 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-018-28591-8>

Local heritage forms an important part of our neighbourhoods - and the appreciation of the heritage contribution to people's wellbeing has significantly increased as a result of the lockdown limitations on movement leading to higher engagement with local assets. Historic places convey a sense of uniqueness and are sources of strength and confirmation of shared community values. These are all important factors for maintaining and improving community cohesion, increasing feelings of belonging and supporting individual and community wellbeing.

The examples for the wellbeing benefits of accessing heritage activities are plenty, ranging from increased social engagement and improved self-esteem in heritage volunteering work, through inspiring positive feelings of connection and shared identity when visiting heritage sites, to improved mental health, resilience and autonomy by participating in therapeutic heritage interventions and strengthening pride of place, ownership and collective empowerment by sharing memories and experiences living in historic places and within a historic environment<sup>6</sup>.

The heritage organisations are already supporting the nation's physical and mental wellbeing through a huge number of projects and schemes. The role of heritage in providing a sense of community cohesion, an opportunity for reflection, and an understanding of place seems quite unique and of significant value to both individuals and communities. The wellbeing benefits of heritage are amplified even further if participants are allowed the autonomy to guide their own learning. This is especially true for individuals who would otherwise be at risk of exclusion from mainstream society<sup>7</sup>.

As [Historic England's 2021 Future Strategy](#) points out, heritage has the potential to improve our lives, by helping us understand our past, our individual and communal identity and help us connect with the places where we live. In 2022, Historic England's [Wellbeing and Heritage strategy](#) openly made the case for the historic environment's role in contributing towards our wellbeing, demonstrating how it can make a positive difference to the wellbeing and potential of people, individually and collectively. It committed the organisation to embed wellbeing outcomes in its work, collaborate with organisations that share the same ambition and support the sector to do the same.

Wellbeing is now one of the four priority areas in Historic England's corporate plan for 2022-2023, demonstrating our commitment to embed wellbeing in our work and put people and their needs first. We are advocating a 'people and heritage-led' approach, which focuses on listening to people's needs and experiences, learning from others and building shared approaches. It encourages embedding wellbeing outcomes in the work of organisations from a variety of sectors; learning from and collaborating with partners, communities and organisations that share the ambition to deliver improved wellbeing outcomes.

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<sup>6</sup> Reilly, S., Nolan, C., Monckton, L., *Wellbeing and the Historic Environment*, 2018 - <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/wellbeing-and-the-historic-environment/wellbeing-and-historic-environment/>

<sup>7</sup> *Heritage, Health & Wellbeing*, The Heritage Alliance, 2020 - [https://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Heritage-Alliance-AnnualReport\\_2020\\_Online.pdf](https://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Heritage-Alliance-AnnualReport_2020_Online.pdf)

We believe that to successfully address population wellbeing, it is crucial to put wellbeing at the heart of strategic approaches, embed it into the work of cultural and heritage organisations and ensure that they report against it as part of their public value evaluation. Individual projects and programmes should focus on areas of wellbeing inequality, where possible, in order to achieve maximum impact.

As increasing volume of research shows, embedding cultural and creative practice in heritage (and in all levels of the education system) will provide a foundation for future resilience and mental health support on population level.

One of the best shared approaches to improve population's wellbeing in a person-centred way is social prescribing. Social prescribing is a way to connect people to practical and emotional support in their communities and beyond. It is based on a personalised approach to the individual's circumstances. For people with complex health and social care needs, it is usually managed through a referral to a Social Prescribing Link Worker, whilst the majority of people can use alternative referral pathways through community, family or volunteer support.

As a strategic partner to the [National Academy for Social Prescribing](#) (NASP), Historic England will continue making the case and gathering robust evidence for the wellbeing benefits of heritage, developing and scaling up the existing provision of social prescribing within the sector and through preparing a set of social prescribing guidance for heritage organisations and link workers. We are also aiming to develop further the recently established heritage and social prescribing community of practice, to support the work of the regional social prescribing cross-sector networks, and help linking the existing heritage social prescribing offer with the NHS regional infrastructure.

**Question - How can we support different sectors within local areas to work together, and with people within their local communities, to improve population wellbeing? This includes a wide range of public services, including education settings, social care, the NHS, voluntary sectors, housing associations and businesses.**

A crucial part of achieving this is the development of new cross-sector partnerships – including with the health sector, local authorities and the voluntary and community sector. They are all invaluable in understanding local need and efficiently supporting groups and individuals locally.

Any projects, initiatives and approaches aiming to address health inequality have to be co-designed and co-produced with the above partners and the potential beneficiaries for these to be relevant, efficient and have the biggest impact.

Social Prescribing is a way to address mental health issues on population level by implementing this cross-sectoral approach and collaboration – both on strategic and on local level.

The main gap is in funding – not for projects and campaigns – but for long-term sustainable provisions that support local Voluntary and Community Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations and the health sector to offer a continuous social prescribing

activity and enhance the resource and support for local social prescribers. One way could be the creation of regional Shared Investments funds, while another could explore the embedding of social prescribing and community support in existing schemes and programmes (including for mental health support)– demonstrating that the latter will be enriched and made more sustainable by including that provision.

We believe that to achieve improved population wellbeing, we need a regional infrastructure that bridges national and strategic issues with hyper local delivery through linking up local players with other resources and opportunities

Working with existing community volunteer schemes, such as First Responders and local community centres and libraries, can help share and build local knowledge of opportunities for mental health support through arts, culture and heritage.

## **Chapter 2 - How can we all prevent the onset of mental ill-health?**

We know that there are many social determinants of our health and they have significant impact on how people feel. No amount of clinical and medical provision can compensate the effects they have on people's health and wellbeing. However, we all can come together to support and develop social prescribing, which has the potential to help prevent the onset of mental health on population level.

### **Question - What is the most important thing we need to address in order to reduce the numbers of people who experience mental ill-health?**

Social Prescribing is an approach in which the health sector is heavily investing at the moment, because it is not only person- and need-centred, but it provides a non-clinical route to support people's wellbeing through support available in the community. This approach has a massive potential to benefit simultaneously the individuals and the health system, but it needs to galvanise efforts across all sectors.

The National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP) call it "*a whole community approach to Social Prescribing*", where a range of community support services are linked to social prescribing via existing and new volunteering routes, sometimes called social prescribing "connectors" and/or "buddies". They utilise the potential of all sectors (including the heritage one) in connecting their wellbeing and mental health support provision in places to the local social prescribing infrastructure and the people in need of support.

Health inequalities are the main reason for people not having access to support and help in many places, and for spiralling out of control when struggling. Social Prescribing is a way to address health inequalities in supporting wide access, need-centred approach and collaborative work with groups and communities with the necessary expertise.

Historic England's vision is that everyone can experience the wellbeing benefits of heritage. This principle aligns closely with our [Inclusion, Diversity and Equality strategy](#), with its emphasis on inclusive practice. By actively working on wellbeing we will deliver greater social inclusion and more diverse ways to interact with heritage.

We will be looking at improving our own delivery, highlight inequities that heritage can challenge, and communicate the value of heritage. We want the outcomes to be about enhanced individual and community wellbeing and levelling up inequalities.

Developing a wide network of support, that includes as many organisations from different sectors as possible, will widen the range of offers we can give people and capture a bigger range of needs, specific characteristics and interests. The access points to needed support could be many and all sectors and type of activities delivering wellbeing and mental health support should be explored.

**Question - Do you have ideas for how employers can support and protect the mental health of their employees?**

Employers can support and protect the mental health of their employees by embedding wellbeing in core objectives and outputs, including in employees' Continuous Professional Development programmes and annual performance reviews. Linking personal and professional wellbeing with wellbeing output of work and ensuring that all KPIs and expected targets / performance indicators are linked to good reported wellbeing and personal / professional satisfaction will promote good mental health and atmosphere of trust and comfort at work.

Historic England is investing in developing a whole-organisational approach to wellbeing, which incorporates the above.

We have been working with MIND, training Mental Health First Aiders and champions, and over 150 managers in Managing Mental Health at work. Mental health and wellbeing have been themes of the last two staff conferences through workshops and keynote speakers.

A Wellbeing conversation is one of the four recommended performance and development conversations in our performance management process and the MIND wellbeing action plan is a tool signposted in the induction and the performance management process. Stress is asked about in the biennial staff survey and an action plan developed when necessary.

We have family friendly policies around parental leave and support, stress and flexible working, offer resources on stress, wellbeing and mental health for self-directed learning and virtual training on resilience, meditation and desk yoga. Sharing lived experiences including some from senior leaders on our intranet has with the other measures and initiatives created a culture where people can talk about mental health to colleagues and managers and the stigma around mental health has been reduced.

Historic England has joined the MIND workplace index scheme and achieved the MIND Gold award for five years now.

## **Chapter 5 - How can we all support people living with mental health conditions to live well?**

### **Question - What do we (as a society) need to do or change in order to improve the lives of people living with mental health conditions?**

Greater access to culture arts and heritage is proven to assist in mental health support and address related issues such as loneliness which often go hand in hand. Equality of access is crucial to ensuring this is available everywhere and it requires infrastructure support for local heritage and culture delivery partners.

Cultural activities through heritage, performance or creativity within education through the curriculum should be given the same support as STEM subjects have received in recent years. Boosting the understanding of the value of these subjects to individuals and their futures and ensuring young people are not just left to add these in through extra-curriculum activities is vital.

The [Heritage Schools initiative](#), run by Historic England, supports local pride of place, belonging and creates new skills; this can provide new ways of people with mental health conditions to operate within education.

Historic England's [Project Rejuvenate](#) will work with those at risk of being excluded from the mainstream education system and those in the youth offending system using archaeology as a therapeutic intervention to increase perspective, see things in new ways and step outside of an existing context. This requires partnerships between voluntary sector, schools, youth justice teams and others to work together towards a common goal.

These two approaches should be embedded within the hearts and culture of education and justice teams to enable creative solutions to problems people face – and the statistics tell us that these problems emerge from individual life context leading to mental health crisis.

### **Question - How can we support sectors to work together to improve the quality of life of people living with mental health conditions?**

Promote cross-sectoral cooperation by encouraging and funding partnerships in developing social prescribing and other community support models for helping people living with mental health issues.

Link existing volunteering schemes which involve physical work – such as our heritage at risk volunteering programmes – into more established social prescribing routes for exercise. Not all exercise is sport and the cultural heritage sector can provide access to work with reasonable physical effort that suits those who do not want to participate in formal sporting opportunities.

## **Chapter 6 - How can we all improve support for people in crisis?**

### **Question - What 'values' or 'principles' should underpin the plan as a whole?**

- Ensure that all approaches and interventions are based on robust evidence

- All projects and programmes are created in co-production with groups with lived experience and experts
- Maximise the potential of interventions by encouraging cross-sectoral effort
- Link up mental health support with Social Prescribing and Personalised care to ensure it is focused on the individual's need and supports local service delivery

Please note: The original submission of this consultation response was carried out via an online form based on the text above.

*Historic England*

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