

Hampshire Commission of Inquiry – Hampshire 2050, Vision for the Future.

Theme 4: Environment and quality of place

Evidence by Steve Trow

Credentials:

I have been a resident of Hampshire since 1991. I am a recently retired member of the Historic England Executive Team and its Director of Research. Between 2000 and 2011, I led policy development for English Heritage on rural affairs, environmental land management and the relationship between heritage, landscape and the natural environment. Between 1987 and 1991, I was Inspector of Ancient Monuments for *inter alia* Hampshire, dealing with the heritage implications of development and land use change. I am now a member of the National Trust's advisory group on the historic environment and also a member of the Advisory Council of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists. The views expressed are my own.

Key background:

1. The historic environment comprises all traces of past human existence, including historic buildings and areas, archaeological sites, parks and gardens and wider historic landscapes and townscapes. It is an important asset for rural and urban communities, attracting investment, promoting regeneration and underpinning social cohesion¹². It is a major contributor to local distinctiveness³, 'sense of place' and the quality of places⁴. It is also fundamental in terms of understanding and telling the human story, locally, nationally and internationally.
2. Heritage promotes active public engagement, with over 5 million members belonging to the National Trust and over 1 million to English Heritage. It is also a key part of the national tourism offer, with heritage tourism generating over £26 bn for the British economy⁵.
3. Despite the different legal and institutional frameworks for managing the historic and natural environments they are a continuum. Indeed, nearly all of England's 'natural' assets are, in fact, semi-natural and all of our landscapes have been formed by the interaction of natural and human influences. Any strategy for the future of the environment and quality of place in Hampshire should seek to integrate both strands. Unlike the national agencies, which tend to operate in silos, local authorities are well placed to promote this integrated approach.
4. Additionally it is important to recognise that the historic environment also has close links to other cultural sectors such as museums, galleries, records offices and libraries and comprises part of the cultural 'offer': something of relevance to the process of placemaking.
5. The historic environment provides the places where many people live and work: with many historic buildings accommodating those functions. Because increasing numbers of historic buildings are - or will become - functionally redundant, the historic environment also has the potential to accommodate additional houses or places to work. This means that heritage has implications for Theme 6: *Rural Hampshire*.

6. The historic environment is widely recognised, in policy and guidance, as making a critical contribution to local distinctiveness and ‘sense of place’ and, therefore, to quality of place and to place-making⁶. It is important to recognise that the statutorily designated (listed) elements of the historic environment (listed buildings, registered parks and gardens, scheduled monuments etc) are only a fraction of the overall historic resource⁷ and are often selected for their ‘specialness’ rather than typicality. While these listed assets do make an important contribution to local sense (and quality) of place, it should be recognised that the far larger undesignated historic resource may make an equal or greater contribution.
7. In recent years, the historic environment sector has developed ways of describing the historic character of landscapes and townscapes at a level above that of individual buildings, sites and areas. Firstly, high level descriptions of the heritage interest have been added by Historic England to each of the 159 National Character Areas profiles for rural England created by Natural England⁸, ensuring their cultural dimension is understood. In addition, national coverage of a far finer-grained map-based analysis of both landscape or townscape units known as ‘historic landscape character areas’⁹, has recently been completed by Historic England. These approaches form a particularly useful basis for strategic planning, for foresight work and for integration of historic and natural environment concerns.
8. Because of the breadth and complexity of the historic environment, a large number of drivers of change are acting on it. For the sake of simplicity, this evidence considers only the four drivers that are identified (A to D) below, although there are numerous other pressures and opportunities that will effect change in the historic environment.

A. The historic environment and climate change: what might happen in the future?

9. Because of the complexity of the historic environment, the implications of climate change are also complex and difficult to predict. However, it is likely that archaeological sites will suffer from the adverse of the impact of climate change on soils, wetlands and the coast; historic parks and gardens will need to adapt as some historically authentic plantings no longer become viable as a result of climatic changes or as new pests and diseases attack them; and historic buildings will be impacted by changes to rainfall, storminess and subsidence, as well as (often misplaced) concerns about their energy efficiency.

The historic environment and climate change: how will that effect/impact on what we do?

10. Without careful adaptation to a changing climate, the quality of many heritage assets may decline over time, resulting in a loss of knowledge, income or social amenity. The National Trust, for example, has already suffered significant impacts on some of its properties from intensifying rainfall, increasing flood risk and accelerating coastal erosion. The rapid spread of tree pests and disease (at least partly as a result of climate change) is beginning to degrade some of the Trust’s historic landscapes. We will increasingly need to adapt historic properties to these changes. IN addition we may need to retrieve the information represented by archaeological sites threatened by climate change, a process that has begun on the south coast for threatened coastal sites through the HLF funded CITIZAN volunteer project¹⁰.

B. The historic environment and technical innovation:

11. Past technological change has often rendered historic buildings functionally redundant (e.g. several hundred thousand traditional farm buildings increasingly redundant since the C19th) and the digital revolution is accelerating the pace of change with many shops, banks, courts, police stations, military buildings etc in the process of losing their primary function. In some cases, where reuse is difficult to accommodate or property and land prices are low, this may pose difficult-to-solve challenges, leading to disuse and eventual dereliction. On the other hand, technological advances can also offer new opportunities: for example, high speed rural broadband could allow many long-redundant farm buildings to be viably converted to housing or business premises in keeping with local character, provided planning policy is flexible enough to promote desirable change.

The historic environment and technical innovation: how will that effect/impact on what we do?

12. Increasingly, planning policy will need to respond to the obsolescence of a range of heritage assets and historic areas as a result of technological change. This may require planning policy to become more proactive and agile, for example by promoting masterplanning of areas subject to rapid change, such as traditional retail high streets and sometimes by revisiting previous policy assumptions, such as the permissible uses of isolated historic farmsteads. Historic assets such as redundant military, prison or judicial estate will offer important opportunities for conversion to housing and new build and local planning authorities should focus on how to achieve new places of quality and distinctiveness, which draw on the original historic character.

C. The historic environment and demographic and lifestyle changes.

13. Session 1 confirmed that the population of Hampshire will continue to rise, with households getting smaller. This will intensify pressure for housing development generally and the need for affordable housing, putting pressure on the historic character of some rural and urban areas. Areas of particular challenge, in terms of the impact on historic character or historic interest, may be historic villages; historic suburbs; and brownfield sites which are important in terms of their industrial heritage.

The historic environment and demographic and lifestyle changes: how will that effect/impact on what we do?

14. In order to accommodate demand for a significant number of new homes, local planning authorities will need to adopt positive placemaking strategies which seek to create distinctive places that promote public health, wellbeing and happiness. The arts culture and heritage have an important role to play in any such strategies¹¹. Whether new housing development is within historic town centres, suburbs or villages or on greenfield sites, a good understanding of the site's existing historic environment will provide the starting point in creating distinctive, rather than identikit, new developments¹².

D. The historic environment, Brexit and deregulation: what might happen in the future?

15. Whilst the immediate implications of Brexit for the historic environment are far from clear, two areas of risk can be suggested. The first concerns the important role of environmental

land management schemes in conserving historic buildings sites and landscapes within the framework established by the Rural Development Programme of the Common Agricultural Policy. These schemes have long been the flagship for an integrated approach to rural land management which embraces both the natural and historic aspects of landscapes. The domestic schemes which will replace this programme are still in development and the priority they will accord to heritage concerns is as yet unclear.

16. Although speculative it is also arguable that the need for the UK to compete outside the EU will drive further and more radical rounds of deregulation in terms of the planning system, and approaches to environmental protection. Currently these offer effective protection to many important heritage assets, but this may be less certain in the future.

The historic environment, Brexit and deregulation: how will that effect/impact on what we do?

17. Any reductions to the scale or breadth of Defra-funded environmental land management schemes, coupled with a more intensive agriculture industry intent on competing on the world market, will inevitably result in degradation of important landscapes, including sensitive landscapes in Hampshire that have benefitted from long term public investment. In effect, the value of this past environmental investment will largely be lost.
18. If the national planning system is subject to further rounds of deregulation, it will be more important than ever to involve local communities in decision-making on planning issues, through mechanisms such as Neighbourhood Planning, and in identifying priorities for environmental land management schemes. At the moment, however, key sources of information on landscape character and the historic environment are not readily available to the public and efforts should be directed towards rectifying this in order to empower communities.

How will the County Council and Partners need to react in the light of these key drivers of change?

19. Taking the above factors into account as well as the important role of Hampshire County Council in managing an extensive farm estate as well as 7,000 buildings on 1,500 sites, many of which are of historic significance, the following actions are recommended:
20. Hampshire County Council working with national environmental agencies including Historic England and Natural England, should adopt an integrated approach which brings together the natural, historic and cultural aspects of landscapes in any future strategies or programmes aimed at protecting or enhancing the environment, and the sense and quality of local places in Hampshire.
21. Historic Environment Records (HERS), including that operated by Hampshire County Council are fundamental to ensuring that the historic environment is protected, managed and enhanced through the strategic planning and development control processes and through other land management initiatives, such as agri-environment schemes. If well-presented and with the facility for crowd-sourcing information, HERS also have the potential to engage and excite communities about their local heritage, and thereby involving them in decision-making about it. This will become increasingly important as approaches to Neighbourhood Planning develop further, possibly against a wider backdrop of increasing deregulation and declining influence for local authorities and national agencies.

22. Hampshire's Historic Environment Record is no longer a state of the art tool and on-line presence is not particularly attractive or accessible to the public. The benchmark within Hampshire in terms of attractiveness, accessibility and active community engagement is the New Forest National Park's 'New Forest Knowledge' website¹³: outside the County it is probably the 'Know Your Place' website of Bristol City Council¹⁴. To ensure the county's citizens have the opportunity to engage fully with their heritage and decision-making on it, Hampshire County Council should endeavour to upgrade the on-line presence of its Historic Environment Record to the benchmark now set by New Forest Knowledge.
23. Hampshire County Council was an early adopter of the Historic Landscape Character (HLC) approach. As a result its characterisation is now rather dated and does not have the functionality of later products: nor is it available online or readily explicable to the public. This tool is a fundamental requirement of bringing together the cultural and natural aspects of landscape and has important potential for engaging communities in discussions of future landscape trajectories. Hampshire County Council, working with the New Forest and South Downs National Parks, should therefore consider upgrading and updating its HLC with the aim of making the outputs available for both professional and community audiences. The County Council should encourage its counterpart local planning authorities in the major conurbations of Portsmouth and Southampton to adopt a similar approach to urban Historic Landscape Characterisation, modelled on exemplars such as Birmingham¹⁵, thereby seeking complete coverage for the historic county.
24. Current planning policy on the countryside often lays significant weight on the "village envelope" despite the fact that the character of large areas of England (including Hampshire) is formed by patterns of dispersed hamlets and farmsteads rather than large nucleated villages. Similarly, small scale housing development on the site of historic farmsteads is generally precluded although those farmsteads would once have housed far larger numbers of people than now. Planning policy based on a more sophisticated understanding of historic settlement pattern and landscape character may, therefore, provide greater capacity for rural house building (including affordable housing) without undue impact on local character, particularly where this involves the adaptive reuse of historic farm buildings. Hampshire County Council should consider whether such an approach could make a useful contribution to its 2050 vision.
25. The impacts of climate change on the historic environment are still uncertain. They are likely to be complex - not least because of the breadth and complexity of the historic environment itself - and they will vary in their scale and pace. Impacts will arise not only from the direct effects of a changing climate, but also indirectly, as a result of society's efforts to mitigate climate change and adapt to it. In the period up to 2050 it is possible that these indirect effects may actually exert more pressure on the historic character of landscapes and townscapes than the direct effects. Hampshire County Council should ensure that, in any strategic response it plans or undertakes in terms of climate change, it takes account of the implications for the historic environment. In addition, as an owner and manager of estate (both land and buildings) of historic importance, the County Council should look for opportunities to develop, in partnership with others, mitigation and adaptation strategies that seek to protect historic character wherever feasible. As the CITiZAN coastal archaeology project based, in part, in Portsmouth, has demonstrated, these

opportunities can also provide excellent opportunities to engage communities through volunteering and citizen science¹⁶.

Steve Trow, 11th October 2018

Endnotes, references and further evidence

- ¹ <https://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/docs/Valuing%20our%20Heritage%2010%20Jan%2007.pdf>
- ² <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2014/value-impact-chapter-pdf/>
- ³ <https://www.commonground.org.uk/local-distinctiveness/>
- ⁴ https://content.historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/sense_of_place_lit_review_web1.pdf
- ⁵ https://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/tha-website/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Promotional_Leaflet2016_FINAL.pdf
- ⁶ https://content.historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/sense_of_place_lit_review_web1.pdf
- ⁷ About 2% of England's building stock is listed and 1% of its archaeology.
- ⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making/national-character-area-profiles>
- ⁹ <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/methods/characterisation-2/>
- ¹⁰ The Coastal and Intertidal Zone Archaeological Network, see: <https://citizan.org.uk/about-us/>
- ¹¹ See the Local Government Association 'People, culture, place: The role of culture in placemaking'. https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/12.3%20-%20culture%20and%20place_v4_1_1.pdf
- ¹² Historic England is currently producing guidance on the role of the historic environment in placemaking, which should be available soon.
- ¹³ <https://nfknowledge.org/>
- ¹⁴ <http://maps.bristol.gov.uk/kyp/?edition=>
- ¹⁵ https://localview.birmingham.gov.uk/Planning/Sites/HLC_Records/
- ¹⁶ The Coastal and Intertidal Zone Archaeological Network, see: <https://citizan.org.uk/about-us/>