

Speech: Michael Ellis' Speech at Heritage Day 2018

Thank you Loyd for your kind introduction.

I am delighted to be here this morning to celebrate and discuss with all of you our shared commitment to our heritage and historic environment.

But before that, I would like to say a few words about Loyd's imminent departure as Chairman of the Heritage Alliance. We have been extremely lucky to have Loyd since 2009. The passion and dedication he has brought to the role were reflected in his well deserved re-election as Chairman for a third time in 2015. That does not happen very often!

On behalf of government, from myself and all of us here: thank you for everything you have done for heritage. My department and I are excited to be working with Peter Ainsworth, incoming Chair of Heritage Alliance, in the future.

Thank you also for hosting us today in this World Heritage site, a stunning reminder of our maritime heritage. The Undercroft here is a beautiful lesson in rejuvenating historic spaces, conserving them whilst ensuring a sustainable future.

Further thanks must go to the Heritage Alliance, for their peerless work in organising this event and for the exceptional work the Heritage Alliance does representing independent organisations throughout England. We are very fortunate to have Loyd, Lizzie and their whole team performing an exemplary service for our heritage and our sector.

2018 has been quite a year to say the least.

It saw the 100th anniversary of the 1918 Representation of the People Act which saw some of the first women gain eligibility to vote. 2018 was also the final year of the centenary First World War commemorations, ending in November with events up and down the country, from the Cenotaph to local village war memorials.

It has been a very busy year for the heritage sector, with a number of changes and announcements affecting heritage. There have been – and continue to be – challenges, of course, but there is much to be positive about as well.

A key challenge, which I know is a concern for the sector, is Brexit. Brexit presents both challenges and opportunities for all sectors and I am aware of the sector's concerns, particularly regarding future funding, international research collaboration and access to skills and expertise.

I want to reassure you all today, that we are taking account of the needs and interests of the heritage sector in the negotiations to leave, and establish

a new relationship with, the European Union.

Last year, we launched the first Heritage Statement, setting out our direction and priorities for heritage in the years ahead. It built on and supported the commitments we made in the 2016 Culture White Paper.

The Heritage Statement was created to link Government's vision for heritage to our wider agendas and strategies. From industry to the environment; from regeneration to conservation; and from investment in placemaking to investment in skills, the statement is one of ambition for, and confidence in Britain. One that will help create a global, outward-looking Britain.

I am thrilled to be here today to update you all on what has been achieved in a single year. All of it through an ever-strengthening partnership between Government and the heritage sector.

A key achievement has been the establishment of the Heritage Council, which I chair, and which is attended at Ministerial level. We had our inaugural meeting in May of this year, and we had our second meeting last month.

The aim of the Council is to enable collaboration and the exchange of ideas, it especially brings together DCMS with key Government departments impacting on the sector including the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and the Treasury.

In my experience it has been an extremely useful forum for energetic discussion of those issues most pressing to us all.

This year has also seen great strides for the role of heritage in place making. I am sure you were all as delighted as I was with the commitment of 55 million pounds in funding for heritage through the Future High Streets Fund that was announced by the Chancellor in the Autumn Budget.

The fund will allow for the restoration of historic high streets, which will be delivered through the expertise of the Architectural Heritage Fund and Historic England with other sector partners. We in Government, and I know you in the heritage sector, see this as a major success, of which I am very proud.

The intertwining of culture, creativity and heritage has been given a great boost since the launch of the Cultural Development Fund this June. Central to England's culture is our heritage – it provides both an anchor and bedrock from which to build.

I am pleased to say that the 20 million pounds available as part of the Fund is fully integrated into the aims of the Heritage Statement, with two key heritage actors – Historic England and the Heritage Lottery Fund – being members of the advisory panel.

Last year, we also announced exciting plans for Historic England to develop a new scheme to enable communities to identify, permanently mark, and celebrate the spots where history has been made, and the people, places and events that are important to them. I am pleased to be able to announce the next stage of

these plans.

The scheme will engage the public in the significance of the historic places on our doorstep and the important things that happened there. It will provide a nationally-representative, alternative way of marking more tangible and previously-unrecognised histories across England; encouraging communities to celebrate and map the places that contribute to our national story in a genuinely diverse and inspiring way.

Such enthusiasm for marking and celebrating local histories should be harnessed to prove a positive addition to plaque schemes across the country that most often celebrate the lives or achievements of individual people in history as opposed to the events and places.

Looking forward, Historic England will look to run a live trial phase next year with a competition launched to source a final design for the marker that will be used at each location.

I am sure, like me, you will be encouraged that this scheme will celebrate national history of local importance in collaboration with communities across the country.

From the local context to the national, supported by our historic environment, Britain's cultural output is the most influential in the world, as part of our world leading soft power. I am very happy – but not surprised – to see Britain topping the world soft power rankings once again.

Here, I must give credit to a Heritage Alliance member, the World Monuments Fund. You have successfully brought the world to Britain's heritage, through admirable schemes such as the Fund for Syrian refugees.

At the same time, the UK continues to be recognised for its exceptional World Heritage: this year we nominated the Jodrell Bank Observatory for World Heritage Status, and it will be considered by the committee next summer, potentially becoming our 32nd World Heritage site.

The UK ratified the Hague Convention and acceded to its Protocols in 2017. We take our international humanitarian law commitments seriously and part and parcel of those commitments is to preserve and protect the most vulnerable cultural heritage across the world.

I am pleased to say that thanks to initiatives like the DCMS sponsored 30 million pound Cultural Protection Fund, we are now one of the world's leading lights in cultural protection. Whether it is preserving Yazidi Heritage in Iraq or helping rebuild Coptic heritage in Egypt, the Fund has already contributed vastly to the UK's standing in this field and by extension its soft power in some of the most challenging conflict-affected parts of the Middle East.

There is no doubt that our heritage is international. I must also mention here the Heritage Alliance and British Council's new travel grant scheme, which will offer travel grants to support UK heritage professionals to develop mutually beneficial international projects and partnerships for their

organisations. Applications will be open from today.

I also want to pay tribute to local planning authorities, and volunteers in the heritage sector, who play a central role in conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

Their specialist advisers have valuable expert knowledge of their local areas and are best-placed to know how to maximise the benefits of heritage in their local area and respond to the needs of local communities.

And as we know, and as outlined in the Government's Culture White Paper of March 2016, Historic England is leading the development of new heritage apprenticeship standards, their promotion and uptake across the sector.

Over the past 18 months, Historic England has convened three Trailblazer working groups to develop new apprenticeship standards in archaeology, conservation and historic environment advice.

Through this scheme, Historic England are ensuring that new routes are available into the sector for the next generation, and I commend this hard work.

The Heritage Statement was comprehensive, and many more advancements have been made to better protect and nourish the sector.

Recently, my department published revised principles of selection for listed buildings, to ensure they are fully conserved and appreciated.

Young people – the future – are being increasingly encouraged to enjoy the nation's rich heritage offer, with more than 700 heritage organisations having signed up to our #iwill campaign, to encourage young people to get involved with heritage projects.

I could go on. But truthfully 2018 has been, and continues to be, a great year for heritage. That is, in no small part, down to the work of everyone here. We have put heritage into the mainstream where redevelopment is concerned.

We have reduced the number of at risk heritage sites, and better protected others. We have secured diverse and significant new investment for heritage projects, whether they be local or national.

I believe we can all continue delivering for a sector we cherish, and I hope that you will be heartened by the snapshot of all the progress we have heard today. There are, of course, always challenges ahead; but, as ever, the passion and dedication of every one of you gives me great confidence that our challenges will be overcome.

Protecting and championing our historic environment and heritage is a noble calling – and you all play a vital role. Thank you for all your work, for having me here, and for ensuring our heritage is secured.