The moling of the underground network of pipes and cables with a directional drill. This method only disturbed a one metre square of historic lawn, which is carefully re-instated by contractors and Athelhampton's gardeners. Photo courtesy of Athelhampton House

Building a sustainable future for Britain's heritage

We continue to face a climate emergency, and everyone must play their part in the race to achieve net zero carbon emissions. Britain's historic houses were built to last — and it is for this reason that they hold the keys to a sustainable future for our historic environment. For the 1,500 independent historic houses, castles, and gardens we represent, adaptation and resilience have been in their DNA for centuries. Now, their custodians are taking the lead in reducing their carbon footprint through investing in repair and reuse, generating renewable energy and enriching the natural environment around them. With the right support from government, they could do so much more to ensure that Britain's heritage will flourish for centuries to come.

Historic buildings hold significant, and often untapped, potential to provide comfortable homes, business spaces, and dynamic community hubs. Imaginative and adaptive reuse of our built heritage would boost rural supply chains, support local jobs, and provide a sustainable and desirable alternative to carbon intensive new build. The greenest building is the one already built; on average, constructing a new-build home uses the equivalent of 80 tonnes of CO2 — ten times as much as refurbishment. Planning reforms, regulatory improvements and funding opportunities will pave the way for our irreplaceable heritage to be part of the solution, as the UK tackles the climate emergency and strives for net zero.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Encourage repair and reuse**
2. **Promote energy efficiency in planning policy**
3. **Help listed buildings invest in green energy**
4. **Ensure rural communities are not left behind**
5. **Support environmental recovery**

HISTORIC HOUSES

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Alscot's Biodiversity Project achieved success in both sales of biodiversity units and land management with tangible results — there are already signs that richer and more varied species are afoot. Alscot also actively works with local primary schools to promote interest and understanding of biodiversity.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Repair and reuse

Incentivise repair and reuse by **reducing VAT on works to listed buildings**. Adapting existing buildings is less carbon intensive than demolition and rebuild, and will boost conservation skills, supply chains, economic prosperity and a sense of place in rural communities. Parity on VAT to match new build is essential; 0% equalisation would have the greatest impact.

2. Planning for the future

All homes should be able to play their part in reaching net zero, but as things stand, the 20% of UK housing stock that is over a century old is held back all too often by the planning system. Without reform, the red tape surrounding listed and traditional buildings stands in the way of making sustainable yet sensitive adaptations to listed and historic buildings.

98% of our members are keen to pursue net zero goals, but planning is the biggest barrier in preventing them from doing so. Governments across the UK must **establish national policies on energy efficiency and carbon reduction in historic buildings**, cutting red tape to allow sensitive adaptions so that our heritage can have a sustainable future.

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1,500

independently owned historic houses and gardens.

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"Imaginative and adaptive reuse of our built heritage would boost rural supply chains, support local jobs, and provide a sustainable and desirable alternative to carbon intensive new build."

SUSTAINABILITY EMPLOYMENT

Below: The wood chip biomass boiler at Browsholme Hall

Right: Pickers were hard at work harvesting more than three tonnes of grapes from the Longleat Estate's vineyard located in the walled kitchen garden. Photo courtesy of Longleat Estate

Bottom right: The wilderness at Blair Castle. Photo courtesy of Blair Castle

3. Green energy

Many of our members are making strides towards net zero and are keen to install renewable energy sources, but restrictive planning rules and the need for Listed Building Consent, combined with huge upfront costs, mean that they are struggling to do so. Governments must recognise that in order to achieve the net zero goals they have laid out, it needs to be easier for historic houses and listed buildings to switch to renewable energy, and reviews into energy efficiency and listed building consent need to have positive outcomes.

As it stands, energy efficiency assessments also promote cheap energy over green energy, penalise rural buildings, and can propose harmful measures for historic buildings. EPCs do not take into account the sensitive nature of historic buildings: they must be reformed to **allow consideration of the specific needs of historic buildings**, **taking a whole-house approach**, **investing in conservation skills**, and **supporting the rollout of heat pumps to off-grid homes**. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) should also be revised, so that the heritage section at least acknowledges the reality of how climate change is affecting historic buildings.

HISTORIC HOUSES

4. Rural connectivity

Rural communities and businesses risk being left behind without modern, sustainable transport options: 35% of our members have properties which are not accessible by public transport. **The introduction of a subsidy scheme for Electric Vehicle charging at rural SMEs** would boost sustainable visits to rural destinations. Equally, **investment in new electric bus routes** would address the issue of the 'final mile' (bridging the gap between local transport hubs and rural attractions), cut down on pollution in rural areas and help stop vital rural roads being clogged with traffic.

5. Environmental recovery

Our historic environment is inseparable from the natural world, and historic estates have a significant role to play in landscape recovery. Rural historic environments provide important habitats for native species, and careful land management is essential to the maintenance of Britain's moors, forests, and heaths. As the Common Agricultural Policy is phased out, new Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) and other environmental schemes must **engage landowners as well as farmers**, **ensure conditionally exempt land is not excluded**, and **embed heritage options at every level**.

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