

Heritage 2020

Foresight Workshop Summary 2019: Collaborative Working in the Historic Environment Sector

The annual Heritage 2020 foresight workshop took place on Wednesday 27 March 2019 at the National Trust in London. It explored collaborative working in the historic environment sector as a first step towards thinking about how the sector will work together to deliver clear tangible outputs and outcomes once the Heritage 2020 programme finishes in September 2020. Twenty-eight representatives of groups that facilitate sector collaboration attended.

The day was structured into a series of three sessions, each discussing a different aspect of collaborative working.

The first session discussed **'Where does collaboration add value in the historic environment sector?'**. Participants collected their ideas individually and then reported back to the group. The main points they identified were:

- 1) Efficient use of resources; intellect, money and time.
- 2) Being truly mixed/multidisciplinary leads to a wide range of skills, values and sectors around the table.
- 3) Enables research, stretches thinking and encourages disruption of the norm.
- 4) Generates an understanding of outside perspectives and their impact on work by the sector.
- 5) Coordination to show strength in numbers. Present a united front with respect to advocacy and to unlock funding.
- 6) Simplicity and coherence - shared language, clarity of communication and technology.
- 7) Up-skilling staff (professional development) through learning from others.
- 8) Reflecting Britain's multicultural heritage in the way we work, reaching out to multicultural communities to add more value.
- 9) Increasing visibility of what others are doing.
- 10) Better identification of issues and campaigns.
- 11) Education and training - helping the higher education sector to understand future needs of the sector.

The second session of the day saw participants divided into four groups to discuss the following question, **'Where are current sector models of collaboration not working as effectively as they could?'**

Concerns could be broadly grouped under four headings, which are summarised below.

1) Funding, Time and Resources (most common issue)

It was acknowledged that funding is a big barrier to collaboration for smaller partners. They are denied a voice as only larger organisations have the capacity to take part. This can result in a dependency on the larger organisations such as Historic England. Other issues are that people often do not have time to carry forward actions between meetings and that competition between organisations for resources and profile can lead to tension.

2) Organisation and Leadership of Groups

The group discussed issues of 'who sets the agenda'; who's inside/outside the circle; meetings being too London centric; unclear lines of authority and accountability; clash of priorities; loudest voices dominating; a tendency to put one's own organisation first; and the perception that agendas in the heritage sector are fixed by a small number of organisations working together.

3) Focus, Planning and Outputs

It was noted that there is often too much focus on the detail rather than the bigger picture and that the sector needs to get out of its comfort zone. People questioned whether the sector is prioritising well enough. It was suggested that there needs to be more scenario planning for 2030/2040/2050 and there needs to be a greater focus on planning for long-term issues.

4) Knowledge Exchange and Research

It was acknowledged by the group that there is lots of knowledge-exchange but that use of cumulative knowledge is poor. It was suggested that some in the sector do not share knowledge as they consider knowledge to be power rather than a means to strengthen the entire sector. It was noted, however, that lots of knowledge exchange is happening at ground level, even if it's not obvious at a higher level.

Following a case study by Euan Leitch or the Built Environment Forum for Scotland on how an effective collaborative model of working has been planned, developed and sustained for Scotland's heritage sector, the final workshop session explored '**what would a successful future model of collaborative sector working include?**'. Participants were again divided into four groups and were asked to envision what collaboration could look like in the future for their given theme.

Group 1 - Joint advocacy mechanisms

- They decided there would be fewer groups to allow clear ownership of issues. Issues would be agreed, arguments underpinned by evidence and stakeholders identified. The approach would be transparent/open and would account for different organisations having different drivers.

Group 2 - Advocacy/policy coordination

- The future would bring together HEF and Heritage 2020, provide a mechanism to bring together heritage and non-heritage sectors, focus on big issues and work on specific tasks. A 'Heritage Observatory', fed into by all organisations, will support the work.

Group 3 - Coordination/advisory/collaborative action

- The group focussed on how the sector would coordinate to input information to Heritage Counts. The future would be resourced sufficiently, there would be sufficient HEF agenda time, and partners would have time to contribute to Heritage Counts. This would lead to emotional ownership and greater use of the product.

Group 4 - Strategic direction/decision

- HEF would define the strategic issues (which do not all need to include everyone). There would be clear terms of reference for participation in HEF and accountability with membership. A five-year vision would help people to gauge how they could contribute. It would focus on project-based tasks and complete them. The group also discussed the Heritage Council and its relationship with HEF/ HEF successor, as the creation of the Heritage Council is a game-changer for engagement with Government.

Conclusions from the day

The workshop demonstrated that collaboration is value and effective in the historic environment sector. Many highly experienced members of the sector are passionate about continuing collaborative working but want to see a new model to support that collaboration.

The workshop provided further evidence to support the Heritage 2020 Helping Things to Happen (HTTH) group's proposal that there is a need for clarity, prioritisation, accountability and tangible action when developing the new model.

Participants agreed that the criteria for effective working that had been identified during the workshop requires some further developmental work to define in greater detail what each element of the overall collaborative structure would do. The Heritage 2020 Helping Things to Happen (HTTH) group has been tasked with leading the development of a new operational model for HEF.

Caroline Peach, Heritage 2020

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