



## 1. Protect heritage from unintended consequences

The survival of our unique national heritage relies on a supportive fiscal and regulatory framework. Changes to regulations in areas such as energy efficiency and short-term lets have the potential to have a devastating impact on fragile historic house businesses, and can make the difference between a viable visitor attraction and an insolvent business forced to close its doors. The Welsh Government must genuinely commit to considering the potential economic impact of changes to the regulatory framework of fragile heritage.

## 2. Unleash the potential of the rural economy

The rural economy has so much more to give, but as things stand, it is often sidelined and has suffered from a chronic lack of investment in recent years. Whilst historic house businesses bring many benefits to their local rural economies, greater commitment from Welsh Government Ministers to work together with the UK Government is needed to tackle rural infrastructure challenges. We must ensure that Wales continues to be an attractive place to live and work for a diverse demographic so that we can fulfil its potential as an economic powerhouse in the modern world.

Main image: © Hawarden Estate, Jack Finnigan

# Heritage brings prosperity

**H**istoric Houses Cymru represents over 100 independently owned historic houses and gardens across the country, including some of Wales's most iconic and historic places. In 2023, Historic Houses in Wales welcomed nearly 200,000 visitors and generated a visitor spend of £861,000 for the Welsh economy. Many of these historic places are vitally important tourist attractions, small businesses and local employers in what are often fragile economies in rural parts of Wales.

Wales's historic house businesses have faced — and continue to — face significant challenges following the aftermath of the pandemic, the more recent cost of living crisis and the increasing costs of repairs and maintenance. The introduction of new legislation is now creating additional challenges for historic houses where heritage tourism is the sole source of income. Without supportive regulation and legislation, the custodians of our heritage are looking at an extremely difficult future.

We are keen to see targeted policies that not only provide our heritage attractions and regional economies with the short-term boost they need to put them on a more secure and resilient footing for the future, but which also encourage tourists to travel the length and breadth of Wales. Where heritage is accessible to everyone, we know it supports health and wellbeing and is a key driver for regional economic growth. It is important that the UK and Welsh Governments recognise the community value of our irreplaceable historic houses and gardens and give assurances and policies to ensure that they can continue to play a significant role for future generations.

### OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Protect heritage from unintended consequences
2. Unleash the potential of the rural economy
3. Support renewable and sustainable energy use
4. Make Wales a competitive and sustainable tourism destination
5. Stimulate investment in repair projects





Music at the castle © Hay Castle

### 3. Support renewable and sustainable energy use

Enabling the heritage sector to play its part in addressing the climate emergency will take more than expert advice. Financial, regulatory and practical support will be needed to help owners implement sensitive energy efficiency measures in a way that protects Wales's unique stock of valued traditional buildings. As the Heat Strategy for Wales recognised, we need a planning system in Wales that is fit for purpose when it comes to our pursuit of net zero. We need greater investment in renewable energy sources in off-grid rural communities, decreasing their carbon footprint, lowering renewable fuel costs, increasing self-sufficiency, and integrating the heritage sector with green energy projects in their communities to ensure a bright and sustainable future ahead for historic and traditional buildings.



Photo courtesy of Cwrych Castle

### 4. Make Wales a competitive and sustainable tourism destination

Creating a sustainable, vibrant tourism market is vital to both our member houses and rural communities. We support the Welsh Government in making heritage tourism a priority. However, the Welsh Government also needs to ensure that there is appropriate tourist infrastructure throughout Wales — not solely in tourist hotspots — including encouraging short term lets where they do not impact local housing need, so that rural communities and local economies are bolstered through tourism and can tackle under-tourism too.

### 5. Stimulate investment in repair projects

The Welsh government must petition the next incoming UK Government to introduce a VAT relief scheme on structural repairs and maintenance to heritage attractions open to the public. This would enable heritage attractions to tackle their repairs backlog, invest in their businesses, generate supply chain work and economic vitality for Wales's rural communities whilst keeping our heritage alive for centuries to come.



Summer Camp festival © Hawarden Estate, Department Two

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