

General Election 2017 statement: Safeguarding archaeology: Our message to the new Government

As the results of last night's general election are digested and a new Government is formed, we have an opportunity to reflect upon and encourage a broad new agenda for cultural heritage, environment and archaeology.

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) and the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) are two leading bodies representing the archaeological sector in the UK. CIfA is the leading professional body representing archaeologists working in the UK and overseas. CBA is the national charity which champions the public and voluntary interest in archaeology.

Our vision is for an environment which is managed effectively, and which delivers the greatest level of protections for our archaeological heritage, maximising the benefits they bring to our communities.

Our archaeology tells the story of the human impact on the environment over millennia. Archaeology is everywhere where there is wildlife, scenic beauty, and nature, as well as in our cities, towns and villages, forming a part of the rich tapestry that is our environment. We want to protect this cultural resource and ensure that all people have access to archaeology for their own personal enjoyment, for knowledge and understanding about the past, and for the benefits of a strong sense of mutual cultural understanding, rootedness, wellbeing, and identity. Just as young people have become more engaged with the political process, we aim to encourage youth engagement with and stewardship of our heritage.

Our message to the new Government is this: Promote the integrated management of our cultural and natural landscapes, uphold the principles of sustainable development in the planning system, and ensure that our archaeology and wider environment will be better protected after Brexit than they are now, and that they can thrive for the benefit of us all.

4 steps for a healthy, productive, and protected environment:

- 1. Prevent the erosion of archaeological safeguards in the planning process**
- 2. Seek an EU exit deal that works for archaeology and the wider environment**
- 3. Develop a world-leading approach to integrated environmental protection after Brexit**
- 4. Champion a stable and productive archaeological sector**

1. Prevent the erosion of archaeological safeguards in the planning process

The previous Government's planning agendas sought to improve housebuilding and development productivity by focussing heavily on deregulation, stripping away or weakening processes which provide safeguards for the environment. This Government regularly stated that it was committed to ensuring effective protection for the historic environment, but its actions fell short, with new provisions of the Housing and Planning Act and Neighbourhood Planning Act creating new holes in the system of safeguards. This is a regressive approach which must be rectified.

At a local level, a crisis in financing local planning departments has led to the erosion of non-statutory historic environment services and the loss of expertise. This challenge must be met head-on with programmes to help local authorities adapt to new delivery models, where necessary. The introduction of a statutory protection for Historic Environment Records would be an effective way to signal the importance of the local historic environment which must be protected in any further planning reforms.

2. Seek a deal from EU exit negotiations that works for archaeology and the environment

Government must ensure that all relevant EU law, including Environmental Impact Assessments, is converted into domestic law through the Great Repeal Bill. Any material changes to those laws should be subject to proper democratic consideration by both the Westminster and devolved parliaments in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. A positive exit deal may include access to EU research networks and schemes such as Erasmus, Erasmus+, and Marie Curie, or funding programmes such as Horizon 2020 and Leader. Any decrease in access to EU funding should be replaced domestically. A reciprocal arrangement with the EU to enable skilled and accredited archaeological professionals to work in the UK should be a feature of any new visa regime.

3. Commit to making the UK a world leader in integrated environmental protection after Brexit

Government must uphold its promise to maintain CAP Pillar Two funding in the immediate period after the UK leaves the EU, and see the programme is replaced in due course with a system which seeks to increase the benefits of an integrated approach to environmental land management delivered under the existing model. The Government should also commit to examining how leaving the EU could permit new systems for protection of an integrated heritage, from the historic to the ecological, which both enhances safeguards and streamline management processes.

4. Champion a stable and productive archaeological sector

Government should assist the archaeological sector in its goals by supporting sector initiatives designed to meet archaeological skills needs domestically and enable the profession to supplement the archaeologists they will be training with accredited professional experts from overseas, as well as enable UK organisations to export accredited archaeological expertise.