



**Local Heritage  
Engagement  
Network**

# **Toolkit**

**No. 1**

**Advocacy:  
How to speak  
up for your  
local historic  
environment?**

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## Contents

**This document will:**

- **Tell you how you can speak up for your local heritage and archaeology, and where and when you might need to**
- **Give you some basic rules and tips for public engagement**
- **Provide ideas of things to do and people to get in touch with**
- **Provide information on ways to get involved.**



## Why should I advocate for heritage and archaeology?

We believe that *archaeology matters*, and that local heritage groups and individuals need to be equipped to understand the potential impacts of political decisions on archaeological services. We want people and communities to get involved in influencing those decisions. Standing up for the heritage services in your areas which make a difference to people is vital if they are to be protected during local authority budget discussions and strategic planning. If this local heritage advocacy is done at the right time and in the right ways, together we can make sure that politicians recognise the strength of feeling of the communities and stakeholders they have been elected to represent.

Archaeology and heritage are especially affected by planning regulations. These include targets for house building, built environment design and use policies, urban and rural development, renewable energy, roads and infrastructure, and regeneration. Heritage can also be a consideration in the development and use of social policies which aim to enhance local amenity, foster social inclusion, celebrate local identities, cultural traditions or diversity, and contribute to sustainable communities. Importantly, heritage is also an important economic resource, and should be part of the considerations in local, regional and national policies on maximising economic growth. Balancing these three elements in the relationships between politicians in local authorities and local communities is the key to good advocacy.

For these reasons, standing up for archaeology and heritage is vital to ensure that decision-makers realise the value of heritage to people. In a period of economic austerity, decision-makers are faced with tough choices about where to spend their limited financial resources. We have to advocate strongly for the things which are most important about the historic environment, so that these issues are not seen as soft targets for budgetary savings.

Heritage and archaeology issues are never going to be considered as important as health, welfare, or education, but heritage does bring genuine social, environmental, and economic benefits to the places where it is supported, and there are proven physical and emotional benefits to people who experience the historic environment in their everyday lives. For local authorities, a modest investment in heritage can help to create these benefits.

We must ask for an investment in heritage and archaeology which is proportionate to the benefits it produces and to the strength of personal feeling that people hold. We must not allow archaeology and heritage to be seen as soft target. Instead we must make sure that if budget cuts are made, the impacts on the historic environment will be proportionate to the importance they hold to local people and businesses.



## Where and when might you need to stand up for heritage issues?

In recent years, there has been a decline in investment in heritage services by local governments. This has led to the loss of some of the services which protect it, such as county archaeologists, historic environment records officers and conservation officers, as well as records office, archive and museum closures or reduced funding and investment.

These all contribute to the erosion of ability for members of the public and professionals to access information and resources and engage directly with local archaeology and heritage. These specialist posts are part of a system which screens development proposals for their impact on archaeology, maintains a county or authority Historic Environment Record, which is a database of all known information about archaeology in a particular area, and local museums, historic sites, parks and gardens. Cuts are also affecting other things, such as the ways in which councils engage with the public. Many councils have cut back on community planning mechanisms, or engagement with schools and local groups, which restricts opportunities for community archaeology.

This document outlines ways in which you and your group can approach advocating for your local historic environment where the type of threats outlined above exist already or are anticipated. These tips are general, but they could apply to a range of situations. We feel they are likely to be of use when you are:

- 1) Acting to protect local heritage/archaeology services from budget cuts;
- 2) Campaigning for high quality historic environment policies in local plans and strategies;
- 3) Protecting individual sites and places during the development process.

There are many ways in which individual citizens and local groups can help protect their local heritage and champion its value. Some of the methods outlined below are **reactive** – they tell you how you can respond, object, campaign, or otherwise make your views known about a threat to an archaeological site, or place. Other ways are **proactive** – they explain how your group can get ‘upstream’ of the problem, contribute to building better relationships with local authorities, and work together to create better outcomes for all stakeholders.



## General points of advocacy and campaigning

Advocacy is the process by which people support or recommend a particular cause or policy. The approach you take will depend on how much time you want to give, what issues you want to be involved with, and whether you want to be reactive to situations which you think are important to comment on, or proactive by seeking to change or influence policies and discussions on an ongoing basis.

- *Organise: **Write an advocacy strategy***

An advocacy strategy is a useful tool for your group. It will help to manage how you engage with political issues on heritage. This strategy document could specify the individuals responsible, the types of issues which the group are concerned about, and procedural guides for what to do and who to contact.

- *Organise: **Staying informed***

Your local council's website will have important information relating to local policies, including news of consultations, local plan revisions, and planning applications. It will also contain details of local government officers, such as the County Archaeologist, Conservation, and Historic Environment Record Officers (depending on what staff are employed). You can also contact your council to find out whether you have a [Heritage Champion](#), who is (usually) a local Councillor with special responsibility for or interest in heritage issues.

News items will inform you of local consultation, plans to cut services, etc. Your wider networks may also be able to feed you news or rumours. Your CBA regional group or local Heritage Society may also monitor local developments and being part of these networks can be very beneficial.

Independent bodies such as the CBA, IHBC (Institute for Historic Buildings Conservation), Heritage Alliance, RESCUE: The British Archaeological Trust and Civic Voice are also useful places to find out about national news.

- *Gaining influence: **Democratic power***

Individuals are the basic unit of democratic power. MPs and local councillors are highly attuned to the concerns of their constituents and local ward members. Whilst decision makers are influenced by a number of things, including party politics, personal opinions, and economic restrictions, any demonstration of democratic voice is likely to have an influence.

This is because they are democratically accountable to their constituents, and if they think that votes are at risk then it is in their interests – both as representatives of the public will, and individuals concerned for their own jobs – to represent those views.

- *Gaining influence: **Local knowledge, local passion***

Much policy which relates to the historic environment is written at a national level and can describe the general principles and reasons why heritage and archaeology are important or valued by people. However, the heritage of a county, town, village, or neighbourhood is best understood by those who live there. Local knowledge of a site and its importance for local ways of life are a vital part of why that site is worthy of protection, and these cannot be easily represented by national bodies like the CBA. Whether considering views from a local hillfort, ancient woodland popular with walkers, or the memories and legacy of industry, it is the community value which, on many levels, really counts.

- *Making an impact: **Represent your members***

If your group represents a membership, it is useful to mention this in any correspondence or press releases you send. Who makes up your membership? Are you professional archaeologists, interested members of the public, or both? It may be useful to consider raising the profile of advocacy work in your group by stating it as a benefit of membership.

Ensuring that your membership is engaged in your advocacy is important, but it is often difficult to consult directly with all members before taking part in advocacy work, when time is tight and fast responses are required. It's vital to strike a balance by having an appropriate way to define how your group responds to urgent issues and a feedback mechanism to communicate news and updates to members.



It may be useful to define some principles for the group and discuss with your wider membership how you plan to uphold them through advocacy. Update the members of your group in your newsletters or emails, as this helps to keep people involved and can help measure membership responses.

- *Making an impact: **Canvass public opinion***

When questioned, the vast majority of people are concerned about local heritage issues. If you can, go out and survey or interview people in your community, and collect some soundbites or quotes, this can add weight to an argument. You do not need to become professional pollsters, but any data you can collect will be useful.

Online petitions are a popular way to get backing for advocacy campaigns. You can create these online at sites such as [38degree.org](http://38degree.org) or [change.org](http://change.org), or do it the old fashioned way, with a clipboard and pen! Share your petitions on social media, amongst members, or at events in person. These 'in-person' interactions on your high street or outside a local supermarket are great opportunities to talk to people about your group's concerns, and increase your membership numbers as well.

- *Making an impact: **Interest the media***

Beyond democratic power, media power has considerable influence over decision-makers and can help to magnify your group's campaigns and concerns. Create a precis of the principles and consequences of your campaign, issue, or proposal and get in touch with your local newspaper, local radio station, or – if you feel your issue is of broader national relevance – a national newspaper with details.

*[For more information see toolkit 2: Working with the Media](#)*

- *Working with others: **Know your heritage network***

Get in touch with other groups with similar concerns in your area and maintain regular contact with them. These groups form your local advocacy network; working with them is a useful way to monitor issues and share information, reducing your workload and increasing your reach and potential for impact.

Create and maintain a database of all local interest groups or societies that may be useful and note in it what kinds of issues they are concerned with, along with contact details. Your regional CBA group should maintain a list like this – get in touch with them and make sure you are part of it.

Additionally, online forums for local groups may exist, or could be set up to keep networks in regular contact, with the potential for regular or ad-hoc meetings to discuss issues or plan longer term proactive engagement strategies.

Once you've built an understanding, you can work with others to decide a way to move forward, whether by collaborating to get stories in the local paper, or echoing points in official communications with authorities. You may be able to write letters with multiple signatories, share petitions or surveys across memberships, run joint events or meetings, or simply share information, inform opinions and agree similar priorities. A large group of local bodies will also have more potential to gain influence with local authorities - for example, getting local councillors to meet with you in person to discuss concerns.

Bear in mind that heritage and archaeology are issues which extend beyond groups solely concerned with these things: Consider local history societies or archaeology groups, but also civic groups, residents' associations, wildlife groups, walker's associations, church groups, local University of the Third Age groups, neighbourhood forums or parish councils. Many of these will have an interest in the built and historic environment and will be concerned with issues relating to them. Find out where your interests overlap and when collaboration is likely to be useful. Specialist groups (such as industrial archaeology societies) may be able to provide technical or specialist advice, and civic societies are likely to represent a large number of people.

- *Maximising your reach: **Make your voice heard in any way***

At its root, advocacy is not complicated. It is about getting your voice heard. The more people you reach and the more opportunity you have to put your views to decision-makers, the better, but even a modest investment of time can have positive influence.

- *Maximising your reach: **Join the CBA!***

As part of the CBA's Network you will be connected to a source of advice and a community of similar bodies around the country with whom you will be able to share experiences. Regular e-bulletins will keep you up to date on national news and campaigns going on around the country.



## Helpful (if obvious) tips

- **Have a positive message** – offer to work with local authorities to find appropriate solutions. Tell them:
  - People *care* about archaeology
  - How archaeology/heritage has *helped you*
  - Heritage can *contribute* to growth, development, wellbeing
  - Heritage is a vital part of the local environment and economy
  - Don't spend too much time criticising or demanding – this is unlikely to be productive.
  - Councils have responsibilities, but in hard times, how what you could *offer* to make things better?
  
- **Seek early interactions and long term relationships.**
  - Get to know your Local Authority heritage officers/Heritage Champion and offer your support
  - Invite them to your events, let them see how important their services are to you. All local politicians love a good photo opportunity! Inform the local press and arrange for a photographer if there is an opportunity for a feel-good story involving your local councillor or MP.
  
- **Prepare and be proactive:**
  - Let the council know you are there and that you care.
  - You do not have to wait for cuts to be proposed to write and tell authorities that you value historic environment services. Tell them how you use their services, and what this means to you, educationally, socially, economically.
  - Look carefully at the type of language the council uses about communities, localism and the importance of social cohesion and well-being. Reflect these statements in your correspondence. Make sure to hold them to account for what they state in their publications and plans!

- Know your arguments and be confident in what you value. The heritage sector nationally has lots of data which you can work with and the LHEN can help signpost to relevant information.
- **Be creative:**
  - Localism opens the door to many interesting avenues for community participation (such as neighbourhood planning) and is limited only by your imagination and that of your council. It may be tricky to get the necessary influence to set up complex agreements, but if you can add value to local authority services then you have a chance.
  - Creativity is equally important in campaigning: the difference between a simple letter and a vibrant community campaign is down to how you present yourself.
- **Try to think what will resonate with people:**
  - A local politician will be interested in issues which are vote winners, or which are politically emotive within communities
  - A local newspaper will be more likely to take a story with a strong hook, such as an immediate threat, a well-known local landmark or site, or where things have a local link.
- **Always be calm and polite:**
  - Even if you have reason to be aggrieved, an angry voice or letter is more likely to be treated with contempt or ignored.
  - Be confident that your opinions are important, back them up with solid facts and you will find yourself in a strong position. Even if you suspect foul play, keeping a level head is the best way to remain assertive.
- **Understand the constraints of the system:**
  - Planners, developers, and local authorities all work within a bureaucratic system of rules and regulations. Mostly the system works well, but it can be infuriating. Usually the officials you deal with will have no more power than you to change these rules, so getting frustrated rarely helps.

- If you suspect foul play there are complaints systems in place, such as the local ombudsman, where you can lodge an appeal. You can contact the CBA for advice and support with this process.
- **Don't get downhearted!**
  - Authorities can be impenetrable, individuals may not have the power or time to be as much help as you'd like, and decisions may not go your way. All of these things can lead you to abandon hope. The historic environment is under severe strain in the present financial climate, and there will be many jobs lost and services reduced or lost entirely. However, the influence of local advocates is vital if we are to try to limit the damage.
- **Don't try to do everything:**
  - Advocacy is hard work and takes a lot of effort. Choose carefully what you want to get involved with. Good partnership working can help to share workloads in terms of research or responses, but you may still wish to choose what you are best placed to respond to.
  - Think of ways to make your opinion known that save time:
    - You could write a shorter letter notifying your support for a position taken by an affiliate group such as the CBA regional group.
    - Prepare a standard position statement.





## What can you do?

### **1. Raise awareness with local decision makers**

One of the most valuable yet straightforward ways of getting involved in heritage advocacy is to write letters or otherwise get in touch with local decision makers. This may be in response to an official public consultation or unsolicited. The aim of this is to show decision makers that heritage and archaeology services are valued by local people.

Some common causes of reactive opportunities to write include:

- Where there is a consultation on budget cuts
- When it is reported that archaeology/historic environment services are proposed to be cut or planning law is going to be changed.
- Where a local museum is under threat
- When there is a local policy consultation
- Where a development proposal is active and receiving public comments
- Alternatively, you may proactively decide to write where there is no immediate cause:
  - Because of general concern over shrinking authority budgets
  - Because of an upcoming budgetary period
  - To communicate a good experience, or need for a service
  - To highlight a local issue or concern.

#### ***Who to contact***

- Local Councillors

Local Councillors are the directly elected representatives of the people within local government. Your local authority website will have a list of Councillors, their political parties and what wards they represent. You can always contact your local representatives on any issue and they are likely to be concerned with any issue affecting their ward.

Councillors also sit on a range of committees within the Council and will have interests in particular policy areas. You should be able to find the

information on who sits on what committees on your council website. Committee members will have more influence over issues in these areas.

- The Leader of the Council

The leader of the council is the elected representative who leads the party with the largest representation within the Council. You are entitled to a response from the Leader of the Council. Letters to the Council Leader will often be delegated to officer levels but it doesn't hurt to bring your issue straight to the Leader's attention.

- Council Executives and directors

Council executives and directorial staff are not elected but are important in developing the strategic direction and policies of local authorities. It is usually worth aiming your letters to the Chief Executive, who will likely read and delegate responsibility for replying. Directors or heads of section (whose roles you will be able to find out online) are the next tier of managers and control divisions, such as planning, culture and environment. There is no harm in copying a letter to each tier of management.

- Local archaeology/historic environment service officers

Contacting local archaeology/historic environment service officers directly is good if you have specific questions or if you wish to generally communicate that you value their service. These kinds of positive letters will likely be logged and can be used to support the service when needed. Letters which you send to Council bosses may find their way down the chain of delegation to officer level. Generally these members of staff are sympathetic to heritage and conservation aims and would like to do more if possible. Faulting staff for a failing service is unlikely to be a productive and may serve to give further reason to council bosses to cut or axe the services.

- Heritage Champions

Many authorities have a designated 'Heritage Champion' who is usually a Councillor who has an interest in the historic environment. They vary in terms of how active, influential, and knowledgeable they are, but they are worth contacting and building a relationship with. They may be more likely to attend events or meetings and may be influenced to act as a result of your interactions. Heritage Champions have volunteered for the role, so you can reasonably expect a sympathetic ear. If you find this is not the case, then, you may have cause to speak to Historic England, who manage the system of Heritage Champions.

Many local authorities will have details of who the current heritage champion is on their websites, but if not you can call the council to find out. If you find it difficult to locate your heritage champion contact [champions@HistoricEngland.org.uk](mailto:champions@HistoricEngland.org.uk)

- Local MPs

MPs are, first and foremost, representatives of those in their constituency, and local residents have privileged access to their time and attention. You can write, email, or visit your MP at a local surgery. Most MPs have personal websites and you can find their details here: <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/>.

Whilst MPs are less likely to get involved with issues of local government jurisdiction, they can be important to raising the profile of local issues and can, if moved, get in touch with local authorities to question decisions of public concern, although most will be wary about meddling in local government jurisdictions. They may also be interested enough to represent an issue in parliament, by asking parliamentary questions or applying for debates.

MPs are particularly interested in emotive issues such as job losses, impacts on local business, and issues which are likely to win votes. Positive stories are also highly likely to influence MPs to take a greater interest: Members regularly cite their local regeneration project, museum, or community dig when in parliament and at public events, but you can also use positive examples to drive home messages about threats to services.

You may also wish to ask whether your MP is a member of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Archaeology, <http://www.appag.org.uk/>



which regularly meets to discuss issues of heritage protection, planning and archaeology policy.

- Local media

Local newspapers and radio stations are a great way to get your issues out to a wider audience and also increase their visibility to politicians.

## **2. Public engagement: events, workshops, discussions, social media, etc.**

Public engagement can add important depth to your advocacy work. Holding events, workshops or discussions about issues and advertising them can generate interest and raise profile. If not your own events, you may give talks at other people's events to spread awareness about campaigns or distribute material. Responses that you get can help to add to your advocacy.

There are many ways in which you can turn public engagement into valuable advocacy ammunition. Surveys, petitions, or interviews can help to capture public opinion and illustrate the weight of opinion of local people.

Examples:

"We surveyed 100 people in the town centre. 88 people agreed that the museum was a 'very important' to the town's cultural offer and 75 thought it was important to local identity."

"85% of people surveyed agreed with the statement 'what I love about [*insert town name*] is its heritage'"

"When asked to answer freely the most frequently mentioned results of Council investment in heritage were: 'local pride', 'attracting tourism' and 'making the city a nicer place to live'".

Petitions can be used to gather large numbers of signatures to demonstrate how emotive an issue is. They rely, however, on hard work to distribute them widely and if you are not able to put the work into sharing them, you may be disappointed with the number of signatories.

Social media, however, can give you access to a huge audience and can be a great way to share your petition and generally promote your campaign or get stories out. Blogs, Twitter and Facebook pages are all valuable.

Some online petition websites include [www.38degrees.org](http://www.38degrees.org) and [www.change.org](http://www.change.org). The government also runs its own e-petitions site at <https://petition.parliament.uk/>. This site is monitored by government departments and can trigger a debate in the house of commons if 100,000 signatures are reached – this high figure is unlikely to be reached by any local issue.

There are other creative ways to use public engagement to maximise your impact which may be available to you if you have the right skills and time within your membership. Some approaches will require considerable effort, but do not be daunted. You may be able to attract young people (such as students during holidays) with work experience placements which will enhance their CVs or skills. (Note: The NUS and other have advice on offering internships here:

<http://www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/24282/NUS%20unpaid%20internships%20advice.pdf>)

### **3. Take on new responsibilities:**

A different approach to advocacy may be to influence local authorities by setting an example, pushing for changes in policy or even offering to take on or contribute to roles which add value to council services. This type of action shows a council the lengths people are willing to go to in order to protect their local heritage.

#### ***Community-led initiatives, localism, etc.:***

You could set up groups (or sub-groups, if you are already a group) to adopt-a-monument, become 'friends of' a monument or site, or apply for community asset transfer.

You may petition the Council to take over voluntary management of a site or offer to open a site to the public on behalf of the Council on a regular basis (once a month to once a year) if it is currently not staffed. You may offer to voluntarily keep a site maintained by mowing grass or picking up rubbish.

On a wider level, you may wish to approach your council to set up an advisory group or volunteer forum to advise or provide assistance on a range of tasks, such as undertaking community excavations and exhibitions, and adding data on discoveries to your Historic Environment Record. This kind of forum has the potential to add a unique community

viewpoint on the processes which affect the historic environment, such as planning.

These kinds of activity, whilst not things to be undertaken lightly, show that there is civic pride and public interest in heritage and they **add value** to Council investments. Such things may provide reasons to the Council not to cut services which are dependent upon them, such as local authority heritage officers or HER managers.

If you are interested in this kind of proactive commitment, you may wish to contact the CBA for ideas and further assistance in how you could set up your offer.

### ***Policy mechanisms:***

There are ways in which you and your group can contribute to policy at a local level. Neighbourhood planning and Community Design Statements are ways that local communities can add to local policies and reflect local passion for heritage and archaeology and be included in material considerations in the planning system.

You may be able to join (as an individual) or advise (as a group) an existing neighbourhood forum in your area about including heritage as part of their emerging plans. If there is no current neighbourhood forum, you can put a group of local residents together and petition the council to grant forum status.

These mechanisms are about more than simply the historic environment, but can include it and can add significant value to local plan policies by specifying where local assets are valued and how local residents would desire them to be treated.

Examples for things Neighbourhood Plans or Community Design Statements can influence include: Local heritage assets, important views, local green space, historic design and character, scale, massing and design of new buildings, location and type of new developments.

Other things may be created as a result of Neighbourhood Plans and Community Design Statements, such as heritage trails, community heritage groups, community excavations and exhibitions, festivals, events, workshops and talks.

More advice on how these mechanisms can assist with local advocacy are available in Toolkit 7 – [A Guide to Heritage in the Planning System](#)



## Advice for individuals

Individuals are the basic unit of democratic power. MPs and local councillors are highly attuned to the concerns of their constituents and local ward members and communicating your own opinions to them should never be considered as wasted effort, particularly if you are well-informed, polite and passionate in the ways you put forward your views and concerns.

The following tips are specifically designed for individuals who are reading this guidance, however, individual actions are most effective when they are coordinated, for instance, through mass-letter writing campaigns. Such action can be highly effective at influencing local decision makers – and even the national government – to take note of a particular issue. With this in mind, these tips largely relate to how individuals can find support and mechanisms for advocacy by joining forces with others.

- *Tell your story*

Individuals may not hold the same democratic force that large groups do, but they are well suited to communicating evocative stories. Individuals are those who may be most intimately affected by decisions made by politicians and they can have impacts upon the views and actions of local politicians. You can write to your MP or visit them at a local surgery. Face-to-face meetings are particularly effective.

- *Join a local group!*

There are thousands of local organisations across the country who are actively involved in the historic environment in numerous ways. Membership is a great way of meeting people, learning about history, heritage and archaeology, and many of these groups are active in engaging with local councils, local heritage sites, and their areas. There is strength in numbers!

Do some research and find out what is in your area. Your regional CBA group may be able to provide some advice and you can find your Regional Group here: <http://new.archaeologyuk.org/join-a-cba-group>. Joining a local group can be rewarding in many ways and you will have the opportunities to get involved with heritage projects and impactful campaigns.

- *Create a community campaign group*

In certain situations you may feel that a specific campaign requires a grass-roots group to gather community support around. This step should not be taken lightly and requires an extraordinary commitment, and you may be able to get support from others, but an effective grass-roots campaign can be a powerful tool to express local passion and evoke deep feelings.

A good example is the Hands off Old Oswestry Hillfort (HOOOH) group whose website can be found here: <http://oldoswestryhillfort.co.uk/>.

Another reason you may set up a group would be to explore engaging in neighbourhood planning and applying for neighbourhood forum status. See [Toolkit 7](#) – A guide to Heritage in the Planning System for more information

- *Join the CBA*

The CBA are an independent organisation which exists to further the public understanding of archaeology and heritage. We believe archaeology matters and that everyone should be able to get involved and benefit from our rich archaeological heritage.

Joining the CBA helps support our work lobbying local and national government on behalf of people all over the country and providing advice through our listed building casework and local heritage engagement network.

You can also join your local CBA regional group and get involved with activity in your local area. You may be able to provide intelligence from the town you live in to help their advocacy work or support them in events or campaigns. More details are available at <http://new.archaeologyuk.org/become-a-cba-member>