

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department for Communities

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT POLICY CONSULTATION

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Mr Lyons (The Minister for Communities): In July 2024 as part of the Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme, I made a commitment to deliver the first policy for the historic environment in Northern Ireland. The consultation being launched today marks an important step towards this.

We have an asset that is a product of a rich and complex history, found in every corner, of our unique and special landscapes, villages, towns and cities.

The draft policy presents us with an opportunity to appreciate and maximise the positive contribution that this part of our historic environment makes to each of us, to our communities and to our wellbeing. It is a departure from historic environment protection and designation being seen as restrictive. Instead, the draft HE policy demonstrates how the historic environment is an enabler: for people's wellbeing; for contributing to good places to live, work and visit; as well as the potential for heritage led economic opportunity through tourism, employment and regeneration. It demonstrates the relationship between heritage and culture and their potential contribution to nearly all wellbeing indicators within the Programme for Government.

This policy has been developed in partnership with all our stakeholders. Their honest and informed participation emphasised that there is a real need to improve the way we are managing our historic environment. A new policy can ensure that it is part of decision making and that it is used, cared for and adapted sustainably.

I recognise that a framework of support will be needed, with priorities for funding identified across this policy. This will mean that it can contribute to a promising future – one where heritage assets, places and activities continue to have positive impacts for the people they connect.

The consultation I am launching gives everyone the chance to express their views on how our historic environment should be identified, protected, managed and celebrated to maximise the contribution it makes to how we live, now and in the future.