

Future of our past?

- 1 Sir, The Heritage Alliance welcomes the debate on the future of English Heritage. The proposal, outlined with the summer Spending Review, is to create a new charity to manage the National Heritage Collection (some 420 sites of architectural, historical or archaeological importance) and a separate body to oversee the statutory heritage services that protect our historic environment – which is a source of national pride, an engine of economic growth, an inspiration to all and the envy of the world.
- 2 There are ironies in the timing and intent of the Government's actions. This year, in which we celebrated the centenary of the Ancient Monuments Act, seems to close a century of beneficial state intervention in the historic environment, and now we need to build a different model that will work for the next century.
- 3 Our historic environment, whether in the hands of the state, charities or private individuals, creates both our sense of national identity and the context in which we, as citizens, can live meaningful lives. So it is disturbing that a consultation of the Heritage Alliance has been delayed by over two months.
- 4 I fear that the dilatory handling of this consultation thus far indicates a shocking lack of understanding of the importance of our historic environment. It is in the interests of all of us that both halves of the new English Heritage should be robust and sustainable.
- 5 Spending cuts have already removed £700 million worth of investment from the historic environment. The Chancellor's autumn statement implied that more cuts were necessary to fund vital infrastructure projects. The historic environment is also infrastructure. It is time that we plan for it in generational terms rather than pandering to the short-termism of the electoral cycle.

Loyd Grossman
Chairman, The Heritage Alliance

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