

# **Barriers to Engagement in Heritage by Currently Under- Represented Groups**

**An Inclusion Report to the National Audit Office**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (*Inclusion*) was commissioned by the National Audit Office (NAO) to carry out research into the barriers to engaging in heritage faced by people from currently under-represented groups. This research is part of a study that the National Audit Office is carrying out into the performance of English Heritage in encouraging currently under-represented groups to engage in heritage.
- 1.2 English Heritage is working towards a target of increasing the number of people from priority groups visiting designated historic environment sites. The three priority groups are: people with limiting disabilities; black and minority ethnic groups (BME); and people from lower socio-economic groups.
- 1.3 In order to examine how effective English Heritage has been in broadening the diversity of those engaging in heritage, the NAO has:
  - visited a number of English Heritage properties and other heritage sites
  - reviewed English Heritage projects that aim to promote engagement in heritage
  - surveyed organisations working in the heritage sector and
  - consulted representatives of the priority groups identified by English Heritage
- 1.4 The research findings set out in this report comprise part of the fourth component. The research was originally intended to comprise three separate workshops, each designed to explore the barriers faced by the three priority groups. However, due to logistical issues, workshops were held with representatives of those with limiting disabilities and BME groups, while in-depth telephone interviews were conducted with representatives of people from lower socio-economic groups. The in-depth interviews followed the topic guide used in the workshops (see the Appendix) and lasted approximately 30-40 minutes.
- 1.5 Although the NAO study focuses on English Heritage, this research looked more generally at the barriers to engaging in heritage currently faced by under-represented groups.

### **Participating Organisations**

- 1.6 Eighteen organisations took part in the research. Of these five represented people with limiting disabilities, eight represented people from BME groups and five represented people from lower socio-economic groups.

- 1.7 The views in this report are based on representatives' opinions of the prevailing view of the group they represent. Some of the workshops attendees had participated in projects or were aware of projects aimed at raising engagement. Understanding of heritage and the efforts made by organisations such as English Heritage were therefore well developed. While the emphasis on heritage sites in general, rather than those exclusively owned by English Heritage was made clear, many of these organisations referred to their experience of working with English Heritage. The discussion of English Heritage was therefore a pre-occupation for some of the participants.

### **Structure of the report**

- 1.8 This report first looks at the understanding of heritage among people from currently under-represented groups. It then explores the general and specific barriers to engaging in heritage experienced by these groups. The following section considers the solutions suggested to address these barriers. The report finishes with a set of conclusions and recommendations. The workshop topic guide is included in the Appendix.

## 2. UNDERSTANDING OF HERITAGE

- 2.1 The understanding of the term 'heritage' and awareness of heritage varies between and within the three under-represented groups. For example, representatives of BME groups suggested that members of the groups they represented had quite definite perceptions of heritage. Similarly a representative of lower socio-economic groups felt that the concept of heritage was quite alien to some sub-groups, such as young people not in employment, education and training (NEET). Another representative saw heritage as being very important to lower socio-economic groups, but referred more to the heritage intrinsic to a local area, to which these groups felt they had a real connection, rather than to specific heritage sites. They were thought to be more likely to participate in heritage if it held some relevance to them.
- 2.2 One participant in the BME workshop raised the issue of using the term 'heritage' as opposed to the term 'historic environment'. He argued that the general understanding of heritage was dominated by organisations with property. It was suggested that DCMS was driving for a move away from this understanding of heritage to one that encompasses all historic environments; not just those sites owned by an organisation and labelled a heritage site. The importance of this is the recognition that heritage exists in local areas and does not necessarily entail leaving that area to visit a more affluent one. People from lower socio-economic groups may be more inclined to engage with their 'historic environment', because they may feel they are interacting with heritage without having to visit official 'heritage' sites.
- 2.3 Participants in the BME workshop also described what they regarded as a fundamental difference between the perception of heritage sites among white people and people from BME groups, particularly those with a colonial relationship with Britain. They argued that while white groups attended heritage sites simply to enjoy their beauty, and viewed a trip to a heritage site as a day out or leisure activity, people from BME groups derived a greater meaning from them and therefore had different intentions for their visit:
- '...for us it's much deeper than that [...] for us it's about inspiration, learning. Positive icons.'*
- 2.4 They commented that organisations who owned heritage sites were more aware of how sites were used by the majority of visitors and therefore did not understand how they could meet the demands of BME groups.
- 2.5 In the limiting disability workshop, extract the 'meaning' of heritage in the context of disability alone was seen as problematic, since heritage means different things

to different people. Disability, compared with other factors such as a symbolic historical significance or cultural relevance, was not necessarily seen as a defining feature in the way that this group prioritised heritage. The importance of heritage was also seen to vary between sub-groups and individuals within the group. For example, for those with a limiting disability, heritage may be seen as important only in so far as it related to their specific disability. However a defining feature in the understanding of heritage among people with limiting disabilities was the perception that it was generally difficult to access. Heritage was therefore very much perceived in terms of its physical barriers.



### 3. BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

#### Information and promotional materials

- 3.1 Participants representing BME groups did not think the heritage sector presented a very inclusive image. They felt the publicity material was intimidating:

*'There's a strong tradition of photos without people. When there are people there's a real lack of images of minority people on the images. Like you're never there.'*

- 3.2 Representatives of people with limiting disabilities raised different issues with promotional material. They suggested that it is often difficult to gain access to information prior to arriving at a heritage site, which raises problems of preparation and expectation. Misleading language and lack of prior information on accessibility (e.g. via the internet) were highlighted as the major issues:

*'People want to know the information upfront to be honest, and if it's not particularly accessible then as long as they know what is and what isn't, then people's expectations are realistic.'*

- 3.3 They also suggested that there was a lack of targeted publicity and marketing for disabled people. Furthermore there was a lack of availability of information in a variety of formats, such as Braille, large font sizes or Plain English.
- 3.4 A representative of people from lower socio-economic groups also suggested that information about heritage sites is not disseminated in ways and places that are easily accessible to people from those groups.
- 3.5 In addition to promotional materials, the representatives of people with limiting disabilities agreed that on-site spaces and objects were not clearly labelled or written in easy-to-read formats, including signage relating to disabled parking, ticket costs, exhibits and gift shop items. Communication was also felt to be a significant issue for deaf people. They reported that without technology such as Typetalk, a loop system, subtitles on official videos and alternatives to audio tours, deaf visitors face increased barriers to engaging with heritage compared to hearing people.

#### Staff training and awareness

- 3.6 Staff attitudes and the lack of training in providing services to disabled people and people from BME groups were salient issues in the workshops. Staff were seen by both groups to have unfriendly attitudes and to display an unwillingness to

help, which was seen to have a potentially alienating effect with visitors from these groups.

3.7 One participant felt that unfriendly staff attitudes could put disabled visitors off complaining if they felt they had not been treated fairly or their access needs were not addressed. They expressed concern that disabled people faced certain institutional and organisational barriers, as organisations did not realise their legal responsibilities and the rights of their service users.

3.8 A representative of people with limiting disabilities suggested that staff may be afraid to help disabled visitors out of fear of doing something wrong. This could be the result of a lack of training, or a low sense of confidence among staff in any training received:

*'There's a lot of fear of getting it wrong. With the best of intentions come the worst of actions. My impression is they're working on improving that. They're aware their staff training is weak.'*

3.9 Staff at heritage sites were generally seen to provide an unfriendly and unhelpful service by participants in the BME workshop. When describing the attitudes of staff at heritage sites towards BME visitors, one participant said:

*'[It's] like you don't belong there. The staff attitude and even the attitude of certain general public on certain sites they look at you like you don't belong there. It's such a surprise to see you. That can be very off-putting. It's almost like 'how did they let you in?'*

3.10 Furthermore, the lack of BME members of staff at heritage sites was also seen as a barrier to engagement.

3.11 One participant argued that not only were BME staff absent on heritage sites, but they were also overlooked as researchers to work on studies that informed heritage projects. He felt that it was important to employ BME researchers on such projects in order to provide an insight into the interpretation of heritage by minorities, and therefore submit an alternative to what was considered the usual Eurocentric view. A number of participants reported that where BME members of staff had been employed to work on heritage projects, many had displayed a sincere motivation to develop what participants described as adventurous and progressive projects. However they said that these individuals eventually moved onto other work due to frustrations over their role.

## **Costs**

3.12 The high cost associated with visiting heritage sites was brought up as a barrier to engagement by representatives of all three currently under-represented groups:

*'...everything costs... a lot of money these days. We are living in a recession... Not everyone can afford to get to these places. Train fares are a lot of money and other bits and pieces.'*

3.13 Admission fees were generally thought to be very expensive and many of the participants thought that they may prevent those from currently under-represented groups from attending. For people with limiting disabilities, who it was argued were particularly likely to be unemployed, the cost of admission was thought to be a major barrier. A representative of people with limiting disabilities also pointed out that disabled visitors should not have to pay extra for their carer, interpreter or other assistant to attend, as the customer would have to pay double to experience the heritage site. It is unclear, however, how consistent policies and practices regarding carers paying entry fees are across the heritage sector.

3.14 The location of many heritage sites in remote areas with poor transport links could pose a significant barrier to engagement, particularly for people from lower socio-economic groups and people with limiting disabilities. Representatives emphasised how expensive it could be to reach heritage sites from urban areas without owning a car.

3.15 Additionally, the cost of food in cafés in heritage sites was also seen as a barrier, particularly for people from lower socio-economic groups and those with large families.

## **Access**

3.16 The issue raised most often was that of physical access. Heritage sites are seen as the most difficult form of culture for disabled people to access physically, both to get to and to get around once there.

3.17 It was noted that using public transport could be challenging for people with limiting disabilities, particularly to get to more isolated sites, due to a lack of confidence in using public transport and a lack of information provided by heritage sites on suitable transport solutions.

3.18 Heritage sites are often characterised as being in remote locations amid rough terrain, with uneven surfaces, steps and narrow doorways as well lacking facilities for people with limiting disabilities such as disabled parking, toilets and

lifts. Younger disabled people perceived heritage sites as not being able to accommodate them and this acted as a barrier to them making even an initial visit. One participant described the attitude of disabled young people as:

*'It's no good me going to such a place, they won't be able to accommodate me when I get there. You get a disabled toilet and that's it.'*

3.19 The limited range of materials available to support site visits was also highlighted as a problem, as this meant the site could not meaningfully be encountered by certain visitors such as those with learning difficulties. One representative commented that such visitors would benefit from having the history visually represented rather than solely written out. A respondent commented that it was important to 'think beyond the access ramp' and consider more imaginatively the need to make sites accessible for people with different needs, such as colour contrasts for the visually impaired.

3.20 The isolation of some heritage sites and distance from urban areas was seen as a barrier for people from lower socio-economic groups, many of whom reside in inner city areas and do not own cars. A respondent commented that visits to heritage could potentially involve a lot of time and transport planning for people from lower socio-economic groups. The amount of planning needed to arrange a trip may act as a barrier to attendance as well as the price of transport.

#### **Barriers to disabled access**

**Examples of the barriers encountered by a participant from the limiting disabilities workshop, and the group that accompanied her, when visiting a castle included:**

- **Lack of signage for disabled parking.**
- **The upstairs disabled toilet was not easily accessible because it was in a corner.**
- **Some of the paths were gravel, which made the use of a wheelchair difficult.**
- **The font on the information materials was very small, which caused difficulties for people with sight difficulties and people who couldn't read very quickly or easily.**

### **Lack of awareness**

3.21 Another barrier to the engagement of BME groups in particular was a lack of awareness about heritage sites. This lack of awareness was in part attributed to the lack of promotional activities that are targeted at BME groups. One participant noted:

*'When it comes to local heritage a lot of local authorities... do not put heritage of interest to BME communities on their websites. They do not have them in other languages other than English'.*

- 3.22 Two representatives of people from lower socio-economic groups felt that with an increased knowledge of heritage would come a wish to access it.

### **Priorities and reluctance to engage**

- 3.23 A further barrier, which could be applied to all under-represented groups, was that heritage is not a priority for individuals within those groups. Despite all efforts designed to encourage engagement, heritage may not be at the top of most people's agenda. A representative of people from lower socio-economic groups commented that some people simply do not have the time to attend heritage sites, which can often take up whole days to visit. Some representative also felt that other individual barriers to engaging in heritage related to an ignorance of heritage or the desire to avoid being identified by their cultural background thus creating a disinclination to attend.
- 3.24 For BME groups and people from lower socio-economic groups, assumptions about the typical heritage audiences caused a reluctance to engage with heritage. For example it was argued that BME groups viewed heritage audiences as mainly *'white, middle class, retired and professional older people'*. The perception that heritage sites are attended by, and designed for, this audience, was seen to reduce the inclination to attend.
- 3.25 A representative of people from lower socio-economic groups commented on both the cultural and generational barriers faced by people from these groups. She argued that the white and middle class culture of heritage sites is off-putting to people who are not white and middle class, and that the typical audience disapproves of their attendance. The respondent used the example of young NEET groups viewing heritage sites as representing wealth and dated attitudes, as well as protected confined environments where behaviour is constrained, e.g. running and shouting is not allowed. Although sites may not match the perception of them in reality, this perception still acts as a significant barrier to attendance.
- 3.26 Heritage sites were often seen as intimidating due to what may be understood as their intellectual content or due to their architecture. Another representative of people from lower socio-economic groups reported that a barrier to engagement amongst people she had come into contact with was the fear of not understanding the heritage sites or the fear of feeling stupid. She thought it likely that this view would fade away after an initial visit to a heritage site where visitors may find that the information is more accessible than originally thought. However

she emphasised the power of this ingrained attitudinal barrier in preventing an initial visit from taking place at all.

## **Cultural relevance**

3.27 The importance of cultural relevance of heritage sites to individuals was seen as prominent for all three under-represented groups. The idea that no one would wish to visit a place that they could not identify with and that was not significant to individuals' sense of self was raised on several occasions:

*'...cultural relevance is the key – if it's not that relevant to people's personal lives then they won't want to engage with the site.'*

3.28 Participants in the BME workshop felt that one of the most significant barriers to the engagement of BME groups in attending heritage sites was the failure of organisations such as DCMS, English Heritage and the National Trust to acknowledge the role of BME legacy, such as colonialism and slavery, in England's heritage and to make this apparent at heritage sites. Participants regarded English heritage as 'fundamentally multicultural' due to the role of BME groups in the building of many stately homes and other heritage sites. For example, it was noted that many historic houses and virtually every public space in Bexley are linked to either the East India Company or the Atlantic slave trade or both.

*'A lot of what we perceive as British heritage has links with non-British history as well'.*

3.29 They argued that many heritage sites are presented to the general public as completely devoid of an outside, non-English involvement and that this made some BME groups less inclined to attend. In addition, it left those who did attend feeling excluded:

*'...when we walk into these properties we get a sense of rejection and omission'.*

3.30 Furthermore, it was suggested that requests for this role to be exhibited was viewed by the relevant organisations as 'very strange' and if met was seen as a 'favour' to minority groups. They claimed that the onus was always on voluntary and community groups representing BME groups to find information for such exhibits.

3.31 It was argued that the failure to raise awareness of this connection prevented BME groups from understanding their link to heritage sites. Heritage sites are incorrectly viewed by BME groups as having nothing to do with them, making them less likely to engage. For example, one participant noted that sites in his

local area have been used by Romany communities for centuries, but a general lack of awareness of this, not only among the general public, but also within the Romany community itself.

- 3.32 Participants emphasised the importance of viewing the acknowledgement and presentation of the role of minorities in English heritage as a mainstream, rather than minority, issue in order to make the general public as well as minorities aware of their relationship with heritage.
- 3.33 Some participants suggested that the failure to acknowledge the role of BME history in English heritage stemmed from an insecurity of Britain's colonial past, and a desire to avoid the portrayal of what may be perceived to be 'negative history'. They felt that failure to acknowledge these issues can lead to underlying tensions which act as a 'silent barrier' to the engagement of BME groups in heritage.
- 3.34 Participants agreed that a key barrier to the engagement of BME groups in heritage was a lack of high-level strategic buy-in. This would involve key people in high positions such as ministers and heads of organisations such as National Trust and English Heritage wanting to raise interest and participation amongst BME groups.

#### Failure to acknowledge role of BME history in English heritage

On the wall of a large room in a stately home was an oil painting of a Lady and sitting next to her was black girl. However there was no mention who this girl was or why she was in that painting. The staff did not know who the girl was and no information about her was available in the publications in the book store.

In another room there was an engraving of a battle in the West Indies but again the relevance of this to the house was not mentioned.

## **Resources**

- 3.35 A lack of resources was seen as preventing heritage sites from addressing a number of barriers to engaging in heritage faced by under-represented groups noted above. Several participants mentioned that they had seen heritage organisations struggle to find funds to improve accessibility and engage audiences.

## 4. SOLUTIONS

- 4.1 Solutions raised in the consultations with stakeholders included those on:
- information and promotional materials
  - staff training and awareness
  - access
  - cultural relevance
  - sustainability and
  - the role of community and voluntary organisations
- 4.2 Some solutions focussed on particular under-represented groups. However many of the solutions could be applied to increase engagement among all groups.

### **Information and promotional materials**

- 4.3 Participants argued that education about heritage aimed at all ages could be instrumental in engaging under-represented groups and addressing the problem of apathy and negative preconceptions. The participants felt that heritage sites should be more proactive in advertising themselves and projecting an image that would be more appealing to under-represented groups. Promotional materials could be more engaging. It was recommended that heritage sites provide clear and accessible information using appropriate formats for different audiences that take into account the language requirements of different sub-groups. Enabling intellectual access to information and sites histories was felt to be important in order to '*gain a picture of what happened all those years ago*'.
- 4.4 One participant suggested holding open days that would enable visitors to attend sites with no or reduced fees in order to attract more diverse audiences and raise awareness of the types of activities on offer at heritage sites. The importance of disseminating publicity material and advertising in places accessed by lower socio-economic groups was emphasised. One participant also suggested holding activities that involved learning and active participation and recommended the use of children's facilities and activities that would then draw mothers in.

### **Staff training and awareness**

- 4.5 It was generally felt that staff at all levels of the organisation – from volunteers who help run the site to trustees and board members – needed appropriate training to meet the needs of a more diverse range of visitors. This included training in awareness of the accessibility issues disabled people may face, and training in diversity. In addition to having basic training in issues relating to disability and cultural awareness, a participant representing people from lower-



socio economic groups emphasised the need for staff to be more available and willing to actively engage with visitors. This participant suggested having a named member of staff that visitors could approach with any questions or problems and more diversity within teams in order to enable visitors to relate better to staff.

## **Access**

4.6 The issue of physical access was most salient among the representatives of people with limiting disabilities. Suggestions included providing: slides for items people may not be able to reach; clear signs and directions; lifts; disabled parking; better lighting; disabled toilet facilities; and larger fonts on signs. It was argued that often these changes could be small, inexpensive and instigated immediately. Another suggestion was to provide better information on public transport links and alternative routes for getting to sites. This could benefit all under-represented groups, particularly lower socio-economic groups for whom arranging and paying for transport may be time consuming and expensive. Some participants highlighted the effectiveness of outreach projects that organised day trips for specific groups and hired vehicles such as minibuses to offer subsidised travel.

## **Cultural Relevance**

4.7 The issue of cultural irrelevance is one that relates to all under-represented groups. Many participants revealed the importance of emphasising any cultural relevance of the site to groups who would not normally visit heritage sites and encourage them to feel they were part of the cultural landscape. It was also suggested that the presence of more staff members on heritage sites from BME and lower socio-economic groups may be beneficial, as it might put visitors from those groups at ease. Most participants in the BME workshop were very aware of English Heritage outreach activities and saw them as an effective and proactive way of engaging BME groups. One participant suggested undertaking an audit of multicultural content in all heritage sites.

### **Engaging with BME groups through culturally relevant projects**

**This example illustrates the effectiveness of making sites culturally relevant in order to engage BME groups.**

**The permanent exhibition in a small museum was based on industry and the Second World War. It was reported that the number of visitors to the museum from BME groups was relatively low, when compared to the large numbers of residents in the local area from BME groups.**

**A new exhibition was installed in the museum that considered the role of the**

East India Company during the Second World War. The opening of this new exhibition generated large numbers of BME visitors.

Engaging women from lower socio-economic groups: 'The Women of Wartime Shipyard' Outreach Project:

The aim 'Women of Wartime Shipyard' outreach project was to engage local women from lower-socio economic groups by considering the role women played in the shipyards during wartime Britain. This project engaged women with heritage through new art forms. Well known local specialist artists helped facilitate workshops in which the participants made crafts with copper materials.

This project was delivered by women for women. One benefit of this approach was that many local women from lower socio-economic groups were also from BME communities and may not have been able to participate in a male-run project. The project increased women's engagement with local heritage and also provided a greater appreciation of the wider role women played in the community.

## Sustainability

- 4.8 Participants in the BME workshop also emphasised the importance of sustaining interest in heritage sites and ensuring that material was in place that would make visitors want to come back. It was suggested that running projects aimed at attracting particular groups should be commonplace, rather than what was perceived to be the current one-off, tokenistic approach which did not encourage further visits:

*'There needs to be something that continues on the back of something like the Abolition year, a legacy [where] you have a whole range of different projects around the country. Maybe concentrate some small pots of money for these particular months'.*

## Role of community organisations

- 4.9 There was consensus among all participants that voluntary and community organisations have a significant role to play to engage currently under-represented groups in heritage. However they felt that partnership working between voluntary and community organisations needs to be more constructive.
- 4.10 In all three groups there were several participants who had been involved in or were aware of outreach projects aimed at increasing engagement in heritage. For representatives of people with limiting disabilities, it was widely felt that engaging

local groups as well as potential visitors who had knowledge of the relevant access-related issues was vital

*'...in that way you're co-producing things rather than just saying 'we're going to do this, we know its going to benefit disabled people'. If you don't ask disabled people how do you know?'*

- 4.11 These comments indicate the importance of giving disabled people themselves a sense of ownership over access policy. It was felt that being consulted and feeling a sense of ownership can lead to greater inclusiveness and, ultimately, more engagement. This principle can be applied to all three groups. It was generally felt that, the outreach currently in place to engage people with limiting disabilities in heritage, although making some progress, was not deemed sufficient.
- 4.12 All participants also felt that closer partnership working between English Heritage and community groups would greatly benefit efforts to increase engagement in heritage, although few were aware of any such partnership working taking place. One participant suggested that English Heritage could use the disability press to advertise their events and outreach projects, and better monitor to ensure they are hitting the right audiences. It was also noted that voluntary and community organisations could provide training, access audits, consultancy and advice.
- 4.13 Representative of those with limiting disabilities felt that a significant factor behind the lack of partnership working is English Heritage's centrally-organised approach to access-related projects and arrangements. This means that individual sites do not consider increasing accessibility as part of their strategies. It was stated that a bottom-up approach to improving engagement may be beneficial.
- 4.14 In contrast, the participants in the BME workshop felt that there needed to be a high-level strategic buy-in as important to increase engagement at the local level. They thought that appropriate messages should come from the government ministers, and suggested a government-led task force which empowers staff from the top down may be beneficial. This was seen as particularly important because resources are released from the top that could ultimately fund work being done by local voluntary and community organisations to engage under-represented groups in heritage.

## 5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The consultations revealed a number of common themes across the three currently under-represented groups:
- a lack of awareness of heritage
  - assumptions about typical audiences
  - cultural irrelevance
  - costs of admission and public transport
  - poor transport links
- 5.2 Barriers to engagement are perhaps most pronounced among those who belong to more than one, or all three, of the groups.
- 5.3 The most salient issues relating to lower socio-economic groups were: the costs of admission and public transport; lack of time; the fear of not being able to understand content or not personally identifying with it; and perceptions about the type of people who are 'supposed' to attend heritage sites.
- 5.4 A key barrier relating to BME groups was the perception that heritage sites were mostly targeted at, and attended by, white, middle class, older visitors. The representatives suggested that: the heritage sector did not project itself in a very inclusive way; that staff on heritage sites had an indifferent attitude towards BME groups; and that BME groups were not selected to work on heritage projects. All of these factors can be seen to perpetuate the view amongst BME groups that they are not intended visitors. A further barrier to engagement was the view that the cultural relevance of BME groups to English heritage was not recognised, as a result of either ignorance of, or awkwardness about, the connection.
- 5.5 While they recognised that barriers exist within the BME community itself, representatives of this group attributed most barriers to the practices of institutions in the heritage sector. They felt that the work being done to increase engagement is perceived as tokenistic and does not encourage subsequent visits. They felt that there was need for a high level strategic support from ministers and professionals in the heritage sector to demonstrate the sincerity of attempts to engage BME groups and exhibit the cultural relevance of English heritage to BME heritage.
- 5.6 Representatives of those with limiting disabilities suggested that heritage sites need to hold historical and cultural significance and be personally meaningful to people in this group. In reality, it is all too often heritage is perceived as something that cannot properly be accessed and/or understood, owing to numerous barriers. The key barriers established were: difficult physical access;

problematic transport links; high cost of admission and transport, particularly for those most vulnerable to unemployment; and lack of appropriate staff training leading to negative or inappropriate attitudes and behaviour towards disabled people.

- 5.7 Another important issue raised was the importance of presenting information about heritage sites in an appropriate way to accommodate different sub-groups (such as loop systems and audio tours for the deaf, Braille for the blind, and vivid visual representations for those with learning difficulties). Lack of suitable communication was also linked with limited intellectual access to heritage, and an inability to bring sites to life for certain groups. Participants asserted that better publicity and pre-visit information would also aid disabled people's engagement with heritage, as it would help them plan their journeys and itineraries as well as sparking their initial interest.
- 5.8 Effective outreach was deemed crucial in increasing engagement, particularly projects involving a strong consultation element where disabled people themselves were sought and reimbursed to lend advice on how best to increase accessibility. Strategically, it was suggested that outreach should be better coordinated and involve more partnership working between local groups, national charities and English Heritage, in order to better access groups with limiting disabilities and gain their expertise and this approach is likely to benefit all under-represented groups. A more bottom-up approach where individual sites are encouraged to instigate this, rather than having it determined centrally by English Heritage would greatly benefit the drive to increase engagement by all the currently under-represented groups.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Strategic buy-in**

- 6.1 The heritage sector should highlight senior-level commitment to ensure that under-represented groups consider that the desire to engage them in heritage is genuine. This commitment should be present in all strata, including:
- Ministers and chief executives in the heritage sector
  - staff and volunteers at individual heritage sites
  - community and voluntary organisations
- 6.2 Communication between the different levels listed above is crucial to increasing participation. It is essential that collaboration between the heritage sector and community and voluntary sector organisations is increased in order to facilitate all of the recommendations made below.
- 6.3 Increased partnership working between and voluntary and community sector organisations to engage under-represented groups may be beneficial. In addition further consultation by the sector with people from under-represented groups may help to find solutions and raise awareness about heritage among under-represented groups.
- 6.4 If resources are currently insufficient to encourage a sector-wide move towards increased engagement, higher level strategic buy-in should be sought in order to increase funds. In the absence of adequate resourcing, greater efforts must be made to introduce small and inexpensive changes that will draw in more diverse audiences.
- 6.5 Views from a diverse range of people should be sought in the planning phases for events and activities in the heritage sector. This may be through increased community consultation or by employing a more diverse range of people to work on projects.

### **Raising awareness**

- 6.6 More effort should be made to develop a better awareness, and tackle negative perceptions, of heritage amongst currently under-represented groups.
- 6.7 The heritage sector should try and develop a better understanding of what different under-represented groups want to get from heritage sites in order to meet this demand. For example, while it may be simply leisure for some groups, others may want to learn about a specific issue.

6.8 Publicity materials have a large part to play in raising awareness about the existence of heritage sites, portraying sites in more inclusive ways and in making heritage more accessible. These materials need to be:

- made to look less intimidating by including pictures in addition to text, and using language that is easier to understand
- made to look more inclusive by, for example, including pictures of more diverse audiences in order to dismiss the perception that only a certain type of visitor attends and is welcome at heritage sites
- advertised in places that will reach different groups and targeted specifically at under-represented groups, e.g. through voluntary and community organisations
- produced in a variety of different formats and languages e.g. in Braille, larger fonts, and Plain English
- made to prepare potential visitors for the visit by providing alternative or appropriate transport information and directions, providing information on dress codes and prices for tickets, guided tours and food

6.9 On-site information needs to be clearly labelled and available in a wider range of formats. Where possible the appropriate technology should be used to enable under-represented groups to engage with the content of heritage sites.

### **Staff**

6.10 Staff should be trained in equality and diversity and in supporting people with disabilities. Equality and diversity procedures with regard to employing on-site staff should be implemented in order to encourage the recruitment of a more diverse workforce.

### **Costs**

6.11 Admission, food costs and tours could be discounted for first time visitors or subsidised for people attending through an organised project. Transport could also be arranged to address barriers associated with high travel costs.

6.12 Policies on charging carers should also be made consistent across the sector.

6.13 The heritage sector could work with voluntary and community sector organisations to organise group trips and negotiate discounts for package deals.

### **Access**

6.14 Some heritage sites should consider other ways to accommodate people with limiting disabilities and to raise awareness to tackle perceptions that sites are inaccessible and unaccommodating.

- 6.15 More consideration should be given to creating new, innovative and inexpensive ways to accommodate people with limiting disabilities. Ideas can be derived from consultation with the public and relevant stakeholders.

**Priorities and reluctance to engage**

- 6.16 Heritage sites should give people a reason to attend, for example centre visits around learning activities or entertainment, in order to raise the importance of heritage to those from under-represented groups.
- 6.17 More work should be done to tackle the assumption that under-represented groups are not the intended audience for heritage and are unwelcome.
- 6.18 Sites need to be portrayed in ways that appeal more broadly to all groups in society, rather than typical audiences. Attitudinal barriers need to be addressed to make sites seem more appealing to modern audiences, as exciting places for young people to be, and as places that are accessible to people of all levels of education.

**Cultural relevance**

- 6.19 The heritage sector needs to demonstrate the relevance of heritage to different groups. Links to colonial history and slavery should be made more prominent and mainstream. These links should be integrated permanently into the very fabric of the sites.



## 7. APPENDIX – WORKSHOP TOPIC GUIDE<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction to the Research (10mins)

- 7.1 This workshop is part of a study that the National Audit Office is carrying out into the performance of English Heritage in encouraging currently under-represented groups to engage in heritage.
- 7.2 English Heritage is working towards the target of increasing the number of people from priority groups visiting designated historic environment sites. The three priority groups are people with limiting disabilities, black and minority ethnic groups and people from lower socio-economic groups.
- 7.3 In order to examine how effective English Heritage has been in increasing and broadening the diversity of engagement in heritage, the NAO is:
- visiting a number of English Heritage properties and other heritage sites
  - reviewing English Heritage projects that aim to promote engagement in heritage
  - surveying organisations working in the heritage sector and
  - consulting representatives of the priority groups identified by English Heritage
- 7.4 This workshop is part of the fourth method and is one of three workshops, each designed to explore the barriers faced by each group. Although the study as a whole looks focuses on English Heritage, in this workshop we will look more generally at the barriers that currently underrepresented groups face engaging in heritage.

### Examples of Heritage sites

- 7.5 Heritage sites can include a wide range of historic settings such as cathedrals, battlefields, monuments, stately homes, abbeys, castles, ruins, and palaces. Some examples of famous heritage sites in England are Dover Castle, Stonehenge, Hadrian's Wall and Battle Abbey.

### Structure of the workshop

- 7.6 This workshop will last between one and a half and two hours and will be structured as follows:
- Introductions

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<sup>1</sup> Topic guides for telephone interviews also followed this topic guide but were directed at the individual rather than a group

- Engagement in heritage
- Barriers to engagement
- Solutions
- Conclusions

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## **2. Introductions (10 mins)**

### **Exercise 1**

7.7 Ask participants to introduce themselves with their:

- name
- organisation
- job role and
- any experience of working with projects to increase the accessibility of heritage

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## **3. Engagement in Heritage (10 mins)**

### **Discussion**

7.8 What do you think is the understanding of heritage among the individuals you represent?

7.9 Is heritage important to the people you represent?

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## **4. Barriers to Engagement (30 mins)**

### **Exercise 2**

7.10 What key barriers do people in general experience in engaging with heritage?

*Prompts if spontaneous response limited – caring responsibilities, busy schedules, poor transport links, no awareness of available sites*

7.11 Why might BME groups/ groups with limiting disabilities/ people from lower socio-economic groups, in particular, not engage with heritage?

*Prompts if spontaneous response limited – cultural irrelevance, poor access, high admission fees*

7.12 Ask participants to explain the barriers they have cited.

7.13 If they haven't listed them discuss the following issues in relation to the extent to which they encourage the engagement of priority groups: physical access, marketing, admission fees, use of innovation and technology.

### **Exercise 3**

7.14 What are the three most significant barriers in preventing the groups you represent from accessing heritage?

7.15 Discuss the similarities and differences in the barriers chosen.

7.16 Could some types of heritage site present more barriers than others? Why?

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## **5. Solutions (30 mins)**

7.17 What could be done to overcome these barriers?

### **Discussion**

7.18 Describe some of the activities that are being done to raise engagement e.g. outreach projects, and ask:

- Is enough being done to increase and broaden engagement?
- Is it appropriate?
- Are any sub-groups' needs not being adequately addressed?
- What else could be done to overcome these barriers and to better include subgroups?

7.19 Have you or your organisation participated in any heritage-related outreach projects? If yes:

- What were the project's aims?
- How did you try to achieve them?
- How do you feel this has impacted on the engagement of the group you represent in heritage?

7.20 If they haven't participated in any ask them to describe any heritage related projects they know of and the impact of the project on the engagement of its target group.

7.21 Are you aware of any of the projects being carried out by English Heritage in raising engagement?

7.22 What is your view of the partnerships between community organisations and English Heritage outreach projects? Do you think there is sufficient community engagement? Are the partnerships effective?

7.23 What role, if any, do community groups currently play in helping to overcome barriers to engagement? Would you like to see this role increased?

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**6. Conclusion (10mins)**

7.24 Do you have anything further to add/ any questions?