



Strategic framework 2013-2019

A response by Civic Voice to HLF's
consultation
April 2011

1. Civic Voice welcomes the opportunity to inform the review of HLF's strategic framework to 2019. This will be of profound importance to the future of heritage and communities everywhere.
2. Civic Voice is the national charity for the civic movement. We work to make the places where everyone lives more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive and to promote civic pride. The network of hundreds of volunteer-led, community based civic societies around the country lies at the heart of the civic movement and it plays an essential role at the core of HLF's strategic aim. This response is informed by their practical experience.
3. Our key points for the strategic review are to:
 - ☛ Commend HLF for its achievements in transforming the funding environment and the perceptions and public benefits from heritage
 - ☛ Use the period of this strategic review to 2019 to provide transformational investment in a new strategic funding programme which secures a more sustainable and resilient community-based heritage movement as a key outcome
 - ☛ Encourage a mix of open and targeted programmes which increases the share of funding on:
 - Small grants from £3,000
 - A targeted programme of support for community heritage on people's doorstep and in their daily lives
 - ☛ Urge a less risk averse culture and style which dramatically reduces the administrative burden, increases flexibility in the use of grants, focuses on outcomes and emphasises the value of up front support and advice over monitoring and evaluation.
4. We have structured our response around the three themes of the consultation:

What should HLF continue doing?

5. In less than 20 years HLF has established its critical role as a champion of heritage. It has transformed the funding environment, broadened perceptions of heritage and brought significant new public benefit from the interaction of heritage, people and communities. We commend HLF for its achievements.

6. This strategic review comes at a critical time and against the background of a fast changing external environment. People are being asked to do more with less. Funding for heritage conservation is in short supply and yet heritage is also being seen as a catalyst for engaging and supporting communities. The strategic review needs to place HLF at the heart of these debates and we welcome the new single strategic aim to make a *“positive and lasting difference for heritage and people”*.

7. HLF is much more than a funding provider and we urge it to strengthen its other roles as a source of research and insight, as a partner, and as a champion for the nation’s heritage and the benefits it brings. It is critically important to recognise these roles as “front line” benefits in assessing HLF’s value for money and they should also be used to inform a more strategic and less reactive approach to its funding role.

What should change?

8. We welcome the continuing support for a mix of open and targeted programmes.

9. With HLF’s support, Civic Voice recently reviewed the grants given civic societies and we discovered only 91 civic societies have benefited to a total of £1.66m through 125 grants since HLF began. Only two awards have been in excess of £50,000 and the average award is £13,300. There has been an additional £3.3m awarded for the restoration of two historic buildings by two civic societies. Yet, it is self evident that the work of civic societies is central to HLF’s aim and far more use should be being made.

10. We particularly welcome the proposed reduction in the minimum level of grant to £3,000 which should help this. We believe it will bring disproportionate benefits in reaching the small community based initiatives that should be a priority. Where HLF has a choice we believe it should increase the share of its funding on the smallest grants.

11. We also urge HLF to adopt a much less risk averse culture and style. We recognise the need to encourage projects which integrate conservation, participation and learning and acknowledge HLF’s role in providing leadership on this. We also recognise the need for effective audit and avoidance of undue fraud. Nevertheless, the current procedures and demands on applicants which are driven by these imperatives act as a major deterrent to people applying and all too frequently stifle projects and have a high opportunity cost for those receiving grants. They also inhibit HLF’s strategic flexibility to respond to changing circumstances. We believe HLF needs to act much more as an enabler and less as an auditor; focusing its staff and procedures on outcomes and emphasising up-front support and advice over monitoring and evaluation. Some projects will fail and this should be viewed as a sign of success in achieving a lighter touch approach which allows others to succeed even better than before and new applicants to come forward. This light touch funding approach will require a major overhaul of HLF’s application procedures and internal audit alongside a culture change programme for its staff.

12. We would additionally, encourage HLF to develop a targeted programme of support for community-led initiatives that promote the value of heritage in people’s daily lives and on their doorstep. This is fundamental to building pride in the places where people live and responding to community needs and the emotional attachment which

people have to their local area. It is self evident that there is a growing interest and potential in developing communities and garnering support for heritage through this approach.

Where can HLF make the greatest impact?

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

Chinese proverb

13. We strongly encourage HLF to take this opportunity to reflect on the balance of funding spent directly on conservation assets and on building the capacity, support and skills of the people and communities that value and care for heritage. The value of a well organised, pro-active, community based network of volunteers championing and caring for heritage is immeasurable and can be achieved for the fraction of the cost of the conservation of even a single mansion house.

14. Given the changing external funding environment and the growing focus on the role of communities in leading and managing change in their area we believe HLF can make a transformational impact through investment in this heritage “software”. This will require a fresh approach which looks beyond the usual debate over “core costs” and “project funding” and focuses on how to build a more sustainable and resilient voluntary heritage movement.

15. This transformation cannot be delivered simply on a project by project basis, although capacity building and community support should be a growing part of project funding. It requires an approach which identifies and values the role played by key community based voluntary sector networks and areas of voluntary sector expertise and invests in them strategically. This will enable networks and groups to make a step change in their organisation and financial sustainability which in turn will bring myriad benefits through the work they do in supporting community groups across the country. This can be achieved through sustained investment across the period of a single strategic framework with benefits that would last for generations.