

The BEN Historic Environment Programme for England

Vision and Strategy

The BEN Historic Environment Programme (HEP) is being developed with grant support from English Heritage. Working in partnership with heritage organisations and ethnic community groups, the project will identify opportunities and partnerships within the heritage sector in order to develop a range of project forms that can be replicated by heritage organisations, thereby fuelling the increase of ethnic access to the heritage sites, historic collections and resources embodied within the heritage sector. Through the catalytic impact of this project BEN and partner organisations aim to create a climate within which there will be an increasing number of activities, resources and offshoot initiatives which enable physical and intellectual access by ethnic communities to heritage in the built and natural environment.

The BEN Integrated Approach to Enabling Access

BEN uses an integrated approach to working with ethnic communities, bringing together social, cultural and environmental themes. This context of working enables the substance of projects to be extraordinarily rich, keying directly into the quality of life of ethnic communities.

Strategically attending to the needs of ethnic communities and heritage organisations

It is commonly accepted that ethnic communities need support to enter into new areas of activities. However, it is not often recognised that mainstream organisations endeavouring to reach out to involve ethnic communities for the first time also need encouragement and support. One of the reasons for proposing the HEP is BEN's recognition that there is a lot of goodwill within the heritage sector, which is however hampered by a lack of knowledge and experience as to how to engage with ethnic communities. Although many would like to apply for funding, they feel they do not have the skills and clarity of what the work means in order to proceed to put funding applications together.

The level of engagement that HEP offers to partners is pitched at a level at which participating partners can enter a new field of work in a supported context and without substantial disruption to their existing work programme. HEP is positioned as a pathfinder initiative, which aims to be the springboard for organisations and community groups to develop the capacity to generate their own offshoot projects, thereby continually increasing programmes of activity which involve ethnic groups. The HEP aims to create a space for heritage organisations and community groups to explore and establish methodology. As a result, they will be able to ascertain clearly their future staffing and resource needs for applications for new funding to take on defined programmes of new work.

BEN is deliberately positioned to act as a catalyst and bridging organisation to nurture connections and support both sides. BEN believes that ultimately the success of its work is to do itself out of a job, leaving behind networks of mainstream organisations and ethnic community groups which can sustain activities within a positive relationship.

Ethnic communities are British too

Everyone's sense of identity and belonging is firmly rooted in the historic environment. HEP will play a crucial role in social inclusion by promoting the multicultural interpretation of the historic environment, highlighting the reality of the multicultural components of British history.

Although identifying cultural aspects of heritage collections, sites and environments is important to express the recognition of Britain's multicultural history and the presence of diverse cultural groups, access to everything that is indigenous to these islands is equally relevant to settled ethnic communities. Members of ethnic communities are British citizens. For those who are born here, it is particularly important to recognise that they belong here although they have a special relationship to their ancestral country.

Not all engagements will touch on ethnic cultural themes. There are many project opportunities which will be simply about access to built and natural environments of enormous beauty which everyone enjoys.

A sense of excitement and opportunity - more than the sum of its parts

It is often extremely difficult, even for experienced organisations, to promote a narrow range of activities to ethnic communities. All people, including ethnic communities, like choice, a range of things to consider and do. By bringing together many partner organisations onto the BEN Historic Environment Programme, we create this choice, and will enable ethnic communities to initially gravitate to what happens to interest them. It will also allow projects to develop drawing on the strengths of more than one organisation, bringing a sense of excitement that results from the opportunities offered which are more than the sum of its parts. For example BEN has already been sounding out one of its project ideas - the BEN Hadrian's Wall Project - and many groups, hearing about the project, have put their names on a list to be involved when it is funded. Instead of just visiting Hadrian's Wall, the idea is to draw on the multicultural history that is embodied in Hadrian's Wall. Hadrian's Wall has some of the best documented materials on the actual people working on the wall, with real names and details of what life was like. Groups of ethnic minority young people will visit different parts of the wall and a dramatist will work with them to access the past history and reflect on what it means for them to live in multicultural Britain today. The resource generated from exploring what ethnic young people think it means for them to be living in multicultural Britain today is also relevant for the use of mainstream young people to reflect on their position in multicultural Britain.

Developing methodology and project forms bringing together diverse opportunities and themes

Through identifying opportunities and themes for projects, BEN and heritage organisations and community groups will work together on a range of project forms. The methodology and project forms identified can then be replicated across similar properties or sites. Heritage organisations and community groups can apply for new funding to do a number of these. A major aim of the project is to generate such offshoot projects, so that the number of projects and therefore the scope and number of activities involving ethnic groups with heritage is continually increasing.

Promoting good practice and stimulating activities and innovation

Events will be held for members of the heritage sector, funders, policy makers and with ethnic community groups, including those who are not directly involved with the HEP. These will provide a platform:

- to promote understanding and awareness of the scope of enabling access by ethnic communities to heritage
- to share good practice
- to fuel debate around current issues
- to stimulate networking and partnerships
- to stimulate increasing activity and projects

Resources, including a website, will be generated to enhance access to heritage.

Releasing the missing contribution of ethnic communities - volunteering, employment, governance

Initially, the first steps will be concentrating on physical and intellectual access. But building on this work, the next steps will be to open up other opportunities which ultimately will release the vast missing contribution of ethnic communities to the care and protection of the built and natural heritage. Ethnic communities will ultimately, as a natural development to access, participate in employment within the sector, engage as volunteers, and take part in governance. All of us who are privileged to be in touch

with beauty and meaning of the historic environment will come to love it, and as human beings we all care about what we love.

Organisations and community groups wishing to participate in the developing BEN Historic Environment Programme may wish to contact:

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