



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP,
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care,
Department of Health and Social Care,
39 Victoria Street,
London,
SW1H 0EU

25 March 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

COVID-19: wellbeing and cultural heritage conservation

I am writing on behalf of the Institute of Conservation (Icon) regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and the potential of the cultural heritage conservation sector can offer people and communities during and after these challenging times.

Icon is a membership organisation and charity, which brings together those with a passion for conserving cultural heritage. We represent around 2,500 individuals and organisations comprising professional conservators, heritage scientists and many others with a commitment to ensuring the long-term survival of objects and collections, historic buildings and archaeology.

We wholeheartedly commend the Government's measures to support communities and businesses amidst this crisis and are extremely grateful to all the NHS frontline staff working hard to keep us safe and well in challenging circumstances; our sincere thanks goes to them for their courage and fortitude.

And, in the cultural heritage sector, we too would like to play our part. For this reason I would like to take the opportunity to draw your attention to the support that our sector can offer. Participating in cultural heritage activities can help individuals mitigate and prevent wellbeing challenges in many ways, including:

- **nurturing a sense of identity** - heritage brings people and communities together across generational, ethnic and socio-economic divides by creating a sense of shared belonging.
- **supporting social connections** - the wide range of volunteering opportunities within the sector facilitate the development of meaningful relationships.
- **building confidence and self-esteem** - conservation is a highly skilled practice and can significantly empower people through new skills and competencies. Studies have also shown that working with historical objects engenders positive feelings of self worth and responsibility.

The UK conservation sector includes several public and civil society organisations that have previously been able to deliver the many benefits of cultural heritage to support the health and wellbeing agenda, whether through social prescription schemes or other targeted projects. Icon is currently working on one such project - Conservation for Wellbeing, a pilot project that combines conservation, archives and mental health. Sadly, this project has been temporarily suspended due to the Government's necessary social distancing policy. Having seen positive outcomes already, we very much hope that the project will restart in due course, though this is partly dependent on the flexibility and support of our funder.

However, as you will be aware, the COVID-19 pandemic represents a serious threat to a largely charitable sector that is heavily reliant on audiences, visitors and public participation, and a significant number of freelance workers. I have written to your colleagues at DCMS and the Treasury to outline how the cultural heritage sector can be best supported to ensure its survival and benefit for people and communities now and in the coming months.

Icon stands ready to support the work of your department and the Government as best we can. Our sector has already been proactively delivering health and wellbeing projects in recognition of the value of this work and its impact on society, and we will continue to investigate remote / digital ways of maintaining these positive outcomes while current measures to address the pandemic rightfully prevent interpersonal contact.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sara Crofts". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sara Crofts BArch (Hons) MSc IHBC FRSA
Chief Executive