

Parliament’s Great Clock, also known as Big Ben, undergoes essential maintenance UK Parliament/Stephen Pike. Parliamentary copyright images are reproduced with the permission of Parliament

On Wednesday our Chair, Sir Peter Luff, and former Chief Executive Carole Souter spoke at the Culture, Media and Sport Committee Countries of Culture inquiry evidence session.

The Countries of Culture inquiry was launched in March 2016 to look into “ways to preserve and promote UK's cultural wealth”. The Chair of the Committee, Jesse Norman, said: "The UK has huge cultural and artistic riches in its regions and nations, including galleries, museums, music, theatre and festivals. This inquiry will look at how best to preserve and enhance those resources, especially in the face of continuing budget pressures;… at enhanced linkages between national and regional institutions; and at new ways in which culture and the arts can be used to develop and revitalise communities."

You can watch the session on the Parliament Live website.

HLF submitted written evidence, which will be published online when it has been formally accepted by the Committee.

Thanking National Lottery players

During the session, Sir Peter began by thanking National Lottery players for their generosity over the last 21 years, which has meant that HLF has invested £7.1billion in more than 40,000 projects. He talked about some of the

individuals involved in HLF projects and the profound difference heritage has made to their lives - Owen Mort, a young man in Northern Ireland who has retrained as a blacksmith; and the Auckland Castle Heritage Hunters, young people in the North East whose lives were changed by getting involved in a heritage project.

Heritage needs diversity

Sir Peter stressed that we want our projects to be as diverse as the people who play the National Lottery. He told the committee that most HLF grants are decided locally in regions and nations – 91% over the last three years. Because HLF does not define heritage (it is defined by those who apply to us, who describe what they want to keep from the past, share and hand on) we can help as many people as possible to explore, restore and share the things that mean so much to them.

Challenges facing the sector

When asked about the challenges facing the heritage sector and HLF, Sir Peter explained that our research suggests local authority cuts to arts and heritage budgets were not uniform across the country. In some areas there are significant cuts to budgets while in others budgets are being maintained or even increased, and Sir Peter said we are going to investigate this further.

[quote]“Thanks to National Lottery players, HLF has invested £7.1billion in more than 40,000 projects over the last 21 years.”[/quote]

Carole Souter stressed that HLF’s focus would be to help grow the capacity of institutions for greater resilience in challenging times, rather than filling revenue gaps, which we are unable to do. Where institutions are receiving less local authority funding, it is essential HLF helps them develop the skills needed to diversify revenue streams. Both Carole and Sir Peter stressed that should local authorities anticipate issues, they should talk to us as soon as possible to see if we can find solutions together.

Incredible heritage across the UK

Sir Peter emphasised that HLF invests in the full breadth of heritage across the UK. We fund museums and galleries; archives; historic buildings; parks; industrial, maritime and transport projects and natural heritage as well as the intangible – people’s memories, cultures and stories. Eighty per cent of our spending has been outside London.

During the committee hearing, Sir Peter and Carole talked about projects we have supported outside London such as Lincoln Cathedral, Derby Silk Mill, Bath Abbey, Giant's Causeway, Swansea Museum and many others. We know 80% of people say local heritage makes an area a better place – it is very important that we are able to reach as many communities as possible.

How HLF works to encourage applications

Throughout the session Sir Peter and Carole highlighted the work of the local HLF teams whose staff can help with applications – several of the Committee members spoke positively about HLF and the local teams. We also have an online community for people to discuss ideas and share tips and our website is full of helpful resources to help as many

people as possible to experience the life-changing impact of heritage.

If you want to follow the progress of the rest of the inquiry, visit the Parliament UK website and follow #CountriesOfCulture on Twitter.