

# Landscape Futures and the Challenge of Change:

## Project Report and Recommendations

“Because of a changing climate, loss is accelerating and we’re finding ourselves very much on the back foot... We have to find a way of consistently applying a framework to allow good decisions to be made about where to focus our limited resources... This project is really important. It forces us to confront some of these issues and start to talk about how we might establish processes to deal with loss, and make space to have conversations with communities about their connection to changing places. This kind of leadership is essential as we see these forces of change becoming ever more present in our daily lives.”

Ian Morrison, Director of Policy and Evidence, Historic England

## Background

The heritage sector recognises that climate change’s accelerating effects will force a reconsideration of the care of heritage assets; in some situations, management of partial loss or extensive adaptation will be necessary. The sector is largely unprepared to meet this looming challenge, and, until recently, strategies for responding proactively have been extremely limited.

The **Landscape Futures and the Challenge of Change** (LFCC) project convened a two-year programme of outreach and consultation which brought together historic and natural environment practitioners to develop a new pathway for proactively and positively managing heritage transformations: **adaptive release**. This approach is delivering practical solutions for challenging sites and underpinning discussion about emerging frameworks for policy and planning in both UK and international contexts. One project participant described this as a “potentially game changing piece of work” that will “help us [the heritage sector] to make better, more effective and more sustainable decisions”.

## Project details

LFCC followed on from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded Heritage Futures research programme, a collaboration with 25 partner organisations which ran from 2015-2019 (AH/ M004376/1). Follow-on funding from the Landscape Decisions Programme (AH/ T012196/1) in 2020 enabled the public body for the historic environment in England, Historic England (HE), and a major heritage practitioner and landowner, National Trust (NT), to co-design and co-deliver applied research in collaboration with academics and sector colleagues.

The team of investigators was led by Professor Caitlin DeSilvey (University of Exeter), and included Professor Rodney Harrison (UCL), Dr Hannah Fluck (Historic England), Professor Rosie Hails (National Trust), and Dr Ingrid Samuel (National Trust), supported by Research Associates Amber Blundell and Harald Fredheim. The involvement of Natural England (NE) as a project partner ensured consideration was given to the natural environment in developing integrated strategies for natural and cultural heritage decision-making.

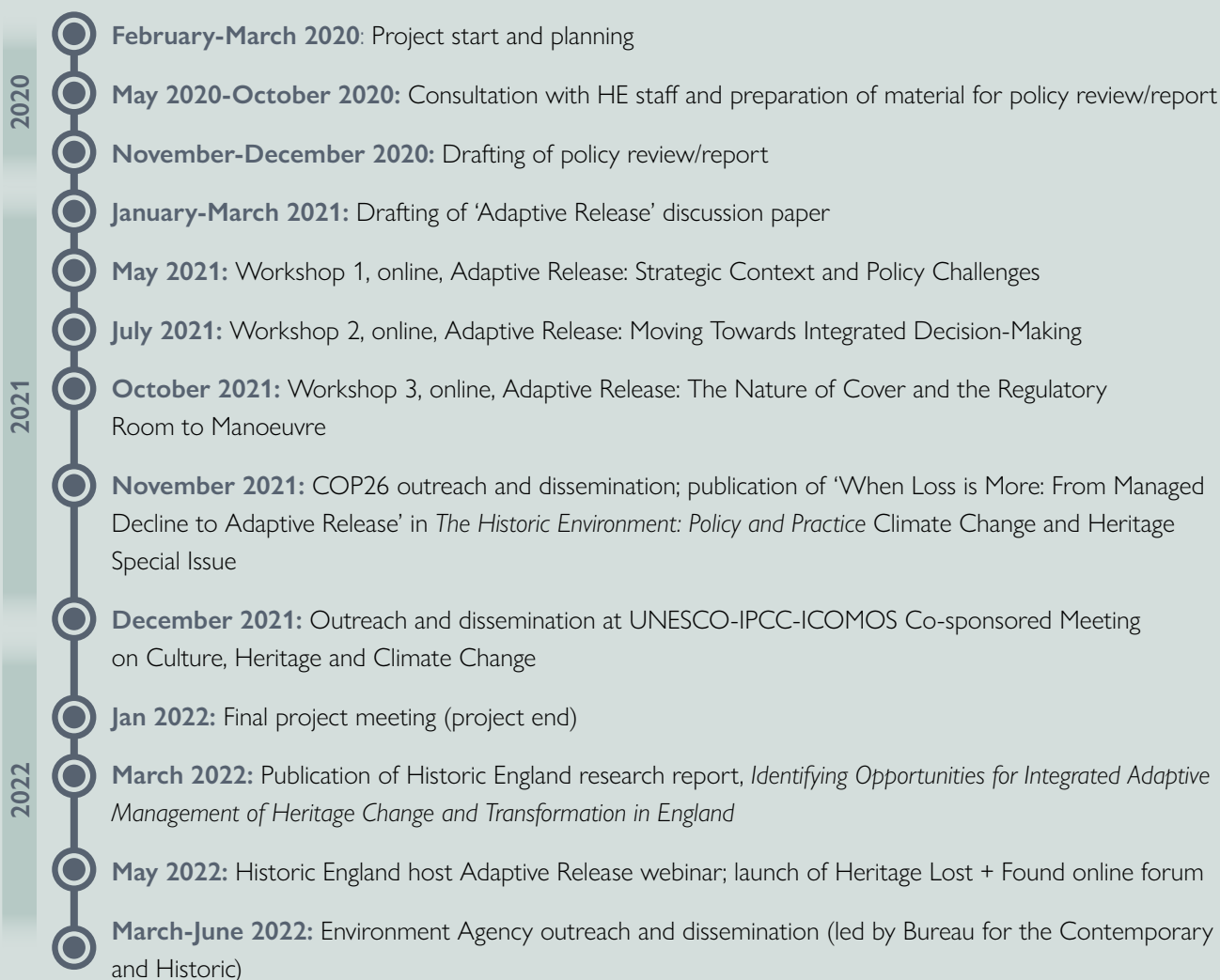
Translational funding from the University of Exeter’s Policy Support Fund in 2022 facilitated expanded partnership with the Environment Agency to develop guidance for trialling adaptive release in selected flood and coastal erosion risk management (FCERM) schemes.



Mullion Cove, Cornwall. © Russell Johnston



## Timeline



## What is Adaptive Release?

Adaptive release is a heritage management pathway that supports the dynamic transformation of an asset and its associated values and significance, within wider landscape settings. Through ongoing monitoring and structured engagement, it provides a proactive, adaptive management option for historic features and environments affected by accelerated environmental change.

“ We talk about the careful management of change, but it's a really difficult thing to face into.... Coming out of this project we're all thinking a bit differently, and have the confidence to do more, to trial adaptive release in some real places... If we need to lose something – and this is really at the very narrow end of the spectrum – it's really important we lose it well; it's really important that we find a way to have these conversations together, that we bring people in, that we provide that longer-term landscape context, that we consult, that we record, and – if we have to – we release, we mourn and we celebrate together. ”

Ingrid Samuel, Placemaking and Heritage Director,  
National Trust

## Key outputs

LFCC brought together national policy makers and one of the UK's largest landowners and managers of natural and cultural heritage assets to co-produce an approach that works for them. Other agencies and organisations engaged through workshops and webinars included Natural England, English Heritage Trust, the Environment Agency, Forestry England, the South Downs National Park Authority, The Landmark Trust, Historic Environment Scotland, Cadw and Cornwall Council. Over 100 operational and strategic staff were directly involved in project activities and hundreds more learned about the work through publications and presentations to UK and international audiences. Project outcomes are now actively informing international discussions about heritage and climate change. The project serves as a successful model for knowledge co-creation that delivers benefits directly to policy makers, regulators and decision makers.

- ▶ LFCC has contributed to a paradigm shift in heritage practice, demonstrating that value and significance can be generated by working *with* processes of change and transformation, as well as by securing preservation.
- ▶ As a direct outcome of the project, HE established an on-line forum (Heritage Lost + Found), where practitioners are actively discussing new approaches and developing best practice.
- ▶ HE 2022 Climate Change Adaptation reporting included LFCC as a case study and noted the contribution to progress against a key goal in 2016 HE Climate Adaptation Plan (5.6 *Develop an approach for dealing with inevitable change, including loss*). The project was also included in the COP26 Climate Champions Loss and Damage report.
- ▶ Project outcomes have provided a foundation for HE collaboration with DCMS and DEFRA on management of cultural heritage climate risks, and were presented as evidence in the HE submission for the 3rd National Adaptation Plan.
- ▶ Adaptive release is included in jointly-developed guidance for climate change adaptation for historic and beautiful places – an initiative led by NT in partnership with Cadw, Department for Communities – Northern Ireland, Historic Environment Scotland, English Heritage Trust, National Trust Scotland and HE.
- ▶ Within the NT, project outcomes are being absorbed into a range of current and future activity, from property-level projects to centrally-led programmes such as the NT's Climate Change Adaptation workstream, and the project's multidisciplinary approach has helped to build a shared sense of endeavour between NT culture and nature conservation practitioners.
- ▶ Adaptive release is increasingly reflected in NT directorate delivery and communication plans and is being recognised in the way the organisation is updating its Conservation Principles, conservation practice and monitoring activity.
- ▶ Adaptive release is gradually percolating into NT decision-making gate points within its project management framework (which automatically now requires a climate action output from large projects) and is being considered as an option where preservation in perpetuity is deemed to be unsustainable.

“ *Heritage has seen a shift from preservation and protection to conservation and managing change, and beyond. Just as we have come on a journey up until now, there's no reason why the journey shouldn't continue to consider whether there is a place for approaches like adaptive release.* ”

Duncan McCallum, Strategy and Listing Director, Historic England





Roof of 18th C malthouse, East Titchberry, North Devon. © Amber Blundell.

## Recommendations

- ▶ Continue to facilitate partnership between Historic England, the National Trust and other partners to identify appropriate sites to be used to trial adaptive release pathways, to include (1) identifying and addressing policy and practical barriers and (2) developing effective strategies for public engagement and evaluation.
- ▶ Provide targeted support to the Environment Agency to consider how adaptive release can be applied to manage at-risk assets in FCERM contexts (building on ButCH consultancy report recommendations).
- ▶ Publish guidance to set out the criteria that would need to be met in order to demonstrate the case for adaptive release and to establish best practice for implementation of adaptive release pathways.
- ▶ Ensure that HE's *Conservation Principles* amendments recognise the value of the existing document in empowering regulators to manage change flexibly and proactively, and mention adaptive release in future amendments as enhancement of these powers.
- ▶ Explore opportunities for using Heritage Partnership Agreements and Conservation Management Plans and existing statutory tools to support adaptive release pathways, and identify case studies to demonstrate options and actions.
- ▶ Remain in dialogue with DCMS, DEFRA and other policy-makers to embed adaptive release pathways into planning for managing climate change risks to cultural heritage and pursue necessary policy reforms to achieve policy alignment.
- ▶ Resource ongoing facilitation of cross-sector collaboration across natural and historic environment sectors (to include discussion with Natural England about potential application of 'climate smart adaptive designations' frameworks in historic environment contexts).
- ▶ Engage proactively with the insurance sector and other owners/managers to identify opportunities to shift policy to provide support for adaptive management of loss and asset transformation, where appropriate.
- ▶ Seek opportunities to promote and discuss adaptive release approaches in international contexts (via contacts in IUCN, ICOMOS and ICCROM) and at future IPCC and COP meetings.
- ▶ Develop further internal case studies and training material within practitioner organisations to build confidence, and work with external partners to design and deliver targeted CPD and skills-training courses.
- ▶ Use the Heritage Lost + Found forum to develop an archive of relevant case studies with the sector (possibly to align with ongoing Historic Environment Forum work on Sector Resilience, and additional case studies in the [Heritage Responds Climate Change Story Map](#)).



## Publications and resources

When Loss is More: from Managed Decline to Adaptive Release. DeSilvey C, Fredheim H, Fluck H, Hails R, Harrison R, Samuel I, Blundell A (2021). *Historic Environment: Policy and Practice*, 12, 3-4: 418-433.  
[www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17567505.2021.1957263](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17567505.2021.1957263)

Identifying Opportunities for Integrated Adaptive Management of Heritage Change and Transformation in England. DeSilvey C, Fredheim H, Blundell A, Harrison R. *Historic England Research Report* 18/2022.  
[historicengland.org.uk/research/results/reports/18-2022](http://historicengland.org.uk/research/results/reports/18-2022)

Heritage Lost + Found Forum [khub.net/group/heritage-lost-and-found](https://khub.net/group/heritage-lost-and-found)

Adaptive Release Webinar Recording. May 2022. [historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/training-skills/online-training/webinars/recordings/webinar-on-adaptive-release](http://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/training-skills/online-training/webinars/recordings/webinar-on-adaptive-release)

Is There a Role for Adaptive Release in Heritage Practice? Briefing Note. March 2022.  
[www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/esi/pdfs/Introducing\\_Adaptive\\_Release\\_March2022.pdf](http://www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/esi/pdfs/Introducing_Adaptive_Release_March2022.pdf)

General view of Martello Tower from the south west, showing sea defences.  
Bawdsley, Suffolk © Historic England Archive (DP046352)



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**Note:** This document supports the further development of the AR approach and does not represent a formal position by Historic England, the National Trust or Natural England.