

# **Study of the Economic Value of Northern Ireland's Historic Environment**

Summary Report on behalf of:

**Department of the Environment**

June 2012



## 1 Introduction to the Study

Northern Ireland's historic environment is a precious asset that has the potential to tell the story of all of its people throughout the 10,000 years of human life in this region. Most notable are the sites and monuments in state care and the buildings listed for their special architectural or historic interest. Collectively, these sites and their landscape setting provide an historic environment that creates the unique place that is Northern Ireland. It is this historic environment that makes not only a wonderful landscape in which to live, but creates a very distinctive sense of place that is attractive to those living elsewhere and who may wish to visit, invest, or come to live here. The historic environment is an important asset which contributes to our social and economic well-being. This report aims to demonstrate the value that it brings.

### Key Figures:

- 190 monuments in state care
- 1,800 scheduled monuments
- 8,500 listed historic buildings
- 17,000 less well-known archaeological sites and monuments
- 17,000 surviving industrial sites
- Some 125,000 pre-1919 historic buildings many of which are still in active use
- 3,000 shipwrecks

Source: Northern Ireland Environment Agency

## 2 The Key Findings of the Quantitative Analysis

Our quantitative analysis identifies that:

- The historic environment is a major contributor to the Northern Ireland economy, creating and sustaining circa 5,400 Full Time Equivalent jobs – this figure reflects both direct and indirect jobs and ‘out of state’ visitor expenditure only;
- The historic environment generates circa £287 million of output per annum and £135 million of GVA (Gross Value Added) each year – these figures reflect both direct and indirect expenditure and ‘out of state’ visitor expenditure only;
- The construction sector generates a broadly similar impact to that produced by ‘out of state’ visitors in relation to the historic environment in NI. This is consistent with the findings of recent research undertaken in Scotland. However, a similar study completed in Wales indicated that the construction sector was of greater importance in terms of impact;
- When the impact of domestic tourism is included, the NI historic environment generates circa £532 million of output per annum, creates/sustains a total of circa 10,000 Full Time Equivalent jobs and generates circa £250 million of GVA each year;
- The GVA produced by the NI historic environment (including domestic tourism) is equivalent to 11% of the Northern Ireland construction sector and 33% of the Information and Communication sector;
- Each £1 invested by the public sector generates some £3-4 spend by the private sector<sup>1</sup>; and
- Although its contribution to the local economy is significant, the historic environment in Northern Ireland produces a significantly lower level of output, employment and GVA than that of its neighbouring jurisdictions, when assessed on a per capita basis. This suggests that there is significant potential to further develop the historic environment sector in NI.

### **3 Wider Benefits - Survey Findings and Case Studies**

#### **Survey Findings**

A wide range of economic and social benefits associated with the historic environment was highlighted by the stakeholders who responded to our survey.

They believed that the historic environment generates a range of benefits for visitors and non-visitors alike that can be expressed qualitatively.

The principal benefits stated by respondents were:

- A sense of identity and history (84% of respondents);
- Preservation of heritage for future generations (79% of respondents);
- Provision of a better living environment (79% of respondents);
- Economic regeneration (e.g. increased tourism income and employment) through heritage conservation and renovation (79% of respondents); and
- Provision of access to historic environment sites for those who are from socially and economically disadvantaged communities (68% of respondents).

#### **Case Studies**

Seven case studies were selected for study: St Patrick's Heritage, Causeway Coastal Route, Derry City Walls and Ebrington Barracks, Navan Centre and Armagh, Lough Erne and Fermanagh, Belfast Cathedral Quarter and Belmont Tower. The case studies were carefully selected to cover a range of characteristics and themes and therefore highlighted a wide range of benefits and lessons learned.

Common issues and recommendations for wider application, i.e. in terms of realising the economic potential of NI's historic environment, include:

- Ensuring that benefits that are derived from the historic environment flow to all parts of local communities (e.g. hotel and commercial space developments alongside public access attractions);
- Engaging the local population through community workshops and open days and evenings during the re-development phase;
- Encouraging first time and return visits through authentic re-creation of the historic atmosphere such as re-enactment events, regular educational and entertainment activities, targeted communication with the public and provision of covered areas that could both accommodate large events and avoid weather issues;

- Embracing modern technology such as providing audio-trails both on site and online (such as podcasts and smart phone applications) that provide more and attractive information about the sites;
- Strengthening links between individual assets, building on the value and appeal of groups of assets to sustain and lengthen visitor stay and engagement. For example:
  - The Belmont Tower Case Study demonstrates the benefits of establishing links between the building and its association with the literary heritage (for example CS Lewis) of the surrounding area of Belfast;
  - The Causeway Coast and Glens Case Study illustrates the potential benefits of forming connections between a range of heritage sites across this relatively large geographical area, and
  - The Lough Erne Case Study identifies the Lough's link to the larger Shannon-Erne Waterway. Reopening the Upper Ulster Canal linking Upper Lough Erne with Lough Neagh would increase its accessibility and potential for further recreational activities;
- Strengthening links with historic environment assets in other countries, especially in the Republic of Ireland, the USA and Canada, and applying for internationally recognised status such as World Heritage Site designation would attract out of state tourism; for example Navan and Gracehill.
- All of the themes (tourism, regeneration, learning, environment and community cohesion / social inclusion) that are relevant to a site should be considered together when designing and marketing a site;
- Raising the core organisations' and site managers' awareness of what constitutes economic benefit, in particular, that economic benefit is not limited to tourism revenue.

Benefits reported from the case study analysis included:

***Economic***

- Attracting visitors and creating jobs
- Increased footfall in areas in need of regeneration
- Enhancement of night-time economy

***Social***

- Community cohesion
- Sense of identity and place
- Civic pride and wellbeing
- Creating safer and shared spaces
- Focal point for wider regeneration

- Skills development and volunteering opportunities

## 4 Recommendations

The recommendations emanating from this study are as follows.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

**Develop a coherent strategy and implementation plan for realising the potential of the historic environment.**

Key steps should involve:

- Creation of an implementation group with a framework for action.
- Embed the strategy in the Programme for Government and involve other government departments and NGOs in its implementation.
- Development of a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the progress and impact of strategy implementation.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2**

**Public sector funding should be increased to realise further economic and social benefit and to encourage private sector involvement**

Comparison of the economic impacts of the historic environment with those of other sectors, highlights that it is a significant sector within the NI economy. However, it produces a significantly lower level of output, employment and GVA than its neighbouring jurisdictions, when assessed on a per capita basis. This suggests that there is significant potential to further develop the historic environment sector in NI.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3**

**Presentation of historic environment sites should be reviewed to enhance their visitors experience and to maximise their impact**

The history and cultural heritage of sites should be easy to access;

- Clear signage should be used on the way to and in the site;
- Connections between the site and other sites / assets should be developed / enhanced;
- Sites should provide a variety of activities ranging from educational, entertainment and linking the historic asset and the natural environment

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

**To sustain and increase the present level of impact generated by the historic environment in NI.**

All principal means of marketing and promoting historic environment attractions should be significantly improved, including:

- The organisations' own websites and other websites;
- Printed brochures and literature;
- Stands at festivals and tourism fairs;
- Social media sites including applications and smart phones
- Television and radio.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 5**

**Organisations involved in the historic environment should consider ways of expanding their existing linkages with suitable partners (including links with the natural environment) to coordinate marketing and promotion efforts**

Collaboration between a range of partners in delivering activities relevant to the historic environment creates benefits in the form of:

- Increased profile and higher visitor numbers for attractions;
- Access to additional funding sources;
- Networking potential;
- Provision of specialist technical advice from other organisations;
- Joint promotional activities; and
- Sharing of information and ideas for visitor development.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 6**

**An economic impact toolkit should be developed for use within the historic environment sector**

Future monitoring activity could be supported by the development of an economic impact toolkit, to ensure that a consistent approach to data capture is applied across the sector. The toolkit could also show how to make the best use of information for the management and promotion of the historic environment.

## 5 Conclusion

This report has quantified the economic value of the historic environment in Northern Ireland in terms of income and jobs. The resulting figures highlight the fact that the historic environment makes a significant contribution to the local economy, but that it produces a lower level of output, employment and GVA than its neighbouring jurisdictions when assessed on a per capita basis.

To date, the economic impact of Northern Ireland's historic environment has been produced in the absence of a co-ordinated strategy.

This study recommends that: Government and NGO stakeholders develop an overarching and coherent strategy for future investment in the historic environment; the strategy should be embedded within the *Programme for Government*; and it should be supported by a robust monitoring and evaluation framework that will assess its impact and value for money.

It is considered that the adoption of a strategic approach to future investment will assist the sector in delivering higher levels of economic and social benefit, which in turn, will contribute to the achievement of economic and tourism development objectives set by the NI Executive.