Green Heat Network Fund: Call for Evidence

Historic England Response October 2020

Historic England is the Government's statutory adviser on all matters relating to the historic environment in England. We are a non-departmental public body established under the National Heritage Act 1983 and sponsored by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). We champion and protect England's historic places, providing expert advice to local planning authorities, developers, owners and communities to help ensure our historic environment is properly understood, enjoyed and cared for.

Given the nature of the questions and our interests we only have general observations to make on the subject of the Green Heat Network Fund.

Historic England recognise the urgent need for action to reduce carbon emissions and the role that heat networks can play in supporting this. Historic England are currently working on two projects on their own buildings that are including ground source heat pumps that may be of interest as examples of how such technology can be compatible with heritage assets: one for the repair and adaptive reuse of Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings (see https://fcbstudios.com/work/view/shrewsbury-flaxmill-maltings and https://historicengland.org.uk/get-involved/visit/shrewsbury-flax-mill/) and the other at The Engine House, Swindon. We are also aware of a number of examples of low carbon heating systems in historically sensitive places (all National Trust owned properties and historic landscapes) such as Wimpole Hall https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wimpole-estate/features/digging-deep-at-wimpole-to-go-greener, lake source heating at the Blickling Estate in Norfolk https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/blickling-estate/news/completing-the-lake-source-heat-pump-project, and ground source heat pump at Croome in Worcestershire. While these are not perhaps the usual idea of heat networks they serve to demonstrate that with appropriate care and understanding such approaches are possible even in our most sensitive historic places.

Further information on low and zero carbon technology and historic buildings can be found here: https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/energy-efficiency-and-historic-buildings/low-and-zero-carbon-technologies/ and specifically on heat pumps and historic environment here - https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/eehb-heat-pumps/heag172-heat-pumps/

Heat networks, and the associated technologies and infrastructure, have the potential to impact upon the historic environment – on historic buildings, structures and places as well as below ground archaeological remains. Any investment in heat networks and associated decarbonising technologies needs to be mindful of historic environment – the potential harm, limitations and opportunities - from the outset. Historic England would be happy to work with BEIS, and other partners, to develop approaches that minimise harm to the historic environment and maximise the reduction in carbon emissions.