

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Strategic Plan

2019-2024

Introduction

In 2017 the CWGC marked its centenary, at the height of the international commemorations of the centenary of the First World. This plan articulates how the organisation will move forward over the next five years, building on past work and ensuring a sustainable and effective future.

Over the past three years we have embraced the need to

- engage more proactively with the public
- appreciate the heritage value of our estate, developing a clearer understanding of the condition of our structures and adopting a new conservation led approach to their maintenance, working in tandem with local heritage bodies.

We have done this within our existing budget, at the same time as supporting the many commemorative events led by our member governments and other key stakeholders.

Over the next five years, we will build on this work, ensuring that the legacy of the centenaries is secured, that commemoration endures and is meaningful, and the most effective programmes are embedded in our work, funded and expanded. Our ability to do everything that we would like to will be dependent on the ability of the charity to generate the necessary additional income.

And we will rise to some additional challenges, including

- How to maintain and develop skills and productivity in the light of an aging workforce, with very low staff turnover.
- How to sustain our horticultural reputation and standards, whilst responding to global initiatives to reduce chemical use and improve our environmental impact.
- How to respond to a post-Brexit employment environment for our expatriate UK based staff and their families in Europe,
- How to operate effectively globally in a locally compliant way, given the status we have as a Royal Charter body.
- How to support our business needs for staff and customers alike with an effective and fully integrated digital and IT strategy.

Our ESG commitments

As an organisation funded by the taxpayers of six nations, and increasingly by public donations for our new work, we hold ourselves to high standards.

Our values are

- Respect
- Communication
- Excellence
- Teamwork
- Professionalism
- Commitment

We will strive to incorporate these values in all that we do. For the leadership team at least, we need to add transparency, openness and honesty to that list, ensuring we are mutually supportive as we drive the organisation forwards.

Environmental

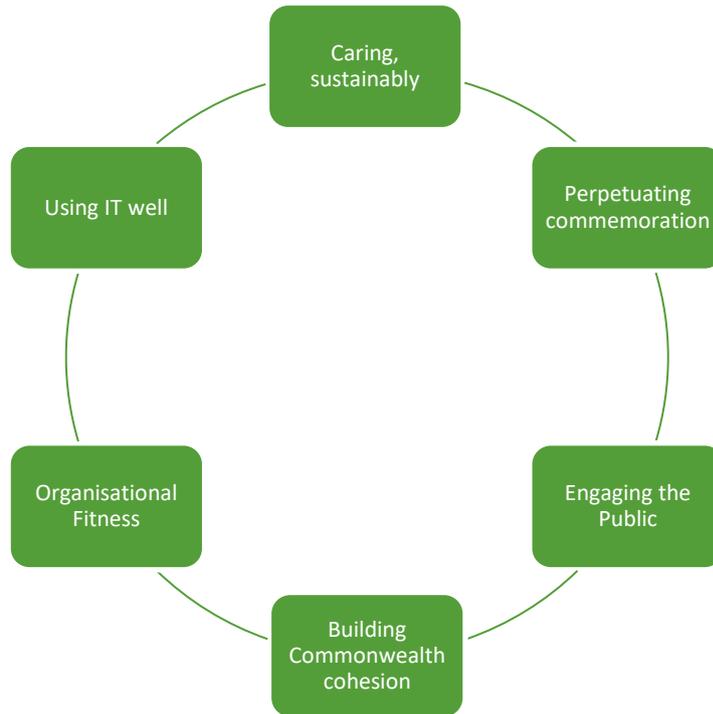
We are committed to working on ever more sustainable and responsible horticultural practices, reducing the use of harmful pesticides and other agrochemicals, and trying to conserve our portfolio of historic structures using greener building practices. We are trying to make our offices and base sites more environmentally friendly, reducing the use of single use plastics and aiming for zero to landfill.

Social

We strive to be a fair employer, treating all staff, volunteers, contractors and all those who work with us with respect and equity. We are working to engage local communities with our work, encouraging participation in care and commemoration, and offer support and a warm welcome to visitors to our sites, to researchers or to those who approach us for information. We will be responsible, responsive and accountable to all our stakeholders.

Governance

The organisation's governance is underpinned by member governments, our Commissioners and our staff who are committed to the highest standards of performance and accountability.



Key ambitions

Caring, sustainably.

We are the guardians of the war dead of the Commonwealth, for now and for the future. After 100 years of care, we need to focus in particular on sustainability, improving our environmental impact, and consolidating our conservation programme.

Perpetuating commemoration

We want to carry on the legacy of the centenary commemorations, engaging younger people, working to tell the stories of all those we commemorate, from both World Wars.

Engaging the public with our work

We need to offer an enriching and meaningful experience for visitors, encouraging more visits both to our online resources and to the cemeteries and memorials.

Building Commonwealth cohesion

To meet our Charter ambition of bringing the people of the Commonwealth closer together as a result of their shared sacrifice, we need to build partnerships with other bodies across the Commonwealth and our global estate.

Organisational fitness

The Commission wants its fabled operational standards to be matched by its efficient management, dedicated teams and the effective use of its member states' resources. We need to develop all aspects of our management to be fit for the future.

A. Caring, in perpetuity, for the fallen

We want to **maintain the standards** for which the Commission has become well known and respected. This has to be balanced with **ever-growing demands on our budget** from an aging estate, and adapting to external environmental challenges including **more extreme weather** events and **water scarcity**. We will **measure** horticultural care standards with our Performance and Quality Management System (PQMS) globally, but ensure that we prioritise the **aspects of care that matter most to our visitors**.

By 2024 we will consistently achieve average 80% PQMS scoring

As we become more visible, the poorer standards which prevail in **scattered grave sites** around the UK will only lead to more invidious comparison with the pristine standards of the war cemeteries. We will use **volunteers** to plug this gap, helping us monitor condition, and provide basic levels of care under our supervision. The Annington-funded “Eyes on, Hands on” Project will be the first stage in this.

By 2024, 75% of UK sites will have some volunteer involvement.

And there is an opportunity to re-engage safely in some places which have been devastated by war. Over the next five years, assuming the security situation allows, we will **restore cemeteries or preserve boundaries** in Iraq, Iran, West Africa, Russia and Somalia. We will review our **alternative commemoration** policy where sites remain inaccessible in the long term.

As an organisation with a perpetual mission, we must operate sustainably. We will continue with the highly successful **conservation approach** to maintaining the built fabric of our sites, working with local heritage authorities to secure protection and funding, and continuing to improve the **traditional skills** of our team.

By 2024 we will have undertaken all works identified in our condition surveys which have a priority rating of 0, 1 or 2 (the most urgent work), and whenever possible, we will seek partner funding.

Our horticultural team has always prided itself on being the best. But we have yet to get to the front of the sector on sustainability, continuing to use pesticides, herbicides and fungicides in many of our sites. It is almost certain that some of these will be banned in the course of this strategic period.

By 2024 we will have reduced our toxic chemical use to the minimum possible, with public acceptance and understanding of any resultant changes to standards where these are unavoidable.

We are also having to consider more carefully the impact and cost of irrigation, our waste management, and our carbon emissions from machinery and global travel. Our conservation approach means we will be re-using and not wasting raw materials, and our tree planting does of course balance some less positive elements. But we will start work now to **operate more sustainably** without compromising too greatly on overall standards, finding better solutions.

By 2024 we will have developed our understanding of our environmental impact, and produced a comprehensive plan to operate more sustainably and reduce our carbon impact.

Volunteering

The step-change in public engagement and in local site monitoring described in this plan can only be achieved through the harnessing of volunteers, around the UK and potentially further afield. A key priority over the next five years will be to draw these strands of activity together offering a seamless portal for volunteers to see what opportunities exist, apply, or register their interest. And we must ensure the different types of volunteers all have an excellent experience, are properly managed, and receive appropriate recognition for their contribution.

Volunteering may take a number of guises. The “Eyes On, Hands On” project will need a range of people, some caring for a single site, others dedicating more time and covering a wider area. We already have site specific guides who welcome visitors to Brookwood, Malta and Plymouth. This could be expanded. We are keen to develop a cadre of public speakers, who can support our public engagement coordinators. We need to develop a training programme and resource platform to support that, to ensure high quality. But that investment could be repaid by using the speaker programme to encourage donations, membership of the Foundation or even legacy giving. There may also be some more scope for using volunteers to supplement the office teams, in our archives, or with other specialised research tasks.

By 2024 we will have a clear volunteer framework and offer in place, engaging at least 5000 people in volunteering activity around the world.

B. Perpetuating commemoration

We want to **harness the legacy** of the centenary anniversary commemorations, during which time so many people have engaged with our mission, and with the stories of those we care for. At the heart of this is **engaging with younger people**, telling our stories, and those of all we commemorate, from both World Wars.

By 2024, CWGC will be seen as a key partner for all world war commemorative activity, offering a central hub, connecting and sharing links around the world.

Our search for new audiences will not be at the expense of the often expert, enthusiast and professional stakeholders the Commission already has, who care deeply about the commemoration of ex- servicemen and who want to understand our policies. We want to maintain a reputation of excellence and professionalism, working with member governments, the battlefield guides, the historians and researchers, ensuring their knowledge and passion informs and supports what we do, and is shared with others. We must improve our key online tool, **the casualty database**, to ensure its continued value and accessibility into the future.

We will be open and engaged, holding regular workshops and conferences to share understanding of our commemorative practices, and explore the best way to communicate commemoration policy and decisions.

We will continue to **support member Government commemorative events** at our sites, and ensure that our media planning builds campaigns around key battle milestones. But this period will lack many major milestone anniversaries, so we will have to build our own momentum to rekindle interest if we see a lag.

We will harness the resources of our Public Engagement Network, area stakeholders and the CWGF membership and our online communities to ensure that all significant anniversaries are marked, reburials are well attended, and that there is a true sense of local ownership around our sites.

C. Engaging the public with our work

We need to offer an enriching and meaningful experience for visitors, encouraging more visits and inspiring greater engagement with the stories of the fallen, and how the Commission cares for them, using the Foundation to support our own efforts. As custodians of an important chapter of world history, we have a rich historical and intellectual heritage we need to share, which we must leverage for current and future generations.

We will use **our new visitor centre** at Beaurains to showcase our work and develop our role as the “go-to” first port of call for people considering a trip to the battlefields. We will also consider how to make more of our sites at Brookwood and Runnymede, and explore the potential for other centres.

By 2024 we will be welcoming 50,000 people a year at our visitor centre(s) or special exhibition locations, as well as the millions who visit our cemeteries.

We may have to consider adaptations to some cemeteries to **ensure safe and sustainable access**. We may reinforce and replace pathways in cemeteries to deal with growing visitor numbers. And we need to secure access for all - physical access for those with disabilities, and meaningful online access for those who cannot reach sites.

By 2024 we will have produced a policy for accessibility and assessed all of our constructed sites against a clear set of priorities for accessibility, resulting in improved access at our 100 most visited sites.

Building on our pilot project in Malta, we will work with local tourism authorities and businesses to **encourage tourists to add our sites to their itineraries**, and in partnership with battlefield tour operators to include our material in their narrative.

By 2024 we will be seen as a natural tourism partner wherever there are substantial numbers of war graves and a tourism industry, and be working in partnership with the travel trade and local destination management organisations.

And we will look for opportunities where little interpretation exists to consider other means of telling stories.

By 2024 our interpretation strategy will have delivered information for visitors at over 2000 sites, physically or digitally, and will involve volunteers.

The Foundation

In 2017, Commissioners agreed that if the CWGC was to remain relevant, it needed to engage new generations with commemoration and with our mission. But that new task came with no additional funding from Governments, and could, arguably, be stretching the boundaries of the Royal Charter into the realm of public benefit, which is more properly delivered by a charity. The Foundation was established to meet this need.

Like any modern organisation, the CWGC retains its marketing and media teams, but when it wishes to tell the stories of the war dead, and engage visitors to the battlefields and the wider community, it can do so in programmes funded by the Foundation.

Hitherto, the bulk of this work has been done in the UK, or in Europe. The rest of the Commonwealth has not been forgotten – but it is challenging for the UK-based team to raise funds for work elsewhere. In its first two years, The Foundation, has secured grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and from Biffa; it has launched the “Eyes On, Hand On” project generously supported by Annington Homes; and it funded the centenary garden at the 2017 Chelsea Flower Show thanks to two major donors. It has over 800 members and has raised £ 170,000 in other donations.

The next five years will be a time of consolidation and geographical extension. It is gratifying that the Intern Guide Scheme is now secure for the next three years, with participants secured from at least four member countries, rather than just the UK. Fundraising will be aimed at specific projects, and at generating the core operating costs of the charity. And we’ll be confident that we have a coherent and well-developed education offer.

By 2024 we will deliver

- *A global project to link schools to the battlefields and to each other through the stories of peoples who fought and died together.*
- *A programme of teacher training support to encourage PGCE students to incorporate war graves into their lesson planning.*
- *A network of trained and authoritative speakers to engage a wide range of groups with what we do, recruiting more volunteers and supporters.*
- *A project engaging young people from BAME communities with our memorials in key locations, underlining the global nature of our work.*

D. To build Commonwealth cohesion

Our Charter mandates the Commission with **bringing the people of the Commonwealth closer together** as a result of their shared sacrifice. Whilst we are unlikely to be able to influence overall cooperation, we will try to **build collaborative partnerships** with other bodies across our global estate, and in particular with organisations in our member nations, engaging younger people with the story of the common endeavour of their forefathers. We will need to work face to face with counterparts in Government and develop links to the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Royal Commonwealth Society to foster better understanding of what we do.

By 2024 we will have networks of influence in every one of our member countries, and relationships with stakeholders in other supporting nations.

Our community engagement strategy must seek out not only those who already know about their local history, but **minority and diaspora communities** who have moved continents and may know less about the common experience of earlier generations of their family alongside the other people of the Commonwealth. We must strive to **tell all the stories** of those we honour, not just repeat the best known.

By 2024 we will have media programmes targeting diaspora communities in key member countries, and a major community engagement programme with young people in the UK.

We want to work with all those engaged in public history and commemoration around the Commonwealth – governments, museums, arts organisations, ex-service associations, schools and universities, ensuring we **share our assets widely** to broad audiences, and **make the most of our limited resources**.

By 2024 we will have developed partnerships with at least four major educational and commemorative organisations in the UK, with a lead partner in each of our member countries. We will have Interns from all of our Commonwealth partners.

E. To be an organisation fit for the 21st century

At over 100 years old, the Commission wants its fabled operational standards to be matched by **its efficient management and the effective use of its member states' resources**. In recent years, the Commission has generated some very useful cost savings, which have helped offset rising costs and new demands. In some cases, project expenditure has been delayed due to challenging environmental or planning issues, but reserves have been set aside to carry forward expenditure. However, we could be more agile in flexing expenditure to cope with changing circumstances.

By 2024, we will continue to secure the funding needed to support our Business Plans, and generate additional income for our charitable and educational engagement, but be nimbler in planning expenditure and redeploying funding, achieving more each year.

We want to develop our teams to respond to new challenges as well as maintaining our traditional standards, **building and passing on our knowledge and skills**, and bringing in external expertise, so we are able to offer efficient and cost-effective delivery as well as rewarding working lives. We currently enjoy a very low turnover amongst the delivery team (0.4% in Europe); whilst this loyalty and experience is of huge value, it means we must consider the **productivity impact of an aging workforce**, and the challenge of replacing these skills when more than half our gardening staff retire over the next ten years.

By 2024, we will have developed programmes to recruit and train staff to replace the departing workforce.

For our first century of operation, we were true to our ethos of comrades looking after fallen comrades, and employed largely Commonwealth, mostly UK citizens in managerial and supervisory positions around the world. With the passing of the years, it is increasingly likely that our **staffing will become more localised**, and management roles will be taken by locally employed people, rather than by posting British staff overseas. There will be less of an expectation of a globally mobile career, but opportunities for talented managers to work overseas on occasion, irrespective of where they joined the organisation.

By 2024 our people will still be as proud to work for us, with a strong emphasis on safety and wellbeing and providing a personally stimulating and inspiring working environment. We will foster a sense of responsibility towards the future, encouraging experienced team members to mentor and develop the skills of newer recruits.

Our Royal Charter status remains challenging in some jurisdictions, and we will continue to **work to ensure our presence is legitimate** and appropriately registered wherever we operate.

By 2024 we will be confident that our operations are legally compliant wherever we work, and our local Agency arrangements are robust and relevant.

The Commission also carries out an important role on behalf of its member governments by delivering “agency services” – taking on the care of cemeteries and memorials which fall outside our core remit, at the expense of individual Governments. Where it makes sense, will look to grow this activity, ensuring that our skills and experience offer the best value and quality to our customers.

To use IT well

To be an effective 21st century organisation we need to invest in and use our IT and digital platforms improve our operational efficiency, streamlining our systems and processes and to enhance our public engagement. Our IT and Digital Strategy will support the delivery of this strategic plan.

Our Information Technology and Systems priorities for the next five years include

- Procuring and implementing a new Human Resources Information System, a new finance system, and an online expenses platform. We will do this using off the shelf software packages which have been tried and tested by other organisations, and which will be upgraded in the future.
- Exploring the best mobile technology for our teams, enabling them to work flexibly and efficiently on our sites, in or out of their offices.
- Delivering the new needs of the charity and our newer visitor facilities, supporting retail capability and public interpretation.
- Maintaining the highest levels of reliability, business continuity and cyber-security.

We built a high quality, durable website platform in 2017. This will remain the centre of our digital delivery into the future. Our tasks now are

- Consolidating the hosting of the website, upgrading the content management system and absorbing all the microsite activity onto the main platform.
- Implementing improved search capability over all CWGC platforms, and delivering public access to apps, crowdsourcing, event planning and better digital asset management.
- Enhancing our Search Engine Optimisation, and making ourselves and our assets more accessible and visible, as well as sustaining our online social media output on public platforms.