To the Right Honourable Dawn Bowden

Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, The Welsh Government

(by email: Correspondence.Dawn.Bowden@gov.wales )

March 4th 2024

Dear Ms Bowden

*Re Cuts to Welsh Heritage Services*

The Prehistoric Society is dedicated to furthering the understanding of our global prehistoric past and conserving prehistoric remains for the future. Our members are passionately interested in many prehistoric sites, museum collections and excavations both in Britain and abroad. I am writing with regard to the proposals to drastically reduce staff and heritage services across Wales.

Wales retains outstanding archaeology from Prehistory, with millennia of societal development. Some of the most significant finds in northern Europe have been discovered here, such as the Red Lady of Pavilland, the Great Orme mines, and of course Preseli is the source of the Stonehenge bluestones. The Mold gold cape is one of the most striking pieces of ornament found ever, an item from Flintshire on a par with anything from ancient Greece or Egypt.

I understand that significant funding cuts are proposed at both Cadw and the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments (Wales) as part of the next Government budget. The proposed budget will also affect the National Museum, which has already had to drastically reduce its archaeological curation and presentation, and there is uncertainty on what the cuts will mean for the Archaeological Trusts, who regularly undertake fieldwork and protect archaeology in their regions.

You have a national duty to protect scheduled monuments in Wales in accordance with the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act, (as amended). Furthermore, you have a duty to add to the schedule and interpret these sites for the public. They are a fundamental part of the national story, telling the origin of how modern Wales has come about. These sites and their stories cannot be divorced from the sense and understanding of self all people are entitled to. But without skilled staff, these stories cannot be researched and told, and the sites cannot be protected.

Vandalism to monuments, and theft, including through illegal metal detecting is on the rise. Will you allow your heritage to be further diminished by making crucial staff redundant? Staff are needed to work with owners, trusts, partner agencies and educators to ensure protection at the very least.

I am very mindful of the difficult circumstances of the current economic climate, however, reducing staff numbers at Cadw and the Royal Commission, following on from funding cuts at the National Museum will push heritage protection over the brink. You risk losing the physical traces of Welsh origins and identity and the experienced people who work tirelessly as curators of those stories.

I urge you to reduce the proposed cuts and make better provision for heritage protection in Wales.

Yours faithfully

Professor Linda Hurcombe, President, Prehistoric Society