

## Historic Counties of the United Kingdom Bill

*The Historic Counties of the United Kingdom Bill is being promoted by the Association of British Counties. It would strengthen Government support for the historic counties of the UK in two ways.*

*First, it inserts a definition of the term ‘historic county’ within the Interpretation Act 1978. Such a formal, legal definition of ‘historic county’ is necessary:*

- *to clarify the difference in kind between the historic counties and those various administrative entities which have been given the label ‘county’ since the 19th century;*
- *to provide a clear understanding of the term ‘historic county’ as used within existing and future legislation and guidance;*
- *to ensure the consistent use of the historic counties across Government and its agencies, within the heritage sector and also more widely as a general-purpose geography for the UK.*

*The definition is based on the Historic Counties Standard<sup>[1]</sup>, the standard definition of the names, areas and borders of the historic counties, e.g. used by the Office for National Statistics<sup>[3]</sup>.*

*Second, the bill effects a return to the appointment of the office of lord-lieutenant to the historic counties, recognising the importance of both the historic counties and the office of lord-lieutenant.*

*To comment on or discuss this draft bill please contact us at [counties-bill@abcountries.com](mailto:counties-bill@abcountries.com).*

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### HISTORIC COUNTIES OF THE UNITED KINGDOM BILL

A Bill to make provision for a standard definition of the historic counties of the United Kingdom; and for the appointment of the lord-lieutenants of Great Britain to the historic counties.

Be it enacted by the King’s most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:—

#### **1 Interpretation of the phrase ‘historic county’**

(1) The Interpretation Act 1978 is amended as follows.

(2) After the definition for ‘High Court’ insert —

*“ ‘Historic county’ means one of the ancient or geographical counties of the United Kingdom as described by Definition A of the “Historic Counties Standard” (ISBN 978-1-0686875-0-1) published by the Historic Counties Trust. ”*

#### **2 Lieutenancy areas in Great Britain**

(1) The Lieutenancy Act 1997 is amended as follows.

(2) Section 2 of Schedule 1 is repealed and replaced by -

*“The counties in England for the purposes of this Act are the historic counties in England.”*

(3) Section 3 of Schedule 1 is repealed.

(4) Section 6 of Schedule 1 is repealed and replaced by –

*“The counties in Wales for the purposes of this Act are the historic counties in Wales.”*

(5) Section 7 of Schedule 1 is repealed and replaced by –

*“The areas in Scotland for the purposes of this Act are –*

*(a) the cities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow; and*

*(b) the historic counties in Scotland.”*

(6) Sections 8 and 9 of Schedule 1 are repealed.

### 3 Extent, commencement and short title

(1) This Act extends to England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

(2) This Act may be cited as the Historic Counties of the United Kingdom Act 2024.

### EXPLANATORY NOTE

Section 1 inserts a definition of the phrase ‘*historic county*’ into the Interpretation Act 1978. This will provide clarity as to the meaning of ‘historic county’ in several pieces of legislation and guidance, e.g. Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012, Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016, Celebrating the Historic Counties of England guidance 2019, Advertisements guidance 2019 and Flying Flags: a Plain English Guide 2021.

This definition of ‘historic county’ is that provided by Definition A of the Historic Counties Standard<sup>[1]</sup>, published by the Historic Counties Trust<sup>[2]</sup>. The historic counties thus defined are as unaffected by the Local Government Act 1888 (which first set-up ‘county councils’) or by any subsequent local government legislation. Detached parts of counties are associated with their host county.

This definition of the historic counties (as it relates to Great Britain) has been used by the Office for National Statistics since 2014 in its *Index of Place Names in Great Britain*<sup>[3]</sup> and is recommended by them as a stable, unchanging geography which covers the whole of Great Britain.

Section 2 amends the Lieutenancies Act 1997, effectively returning the appointment of the office of lord-lieutenant to the historic counties.

[1] The Historic Counties Standard, 2024, Historic Counties Trust (ISBN 978-1-0686875-0-1)  
[https://historiccountiestrust.co.uk/Historic\\_Counties\\_Standard.pdf](https://historiccountiestrust.co.uk/Historic_Counties_Standard.pdf)

[2] The Historic Counties Trust, 4 Rugby Way, Croxley Green, Hertfordshire, WD3 3PH.

[3] Index of Place Names in Great Britain, 2024, Office for National Statistics, 2023  
<https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/6cb9092a37da4b5ea1b5f8b054c343aa/about>



The Association of British Counties promotes the identities of the historic counties of the UK and their important role in our culture, heritage and geography.



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