

SCOTLAND'S BUILT AND HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SUMMIT 2009

Report on the Workshops

Workshop 1

How do we develop common agendas and stronger partnerships across the historic and built environment sector?

Facilitator: Raymond Young, Non-Executive Director, Historic Scotland

Recorder: Pat Connor, Director of Communications and Media, Historic Scotland

Key Issues

The group felt that more time needs to be spent on developing partnerships based on listening and understanding, and built on mutual respect and trust.

It was important that partnerships did not become talking shops, and they should be cost effective.

There was support in the group for a strategy to share information and skills, and to explore the possibility of sharing facilities.

The main areas and points covered in discussion were as follows:

The nature of partnerships

- Partnerships are only successful when the partners are equal.
- It is important for partners to know and understand each other's aims and remit.
- Partnerships should be primarily about adding value (not identifying economies of scale).
- Partnerships are about active listening and understanding each other's agenda.
- The historic environment needs to be 'placed' differently and to be better contextualised for a wide range of different partners.
- The starting point is organisational: people need to be encouraged to interact more with partners and become more involved.
- There is a need to involve all sectors, including the private sector, in partnership working.

Joint initiatives

- Partners have different areas of expertise and it is important to play to people's strengths.
- There is considerable potential for organisations to work together more. There is also a need to build on existing partnerships and look for more opportunities to work jointly.
- Initiatives can come from any organisation, at any level.
- Homecoming was a good example of successful partnership working, but needs to be sustained: for example, Event Scotland could build on and enhance Historic Scotland's excellent events programme.
- Due recognition needs to be given to which partner organisation has led or instigated an initiative.
- There is not enough joint working between Government departments. Central Government needs to bring people together more: there is not enough working across boundaries (for example, built and historic environment, rural affairs, culture).

- Knowledge exchange is not well enough developed in the built and historic environment sector: the cultural sector has done better at this.
- The MoD works very well in partnership with Historic Scotland (and if we can, anyone can!).
- Historic Scotland has a huge range of knowledge, skills and expertise. This should be shared more with smaller groups, which would help bring the sector together and facilitate partnerships.

Vision and leadership

- A shared vision should be our starting point: we all have to take an interest in this.
- HEACS did much of the ground work and there is no need to reinvent the wheel.
- Leadership is not just about ideas: it also means ensuring that things are taken forward.
- Good leadership is not about dominance or dictatorship.
- Leadership can come from any level within an organisation, top to bottom.

Engaging with the public

- It is important to focus on how we engage with ordinary people and members.
- The historic environment is about people.
- Not enough is done to inform people about partnerships.
- Dundonald is an excellent example of what can be achieved by a partnership project run by a local group.

Consultations

- Genuine consultation should start earlier in the process of policy development.
- Consultation on the Historic Environment (Amendment) Scotland Bill was cited: this should have involved local authorities and others earlier.
- Earlier warning of important consultations would allow time for more joined-up thinking by consultee organisations, and for them to explore common concerns.
- Consultations represent a sizeable amount of work for voluntary bodies, but it is important that bodies have their say.
- It is also important that Government listens: consultation must be meaningful.

Funding and resources

- Funding is the 'elephant in the room'. Everyone is jostling for position to obtain funds.
- There has to be a way of dividing funds more equitably. The need to compete for funding, and the time it takes, affects the ability and willingness of groups to work together.
- Historic Scotland could contribute more of their expertise to partnerships: this is not only about funding.
- Similarly, the City Heritage Trusts are not only funding bodies: they advise and offer expertise on the historic environment in their areas. They could be a 'one-stop shop' for funding and information.
- SNH has carried out research on setting up partnerships: we could work with them on this.

The importance of collections

- The historic and built environment includes collections. Future discussion needs to involve museums and other collections.

Workshop 2

How do we best integrate our aspirations for the protection and enhancement of the built heritage with our aspirations for quality in new development and place-making?

Facilitator: Jim Mackinnon, Chief Planner and Director for the Built Environment, Scottish Government

Recorder: Lucy Blackburn, Director of Policy, Historic Scotland

Key issue

Community engagement

The Group identified as a key issue the lack of opportunities to bring together individuals, communities and organisations to discuss what was valuable about specific built environments as a whole, rather than in the context of individual buildings, projects and proposals.

The main areas and points covered in discussion were as follows:

- The need to use processes to demonstrate the political importance of protecting the legacy: it considered the example of Landscape Character Appraisals, which, it was argued, provided a setting for a discussion of values. It was argued that we need something like this in urban settings. Some felt that the development plan process could be used more effectively as an opportunity to have a more explicit discussion of value. Local planning ability and expertise was essential to support this: some questioned whether the training of planners was fit for this purpose.
- The way in which discussion of new projects becomes too polarised, the difficulty of finding middle ground, and the need to find ways round that. We need to find better ways to bring communities and developers together.
- Related to both points above, that we are very bad at asking the people who live there what makes a place special. There must be better ways to do this: where there is good practice, it should be shared. There was a suggestion that we needed to equip people better to take part in local debates. There are examples of good community engagement, for example, in Eland and Govan.
- The need to bring in all the other big funded organisations which do not have the historic environment high on their agenda. Large transport players were identified as one such group.
- That the historic environment is present across the whole of Scotland; it is not just the scheduled and listed assets. We need to get better at explaining the historic character of surroundings and need to foster public understanding of why certain things are valuable.
- The group also identified some practical issues which created a pressure against the retention and appropriate repair of our existing building stock, in particular:
 1. The different regimes for VAT for new build and repairs distort decisions. There was scope for a major joint lobby of the UK Government, working with the Secretary of State.
 2. The need for better use of procurement to promote local skills and materials.

Difficulties of procurement were too often used wrongly as an excuse for not using local materials – there is a need for myth busting.

- The group also discussed whether current systems needed to look more at landscapes and townscapes, rather than specific sites which are the main focus of historic environment legislation; and noted that current approaches mean that we are not good at creating the conservation areas of the future.

Workshop 3

How can we ensure quality and sustainability for Scotland's architecture, whether old or new?

Facilitator: Anne Marie Stannard, Non-Executive Director, Historic Scotland

Recorder: Brian O'Neil, Director of Human Resources, Historic Scotland

Key Issues

Education/awareness/guidance

The key messages here were that skills for both trade (traditional) as well as architectural qualifications and other professionals were essential if we were to address this question. It was also recognised that funding needs, and the constraints surrounding funding, were issues which needed to be addressed.

The importance of protection and maintenance / aftercare of the historic environment was paramount. The consensus was that there was a lack of maintenance planning in place and that the importance of care and maintenance plans could not be overstated.

The role of the public sector

There was consensus that the public sector needs to lead by example in terms of quality and sustainability. In other words, the public sector needs to show that quality and sustainability for both old and new buildings could be achieved provided there was proper investment in terms of education, awareness (also at local level), and that this was backed up with appropriate guidance.

The main points covered in discussion were as follows:

Education

- Industry-led qualifications should set the standards.
- Funding and resources are needed to enable owners and developers to meet the required standards.
- Education should be addressed both to trade businesses and homeowners.
- Public authorities need to take the lead.
- There needs to be more investment in craft skills.

Public bodies

- The agenda of the public bodies is driven by iconic buildings.
- There needs to be more realistic planning on usage.
- Public bodies need to communicate their excitement and passion for buildings.
- There needs to be a focus on outcomes (the contribution of the historic and built environment to the public realm and to place-making).
- There needs to be more guidance for owners.

- Public bodies need to demonstrate a duty of care to buildings and monuments in their ownership.
- There is a need for more joined-up thinking within and between public bodies.

Wider issues

- Design and maintenance plans are important.
- The wider economic needs and benefits must be identified
- Longevity is the key for both old and new buildings.
- An holistic approach to the built and historic environment is essential.
- User needs must be fully taken account of in design.
- Investment in the built and historic environment is about investment for the future.
- The time-line varies (Heritage versus The Rest).
- The planning system is failing to deliver good places to live and work.

Workshop 4

How might we develop and promote innovative projects and approaches which deliver value in Scotland and which promotes our expertise across the world?

Facilitator: Bob Stewart, Non-Executive Director, Historic Scotland

Recorder: Malcolm Cooper, Chief Inspector, Historic Scotland

The main areas and points covered in discussion were as follows:

Skills development

- There needs to be support for broader skills development across the sector (sources of funding, availability of training, etc).
- The experience, nature and context of exemplary projects could be shared and promoted more broadly within the sector and beyond.
- Outreach activities could be developed to promote the sharing of skills.

The relationship between national institutions and the voluntary sector

- The voluntary sector had some difficulties in working with national institutions such as Historic Scotland and the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- The wide range of grant schemes, each with different application processes and each demanding different monitoring information, added to the difficulties and overheads of the voluntary bodies taking forward schemes (one example given was Castlemilk Stables).

Intermediary bodies for the historic and built environment

- The role of intermediary bodies was discussed, including the future role of BEFS.
- It was suggested that it might be useful for an intermediary body to sit between the national institutions and the voluntary sector; and that there was a need to improve communication between the two (for example, between Historic Scotland and building preservation trusts).

Priorities for funding

- The likely reduction in the availability of national funding through established grant schemes (Historic Scotland, Heritage Lottery Fund, etc) was a cause of concern, and could lead to increasing reliance on other (local) sources of funding.
- It might be that funding providers should place more weight on local rather than national priorities.

Mechanisms for sharing

- Experience and skills could be shared more effectively across the sector.
- Historic Scotland could have a stronger role in achieving skills-sharing.

There were some other important general messages from the Workshop 4 discussion:

- Do not reinvent the wheel
- The right pieces exist, but not all are in the right places
- Do not duplicate
- Simplify
- Link in to communities
- Historic Scotland should lead change

Workshop 5

How can Historic Scotland change its approach and working methods to further release the potential of Scotland's historic environment and to further support other parts of the sector?

Facilitator: Marc Ellington, Non-Executive Director, Historic Scotland

Recorder: David Mitchell, Head of Technical Conservation Group, Historic Scotland

The main areas and points covered in discussion were as follows:

Funding

- Longer-term funding commitments to other organisations would facilitate more strategic planning and help them retain key staff.
- Historic Scotland could play a role in co-ordinating the disparate funding sources across the sector.
- Historic Scotland should include funds for regular repair and maintenance in grants it awards in order to reduce deterioration and the need for large capital sums to be found.
- Buildings should be funded for their architectural, historic or technical merit and importance (rather than because they tick other 'boxes').
- There is a need to simplify 'red tape' in funding applications and monitoring; an audit might help identify scope for simplification.
- Historic Scotland needs to champion the need for better funding for the sector within the Scottish Government. It needs to articulate better the historic environment's contribution to the economy.

Other issues

- The historic environment is much larger than the designated heritage assets: Historic Scotland could do much more on vernacular buildings, in particular.
- Historic Scotland needs to do more to promote understanding and awareness to the broader public – to help people understand the importance of their local environment as part of the broader historic environment.
- Historic Scotland should encourage and strengthen the concept of 'sense of place' and help to promote better management of sites by others.
- Historic Scotland should review which areas of its work might be better done by other bodies (for example, Properties in Care), but those bodies would need the resources to match.
- Historic Scotland should make its specialist expertise more available to others.

- Historic Scotland should undertake more advocacy within Scottish Government on behalf of the sector.
- Historic Scotland staff need to have a better understanding of 'real world' issues, especially technical and economic.
- Historic Scotland could make better and more consistent use of its enforcement powers.

Workshop 6

How can we work with local authorities and others to develop their capacity in relation to both new design and the historic environment?

Facilitator: David McGibbon, Non-Executive Director, Historic Scotland

Recorder: Peter Bromley, Director of Properties in Care, Historic Scotland

The main areas and points covered in discussion were as follows:

Funding

- Local authorities and others will have fewer resources going forward, as will all public bodies.
- We will have to work together in different ways, not only to reflect the resource position, but also the desire for different outcomes.
- Local authorities are facing 12% cuts, but this is not just a 'local authority problem'.
- Some local authorities have very little resource for the built and historic environment now; others already do a very good job.
- Caring for the historic environment needs to be adequately resourced at local authority level.
- A study of the available resources (past and present) could be helpful.
- The socio-economic value of the historic environment needs to be emphasised.

Network of expertise

- A network of expertise already exists and there are many examples of good practice: both of these can be built on.
- The network of local authority archaeologists could be one model. It would be useful to look at other examples of effective networks already in place.
- Some areas have a wide geographic spread that makes sharing skills and experience difficult.

The importance of local knowledge

- Local knowledge is vital; any 'sharing' or partnership schemes need to build in 'localness'.
- Local volunteers and voluntary bodies might be able to help here.
- The enthusiasm of local history groups and others needs to be harnessed more effectively. Groups such as the Garden History Society and the Historic Towns Association were cited as doing good work in this area.
- Voluntary bodies vary in terms of their expertise and their remit (for example, involvement in lobbying).
- The Urban Design Group (Glasgow) was cited as a good model for its approach to new design and the historic environment.
- It is important to be inclusive and not exclusive: we should not be too prescriptive in defining the historic environment at the outset.

The role of Government

- There is a need for the centre / Scottish Government to drive and help with consistency to make sure that the coverage of expertise is not too patchy, and the application of good practice is national.
- The weak legal/statutory base for care and protection of the historic environment is a problem.