

HISTORIC SCOTLAND BOARD

Paper Title: UNESCO/ICOMOS MISSION TO EDINBURGH

Purpose

1. To advise the board of the recent UNESCO mission to Edinburgh.

Background

2. Historic Scotland and City of Edinburgh Council hosted the UNESCO/ICOMOS mission to Edinburgh (12-15 November) to examine the state of conservation of the World Heritage Site (WHS). This followed an invitation from the State Party in response to concerns from the World Heritage Committee about the impact of proposed developments on the outstanding universal value of the site.

3. The mission Inspectors, Dr Mechtild Rossler (UNESCO) and Professor Manfred Wehdorn (ICOMOS), met with the Council, Historic Scotland, the developers and key stakeholders to look in detail at four major developments - Caltongate, St James' Centre, Haymarket (Morrison St car-park), and Leith Docks. They discussed the broader strategic context for Edinburgh and visited other areas within the WHS including Princes St and the Cowgate fire site.

4. At a press conference on Saturday 15th Dr Rossler stated that in her view the world heritage site was not at risk. She made some observations about the four key development sites although the status of these remarks is unclear as these seem to fall outwith the formal reporting process. We understand that she spoke to the Scotsman following the visit. The resulting article led the Director of the World Heritage Centre, Francesco Bandarin, to write a letter of correction to the newspaper (see annex).

5. Despite the press comments our understanding is that any decisions are actually taken by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee rather than the mission and the report to the Committee must be agreed by UNESCO and ICOMOS international.

Conclusion

6. The Inspectors will report their findings to the next session of the World Heritage Committee in Seville in June 2009. Prior to this the State Party will be given the opportunity to correct any inaccuracies in the draft report and must prepare a State of Conservation Report to be sent to the World Heritage Centre by 01 February 2009. We await the draft report.

MALCOLM COOPER AND LUCY BLACKBURN
INSPECTORATE AND POLICY TEAM
02 DECEMBER 2008