

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy

Response from Gareth Davies

I respond to the National Assembly for Wales' Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee invitation to express views on this subject.

I am a retired, graduate archaeologist, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London and a Fellow of the Museum's Association. As a former senior museum professional heading a local authority archaeological field unit I have some 25 years experience of working with the major historic environmental agencies of England (including English Heritage & the former RCAHME). Subsequently, I was Director of the Council of Museums in Wales (a sponsored bodied of the Welsh Office and partly the forerunner of CyMAL) and am currently a board member of a Welsh Archaeological Trust (though the views I express are personal). It is against this background of long association with the historical environment, its investigation, preservation and interpretation for the public benefit that I respond. My observations follow the order of the Consultation Questions

The Welsh Government's *Chitty Report* (2011) cogently argues that there are appropriate useful systems in place for protecting and managing the Welsh historic environment but which require improvement – greater flexibility, closer collaboration in the form of strategic partnerships and a policy based on proper utilization of current resources rather than any need for its deconstruction.

The demise of the Welsh Tourist Board and its replacement within the Assembly Government has seriously disadvantaged tourism. The burden of promoting the historic environment now falls almost entirely on CADW, a task it is palpably ill equipped to perform. Much of its on-site interpretation falls below 'state of the art' standards, or is absent. If any of the Welsh historic environmental agencies need investigating it is CADW's promotional and interpretation roles that need radical examination. Many of its sites would be substantially better served by transfer to an independent body such as the National Trust, which would certainly promote more vigorous local participation.

The specialist role of the RCAHMW makes it distinctly different to CADW. As a sponsored body of the Welsh Government it has an independence which preserves it from political control – its most serious asset and uniquely differentiates it from CADW. This should be preserved at all costs and fundamentally rules out its political take-over by any 'state' agency. We have seen the disastrous result of losing the Welsh Tourist Board. Its status should be enhanced and the Chitty model of a new WGSB combining RCAHMW and CADW outside government, offers the

most effective long term improvement to the Welsh historic environment. Until such time as this can be achieved nothing should be done to diminish the status of the RCAHMW. A strong RCAHMW, at arm's length from the Welsh Assembly Government is vital.

Some local authorities with museums provide useful interpretation and promotional services on a community basis and can bring a relevance to the local population additional to the wider contextual contribution of 'national' institutions.

Across a spectrum of fronts and activities mirroring those of CADW and the RCAHMW the former Welsh Archaeological Trusts are essential components in the delivery of the Welsh Government's historic environmental policy. Their continued funding at an appropriate level by the Welsh Government through CADW, should remain a priority.

These are merely outline observations and I shall be pleased to expand if necessary.

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