

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy

Response from Cliff Croft

I am providing comments for this Inquiry as an individual ambulant disabled octogenarian who has been heavily involved for many years campaigning for and advising on equality and suitability of access in the Built environment and to services for disabled people, whether disabled due to impairments, age, or supporting others who may be in need of assistance.

For this reason, I am a member of several local Disability Organisations and Older people's organisations, and represent them on some wider Forums. I am not conversant with the Welsh Government Historic Environment policy, but make comment on the basis of my awareness of accessibility and usability of Historic and Listed Venues.

From my observation of historic buildings and open spaces, there have been some obvious and other less noticeable alterations made at most venues in order to meet the needs of the users of the day and date. Doors and windows have been added or blocked off in most historic buildings and spaces. At other venues new Paths and roads have been provided.

It is my opinion that changes should continue to be made to working buildings where necessary to allow universal access and enjoyment of listed Buildings. Modern photography and digitisation makes the recording of existing usage very easy and factual.

During the last thirty years we have seen a momentous change in the freedom and mobility of Disabled and Older people. Disabled people are going places and doing things previously undreamed of; but there is still a long way to go. There are still many restrictions on access to a variety of premises.

Successive Governments have made small changes to the Laws and Regulations e.g. The Equality act 2010, that have required developers and Service Providers to make suitable provision for Disabled people. Unfortunately rules governing our Heritage/Listed Buildings and Environment have not properly required that controllers of these buildings etc make the necessary changes that would enable

Disabled people to enjoy and understand our Heritage in the manner afforded to others.

Listed Working Buildings, e.g. Hotels and Public Buildings, are often inaccessible or very difficult to access, thereby preventing or discouraging use by disabled people and their carers. These may be local residents or Tourists.

CADW Access Policy states *The aim in dealing with adaptations as part of the statutory planning process should be to seek solutions to overcome barriers in a positive way.*

This policy has not been applied in an even manner; some Heritage/listed venues are very accessible whereas there are others where CADW have not permitted even slight changes that would allow disabled people to enjoy the venue. e.g Refusal to allow alteration to a section of a Balustrade on a Band Stand to form a gate, to make access by platform lift possible; also refusal to allow introduction of handrails on the steps of the Bandstand. These minor changes would allow disabled artists to take part in performances. Modern photography makes the recording of existing appearance very easy and factual.

Many of our Heritage buildings have shown changes have taken place for operational reasons during their lifetime and it is my opinion that changes should continue to be made to working buildings where necessary to allow universal access and to demonstrate the historic manner in which life of disabled people is changing for the better.

Refusal to permit reasonable alteration to the access of a building is a barrier to change and stands in the way of future Social history.

Questionnaire Responses

How appropriate and successful are the current systems employed by the Welsh Government for **protecting** and **managing** the historic environment in Wales

The present system over protects some aspects of the Historic/Listed Environment, by discouraging or failing to allow accessibility alterations to premises and places that demonstrate that we are living in a changing world. History is being made. There is need for improved guidance on how to make our Historic/listed venues more inclusive and accessible to all, without destroying the Architectural theme of the venue..

How well do the Welsh Government's policies **promote** the historic environment in Wales (for instance, in terms of interpretation, accessibility, attracting new audiences and tourism)?

Most Historic attractions that I have visited have been reasonably accessible to most people; some need audio description facilities. Sometimes we find pebble or gravel paths around Historic ruins, these are most difficult for ambulant disabled people, impossible for wheelchairs, and should be replaced by firm surfaces.

There are listed Public Buildings and Hotels that are either very difficult or impossible for me and other disabled people to access. The controllers of these building should be encouraged to make alterations allowing them to come as near to BS8300-2009 standards as possible.

It must be remembered that if facilities are provided allowing disabled people to move above or below the entrance floor level, facilities and organisation must be in place for the emergency evacuation of people who are unable to use stairs. Over 20% of the population has a disability and a large percentage of them have a carer. If Listed Buildings and other historic venues were made fully accessible, disabled people and their carers would be encouraged to visit them as tourists.