

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy

Response from Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage

1. I am pleased to give evidence to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee's Inquiry into the Welsh Government's historic environment policy and I welcome the Committee's views on the issues that lie ahead of us.
2. The historic environment is central to our culture in Wales and to our local, regional and national identities. It is a shared resource and part of our collective inheritance.
3. In January, I launched my draft priorities for the historic environment of Wales <http://cadw.wales.gov.uk/historicenvironment/policy/ministerialprioritiesforthehistoricenvironment/?lang=en>. One of these priorities is to foster a better appreciation of the value and impact of local heritage to communities and to their sustainable development. I want to encourage people to understand, enjoy and value the features and stories that give places special character and distinctiveness and use that to inform new development and community wellbeing. I want to ensure that communities are involved in that process and empowered to make decisions about what is important to them.
4. The next eighteen months will be a crucial time for the historic environment as the Welsh Government continues to seize the opportunity, through the Heritage Bill, to take a fundamental look at the current systems and practices in place to protect our historic environment as well as looking at the wider social, environmental and other forces which will affect our heritage in the future. We know that we need to consider a system of protecting historic assets which is more fitting to modern day issues. Along the way there will be a period of extensive engagement and consultation including the forthcoming Treftadaeth conference on 19 July, publication of my Historic Environment Strategy in the autumn and formal consultation on Bill proposals next year. I welcome the valuable contribution that this Committee can make to this process.

5. The Committee has asked a number of consultation questions and I will address each of these in turn.

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

6. There is currently a wide range of legislative controls to help protect historic assets, many of which have been in place for many years. The basic principle of the current system is to identify those heritage assets that are of national significance (including historic buildings and ancient monuments) and to afford them statutory protection. Data on Wales' historic assets can be viewed in my position paper on the Historic Environment published in January 2012.
<http://cadw.wales.gov.uk/historicenvironment/policy/ministerialprioritiesforthehistoricenvironment/?lang=en>
Any proposed change that might impact on these designated assets has to go through a consent process.
7. In general this system has worked well although it could benefit from a programme of streamlining and modernisation.
8. I am also aware that there are a number of current tensions. One example is how we manage those elements of the historic environment of Wales that are not provided with statutory protection. For example, some historic buildings might be greatly valued by local communities but do not meet the strict criteria for statutory designation and consequently are more vulnerable to demolition.
9. The management of these non-statutory elements of our historic environment is currently the responsibility of local authorities, guided by planning policy and associated circular guidance. Any review of the legislative arrangements has to be accompanied by a similar examination of this wider policy framework.
10. In 2011 the Welsh Government published six key Conservation Principles for the sustainable management of the historic environment in Wales
<http://cadw.wales.gov.uk/historicenvironment/conservation/conservationprinciples/?lang=en>. They include the principles of shared ownership, shared responsibility, participation and transparency and these will inform the current review of our policies for protecting and managing the historic environment of Wales.
11. Historically, the protection and conservation of historic sites has focused solely on the material remains of the past – the fabric of buildings and monuments and its association with past events and individuals. However, the published conservation principles highlight the need to reflect on the wider values that heritage plays in our lives – its social, economic and community value. This recognises that people

draw their identity or collective memory from a historic site and use them for a wide range of social and economic benefits.

12. These themes have already featured prominently in the programme of workshops and debate that I launched in February and which are helping to shape the future policy for the historic environment including the content of the forthcoming Heritage Bill, due to be introduced during the 2014-2015 session. By the end of July we will have held seven workshops and a national conference. A series of roadshow sessions are now being planned to provide an opportunity for further views to be expressed by the Third Sector and by the wider public.
13. From this consultation, people are already telling us that local communities need to be empowered to contribute to those decisions that are important to them. We are being asked to consider whether there is a scope for a system that fosters local decision making, perhaps working alongside the existing approaches to the assessment and protection of heritage assets.

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)?

14. One of the priorities underpinning our policies to promote the historic environment in Wales is the commitment to widen access to our culture and heritage and encourage greater participation. Our outstanding heritage in Wales provides a real opportunity to support communities that can often feel distanced and indeed dis-engaged from their historic environment. It is therefore vitally important that the Welsh Government uses every opportunity to improve people's connection with and pride in the place in which they live. We have already seen a number of success stories in this area including international recognition of conservation and interpretation achievements, with Cadw at the front end of delivery.
15. The Welsh Government, through Cadw, is responsible for 127 of our greatest heritage sites, from great castles and abbeys to industrial heritage sites and prehistoric monuments. They are key elements of our tourism industry and for switching people on to our history.
16. They are also a means for encouraging our young people to unlock their own creative potential. For example, the current Cauldrons and Furnaces arts and heritage project held at eight Cadw sites across Wales is part of the Cultural Olympiad project and has been three years in the making. Almost 20,000 young people have learned new creative skills along the way and these skills are currently being showcased on a global stage. The project has engaged with hard to reach audiences and included among it homeless people, clients of the youth justice service and young people with disabilities. It forms part of

a wider approach to widen Cadw's audience base, through a Heritage and Arts Framework.

17. Cadw archaeologists are also working with partners, such as the Archaeological Trusts in engaging with communities and new audiences by developing a range of activities designed to encourage participation in discovering more about the past. This emerging Community Archaeology Framework is already working with a range of new audiences, including young offenders and children in pupil referral units.
18. At the same time Cadw is not neglecting its more traditional audiences and the crucial role that heritage plays in the tourism economy. In 2010, £144 million was spent in Wales on holidays where culture was the main activity for the holiday, and £590 million was spent on holidays where a cultural activity was undertaken as part of the holiday – clearly a significant contributor to the visitor economy. The current investment of £19 million in the Cadw-led Heritage Tourism Project with funding from the European Regional Development Fund is an example of how current Welsh Government policy is seeking to exploit the tourism value of the historic environment. Cadw participates in the Cultural Tourism Partnership, which is convened by Visit Wales and maintains a close working relationship with the tourism sector.
19. Underpinning the Heritage Tourism Project is the development of an all Wales Interpretation Plan, which will be the first ever for any country in Europe and will offer Wales further international recognition. The plan will help to bring alive the stories of historic sites across Wales and make the sites more enjoyable to visit.
20. The storylines provide strong, structured, thematic and practical frameworks for delivering interpretation and will provide links to other places where visitors can 'follow the story'. This joined up approach to interpretation should encourage visitors to understand that monuments do not exist in isolation, but are part of wider national or regional stories. It is fair to say that these monuments very often formed the 'blueprint' of the Welsh towns and communities and provided the framework around which they were subsequently built. This approach will encourage visitors to explore more heritage sites and make links between sites and stories. In this way it is anticipated that visitors will explore more and stay longer. Twelve thematic interpretation plans have now been completed and a further five plans are under way. I will be launching the overall plan at a major interpretation conference this autumn.
21. The successes of these programmes are borne out by individual achievements such as the award in 2010 of a prestigious Europa Nostra award from the Pan-European Federation of Cultural Heritage. This award, for the 15-year conservation project at the Bishop's Palace St Davids, identifies Cadw's conservation work as an outstanding

example of heritage protection and the provision of public access, including for wheelchair users. Wales' success and standing in the area of conservation and interpretation can be measured by the Federation's decision to hold its next conference in Wales in 2013.

How well do the policies for the historic environment tie in with wider Welsh Government policy objectives (such as the regeneration of communities)?

22. Across the Welsh Government there is synergy between policies that support the historic environment alongside wider priorities. For example, it is the Welsh Government's ambition to see the environment managed as a whole and understanding the cultural landscape of Wales, and the consideration of human impact over time, is integral to such a holistic approach.
23. Within my own portfolio we are already building on the existing work between the Welsh Government and local authorities in Regeneration Areas to ensure that physical regeneration and economic development are informed by, and respect, the local heritage that makes places distinctive and special.
24. For example, the Welsh Government is working closely with the local authority in Swansea to deliver heritage-informed regeneration of the Hafod and Castle areas of the city. And in Caernarfon, Cadw's characterisation study of the town's waterfront has proved particularly valuable in providing an understanding of how the town's character can provide the bedrock of regeneration activity.
25. Sustainability is at the heart of the Welsh Government's agenda for Wales and conservation of the historic environment, using traditional methods and skills, is inherently sustainable. In Wales over one third of the total building stock dates from before 1919. This is higher than any other part of the UK and makes an understanding of traditional building crafts skills particularly relevant here.
26. Cadw has been actively engaged with a number of organisations in order to promote a well informed approach to the conservation and development of traditional buildings across Wales. This has included traditional building craft skills, with both a supply and demand focus. Cadw has liaised with the Department for Education and Skills on this issue, as well as ConstructionSkills Wales and other potential partners.
27. Cadw has also retained its own skilled craft workforce and is looking to employing new apprentices in the near future. It has also provided training places for trainees from the Heritage Lottery Funded Skills Bursary Scheme and supported training placements from the Tywi Centre. Craft skills are also of great interest to visitors of historic sites and Cadw is now weaving this into the visitor experience at key sites.

What would be the advantages and disadvantages of merging the functions of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales with the functions of other organisations, including Cadw?

28. It is critical that we regularly examine our structures to ensure that we deliver our desired outcomes in the most efficient and cost effective way. The Commission does good and important work but I am also aware of the range of knowledge, skills and expertise needed to sustain core functions of historic environment services as a whole and I am anxious to find a means to ensure wider and long term resilience in a climate of reducing public funds.
29. I have established a working group, comprising officials from the Royal Commission, Cadw and CyMAL, which is looking at these issues in detail. While the outcome could be merger, no decisions have yet been made and a number of potential models are being considered. The English Commission was merged with English Heritage more than a decade ago and a similar review of the Scottish Commission was initiated in late 2011.
30. I have made it clear that this process is not about generating savings but to ensure that budgets are efficiently targeted at the areas of greatest priority during what is expected to be an extended period of budget reductions.

What role do local authorities and third sector organisations play in implementing the Welsh Government's historic environment policy and what support do they receive in this respect?

31. Local authorities have a key role in the protection, management and promotion of the historic environment of Wales, in particular through the planning process. They are supported by Planning Policy Wales and associated circular guidance. Cadw works closely with local authority conservation teams through the Built Heritage Forum which provides a regular opportunity to share advice and expertise and focus on priority issues.
32. The work of the local authorities is also supported by a range of third sector organisations who provide advice on a number of specialist areas. For example the Welsh Archaeological Trusts provide advice to local planning authorities on the archaeological implications of development proposals. The Trusts are unique to Wales but the model is attracting growing interest from elsewhere in the UK.
33. This framework for the delivery of local historic environment services is being examined alongside the planned heritage legislation. Cadw has

also set up a working group with the WLGA and local authority representatives to respond to the Simpson Compact commitment to review the scope for collaboration in the future delivery of support for listed and historic buildings. This group is considering how best issues such as capacity and consistency of conservation advice can be addressed in future.

34. My Historic Environment Group (HEG) is there to advise the Welsh Government on action to benefit and promote the historic environment of Wales and brings together key partners from across disciplines and sectors. Its role is to identify strategic issues and priorities for action including the roles of the public, private and voluntary sectors in maintaining and enhancing the historic environment and the co-ordination of joint working and partnership.
35. HEG brings together the strategic players in the historic environment sector on a regular basis. Significant among these are the National Trust in Wales, British Waterways (shortly to become Glandŵr Cymru) and Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales. These and other HEG members are also custodians of heritage assets and key contributors, alongside Cadw, to the economic, social and educational impact of the historic environment.
36. The historic environment Third Sector is vibrant and does much good work to bring heritage alive. There are over 87 third sector organisations in Wales which could be called museums. Almost half of these are run entirely by volunteers. Such museums play a vital role in interpreting the historic environment. They do this through displays and exhibitions, trails, lectures, work with schools and communities, as well as being as repositories for artefacts from the historic environment.
37. Another example of the good work of the Third Sector is Heritage Open Days- ‘Open Doors’. Cadw funds the Civic Trust for Wales to arrange ‘Open Doors’ events each September and many local voluntary and civic groups are involved in organising and staffing these events. Many thousands of people visit heritage sites for the first time as a consequence of this annual celebration.
38. I am conscious, however, that the historic environment Third Sector is also vulnerable and disparate. My draft priorities for the historic environment of Wales launched in January set out my concerns over the resilience of the sector with its heavy reliance on public funding, and we will need to consider further whether the sector has the capacity, structure and clarity of purpose to sustain its future direction.

Next steps

39. It is good business practice to keep under review both what the Welsh Government is funding and the ways in which we ourselves are delivering on the ground, and whether the balance between policy and

delivery is correct. I have a portfolio which is designed for joined up delivery and, while there are inevitably resource challenges, I believe through new legislation, imaginative strategic planning and partnership working, there is scope to deliver bold, imaginative and creative solutions for the protection and use of the Welsh historic environment into the future.

40. I look forward to hearing the Committee's views which will help inform my thinking over the coming months.

Huw Lewis, Minister for Housing Regeneration and Heritage.