



· INSTITUTE · OF · HISTORIC ·  
BUILDING · CONSERVATION

*Making Heritage Work*

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Dear Adam

## **UNDERSTANDING PLACE**

### **Historic Area Assessments: Principles and Practice**

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) is the professional body of the United Kingdom representing conservation specialists and historic environment practitioners in the public and private sectors. The Institute exists to establish the highest standards of conservation practice, to support the effective protection and enhancement of the historic environment, and to promote heritage-led regeneration and access to the historic environment for all.

Thank you for inviting us to participate in this consultation.

The Institute welcomes this document. We think it:

- fills a gap in available guidance on generic area assessments for the historic environment.
- covers the topic to an appropriate level of detail and is a good representation of best practice.

We have some points of detail you might like to consider:

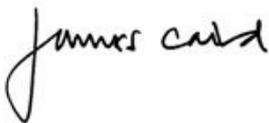
- Paragraph 1.2.2 refers to PPS15. The Institute has been quite critical of the scope and approach of this document. The importance of *Understanding Place* as a planning tool needs to be fixed in PPS15 and we hope that you have made this point in the recent consultation. Clearly references will need to be altered in the final version of *Understanding Place* as we understand PPS15 is being substantially reviewed.
- The terminology is generally appropriate and well-explained. This is important as *Understanding Place* needs to be understood by lay as audiences as well as those in a variety of professional roles. In places, however, we think you lapse into too

academic a style (e.g. "an evocation of the historic environment at one or more appropriate epochs") and that the plain English generally used should predominate.

- Whilst we understand that HAA is intended for a wide range of circumstances, we are slightly uneasy about the constant juxtaposition of advice on the need for speed with the full range of possible detail for the most detailed schemes. We think reference to the table at 3.4.3 would be useful in a number of places to direct the reader more readily to a resolution of this issue. It would also be useful to have a greater range of sample survey sheets (the circulated examples are at the simplified end of the range of possibilities) and wonder whether you could set up a web-based resource with examples from previous HAAs and the circumstances in which they were used.
- We think you should revisit the advice about boundaries. While this is sound in relation to the nature of HAA, it pays insufficient heed to the boundary-obsessed world of planning policy. We think it should be made clear that the delineation of the various aspects of HAA is important from that perspective.
- In HAA the range and quality of the photography is paramount. You correctly emphasise the need for good record-keeping. You might mention contemporaneous dictation of details into a hand-held dictation machine as a way of not getting in a muddle. We don't think you should be advocating anything other than digital photography, for reasons of document handling, but that you should advocate photographs being taken at the highest possible resolutions to maximise the range of uses to which they can be put in future. It would be a pity if the supposed memory capacity of a surveyor's camera were to become the default determinant of picture quality.
- We think you skim over the topic of community participation. In many places there is a large amount of HAA work already completed by local historical societies and the like. Engagement with such bodies can be very prompt and useful. Such bodies sometimes have the skills and resources to carry out HAA themselves. We think they should be encouraged to do so.

We hope these comments are helpful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Caird". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

James Caird  
Consultant Consultations Co-ordinator