



INSTITUTE OF HISTORIC BUILDING CONSERVATION

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30 September 2004

Dear Sir

Culture at the Heart of Regeneration

I refer to the above consultation document.

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation is the professional body representing conservation specialists and practitioners in the public and private sectors in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. It has around fourteen hundred members divided between fourteen branches. 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.

The IHBC strongly welcomes this consultation paper, which recognises the important role played by culture in regeneration and seeks to develop a better understanding of the ways in which it does this. There are clear relationships between culture and the physical character and vitality of an area. This is a timely document, given the findings of the recent report of the ODPM Select Committee on the Role of Historic Buildings in Urban Regeneration (July 2004). The historic environment is clearly of key importance to the Nation's cultural identity.

In response to the questions raised, the IHBC would make the following comments.

Icons, Cities and Beyond:

QUESTION 1

How can we make sure that landmark cultural buildings achieve the right balance between maintaining cultural excellence and relevance to their local communities?

There is a need to consider the needs of each individual case and area rather than trying to establish standard approaches. The presumption of this question seems to be that all projects need to be targeted at all sectors of society. In some areas, the individual social and economic circumstances may indicate that a scheme be targeted specifically at local communities. In other areas the needs may be different. For example, in underperforming areas, the aim may be to retain or attract skilled and trained workers.

In addition, it needs to be recognised that society is increasingly diverse, including within various socio-economic groupings. Care is required not to stereotype communities. Even within well defined community groups, the needs and aspirations of different people are often in conflict.

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It is interesting to note that landmark cultural buildings are sometimes simultaneously the most popular and unpopular buildings in an area.

Cultural education is clearly important, as is the recognition in such education that the boundaries between so-called high culture and popular culture are increasingly blurred. Achieving cultural excellence is as much about popular and accessible culture as more minority tastes.

One of the signs of a progressive and vibrant society is an acceptance and tolerance of those who would challenge the mainstream. The radical and challenging is often later absorbed into the mainstream. The Sex Pistols are now fat middle aged men and their music is played in shopping centres and lifts. The Angel of the North, controversial before it was erected, is now the cherished icon of the Newcastle/Gateshead area. The key point is that ensuring relevance to local communities is not the same as imposing unchallenging or bland solutions. The needs of local communities are complex and diverse and it is dangerous to try to oversimplify them or cater solely for a perceived safe middle ground.

QUESTION 2

What role does culture have to play in tackling the complexities of rural regeneration, and what evidence is there of what works best?

There is a need for funding programmes to cater for the more fragmented and small scale nature of many rural regeneration projects. Heritage funding regimes tend to neglect single grade II listed buildings or buildings of special local interest, despite the crucial role that projects involving such buildings can play in rural renaissance.

QUESTION 3

We have found that strong leadership has been the key to driving through cultural innovation. But innovation can be controversial and is often opposed by local communities. How do we achieve a balance between leadership and responding to the concerns of local communities?

It should be recognised that innovation has often been resisted throughout history. However, it is important not to assume that local communities are universally hostile to change and innovation. It depends how they are handled.

There are very real examples where so called progress has occurred at the expense of local communities and established cultures, one of the more notorious examples being the demolition and redevelopment of the St Mary's area of Southampton.

It is essential to foster local pride and recognise local buildings and places cherished by local people. Working with the existing fabric of an area has usually been more popular with local people than comprehensive redevelopment, and has allowed existing local cultures to be maintained much more successfully. In inner areas of cities like Newcastle, Liverpool and Manchester, creative industries and established local businesses are accommodated in close proximity, as are older housing and new accommodation, and fine arts and popular culture. This is because the areas have been regenerated on the basis of working with the historic fabric rather than comprehensive redevelopment. Due to the nature of modern development finance and developer practices, it is very difficult to achieve diversity or to cater for local communities and small businesses in larger comprehensive redevelopment schemes. There is a need to recognise that local culture is often embedded in the very fabric of an area. Cultural innovation is far more readily accepted where it is part of a wider regeneration picture which respects established cultural infrastructure.

With this in mind, the Institute is particularly concerned that the recent 'Way Forward' document on heritage protection fails to get to grips with the current failings of conservation area protection and buildings of special local interest.

A Sense of Place:

QUESTION 4

Many claim that public art has impacts beyond its aesthetic value, but we have found little evidence of this. Are there ways of measuring its wider impact, and do you have any examples?

It is interesting to note that towns and cities that have benefited from the most successful regeneration in the past decade have all placed emphasis on public art. Manchester and Newcastle are well known

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examples. Equally, in underperforming areas, public art is often neglected, as is the wider quality of the public realm and public spaces. Such neglect acts as a clear deterrent to potential investors, visitors and people who may be considering moving into an area. Public Art is a component part of creating the kind of image and quality of public realm that is essential to create confidence and make an area competitive. Public art should not be considered in isolation, but as part of this wider context of urban quality.

QUESTION 5

What more can be done to encourage developers and planners to include culture in regeneration strategies and programmes?

There is a need for the Government to recognise fully in planning policy and guidance the importance of culture and local cultural identity. Areas that emphasise culture, design and a well maintained historic environment are almost universally more successful than areas that neglect them. Strong planning and heritage protection need to be recognised as positive tools for securing high value regeneration, not barriers. It is interesting to note that pressures for relaxing planning standards and heritage protection often come from risk and change-adverse mainstream developers. In contrast, the entrepreneurial and innovative developers that have delivered the more dramatic transformations of inner city areas (and developed new markets) rely on strong masterplanning and the level of certainty that can only be delivered by a robust and quality-orientated planning system, including robust heritage protection.

In particular, it should be recognised that attracting increasingly mobile employers and their skilled workforces to an area requires a high quality environment, diverse and vibrant cultural and social infrastructure and distinctive, high quality housing. Historic buildings and areas have been absolutely fundamental to providing all of these, as illustrated by Manchester's Castlefield area and Liverpool's Ropewalks. Such areas are a focus for innovation, creative industries, small business development, inner city living, leisure industries and the arts. It is not clear that this has been fully grasped by the Government, which has been reluctant to embrace cutting edge regeneration practices in its recent policy and guidance documents.

The DCMS needs to give proper recognition to the importance of local historic environments to the cultural identity and life of an area. The IHBC is concerned over the failure to give this recognition in cultural and community strategies.

There is a need to develop skills in local authorities, RDAs, national organisations and Government Departments. The Local Authority Conservation Provision Survey highlighted the shortage of specialist conservation staff in local authorities. This has implications for the quality of decision making and severely limits the ability of local authorities to undertake proactive project work to promote culture.

Regional Development Agencies demonstrate very mixed performance in respect of culture, design and heritage. Whilst some, such as Yorkshire Forward, have a good track record, there are others that give little or no priority to these matters. This clearly limits their effectiveness as regeneration agencies. There have been problems in some areas with gaining RDA commitment to heritage-based area regeneration schemes such as Townscape Heritage Initiatives. Monitoring of RDA performance in respect of culture and heritage is required.

English Heritage should consciously move from a strategic approach to regeneration (which merely adds to the overload of strategy) to a delivery orientated approach. This will require more direct engagement with national and regional funding bodies, an expansion of advisory and casework capacity, and development of in-house bidding, project formulation and project delivery expertise.

Housing renewal is a further issue in maintaining sense of place and local culture. The IHBC would strongly encourage the Government to investigate innovative methods of housing regeneration, such as the refurbishment schemes being undertaken by specialist developers in places like Salford, Bradford and Rotherham.

Delivering for Communities, with Communities:

QUESTION 6

What role does culture have to play in strengthening communities and bringing different social groups together? Do you have any evidence-based examples?

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There are numerous town centre based heritage-led regeneration initiatives around the UK that have helped to deliver social inclusion and strengthened local communities. Schemes based in the six towns and older industrial core of Stoke-on-Trent, including under-performing centres like Burslem, have delivered affordable town centre housing, new meeting places and social space, employment opportunities, cultural and community facilities, international standard performance venues (see below), affordable housing, shops, pubs, restaurants, visitor attractions, education facilities, a refurbished school of art, better transport infrastructure, manufacturing floorspace, conference and seminar space, enterprise units, voluntary action accommodation, health care facilities, and ceramic design incubator units and workspace. The historic environment has attracted tens of millions of pounds worth of public funding, levering in substantial private investment, and has been a significant resource in regenerating the City's various towns, canals and older industrial areas. This regeneration has been very much community based with a clear focus on reinforcing local culture.

QUESTION 7

How can we measure the benefits, or added value, that culture brings to delivering key social policy objectives?

Whilst it is always useful to identify measures of performance, it should be appreciated that the most successful practitioners are often those with a grasp of the less tangible and unquantifiable aspects of regeneration.

It may be useful in considering this issue to refer to the research undertaken in the USA by Donovan Rypkema in respect of heritage-led regeneration. His paper on the Economic Power of Restoration is attached for information. This concentrates on matters such as average income, contribution to the local economy, skilled employment, social inclusion, etc.

QUESTION 8

What incentives could be put in place to align developers' short term objectives with the longer term cultural and social aspirations of the community?

There is a need for radical change in the way the planning system engages with local communities. Civic societies and other community groups are rarely involved in planning decisions until the submission of a planning application. Local residents, civic societies and other community groups should be actively engaged in the plan and policy making process, not merely consulted on completed drafts. Suggested methods for achieving this include undertaking market research and providing free training to civic societies, community groups and others to allow more effective interaction with the planning process (capacity building). It is often far too late by the planning application stage for people to make a real difference.

Strong masterplanning for major sites is essential, again with full community involvement. This needs to involve pro-active community exercises, not just advertising the existence of a draft document.

The role of planning and heritage protection in protecting community interests needs to be appreciated and emphasised in future planning policy and guidance to a far greater extent.

It is interesting to note that specialist and more entrepreneurial developers have been much more willing to work with local communities and to respect local culture than mainstream developers. This is to some extent due to their preference for site specific development rather than delivering standard products, the latter inevitably requiring standard cleared sites. The specialist developer often realises the importance of considering the wider social, economic and physical context due to the more quality orientated nature of their product. It would be useful to undertake research to gain better understanding of the way different types of developers work with local communities and the extent to which they have common or irreconcilable aspirations.

Making the Economic Case:

QUESTION 9

How do we ensure that the gentrification of an area does not lead to displacement? Do you have any good examples?

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There are clearly examples of regeneration initiatives ignoring local communities and sometimes pricing them out of an area. This problem can also be market-led, for example where commuters buying property in rural settlements helps trigger the decline of local facilities and pushes property prices out of the reach of the indigenous population.

However, in some instances it is desirable to attract a more diverse population into an area and this can be welcomed by existing communities, especially in areas of severe market failure. In housing areas suffering from social deprivation, absentee landlords and high tenant turnover rates, more long-term residents have been known to express a preference for new housing for people on higher and regular incomes, to help bring stability to their area. In other areas, where the land economy is overheating, affordable housing will be more of a priority.

The question is well-posed. The aim is not to stop gentrification, but to ensure it does not lead to unwanted displacement, especially in areas of high demand. To ensure that the proper balance is struck, it is necessary to provide support for existing businesses, to encourage incremental change rather than comprehensive redevelopment, retaining older commercial areas which can cater both for local demands and creative industries, and adopting robust policies on mixed use and affordable housing as part of mixed tenure development.

QUESTION 10

In urban regeneration, how do we strike a balance between meeting the needs of the so-called “creative class” and the needs of the wider community, particularly those from disadvantaged groups?

As indicated above, this is best achieved by working with the existing cultural and historic fabric of an area rather than through comprehensive and large scale redevelopment.

It should be appreciated that the ‘creative class’ is often part of the local community, especially in industrial cities where there is a legacy of craft based industries.

QUESTION 11

How can we ensure that cultural regeneration projects offer a range of employment prospects for the local community, not just low paid service jobs? Is there an argument for training as an element of such regeneration and how might this be incorporated?

Training and education of local people are fundamental requirements for successful regeneration. Whilst it is often desirable to retain and attract skilled and trained people to an area, it is equally important to build the capacity of the local population, if new businesses and better paid jobs are to be attracted. Physical regeneration without local capacity building is rarely successful.

Next Steps

QUESTION 12

Are these the right priorities for action?

The IHBC agrees with the suggested priorities for action. Partnerships are already effective in many areas and are essential to successful project delivery in many instances. Good practice is clearly important, as discussed above, and some of the weaker RDAs in particular need to be challenged. Also, as stated, there is a need to develop skills and specialist staff at all levels.

There is a clear need for better research and evidence gathering to help develop a comprehensive understanding of modern high-value regeneration practices. The IHBC has a number of regeneration practitioners in its membership who have been involved in successful urban regeneration schemes.

QUESTION 13

What else could be done to strengthen partnerships?

There is a need for central government to take a strong lead on this. In particular, the inconsistencies in the performance of RDAs need to be examined. RDAs should be directed to adopt clear priorities and targets for culture and heritage related regeneration. Similarly, issues of poorly performing local authorities need to be addressed.

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Funding regimes in the UK are increasingly complex and onerous. Different funding packages can be difficult to mesh together due to incompatible criteria and timescales. Regeneration is becoming increasingly difficult to deliver, even for trained professionals. Voluntary groups are effectively excluded from obtaining funding in many instances. The need to match different funding sources together rather than using single funding sources to cover whole project costs is an effective mechanism for preventing regeneration. The UK's bidding and funding mechanisms need radical simplification.

The scope for public/private partnerships has been compromised in some instances by the current EC interpretation of gap funding and it is essential that the post 2006 provisions for the UK provide as comprehensive a solution to this problem as possible. Certainly, the current notifications on heritage protection and other matters need to be carried through and if possible improved.

As referred to above, there is an urgent need to expand the number of skilled staff in local authorities, RDAs and other regeneration agencies, especially in cultural and heritage matters.

QUESTION 14

What else could be done to support those directly involved in regeneration?

Many of the measures suggested in the document would have a very marginal impact on practice on the ground. Things like best practice web sites tend to be used by those who already have a good level of awareness. The need is to target those with low levels of awareness.

More effective measures would include training and expansion of skilled staff, heritage and culture champions for local authorities, compulsory training for elected members, simpler funding programmes and state aid regimes, and of course increased resources for the culture and heritage sectors.

QUESTION 15

Do you have any evidence-based examples of culture's impact on regeneration?

The document refers to some of the better known and high profile culture related projects that have acted as drivers for wider regeneration. There are numerous other projects around the UK that have made similar impacts.

The Ikon Gallery in Birmingham, created through the conversion of a listed Victorian school building, helps to make Brindley Place a more visitor orientated place. Themed areas such as the Jewellery quarter in Birmingham, the Ceramic Design Quarter in Longton (Stoke-on-Trent) and the Lace quarter in Nottingham are examples where craft based industries are providing a basis for modern regeneration practice. The Royal Birmingham Society of Artists in St Paul's Square in the Jewellery Quarter includes a high quality gallery and provides support for creative industries whilst also attracting visitors into the area.

Culture and leisure are fundamental to the urban renaissance in Manchester, including the refurbished and extended main Art Gallery, the Green Room Theatre (created in two railway arches), the Royal Exchange Theatre, and numerous others. All of these are housed in historic buildings and attract people into Manchester, either to visit or to live.

Liverpool similarly uses its culture and built heritage to help create a modern City, attractive to visitors, investors and as a place to live. The Conservation Centre, the various attractions at the Albert Dock (including the TATE Gallery, Maritime Museum and Beatles Experience), the Open Eye Galley, FACT, the refurbished main Art Gallery, the Liverpool Institute for the Performing Arts, and the numerous other initiatives in the Rope Walks and other areas are all part of the wider regeneration picture.

In Stoke-on-Trent, the conversion of the Victoria Hall and Regent Theatre to create international standard performance venues has impacted on the wider area, attracting private sector investment in new bars, restaurants, shops, etc. This has helped to create a more vibrant and varied night time economy, something that has helped the City to attract better quality development and investment.

QUESTION 16

What else should be done to strengthen the evidence of culture's role and impact on regeneration?

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Holistic analysis is required of areas that have managed to regenerate and modernise, especially areas previously suffering from severe market failure. The role of culture must be considered against a wider regeneration, focusing on the common characteristics of modern regeneration practice such as:

- The development of new markets, especially in city living, retail, culture and leisure, and with a new emphasis on quality;
- an emphasis on the quality of the public realm and public spaces by both public and private sectors, especially as a basis for entertainment and cultural events;
- use of design and heritage-led approaches to regeneration, especially by dynamic, specialist developers;
- very high quality contemporary design in new buildings and the refurbishment of historic buildings
- Innovation and development of small businesses, especially creative industries, often in older properties and areas that offer lower rentals.

In contrast, regeneration schemes could be examined where mainstream developers have led the process and where there has been little emphasis on matters like culture, design and historic environments.

The IHBC would be pleased to be involved in any research programmes to examine the role of culture in regeneration more fully.

I trust that the above comments are useful. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you require any further information.

Yours faithfully

Dave Chetwyn
Vice Chair