



INSTITUTE OF HISTORIC BUILDING CONSERVATION

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Dear Mr Boulton

DEFRA Consultation 2007-2013 – Rural Development Programme for England

I refer to the above consultation document.

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) is the professional body for 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.

The Institute welcomes the opportunity to respond to the DEFRA Consultation 2007-2013 – Rural Development Programme for England, and would make the following comments.

Conservation staff are in a unique position to gauge the pulse and tenor of the change in the countryside. Although not able to gather statistics, except within individual Local Authorities, it is clear that certain factors are relevant to this consultation. Notable is the rate at which farmers are disposing of their holdings to city dwellers whose real interest is the principle residence, with possibly minor equestrian activities. This leaves the land and the farm buildings vulnerable. In the case of historic farm buildings this can be as disastrous as the drive for modernisation in the 1970s, resulting in decay and eventual demolition. One of the prime problems is the lack of vernacular building skills and expertise for repair even if funds are available. Of equal concern is derelict land, particularly in the peri-urban zone, leading to increasing demands for development. In the rural zone, all manner of holdings, that have recently changed ownership to former city dwellers, ranging from 5 acres to 500 acres, appear to be lacking in expertise for basic animal husbandry, other than equestrian activities, that will surely reach saturation point. Reports that new countryside dwellers need to take lessons in cattle management in order to manage the land, do little to dispel concern that change is happening at such an accelerated rate, that the countryside may not be able to cope. The Institute are concerned at proposals to promote early retirement, even if there is no actual funding for this, unless measures are

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put in place to ensure knowledge transfer, to a younger generation.

The Institute urges that DEFRA be aware of these facts and to instigate more scrutiny of change, constructing an evidence base, of the use of land and buildings, holding by holding, to include the house and farm buildings, and in particular diversification and new uses, all of which will long term, have an important impact on the historic landscape.

Traditional buildings of the farmstead, in particular, are fundamental to the character of the countryside, and for too long have disappeared without notice. This is a most regrettable loss, as they, and their context, often represent the most tangible evidence of farming activities for previous centuries. Such historic environment is the very backbone of the rural landscape, and the Institute would welcome any initiatives to conserve this most important aspect.

The Institute broadly agree with the principles set out in this “high level” report, in particular micro enterprise and improving skills, (p9, para. 23) and (p14, para. 41) and priorities of protecting the historic environment. Structures should be expanded to include the buildings of the farmstead, as too often structures are interpreted as walls rather than roofed buildings.

Questions 6,7 and 8

The principle concern of the Institute is the lack of skills required for the repair of traditional structures, and feel that employment (para. 42) could be stimulated by generating a demand for not only wall restoration but building repair using appropriate vernacular building skills and traditional techniques. So often inappropriate use of materials (e.g. cement) leads to destruction rather than repair.

Question 10.

P20, para 47, also refers, why is building repair missing from “skills and knowledge transfer”

Question 13.

P23, para. 54 is relevant. The Institute reinforces the message that effective re-use of historical listed structures is their only hope of survival, and welcomes the innovative and sustainable enhancement of rural heritage assets, including generation of employment in the rural sector. A word of caution is however relevant here. Too often, too little attention is given to the quality of the historic buildings, and the need for careful retention of features indicative of their former use, as well as sympathetic vernacular building repair techniques.

Question 14.

P24, para. 56- access to training and re-skilling opportunities should include traditional building techniques and the use of traditional building materials e.g. lime mortars.

Question 18.

P25, para. 58. – Leader is generally welcomed. In Dorset in particular, the Dorset Centre for Rural skills is an invaluable asset, but some leader projects may lack the focus necessary to deliver pragmatic benefits to rural communities, their economies and hence the built environment.

Conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage needs to embrace more robustly the historic built environment. The Institute endorses everything set out in the English Heritage response, in particular:

Regional implementation of the RDR should involve EH and IHBC.

It is too early to be further prescriptive concerning Environmental Stewardship. The scheme must be allowed time to develop and mature.

Deficiencies in the protective arrangements for the historic environment exist, in particular, historic farm buildings, implying the need for incentive schemes for positive management.

The need to make information on historic environment assets accessible.

The need to find creative ways of harnessing the economic value of environmental quality for rural communities.

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Of particular concern to the Institute is the need to address the shortfall in traditional building skills, and the education of building contractors in the use of traditional building materials. The advanced age of the current craft skills workforce of primary concern, and the need by a process of funded knowledge transfer to educate a younger generation in these traditional skills (roofing, walling, plastering/rendering/timber framing/joinery etc). Thus the following would seem to be relevant:

Measures to be put in place to ensure the re-use of traditional structures but in a manner appropriate to the nature of their traditional construction, to include fiscal incentives.

The need to develop a clear framework for national and regional priorities for LEADER, to include factors other than employment.

THE UPLAND REWARD STRUCTURE

IHBC endorse the views of English Heritage on this aspect including:

Payments should be closely linked to the delivery of environmental goods. (Question 1)

Small to medium sized holdings need to be encouraged to participate in the scheme. Such holdings invariably have a good survival of upland agricultural buildings important for the landscape. (Question 9)

Traditional management practices are welcomed but should be expanded to include hefting and shepherding. (Question 13)

Upland farmers are guardians of a unique landscape heritage, rich in history and archaeology, and they need immediate access to funding of a sustainable nature. (Question 14)

A transitional period is strongly favoured. Upland farmers need maximum assistance and time to access the benefits of environmental stewardship. (Question 16)

The Institute does not favour the abandonment of land. Positive management albeit in a low-key manner in line with age-old traditional practice, is the best approach to England's unique upland landscape. Building groups form an essential part of this rich landscape, to be thought of as essential punctuation marks. They are rarely affected by recent change and thus have much to tell and illustrate of any earlier and in many ways untouched way of life. The best way of support for these important groups is maximum support for and use of their landscape with a traditional upland farming pattern.

I trust these comments are helpful.

Yours faithfully

Karen Holyoake
Consultations Secretary