



INSTITUTE OF HISTORIC BUILDING CONSERVATION

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Dear Madam

Making the Most of Our Civic Heritage

I refer to your invitation for comments on your consultation draft, "Making the Most of Our Civic Heritage".

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation is the professional institute, representing conservation professionals 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 and to support the effective protection and enhancement of the historic environment.

The IHBC generally welcomes the document and would make the following comments on its detail.

Under the guiding principles (pp 4 & 7), 'OUR CIVIC HERITAGE' should include reference to it being part of the economic, social and cultural life of an area. The general text should make reference to the contribution made by built heritage to economic activity, projecting a positive image and raising the profile of the area. Built heritage is often a key element in securing urban renaissance and attracting new high value investment and jobs, in addition to creating places people want to live in.

The document is a little defensive in places rather than promoting an assertively positive argument for heritage. For example, under 'CHANGING TIMES' (pp 4 & 8) it states "The Civic Heritage is not a burden". It would be better to state "The economic, social and regeneration value of civic heritage is increasingly realised ...". Generally, the text needs to refer to the potential of the built heritage to provide high quality working and living environments, and local prestige.

Under 'OBTAIN BEST VALUE ON DISPOSAL' (pp 6 & 17), the following should be added "and ensuring the asset makes the best contribution to the local economy and community".

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The section on UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING CHANGE (p11) should also make reference to the importance of understanding the social, economic and environmental context of the present. Whilst the buildings are historic in origin, they now play an important role in contemporary society. Conservation is about managing historic buildings in the present and for the future.

There is no reference anywhere to the role of local elected Councillors in general, and to Portfolio Holders in particular. The roles of the Property Portfolio Holder (working with the Corporate Property Officer – and the Council's Executive) and the Planning Portfolio Holder are vital. Sometimes Property and Planning will be combined in one Councillor Portfolio role. Such persons may have delegated authority from the Executive to agree some property transaction or repair & maintenance etc., decisions with the Corporate Property Officer under the powers of the Local Government Act 2000. A reference to this (in 1.3 and/or 3.1?) might be helpful. It would also be helpful to refer to the need to train Councillors about the historic environment implications of the Council's property portfolio (part of an extended aspect of the Nolan recommendations on Councillor CPD?).

The second paragraph of 3.1 might usefully allude to the developing concept, under Best Value of local authority Annual Conservation Management Statements (including progress on Listed corporate properties) – a kind of local government State of the Historic Environment Report.

The list of references could usefully include the important article from JPL cited on page 24.

In the Annex (p21), the Historic Environment Champion's role should include:

- Ensuring that the social and economic potential of the built heritage is fully realised
- Raising awareness of best practice in heritage-led regeneration
- Promoting the built heritage as a key element in securing urban renaissance
- Ensuring the built heritage forms part of local strategies to create a sustainable urban environment

Finally, but most importantly, the document needs an additional section dealing with resourcing. The most fundamental issue affecting the management of civic heritage, and leading to substandard maintenance, is the lack of resources. The document needs to deal with the issue of funding if it is to influence practice on the ground.

I hope that these comments are helpful.

Yours faithfully

Dave Chetwyn
Consultations Secretary