



· INSTITUTE · OF · HISTORIC ·  
BUILDING · CONSERVATION

*Making Heritage Work*

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Dear Sirs

## **NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE COMMISSION**

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) is the professional body for building conservation practitioners and historic environment experts working in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, with connections to the Republic of Ireland. The Institute exists to establish, develop and maintain 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. Our response to the questions posed is as follows.

### **1. Do you agree that the National Infrastructure Commission should be established as a non-departmental public body via primary legislation?**

Yes. But we should like to add a point not covered by any of the questions in the consultation. This relates to paragraph 2.7 and the more detailed remit of the commission that goes beyond the need, comparative need and affordability of infrastructure. This broadly concerns the process impediments to project delivery.

In our own sector of heritage we have concerns about the resources available in the light of public spending cuts at least in the short term. This has the potential to delay the implementation of infrastructure projects in their fulfilment of statutory process and mitigation requirements.

We therefore think that the remit of the commission should explicitly include the broader concept of implementability especially with respect to its relationship with other Government departments and any wider consultation.

### **2 Do you agree that the commission's National Infrastructure Assessments should be laid before Parliament and that the government must respond within a specific timeframe? What would an appropriate timeframe be?**

We agree. To avoid unnecessary uncertainty, we think timeframes should be short but, in complex cases, for interim responses to be allowable.

**3 Do you agree that it should not be mandatory for the government to lay the recommendations from specific studies before Parliament, but that the government should have discretion to do so where necessary?**

We strongly disagree. If the purpose of the commission is to depoliticise infrastructure planning the whole process should be open. Government should not be allowed to suppress politically unpalatable advice. So laying recommendations before Parliament should be mandatory with the Secretary of State coming to alternative conclusions on what are thought to be the merits of individual cases in the same way the Secretary of State deals with Inspectors' reports in cases under the Town and Country Planning Acts.

**4 Do you agree that economic regulators should 'have regard' to Endorsed Recommendations?**

Yes.

**5 Do you agree that government should legislate to oblige the commission to produce National Infrastructure Assessments once in every Parliament?**

Yes. New Governments have new priorities and these should be based on up-to-date data.

**6 Do you agree that that the precise timing of reports and interim publications should be a matter for the commission in consultation with relevant departments?**

Yes.

**7 Do you agree that a GDP envelope would provide the most effective fiscal remit for the commission?**

We have no expertise in this area. However, given that infrastructure proposals can have widely varied benefit to cost ratios, a fixed GDP constraint might be viewed as over-restrictive. A GDP baseline with possible uplifts based on economic benefit might be preferable.

**8 Do you agree that a transparency requirement should be placed on the commission with regard to its economic remit?**

Yes.

**9 Do you think that any additional constraints are necessary to deliver the commission's anticipated benefits to consumers?**

We have no suggestions.

**10 Do you agree that the remit should be set by a letter from the Chancellor, on behalf of the government?**

We agree with the suggested format.

**11 Do you agree that the commission's working assumption should be to only review those areas of infrastructure that are the responsibility of the UK government?**

Yes.

**12 Do you agree that the decision of whether to accept or reject the commission's recommendations should rest with the responsible government?**

Yes.

**13 Should departments be obliged to accede to the commission's requests for analysis?**

Yes, we think this is vital. In our own interest area of built heritage we think it is imperative that Historic England, for example, be required to scrutinize policies and proposals in relation to its responsibilities. We also think that the legislation should also provide for departments to consult more widely if there may be information on the potential (say environmental) impacts of assessments. This would be to ensure, as far as possible, that potential public concerns on infrastructure provision do not arise late in the day and, as a result, delay implementation. See our response to Question 1.

**14 Do you agree that the legislation used to create the commission should place obligations on the relevant regulators and public bodies to share information with the commission?**

Yes.

**15 Should legislation also place obligations on the relevant regulators and public bodies to provide analysis for the commission?**

Yes.

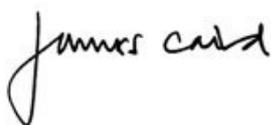
**16 Do you agree that the government should specify a timetable to review or replace a National Policy Statement when endorsing recommendations?**

Yes.

**17 Do you agree that, while additional consultation may be necessary, consultation undertaken by the commission should not be repeated by the Secretary of State when preparing a National Policy Statement?**

Yes. But we think the scope for "additional consultation" should be framed in a way to allow concerns about the scope and quality of the earlier consultation to be addressed.

Yours faithfully



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