



INSTITUTE OF HISTORIC BUILDING CONSERVATION

Review of Public Administration
McKelvey House
25 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6GD

Mrs Karen Holyoake
PGDipTP, PGDipArch, BA(Hons)Arch, IHBC
Consultations Secretary
Institute of Historic Building Conservation
Handel House
64 Campbell Street
Brierley Hill
West Midlands
DY5 3YD

Tel: 01902 555625
Mob: 07956 538398
E-mail: consultations@ihbc.org.uk

14 October 2005

Dear Sir

Review of Public Administration

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation 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 would like to take this opportunity to broadly support the comments made by the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society (UAHS) in response to the Review of Public Administration (RPA) consultation, and make the following observations.

The historic environment has a tremendous impact on civic pride, image, emotional attachment, community spirit and cohesion. It also plays an increasingly central role in the delivery of a range of public policy objectives including education, economic development, sustainable growth, urban and rural regeneration, repopulation of inner-city areas, improving competitiveness, cultural development and supporting local communities. The response of the Institute will focus principally on the issues surrounding planning and the building environment.

The Institute supports the recommendation to set up professional planning staff within each newly created local authority, enabling planning decisions to be made at a local level. Building conservation should be represented through appropriately skilled staff (not necessarily architects) at all levels, with skills attested through membership of the IHBC or accreditation within their own profession. Investment in historic places helps to support local businesses, industries and communities, preserve local distinctiveness and identity (sense of place), and foster local pride. For conservation officers to be efficient and thrive, they should be well resourced, and devoted permanently and exclusively to conservation duties. This raises the issue of responsibility. UAHS suggest that conservation officers should be responsible to Environment and Heritage Services (EHS). EHS is an agency of the Department of the Environment (DoE) rather than a democratically elected body. We consider that a more appropriate mechanism would be to have conservation officers in local authorities covering all

INSTITUTE OF HISTORIC BUILDING CONSERVATION

local heritage matters, with historic environment staff within EHS providing local authorities with specialist support and assistance when necessary.

There are concerns with EHS issuing separate listed building and conservation area consents. This would mean decisions being taken by a non-democratically elected body. If EHS remit does extend to conservation area management, it is essential that both EHS and local councils have conservation staff at a local level, and at a more strategic level.

Regarding the devolution of powers to the newly created local authorities, local councillors should receive appropriate training in relevant fields, such as planning and building conservation. This is necessary because the historic environment is crucial to the creation of places where people positively choose to live, work, invest and spend recreation time. It is therefore important that the decision making process about such places is competent, transparent and accountable.

Enforcement powers affecting listing buildings and conservation areas should be with the democratically elected local authority responsible for planning and conservation matters. The role of EHS staff would be to provide expertise back up in more difficult cases.

Retaining an independent Planning Appeals Commission is necessary. The Institute would also invite the RPA team to argue for the introduction of an appropriate appeals system, fairly reflecting third party interests, as a crucial aspect of the devolution of planning powers.

I trust these comments are helpful.

Yours faithfully

Karen Holyoake
Consultations Secretary