



· INSTITUTE · OF · HISTORIC ·
BUILDING · CONSERVATION

Making Heritage Work

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Dear Sirs

THE ROLE OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) is the professional body of 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 submit views. We would like to comment briefly on the following aspects identified for inquiry:

- ◆ the effectiveness of RDAs and their role in adding value;
- ◆ RDA expertise;
- ◆ the consequences of expanding RDA remit to include new functions, as proposed by the sub national review, including the delivery of EU funding;
- ◆ the accountability of RDAs; and
- ◆ how RDA performance has been measured in the past and will be measured in future.

The effectiveness of RDAs and their role in adding value

While the focus and performance of RDAs varies, we have concerns that they tend to focus on regeneration in the form of projects (particularly large-scale and high value ones) rather than places and measurable outcomes rather than communities. This is an obvious pitfall given the business focus they have been given and the targeted approach to their work. But in view of their intended strategic planning and housing roles it should not be their sole focus.

The Institute believes that there should be specific duties placed on RDAs to contribute to three specific agendas with immediate effect:

- ◆ Sustainable communities;
- ◆ Place-making;
- ◆ The heritage dividend – that is capitalising on the value of heritage assets in the formulation of regeneration projects. This is a proven method of adding to the value of existing places and communities and what makes them tick.

RDA skills

While RDAs are well served by their officer corps in many respects, we perceive that there may be skills gaps in some areas, not least in those mentioned in the previous and succeeding paragraphs. The Institute believes that it would be prudent for RDAs to undertake skills audits between the implementation of SNR and/or the publication of the guidance intended to follow it and the formulation of their staffing and consultancy budgets, so that any gaps in their current staffing and in that intended to transfer from the Regional Assembly might be filled. It has also been suggested that a member or members of RDA boards should be given specific responsibility for the sustainability issues, the place-making agenda and heritage issues and that it would be helpful if the holders of these portfolios were identified and these roles were publicised more widely.

We would also like to suggest that the RDAs collectively form topic groups for skills development. This would allow the transfer of skills from region to region, share best practice as well as securing more cost-effective input from specialist interests where this were needed to help with skill development.

The consequences of expanding the RDA remit

The Institute is concerned that the SNR proposals to merge RDA and Regional Assembly functions may reduce the effective delivery of both their current fields of work. Were this to occur, we are concerned that it would be the all-important details of strategies and proposals that would tend to suffer leaving local communities and places with poorer outcomes than would otherwise be the case.

The accountability of RDAs

The Institute is not convinced that the accountability and scrutiny proposals proposed in *Prosperous Places* are well enough formed to be workable. Our major concerns are the physical and social outcomes of strategic policy regeneration schemes in terms of place-making and built heritage. We feel that the emphasis will tend to be top-down one through BERR, concentrating on easily measurable outputs, and that arrangements for bottom-up scrutiny and accountability, which we hope would be largely qualitative, will tend to have lesser significance. In order to assist with transparency and access to people with pertinent responsibility, the Institute would like to suggest that RDAs be required to publish the names and responsibilities of their board members.

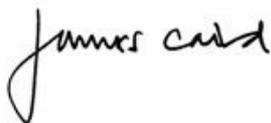
How RDA performance has been measured in the past and will be measured in future

RDA performance has been measured in the past largely through expenditure and head counting. There have been no qualitative measures. The Institute believes that if environmental quality is to be maintained and improved, qualitative performance measures are essential.

Links to government departments

The Institute notes the importance of closer working between government departments and RDAs. On 2nd July 2008 the Heritage Minister, Margaret Hodge, was questioned specifically by the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee (during their Inquiry into the forthcoming heritage protection reforms) about working with DCLG to demonstrate good practice using heritage as a driver for regeneration. The Minister gave assurances that she wished to strengthen those links and would (that same day) be meeting the RDA Chairs to talk about how DCMS would strengthen the links on place-making and heritage issues. The Institute would be like assurances that Chairs of RDAs were receptive to that message and would give due weight to it through the heritage responsibility of a Board member of each Agency.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Caird". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'J'.

James Caird
Consultant Consultations Co-ordinator