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**Dear Sir**

**Re: The Raynsford Review of planning: Call for evidence**

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation 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.

This call for evidence aims to identify how Government can reform the planning system to make it fairer, better resourced and capable of tackling the major challenges which confront the nation. It also seeks to establish a vision for Planning in England and to rebuild trust in the planning process for the public and professionals.

We are very pleased to have the chance to comment on the Call for evidence. The Institute's comments are as follows:

**Planning Policy**

It is important that Planning Policy as represented by the NPPF responds to the varied needs of communities across the country and makes allowances for the specific needs of the area.

Planning policy should recognise explicitly the differing priorities in different areas and should not make assumptions based on the situation in one area, particularly that in urban growth areas and especially London

and the South East. From area to area priorities may be providing affordable housing or attracting jobs but ensuring sustainability, feasibility and viability of proposals is often going to be key. Likewise a National Plan could exaggerate the economic or social divisions of the country and concentrate further government investment in the existing growth areas.

The strategic approach to planning currently in place with local plans allows strategic priorities to be identified for development of an area but still allows sufficient flexibility in individual decision-making. This is a broadly successful and positive system. The level of enthusiasm for neighbourhood planning can however be very variable from area to area.

The phraseology of planning policy and legislation, specifically for the IHBC, related to protection of the historic environment can be conflicting. The introduction of the term 'significance' into the NPPF does not always sit happily alongside the use of 'special interest' defined by the legislation.

### **Planning applications**

The poor quality of many planning applications is one of the most common causes of delay during in the planning process. This is often due to lack of knowledge or appreciation by developers of the necessary skills required in their professional teams to design good quality, sustainable development. Lack of design and conservation skills is a common problem.

### **Conservation Areas and Permitted Development**

The Conservation Area is the historic 'place' to which most people relate, in which they live, work and play and where they want to see clear, logical and easily understood controls. Conservation area grant schemes have delivered substantial social and economic benefits, especially in under-performing areas.

Variations in Conservation Area controls from area to area, and even street to street do not help the image or reality of conservation and undermine public confidence in the system. The standard Conservation Area controls do not adequately provide for the management of areas in the public interest, and so widespread use has to be made of special controls: Article 4 Directions. That being said, the public do not easily understand Article 4 Directions and for local authority conservation professionals they are complex, time consuming and highly political to develop and manage. There is a pressing need to make Conservation Areas simpler, more consistent, more open, and understandable and for Conservation Area designations to give the kind of protection expected by the public. The initial designation of a Conservation Area should remove certain kinds of permitted development as a matter of course, without the need for additional designations.

## **Effectiveness of the plan led planning system**

In the context of the scope of the planning system a question is posed as to how effective is the application of the plan-led planning system. IHBC suggests that the planning system would benefit from the introduction of urban design competitions.

Currently, there is no provision for three-dimensional plans at a scale between local plan and submissions for planning permission or listed building consent. When negotiating design and heritage issues with developers, local authorities are often prepared to sacrifice aspects of the local plan for short term economic benefits. But it is the piecemeal approach, which can add up to a permanent, detrimental impact on neighbourhoods, particularly in or near conservation areas.

Specific urban design models would provide a coherent spatial vision and, if adopted by the local authority, would limit developers to more sympathetic proposals.

## **Issues concerning protection of heritage**

There is increasing pressure within planning departments to perform in the context of heritage protection. Resulting from this there is a need to ensure within Local Authorities that the requisite conservation skills are consistent countrywide; to establish whether the requirements for capacity building within Local Authorities are adequate; whether conservation functions within Local Authorities are adequately resourced; and whether additional resources could be provided in the context of heritage to boost performance and enhance skills.

It is important to establish whether there are enough Local Authority staff with appropriate training and skills to support enforcement of planning control where designations apply to historic building stock; to regulate and process adequately the impact of interventions to historic building stock; and to enforce regulation of unauthorised development or development in breach of planning control.

Since 2006 the IHBC, in conjunction with English Heritage/Historic England and the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers, has monitored Local Authority Staff Resources<sup>1</sup>. The figures collated indicate a continuation of a downward trend that began in 2006 which has resulted in the number of conservation specialists in England falling by 37% and the number of archaeological specialists advising local authorities in England has falling by 35% .

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<sup>1</sup> <https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/ninth-report-la-staff-resources/ninth-report-la-staff-resources.pdf>

A skills assessment of local authority conservation staff was carried out by the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC)<sup>2</sup>. The report, commissioned by English Heritage, is based on data collected and collated in 2013 relating to the initial mapping of the skills available to England's local authority conservation services in delivering their statutory and non-statutory duties. It set out to provide the following

- understanding the skills essential to a service that is able to deliver in line with statutory duties and non-statutory obligations
- identifying where gaps in skills may exist and so establish how best to fill gaps
- appreciating preferred methods of filling gaps by developing skill
- establishing baseline data to allow repeat assessments in future years to identify emerging trends and threat.

The IHBC Areas of Competence and the corresponding competences represent the standard for the assessment of skills, knowledge, experience and understanding that the IHBC requires of historic environment conservation professionals. The IHBC's four Areas of Competence comprise the overarching 'Professional' Area of Competence, and the three Practical Areas: 'Evaluation', 'Management' and 'Intervention'. Within these broad areas sit more specific Competences. The Professional Area of Competence informs and shapes conservation advice whilst the Practical Areas of Competence correspond to how conservation is achieved, by evaluating, managing and, as appropriate, changing places.

The report flagged that the lack of such skills in some authorities may lead to inadequate practice or conservation outcomes and it recommended that an investigation should be considered of if, and how, major conservation skills gaps can impact on the historic environment related performance of the whole local authority planning service.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ihbc.org.uk/skills/resources/Skills-assessment-of-local-authority-conservation-staff-final.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Skills which were considered by the majority of respondents to be crucial to the future maintenance or development of any competent local authority conservation service were:

1. Conservation Philosophy
2. Standards of conservation practice
3. Conservation Legislation
4. Conservation Policy
5. Heritage at Risk
6. Condition assessment
7. Use of materials & repairs to historic buildings

The skills considered by the majority of respondents to be valuable to the future maintenance or development of any competent local authority conservation service were:

1. History
2. Research & recording
3. Data management
4. Finance & economics
5. Project development
6. Project management

In terms of planning education IHBC has considered the differing competencies required for decision making for implementation of works and suggests that their system of accreditation envisages the different role requirements in differing capacities. This must also be seen in the context of requirements for practitioners to have continuing CPD. Questions which arise include whether the current provisions for protection of the built environment have taken into account the differences in terms of performance of historic materials in the context of energy efficiency; whether there a need for adjustment of some regulatory requirements in the context of Historic Building Stock; Whether there are adequate resources in place to properly facilitate community engagement in Local Planning and participation of local communities in Local Planning Frameworks; and whether practitioners in Local authorities and within State Organisations have the requisite competencies to facilitate stakeholder and community participation or engagement.

We hope these remarks are of assistance,

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. A.', written in a cursive style.

IHBC Operations Director