



INSTITUTE OF HISTORIC BUILDING CONSERVATION

Regional Policy Unit (White Paper)
Department for Transport, Local Gov't and the Regions
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Dear Sir/Madam

Your Region, Your Choice – Revitalising the English Regions

I refer to the above White Paper.

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 supports the Government's commitment to regional policy, and agrees that it is important in achieving social justice, sustainable growth and maximising the Nation's economic development potential.

To facilitate effective regional policy, the IHBC believes there are three major areas that need to be afforded the highest priority, in addition to those discussed in the White Paper:

1. The European Regeneration Framework and impact of state aid law on regeneration
2. Urban Renaissance and the importance of quality in the urban environment as a means of attracting high value investment and jobs and improving competitiveness
3. The need for changes in the funding of rural areas

These matters are dealt with in more detail below.

1. The European Regeneration Framework

The lack of reference to European State Aid rules is very surprising given their fundamental significance and impact on regional policy. Following on from the EC's 1999 decision on the

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PIP, current state aid provisions fundamentally undermine effective regional policy. Block exemptions and notifications have been used to patch the system up, but these are extremely complex, introduce considerable delay and uncertainty, and in many instances are still inadequate. For example, even in the case of SMEs in a tier 2 assisted area, funding is limited to 20-25% intervention rates, which in many instances are hopelessly inadequate to trigger much need regeneration and new economic activity in areas suffering from decline and economic failure.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and DTI have been very proactive in developing new notifications such as the Housing Gap-Funding Scheme and the Historic Building Regeneration Scheme. However, to deal with the overall issue, the IHBC agrees with the findings of the TLGR Select Committee that a new European Regeneration Framework is urgently required (TLGR Committee, 'The Need for a new European Regeneration Framework, 31 July 2002). This new framework would need to deal with housing, the historic environment, derelict land and other legitimate regeneration functions, to differentiate them from subsidies to trading companies. Until such a framework is in place, meaningful regional policy is seriously inhibited.

2. Urban Renaissance and Urban Quality

The White Paper does not get to grips with the new regeneration agenda and concept of urban renaissance. High quality contemporary buildings, well designed public spaces, and the creative use and regeneration of historic buildings and areas have all been used as means to raise the profile of different areas and regions and to improve their competitiveness. It is not merely by coincidence that areas with high quality urban environments and well-maintained historic quarters are best able to attract high value new investment. The North-West and North-East regions in particular have benefited from high profile regeneration initiatives based on design and heritage-led regeneration (examples including Castlefield in Manchester, the river frontage in Newcastle and Gateshead, Liverpool waterfront, etc). The term urban renaissance is well demonstrated by these examples.

The IHBC is especially concerned at the lack of mention of the historic environment. The historic environment is a key element in numerous high value regeneration schemes around the UK and Europe and in achieving urban renaissance. Heritage-led regeneration is extremely important in creating the right kind of environment to attract increasingly mobile firms and skilled workers and securing high value investment and jobs. Robust heritage regeneration policies and objectives need to be incorporated into regional strategies and funding programmes. RDAs and local partnerships need to ensure high standards of design and to emphasise best practice in heritage regeneration when considering projects for funding. Measures need to be taken to raise awareness at regional and local levels of the principles of urban renaissance and of design and heritage-led regeneration. English Heritage has started to address the regional agenda through its Regional Historic Environment Forums. However, these need to develop direct links to provide input into Regional Development Strategies and Regional Cultural Strategies

It is important to appreciate the more localised dimension within regional policy. Many failing areas are located in generally prosperous regions. It is especially important to target areas with poor urban environments.

The list of Regional Strategies put forward in the White Paper (box 4.1) should include an additional item: 'Urban, Rural and Historic Environment and the Urban Renaissance'. This should deal with the kind of issues outlined above.

The matter of urban quality needs to inform the Government's thinking if future regional policy is to be effective. Regions that emphasise urban quality (both new and historic) can improve their competitiveness both at national and wider European levels.

3. Rural Regeneration

The issue of rural regeneration needs to be developed as a key strand of regional policy. Much of the rural environment (by definition) is fragmented, based around isolated individual

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buildings or small groupings. Many of these are limited in scale. Nonetheless, their collective contribution is considerable, in providing housing, accommodation for commercial enterprise, helping to define the character of rural areas, and as a basis for regeneration and economic development. It is essential that regional strategies and funding programmes are geared towards small scale isolated schemes in addition to the area-based approaches developed for urban areas.

In conclusion, the IHBC generally supports the aims set out in the White Paper. However, the importance of the matters outline above cannot be overestimated. They must inform the Government's approach to regional policy if it is to be effective.

Yours faithfully

Dave Chetwyn
Consultations Secretary