



· INSTITUTE · OF · HISTORIC ·  
BUILDING · CONSERVATION

*Making Heritage Work*

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Dear Ms Williams

### **THE SETTING OF HERITAGE ASSETS: ENGLISH HERITAGE GUIDANCE**

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.

Thank you for inviting us to participate in this consultation.

The IHBC welcomes English Heritage's intention to produce Guidance on this topic and the very thoughtful and methodical approach to it. We have canvassed our members for their thoughts and have had a wide range of views expressed. As you might expect, the response we have had is very firmly rooted in the perspective of designers and conservation officers, who are daily dealing with proposals for new development in everyday places with frequently recurring issues of place-making and urban design, often involving the setting of heritage assets as a matter to be taken into account.

The problem for many of them seems to be that the draft Guidance reads like a theory of heritage setting rather than a practical guide. The tensions within the document are admirably summed up in the illustration on the cover which immediately evokes rhetorical questions: is this an example of beneficial or detrimental impact? What would we decide if anything in the picture were to be a proposal, rather than an existing building? To what extent can charm, quirkiness or historical accident occurring outside normally acceptable parameters contribute to a sense of place? This effect may have been intentional, but it only serves to emphasize that there can be a wide margin between a well-executed academic exercise and tool-kit for over-stretched urban practitioners.

The IHBC would like to suggest that, to be useful in an everyday context to heritage practitioners, the Guidance needs to address some fundamental points.

## **Target audience**

Paragraphs 2 and 3 of the document outline its purpose and target audience. The Institutes considers that it is likely to be more useful in relation to some than others.

- For internal EH use (both for advice and in relation to EH's own property), where the users will be familiar with processes and terminology, we think the document is a good one.
- For use by "those involved in managing change", we think the document will be of less use. This is because it is insufficiently rooted in planning policy. To be of real use to everyday practitioners it should:
  - be better referenced in relation to planning policy as a whole, not just PPS5, but to PPS1, other PPSs and to the widely accepted techniques of urban design; and
  - be much clearer about the fact that it represents only part of the urban design/place-making/contextual analysis tool-kit and should be regarded as a detailed approach to be adopted where the significance of the setting of heritage assets goes beyond everyday circumstances.
- For wider use (particularly in relation to the Government's localism agenda) we think the document has the potential to be really problematic. This is because, to those not versed in heritage practice, the extraordinary potential breadth of its approach (e.g. the definition of context including other works by the same architect wherever located – para 19) may reinforce anti-development and very conservative design preferences, notwithstanding the caveats at paragraph 53 and elsewhere. We think a useful shift of emphasis would be to include the implementation of successful place-making in heritage settings among the Guidance's objectives.

## **Balance**

Part of the problem is with the range of case studies in Appendix 1. Whilst these are very well chosen to represent the issues illustrated, they are overwhelmingly of heritage settings in which any form of development would be undesirable or at least very problematic and controversial. The impression given, therefore, is of a document which is trying to rein in the development excesses of the past.

The Institute thinks that this should be addressed by celebrating good examples of developments within the setting of heritage assets which have not affected, or even enhanced, their significance. This would point practitioners in the right direction for new proposals and also head off ill-informed criticism of competently prepared proposals. It would also be helpful to have the Guidance refer to the positive benefits to heritage that can accrue from good place-making and urban design.

## **Proportionality**

Many of our correspondents view the suggested process in Section 3 as another hurdle to getting anything done. As you will be aware the number of assessments that many development proposals are subject has become considerable. The prospect of another with more than a dozen specific aspects to be considered is unwelcome when many of them are already the subject of scrutiny in the normal urban design process. For many projects such a detailed approach is unnecessary and the document should be clearer about this. The impression given at paragraph 48 is that the choice lies between the detailed analytical approach set out there and a more detailed analytical approach as set out in Appendix 1.

We feel that the Guidance should make it clear at the outset that it is intended to be a statement of "best practice" and not a new process which needs to be slavishly adhered to in anything other than the cases of greatest importance, highest significance and most substantial potential impacts.

### **Conservation Principles**

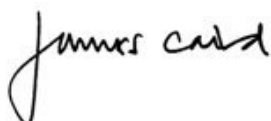
These days most English Heritage policy and guidance is founded on *Conservation Principles*. If EH is serious about helping the heritage sector to better practice it needs to review this principle. *Conservation Principles* is not a helpful document in planning processes. Its language and terminology relate poorly to that of the legislation and the general body of planning policy, which varies between statutory regimes, and, even to experienced professionals, it is not an easy read. In fact *Conservation Principle's* detachment from mainstream planning policy means that most development managers do not use it for this reason alone and many of our members consider it to be unhelpful in relation to their part of the planning process. Therefore, the draft document would be greatly enhanced if the support for its principles could be rooted in PPSs (not just PPS5, but PPS1 and other guidance) with references to *Conservation Principles* (if required at all) left to footnotes. Above all the document needs to be very clear about where it stands in the general hierarchy of Guidance.

### **Future-proofing**

We are acutely aware that the Government proposes to reduce the "7,000 pages" of planning policy very considerably and that our view of the need for the draft document to fit in with general policy may have an entirely different perspective not very long from now. We think it may be advisable for progress on the document to be aligned with the Government's programme for planning policy and guidance as a whole.

We hope these comments are helpful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Caird". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

James Caird  
Consultant Consultations Co-ordinator

## Responses to consultation questions

**1.** The English Heritage draft guidance is intended to assist the implementation of the policies and guidance on setting in Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment and the Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide.

(1a) Do you consider that this English Heritage guidance on Setting conforms to the Government's policies and guidance in the PPS and Practice Guide?

(1b) If not, can you explain how it diverges?

(1c) Do you consider that it will assist implementation of the Government's new policies and guidance?

**IHBC response:** The Institute considers that the draft Guidance is largely compliant with the general intentions of PPS5 but has inadequate reference points to this and the wider range of planning policy documents. This is important because PPS5 itself states that it is only one aspect of policy amongst many (paragraph 1).

Cabe has produced much useful urban design guidance and EH should examine this in detail to ensure that the Guidance is not at odds with Cabe guidance but adds value through dealing with the setting of heritage assets in circumstances only where Cabe guidance is inadequate, with specific references where appropriate.

**2.** The English Heritage setting guidance applies the heritage values approach advocated in *Conservation Principles, Policy and Guidance* to the consideration of setting.

(2a) Do you think this approach is helpful and that it is successfully achieved within the draft guidance?

(2b) If not, what alternative approaches would you suggest?

**IHBC response:** The Institute does not consider *Conservation Principles, Policy and Guidance* to be a helpful reference point. The general approach is appropriate but it should be clearly referenced to the relevant paragraphs in PPS5 and use the terminology of the PPS, as it is the PPS, and not *Conservation Principles*, that must be used to justify and explain decisions affecting the historic environment under the Planning Acts.

**3.** The English Heritage setting guidance is intended to cover a wide range of circumstances, from large scale infrastructure projects to more common types of development and for initiatives such as conservation area management plans. We have drafted our guidance to cover the generality of setting issues applying to such circumstances. We have avoided additional technical guidance specific to particular types of development such as tall buildings and wind turbines, as this is included in the specific guidance we offer on these development types.

(3a) Do you agree with this approach and, if so, have we struck the right balance to ensure our draft guidance applies to the majority of circumstances?

(3b) Are there additional issues that you consider should be included in specific guidance on particular kinds of development?

**IHBC response:** The Institute thinks that the approach is let down by the detail. Many of the examples in Appendix 1 are so obviously vulnerable to wind farms that it seems a bit specious to studiously ignore references to them especially as there is a general need for guidance on the assessment of the visual impacts of wind farms. On the other hand,

“the majority of circumstances” can be more than adequately dealt with without the detailed analytical approach that is advocated and the Guidance should avoid any implication that it is a methodology for “the majority of circumstances”. We would prefer the general use of the Guidance to be described in terms of circumstances in which the setting of heritage assets may need more consideration than would be provided by normal urban design and place-making techniques. We think the issue here is not so much the Guidance itself, but the description of its application and its everyday use.

4. In Section 3 (paragraphs 42 to 62) of the draft guidance we set out, as an assessment framework, issues that we consider may need to be taken into account in assessing the impact on the significance of a heritage asset of changes within its setting.

(4a) Do you agree that these are the correct factors to consider?

(4b) If not, can you suggest which factors should not be considered or which additional factors should be?

(4c) Do you agree that the questions posed in paragraph 49 are a helpful way of structuring the assessment framework?

**IHBC response:** The Institute thinks that the framework of issues is nicely handled and poses an appropriate range of rhetorical questions that practitioners should pose. What is less clear is how one achieves an optimum balance between criteria bearing in mind that it is difficult to evaluate the weight to be given to each when almost always the overwhelmingly dominant impacts of setting are visual.

The Guidance does not adequately deal with a major principle of PPS1 (paragraph 18) because it does not properly deal with a number of factors that can affect setting or where changes within the setting of an asset can affect the use or viability of the asset itself:

- Economic issues. The need for heritage assets to have economically viable futures. The Guidance should address this in a positive way, such as capitalizing on the heritage dividend rather than treating heritage as an inhibition to economic progress.
- Social issues. The need for heritage assets and their settings to reflect the local and neighbourhood assessments of significance as well as national and academic ones.
- Environmental issues. How the historic environment (and the setting of assets within it) can contribute to, rather than inhibit, contributions to combating climate change.

While the Guidance may not have room to deal with these in detail, a few words and a reference to the appropriate guidance would be enormously helpful to the overall balance of the document.

5. In paragraphs 55 to 58 of the draft guidance we discuss the issue of cumulative impacts in relation to setting.

(5a) Do you have views on the practicality of the approach suggested in paragraph 58? We would particularly welcome views from Local Planning Authorities.

**IHBC response:** The proposed methodology is fairly standard way of assessing the effects of any cumulative impact. It would seem inappropriate to deviate from this to any great extent. What might be useful is some reference to the serious difficulty of

weighing the tipping-point for cumulative impact, whether real or anticipated. We suggest that the second word of 58c should be "subsequent".

6. In Appendix 1 of our guidance (paragraphs 63-74), we provide illustrate examples of how setting can contribute to the heritage values and significance of a heritage asset, structured around a range of questions. These are not intended to provide examples of good or bad development within the setting of an historic asset, but rather to illustrate how an analytical approach to setting can provide better understanding.

(6a) Do you think this approach is helpful?

(6b) Do you have comments on the appropriateness and usefulness of any particular example?

**IHBC response:** To be useful, the Institute thinks that examples should be given. Otherwise the document will not be of significant use to general users. The advocated analytic approach is quite good in principle and one which deals well with all the various aspects of setting that heritage practitioners might encounter. But we are concerned that the examples themselves are too generally of the sort where the advocated process would lead to the conclusion that no development would be appropriate. To redress this we would like to see a parallel range of examples that celebrate successful developments in sensitive settings. We would be pleased to assist with generating a set of examples from our members' local experience and knowledge.