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Dear Sir

Strategic review of the Houses of Parliament Restoration and Renewal Programme

Summary

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC), the professional body of conservation specialists and historic environment practitioners and a leading authoritative body in historic building conservation recommends:

- The repair and adaptation should take a conservation led approach. Informed repair and adaptation is the key to the success of project, firstly setting out an understanding of the heritage significance of the building, then formulating proposals using skilled heritage conservation expertise to repair the building and introduce modern interventions.
- There are significant skills and knowledge gaps in heritage conservation throughout the UK. Training more people in skilled building work and conservation of historic buildings, will subsequently enable other historic buildings nationwide to be restored. Trickle down training in best practice across the UK will promote new employment potential, sustainable reuse of buildings, contribute towards regeneration, and increase income from tourism. Providing a showcase for UK heritage skills to a world-wide audience will increase trade, skills exchange and international tourism. Structured training opportunities can be accommodated within existing programmes.
- Sourcing of suitable traditional materials and products offers the potential for new business and employment opportunities, especially in parts of the UK which are most effected by the economic crisis and unemployment.
- We hope that the advice of Historic England will be taken throughout the lifetime of the project.
- The Institute suggests work should be phased on a priority basis, reserving work for later rather than cutting costs and quality.

- Careful consideration should be given to the potential risks from fire during the repair works.

Introduction

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.

Houses of Parliament and The Palace of Westminster are amongst our most important historic buildings and this status is recognised in its Grade I Listing. The Institute as a leading authoritative body in historic building conservation would like to offer some points for consideration for the review of the Houses of Parliament Restoration and Renewal.

Conservation led approach

The starting point for the repair and adaptation of the Houses of Parliament should be to take a conservation led approach to the work, even where changes are being made. This is the only way to protect the essence of this important iconic and internationally recognised building. Informed repair and adaptation is the key to the success of project, firstly setting out an understanding of the heritage significance, of the building. Then formulating proposals in a thoughtful and appropriate way using skilled heritage conservation expertise to repair the building and also to innovatively introduce modern interventions to bring it into the 21st Century.

The increasing problems the building is experiencing may be more the result of unskilled, *ad hoc* and piecemeal responses to date than the result of the age of the building. A competent, conservation-led repair, maintenance and adaptation programme is what is needed

Skills and knowledge development

The Programme website says that "given all the specialist skills required, the supply chain will involve many small and medium-sized companies and require an investment in training and apprenticeships." There are significant skills and knowledge gaps in heritage conservation throughout the UK. Especially at this time of employment crisis, the opportunities for work and training this project provides are even more important. The project should support jobs and training opportunities across the country not just in London. Training more people in all areas of skilled building work and especially conservation of historic buildings, using this major project, will subsequently enable other historic buildings nationwide to be restored. Trickle down training in best practice across the UK will promote new employment potential, sustainable reuse of buildings, contribute towards regeneration, and increase income from tourism. Providing a showcase for UK heritage skills to a world-wide audience will increase trade, skills exchange and international tourism. Structured training opportunities

need not slow projects down but with careful planning and a modest budget, can be accommodated comfortably within existing programmes.

Sourcing of materials

"Parliament already works with specialists across the country, sourcing encaustic tiles from Ironbridge; cast iron roof tiles from Halifax, Sheffield and Chard; limestone from Doncaster and Clipsham; and slate from Ffestiniog, North Wales" Sourcing of more suitable traditional materials and products for the project, offers the potential for new business and employment opportunities especially in parts of the UK which are most effected by the economic crisis and unemployment.

Historic England advice

The government has a statutory adviser on the historic environment in Historic England. We hope that the advice of Historic England will be taken by the Sponsor Body when setting out the scope of the project and by the Delivery Authority when implementing the project.

Budget

The Programme is stated as being "committed to ensuring value for money for the taxpayer" and will clearly aim to do this within a budget. If the works come in above the available budget, the Institute suggests that work should be phased on a priority basis, reserving work for later rather than cutting costs and quality.

Fire risk

We would ask that the very careful consideration is given at all stages in development and implementation of the project to the potential risks from fire during the repair works, in the light of recent regular disasters such as Glasgow School of Art and Notre Dame, often during ongoing refurbishment works.

Yours sincerely,

Fiona Newton
IHBC Operations Director