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Dear Sir

Town Centre Action Plan Expert Review Group

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.

We are very pleased to have the chance to offer some brief comments for the Expert Review Group to consider.

Although the Institute's comments fall mainly under the Review Groups theme of Planning, Access & Place Management they cross over and feed into all the other themes being considered.

The historic environment in town centres should be recognised as an important part of what makes some town centres more competitive, more able to attract visitors and locals alike and contributes strongly to quality of life.

A renewed focus heritage-led regeneration in historic areas will help town centres. Funding area grant schemes would support investment, improve the appearance of buildings especially shopfronts and make upper floors more viable. Such interventions are sustainable and have long term benefits for a relatively small investment.

This successful approach to town centres taken in heritage led regeneration over recent years can also be applied as a methodology to the improvement of local areas where the heritage is less well acknowledged. Many improvement and regeneration schemes in town centres are not of sufficient quality or focused enough. The final

outcomes can make little change or improvement with poor quality improvements and without specific focus on areas or groups of buildings. Lessons for all town centre area regeneration can be learnt from successful heritage led regeneration schemes such as Historic Environment Scotland's Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS).

A greater residential population in town centres will support continuing retail in a move away from destination shopping. Many historic towns have traditionally had a town centre population but there are town centres with few people living in them. More housing may be needed in town centres but this should always be sensitive infill which is well designed, of quality construction and most importantly to scale and in context. The location of new housing should be carefully considered to ensure it does not destroy the cohesion of the retail area, leading to further decline as shopping areas get cut off from each other and stop footfall. The quality of existing town centre housing should also be improved, much of it, especially bedsits over and behind retail properties, can be cramped and squalid.

Town centres still also need to encourage people from outside to visit for shopping, and personal and social activities. The mismatch of free parking outside towns and costly parking in towns may prevent the use of town centres. A strategic removal or reduction of parking fees in town centres, especially small towns, and a focus on maintaining better affordable public transport, will help sustain and support the use of town centres.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Newton
IHBC Operations Director