

*Planning and the Historic Environment 2002*

An Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> century – 17 May 2002

**"Sound in conception and effective in operation"**

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**Introduction**

When this conference was first mooted, the idea was to raise the common agenda between buildings and archaeology. It is fortuitous, then that the government in its green paper has flagged its intention to review the two fundamental documents which govern practice on archaeology and buildings in the planning framework, PPGs 15 and 16. Today therefore seems an ideal occasion on which to explore what bringing those two PPGs together might mean, and more important what - in the 21st century - we as a profession might want to achieve through this.

PPGs 15 and 16 are two very different documents - the first based on earlier policy documents, including Circular 8/87, with a long technical annexe and a huge range of issues covered. The second is a shorter, punchier document, with relatively few key principles and no pedigree, but a document which has fundamentally changed the nature and practice of archaeology in England.

In this paper I want to look at a series of key questions:

- What does the government want?
- What has happened since the last versions?
- What are the issues for us?

- What might a new document look like?
- What can the sector most usefully do?

### **What does the government want?**

It is worth pausing to look at the signals being put out by government. We know there are two key documents - the current planning Green Paper, and Force for the Future, the government's statement on the historic environment.

In his recent statement to the DTLR select committee, Lord Falconer noted his concerns about the planning system, that it was slow, rules-driven as opposed to proactive, over-complex, unpredictable, lacking community engagement, under resourced and not user friendly.

### Just what do these words in the PPGs mean?

- affect
- special architectural and historic interest
- Character
- what needs consent
- evaluation?

### Quality of Information

- Poor information is a key source of delay
- lbc applications, CA appraisal, Archaeological evaluation

#### Databases

- Just what data does an effective conservation service need?
- What if the buildings people are not interested?

#### Local authority skills and practice

- We know there is a problem
- Can the PPG update the 1995 advice?

#### Who does what in the process? What are their responsibilities?

- EH
- LPAs
- NGOs
- Communities

Conditions - necessary, reasonable, enforceable

New design

- In the PPG or out?
- CABE or EH?

And that is before we deal with the issues specific to listed buildings, conservation areas and archaeology. Should there be an Annexe C for each? Or is that the provenance of EH?

## **Structure**

We don't know how long the new document might be or what shape it will be take. I am sure, however, that we will be looking at something very much shorter than the current documents, closely focussed on principles with practical notes in the guidance.

We will have to think about what goes in and what goes out - should the PPG be confined to planning matters or should designation be included?

If it is a wider document, should the structure follow the cycle of management - understanding, designation, maintenance, managing change and monitoring?

Will it be sufficiently connected to the wider policy aims of central and local government?

Whether or not the green paper proposals will solve these problems, it remains useful to

see where the areas of concern lie.

In FfoF, the government stated its continuing commitment to the principles in both PPGs. This is welcome news, but also welcome is their statement that they would like the regulatory system to be

***"sound in conception and effective in operation"***

the phrase might be a very useful starting point for any new thinking about what is needed.

The idea of conflating the PPGs is one which is not specifically identified in 'Force for our Future', but is one which chimes with the ambitions to simplify the system, and also does make sense in terms of the integrated commitment to the historic environment as a whole.

We know also that there are concerns about the application process, and that the government have identified a need to move towards

***"standardised application and administration systems"***

so we can expect a long hard look at what information is needed with applications.

Ffof also flags up the need for long-term legislative reform, and particularly the integration of listed building consent back into the planning system. Although this is a matter for legislation rather than for guidance, the ambition will clearly have some influence on what might be expected in the PPG.

The other signpost is that the new PPG is likely to look something like PPG 3 - a streamlined document, which identifies key principles and practice and leaves more detailed guidance for daughter documents.

## What has changed?

In the decade or so since the PPGs were published, a number of things have changed in how we care for the heritage.

- The idea of historic environment - identified in PPG 15 - has grown to gain wider acceptance. Even if we don't like the term, the concept of heritage being more than a few isolated monuments, and something more akin to the natural environment is critical
- Urban Regeneration has shown us how heritage can contribute to economic regeneration
- Foot and Mouth showed the economic impact of heritage in the countryside
- Better data - we have better data about the economic benefits of the historic environment, and are beginning to tackle the question of social benefits
- Conservation planning has, I hope, taught us to look at significance in a much more open, sophisticated and much broader way, dealing also with conflicting values

But there are battles we have not won. We continue to lose sites - as MARS and Buildings at Risk have shown, the heritage remains vulnerable to development, to agriculture, to financial loopholes.

What has also not changed is that heritage continues to be portrayed in negative terms, seen by planners as a break on development, by environmentalists as a barrier to better energy conservation.

The whole sustainability agenda - now we are told at the heart of government policy - has failed to address the historic environment - or we have failed to address sustainability. At a recent Italian conference I was told by eminent conservation experts that the role of heritage is to sustain the economy, a view which is not as extreme as one might hope.

And heritage remains, in the large part, a fairly dull, monochrome business. We have really failed to address the whole question of diversity, not just in WHOSE heritage we represent, but in what we hand on to future generations.

### **What do we want to achieve?**

The government is currently grappling with a defined purpose for the statutory planning system. Might we not need a similar defined purpose for conservation?

The big message, purpose and aim for the PPGs has to be to:

### **SUSTAIN THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT**

This means sustaining it in its own right, as something which is of value, which contributes to the quality of life, which matters. This means handing on to future generations what we value - a historic environment which is diverse, in good heart, and contributes to the quality of life.

- What are the four or five basic principles by which we operate?
- How can we get better, more transparent decisions?
- Need and justification in PPG 15 -just what should that be?
- How do we reconcile conflicting values ?

- economic and heritage
- ecology and historic environment
- What belongs in daughter documents, and what is the responsibility of English Heritage or others to produce?

### **What should the professions do?**

- Be clear on what the PPG can and cannot do.
- Constructive, coherent dialogue
- Vital role of Heritage Link

### **Conclusion**

Over the next few months of thinking about the new PPG and what it might achieve, it is important that we keep a few basic points in mind.

The historic environment is a critical part of the planning agenda capitalise on public perception of value of heritage encourage positive approach to managing the historic environment make better, more intelligent decisions bring people with us

#### The title of this talk:

Sustainability - overriding philosophy Significance - underpins every decision we make  
Scholarship - not afraid of it Stakeholders - without them pack up and go home



Characterisation - what do we mean by it?

For me, it is the agenda of Informed Conservation. Ensuring that we have enough information about what matters and why, before we make a decision, Whether that means a conservation area appraisal, a holistic site evaluation, a historic landscape character assessment or a conservation plan.

The critical issue is to understand what matters and why, and the reason for doing so, is to hand on what we value to future generations.

Conservation - sustaining the historic environment if you prefer - is about managing change in order to hand on what we value to future generations.

Force for our Future has flagged up that any new or revised PPG should be sound in conception and effective in operation.

A pretty good starting point.