

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy

Response from the National Trust



Ymddiriedolaeth
Genedlaethol
National Trust

1. Introduction

The National Trust welcomes the opportunity to contribute evidence to the Inquiry into the Welsh Government's historic environment policy.

Our historic sites in our cities, towns and villages, the historic features in the countryside, and the wider historic landscapes are intrinsic to the cultural life of people in Wales and are a major attractor of visitors to Wales:

>77% of visitors to Cadw sites are from outside of Wales

>15% from overseas

The National Trust is a charity which makes a significant contribution to the economic, social and environmental life of Wales:

- it is Europe's largest conservation charity caring for special places in Wales, Northern Ireland and England - for everyone to enjoy
- it looks after the natural and historic resources upon which so much of the Welsh tourism industry depends. It cares for, and welcomes everyone to enjoy, 18 of Wales' finest houses, castles, gardens and industrial sites, one fifth of the coastline of Wales and 50,000 hectares of land much of it in Snowdonia and the Brecon Beacons, with 240 tenanted farms
- it is the largest social enterprise in Wales;
- it is supported by over 112,000 members in Wales and by 4 million overall;
- it is the largest tourism business in Wales: welcoming a million visitors to its attractions, shops, holiday cottages, restaurants and tea rooms;
- over 4 million people enjoy free access to the Welsh coast and countryside managed by the National Trust;

- it is the biggest non-government provider of educational visits in Wales: 50,000 school pupils and students visit each year;
- it is a major employer in often remote rural areas with nearly 300 permanent staff and many more seasonal staff;
- it attracts over 5,400 volunteers who donate 250,000 volunteer hours per year;
- it is not dependent on Government funding

2. Responding to the Inquiry's questions:

2.1 How appropriate and successful are the current systems employed by the Welsh Government for protecting and managing the historic environment in Wales?

- The current systems are successful for protecting and managing the designated parts of the historic environment i.e. the aspects deemed to be worthy of statutory protection because of historic, archaeological or architectural merit.
- It can be argued that all the landscapes of Wales, rural and urban are significant to a greater or lesser degree. Have we got the appropriate measures to make sure that these areas are protected?
- We have no means of taking care of special places that are valued for intangible reasons.

2.2 How well do the Welsh Government's policies promote the historic environments in Wales (for instance, in terms of interpretation, accessibility, attracting new audiences and tourism)?

- This has improved enormously over the last few years with a range of passionate Ministerial Statements issued providing clarity on the Welsh Government's policies and aims. These have helped to increase the profile of the historic environment in policy circles..But do the positive messages reach the public, or do they still have negative impressions, for example, about perceived delays in getting planning permission on Listed Buildings?
- Cadw's 'Conservation Principles' have been widely welcomed by the sector.
- Cadw has a list of 'Priorities 2011-2016' and we engage with that through the Minister's Historic Environment Group (HEG). However, we recommend it's time to review the effectiveness of HEG as a means of promoting the historic environment.
- Interpretation tends to focus on sites in Cadw's guardianship and those open to the public. For instance the registered Historic Landscapes have been little publicised.
- Within these limits, we note that work to attract new audiences to the sites in Cadw's guardianship has been good – for instance work with the Arts Council and the many and varied public events at the Castles in Caernarfon, Conwy and Caerphilly.
- The pan-Wales interpretation strategy and plan has been completed but a rather overly complex process may be hampering its delivery.

2.3 How well do the policies for the HE tie in with wider WG policy objectives?

- **The emerging Natural Resources Body**

The National Trust is concerned that there is little recognition of the continuum from natural environment to historic environment to cultural environment. We recommend that the definition of 'the environment' for, and by, the new body is a broad one which recognises this continuum. Very little of Wales' environment is 'natural' as most of it has been influenced by people. We feel that this holistic view of our environment needs to be ingrained in the way the single body views our environment and carries out its duties and a key way to ensure this will be to provide training for staff which enables them to recognise and appreciate the interdependencies of our natural, historic and cultural environment.

- **'Sustaining a Living Wales' Green Paper**

The Green Paper is weak in recognising this continuum. It does identify 'culture' as a key service group noting how local places, landscapes and seascapes are essential ecosystem services, but does not inspire confidence that there will be good integrations between the historic and natural environments in terms of opportunities and needs.

- **Regeneration**

The Welsh Government's Centre for Regeneration Excellence in Wales (CREW) has a remit to promote excellence in regeneration and to establish a more integrated regeneration practice across Wales. One of their four key areas of activity is rigorous research. They are developing a 'Historical Characterisation Toolkit' with Cadw and the Design Commission for Wales.

- **The Sustainable Development Bill** (current consultation)

In the consultation document there is no mention of organisations representing the historic environment such as Cadw or the Royal Commission as *'an organisation making clear contribution to people's economic, social and environmental wellbeing'* although the National Library, the Arts Council and the National Museums of Wales are listed.

- **Woodlands for Wales** (Jan 2011)

This Welsh Government policy document acknowledged that: *'Woodlands and trees make a positive contribution to the special landscape character of Wales and to sites of heritage and cultural importance'*. Within this document there is a very good understanding of the value of landscape and the way the history of Wales is reflected within it. For examples it states: *'In managing existing woodlands and trees, the value of archaeology within the woodland is respected, as well as the archaeology of the woodland; in creating new woodland, existing heritage sites are protected from damage and the integrity of historic landscapes is preserved.'*

- **Glastir:**

Disappointingly, even though Glastir is one of the drivers designed to feed into the above woodland strategy, and farmers are the custodians of our historic landscapes,

there is an absence of meaningful provision for the historic environment in Glastir. The issues for the historic landscape are not touched upon within this scheme. The outcomes desired from this scheme are: combating climate change, improving water management, maintaining and enhancing biodiversity.

- In the linked document 'Why Plant Trees on my Farm?' there is no mention of heritage or historic landscapes.

- **Planning Policy Wales** (Feb 2011)

A positive example of integration of the historic environment into other Welsh Government policies is Planning Policy Wales. This is designed to help local authorities develop Local Development Plans, and has a chapter on conserving the historic environment. In this the Welsh Government's objectives are to:

>preserve or enhance the historic environment, recognising its contribution to economic vitality and culture, civic pride and the quality of life, and its importance as a resource for future generations

and specifically to:

>protect archaeological remains, which are a finite and non-renewable resource, part of the historical and cultural identity of Wales, and valuable both for their own sake and for their role in education, leisure and the economy, particularly tourism;

>ensure that the character of historic buildings is safeguarded from alterations, extensions or demolition that would compromise a building's special architectural and historic interest

>ensure that conservation areas are protected or enhanced, while at the same time remaining alive and prosperous, avoiding unnecessarily detailed controls over businesses and householders.'

It identifies the important role of Cadw, the Royal Commission and the Archaeological Trusts in recording and protecting sites. It also specifically mentions the importance of the setting on several occasions: *'Effect on historic landscape, park or garden and settings as a material consideration'*

- **A White Paper for Better Lives and Communities** (current)

An example of the lack of integrations is the current Housing White Paper is squarely aimed at solving the housing problem, but nowhere, other than in the Minister's title, in the entire 82 pages are 'heritage', 'historic' or 'conservation areas' mentioned.

While fully recognising the importance of solving the shortage of suitable housing the White Paper appears to only see the number and condition of houses as the problem and does not look at the setting, the need to integrate new homes into communities and the need to look at the historic uses of areas.

2.3 What would be the advantages and disadvantages of merging the functions of RCAHM with functions of other organisations, including Cadw?

- Understanding the historic environment is fundamental to effective management of Wales' heritage assets and so we need to make sure that this service continues to be provided, irrespective of the organisational structure. The Royal Commission has done some exemplary work over the years adding greatly to our understanding of the historic environment. It has also led the way in publicly communicating the exceptional quality of the Welsh Historic Environment through

Coflein which provides access to a range of records via the web and also the successful series of television programmes: 'Hidden Histories'.

- From a National Trust perspective our concern would be the risk of loss of expertise currently available within RCAHM. We would ask that this expertise is maintained for Wales irrespective of where it is housed.
- We value the independence of the Royal Commission from the political institution of Welsh Government. The risks of losing this independence need to be considered.
- The main advantage would be budget savings but we would ask that this is properly assessed, both the short and long term consequences.

2.5 **What role do local authorities and third sector organisations play in implementing the WG's HE policy and what support do they receive in this respect**

- The National Trust is a charity which is independent of government for its core funding. However, we apply for grants to Cadw, the Heritage Lottery Fund and others for support for special projects and initiatives at our historic properties.
- We work in partnership with a wide range of Third Sector and Government partners to deliver joint projects e.g. with Cadw, Visit Wales, CCW, CPRW, the Archaeological Trusts. Please see the two case studies below.
- The third sector organisations in Wales which relate to the historic environment are not organised into a formal network like Heritage Link in England. There are a few Wales wide bodies like ourselves, a few strong regional bodies such as the Archaeological Trusts, but in the main the sector comprises very local groups and historical societies.

3. **Conclusion**

Therefore National Trust welcomes the Welsh Government's positive efforts with historic environment policy. But we feel the potential for the historic environment to deliver across the Government's priorities such as regeneration, learning, social inclusion and Glastir has yet to be fully realised. We also feel there is much more scope to harness the public's interest in their history and historic environments and National Trust is well placed to work with Welsh Government to deliver wider public engagement.

Case Study 1 – Partnership working

On behalf of the Historic Environment Group: a co-operating group of stakeholders including Cadw, Forestry Commission, Heritage Lottery Fund, Royal Commission, National Trust, Countryside Council for Wales have commissioned research into **"Assessing and addressing the potential impacts of climate change on the historic environment in Wales"**. From this work the group has developed and is reporting on a strategic approach for both assessing and addressing the potential impact of climate change on the historic environment in Wales. The focus of the research is the adaptive response to the consequences of climate change.

Case Study 2 – joint work to promote the value the historic environment of Wales
(Please see the summary leaflet provided to the Committee.)

Research published in September 2010 shows the historic environment makes a significant contribution to the Welsh economy. It is estimated to support 30,000 full time equivalent (FTE) jobs, to contribute approximately £840 million to Wales' gross value added (GVA) and to contribute some £1.8 billion in respect of output.

The wider importance of the historic environment has been evaluated through case studies which show that the public value of the Welsh historic environment is considerable. It supports regeneration through acting as a catalyst for further investment which encourages local pride. The environment benefits by the conservation of landscapes and habitat and through volunteering and training opportunities local communities get involved in the conservation and promotion of the historic environment and are equipped with skills for work. Access and learning is also a priority which enables people of all ages to learn about their history and culture and supports the national curriculum

The research “Valuing the Welsh Historic Environment” by, ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd, shows that, in addition to the direct economic benefits provided by important historic assets, there are significant indirect impacts in supporting wider economic, social and environment priorities, for example as a catalyst to investment and improving skills that enable more people to get work. Much of the share of the economic impacts relates to tourism expenditure attributable to the historic environment as many visitors are attracted to Wales because of its wealth of heritage attractions.

The report concludes that the Welsh historic environment is a valuable asset which must be actively cared for and promoted. It also stresses that once these assets have been lost or forgotten they can rarely be recovered.

The National Trust chaired the Valuing the Environment steering group for the study in partnership with Cadw, Visit Wales, CCW , HLF and the three National Park Authorities.