

Speech by Patricia Ferguson, Minister for Tourism, Culture & Sport to the Annual Conference of HEACS at Falkirk Town Hall

14 September 2006

The text of the speech was delivered on behalf of the Minister by Ms Lucy Blackburn, Director of Policy, Historic Scotland.

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, Ms Burns, members of the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland, ladies and gentlemen.

I am very glad to be addressing this important gathering of people involved in, and committed to Scotland's historic environment.

This is a particularly important year both in the short history of HEACS and in the development of policy for the wider historic environment: HEACS has submitted its reports and I have issued the first in a series of Scottish Historic Environment Policies. It is also a year in which we have seen new challenges to the survival of the historic environment, particularly our listed buildings and conservation areas. There are three themes I want to pursue this afternoon:

- first, I'd like to say something about HEACS's achievement in presenting its final 4 reports;
- I then want to mention developments in wider policy for the historic environment;
- and, finally I'd like to share my concerns with you about a key challenge we need to tackle together: the perception that historic buildings and our wider stock of pre-1919 buildings are not and cannot be made sustainable; that somehow they are energy inefficient and impact badly on carbon emissions through wasting energy.

HEACS REPORTS

My predecessor set up HEACS three years ago, as a body independent of Scottish Ministers and their officials in Historic Scotland, to provide strategic advice on issues affecting the historic environment: we were looking for new ideas, some blue-sky thinking, developed outside the existing structures.

HEACS was given 5 key tasks.

- The first of these was to report on the need for an Audit of the Historic Environment: as a result of that report I set up an Audit and work is under way on three contracts to gather and assess data on the state of our ancient monuments and historic buildings.

In the last few weeks HEACS has delivered the remaining four reports:

- first, on the criteria for taking properties into state care;
- second, on the availability of traditional skills and materials to meet the needs of the built heritage;
- third, on the role of local authorities in conserving the historic environment;
- and finally, on whether there is a need for a review of the existing heritage legislation.

All four documents contain interesting and constructive ideas. We have not had the papers long and there is a lot of substance in them. It will inevitably take some time for me to work through the many recommendations with my officials and to decide how to take matters forward and to prepare formal responses. Today's event and debate, to which my officials will be very interested to listen, will inform that response.

It is early days yet, but some recommendations resonate with what is already planned or in hand: for example, the report on local authorities sets out recommendations that Historic Scotland should communicate better with other parts of the Scottish Executive in relation to the historic environment.

I am glad to say that Historic Scotland has been strengthening its policy capacity, not least to enable even more strategic engagement with the wider Executive, through initiatives such as the SHEP programme. There are, of course, many other recommendations that will require very careful consideration, particularly in relation to the resources available.

Although I am not yet able to respond in detail to the reports, today's conference is perfectly timed to give me an opportunity to thank the members of HEACS - all people with busy lives and careers - who have put so much energy, commitment and time into the evidence gathering, the analysis, discussion and writing. I think the whole historic environment sector owes you many, many thanks for that investment.

SCOTTISH HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT POLICIES

While HEACS has been working on its reports, I and my officials have also been busy. Three years ago my predecessor commissioned a review of Historic Scotland: a particularly important recommendation in the report was that there should be a policy statement for the historic environment in Scotland, building on the First Minister's St Andrews Day speech and the National Cultural Strategy, and approved by the Executive. The need is being met by the strategic ministerial policies for the historic environment, called the Scottish Historic Environment Policy series - SHEPs for short, and I'd like to say a little more about them today.

SHEPs are intended to set out Scottish Ministers' vision and strategic policies for the wider historic environment and also to provide greater policy direction for Historic Scotland. A key part of the process is that all the policies are put out to public consultation to ensure that there is widespread buy-in from stakeholders, the sector and the wider public.

The most significant of the SHEPs is *Scotland's Historic Environment*. This sets out Scottish Ministers policies for the whole sector. The public consultation on SHEP1 ended in June 2006 and I hope to publish the final version early next year.

SHEP1 will be a very important document in many areas and not surprisingly the consultation attracted an interesting range of responses from individuals to major organisations - all the responses are now available on the Scottish Executive website. I am pleased to say that the response was overwhelmingly positive. However, it would be fair to say that some of the responses wanted SHEP 1 to be a very ambitious document.

Some of the responses suggested very radical changes indeed – changes that could only be realised through far-reaching agreements throughout the public sector in Scotland, and some requiring legislation. Implementing the full range of options the consultees recommended would be the work of many years, even if agreement for some of the more challenging and interest-specific sectoral recommendations could ever be achieved.

Because we have never had such clear and detailed statements of ministerial policy before, it is important to remind ourselves that one aim of SHEPs is actually to document what policies are already in effect. Three years have passed since the review recommended that these policies be set out, and I do not want to delay further the building of that basic policy framework.

However, I am pleased to say that I expect the final version of SHEP 1, when it appears early next year, to be a stronger document than the draft, and there will be a clearer role for it in consolidating earlier policy, such as the Stirling Charter. I think respondents will be pleased by the positive way we have been able to deal with many of their suggestions.

The rest of the SHEP series continues to develop. SHEP 2 on the scheduling of ancient monuments is published; the consultation responses have been analysed for SHEP 3 on gardens and designed landscapes, and further SHEPs on a range of other issues are being actively developed for consultation before spring 2007. The series was warmly welcomed by the Parliament in a debate in April.

So, the SHEP series, by setting out clearly policy on the historic environment, will place all our work on a sounder footing, perhaps providing something for the sector to rally around to deal strongly and consistently with the challenges it faces.

THE CHALLENGE

And it is one of these challenges that I want to share with you this afternoon: my concern that frequently, the scope for older buildings to have a good carbon footprint is badly underestimated. You will hear it argued that we have to make radical changes to old buildings, or even that they have to be demolished and replaced. What an incredibly narrow and unsustainable approach! We can only look at the carbon emissions assigned to historic buildings, indeed their whole environmental impact, if we look at their whole life cycle, from construction to demolition.

When I spoke to the Parliament about the SHEPs in spring I said that you don't get much greener than re-using old buildings. I stand by that statement. Caring for this legacy is one of the most sustainable things we can do. There are over half a million pre-1919 dwellings in Scotland. Some are of great historic importance and interest in themselves; many others are part of interesting and characterful townscapes. Most provide comfortable homes, with spacious and flexible accommodation.

If we are to knock them down and start again, think of the energy and resources invested in these thousands of homes - the labour of men and women, the natural resources extracted from the earth, the private and public money spent.

Think how irresponsible it would be to throw away all that investment - the work, the resources, the money, the energy, and the character:

- if we have other alternatives it is irresponsible to cause the waste and pollution inherent in demolition;
- if we have other alternatives it is unsustainable to put the demolished material in landfill;
- if we have other alternatives it is irresponsible to quarry and transport new materials, increasingly from half way round the world.

I want us to work together to challenge the idea that reusing old buildings is somehow not sustainable or that they have to lose much of their character to be acceptable. Research shows that thermal mass - as in traditional stone buildings - is great at moderating temperature - keeping offices and hotels cool in summer - often avoiding the need for air conditioning.

One contentious issue is that of windows. There is a debate to be had on the full life energy costs of wholesale replacement of timber sash and case windows - made from sustainable materials and with a life often in excess of a century and a half if maintained - compared with windows of modern materials that use irreplaceable hydrocarbons in manufacture and can radically change the appearance and character of buildings they are fitted to. There are energy issues to be addressed but it is a debate that has to be carried out on the basis of good evidence. It is certainly a debate that I and my officials in Historic Scotland are keen to engage in.

CONCLUSION

So, in conclusion, I am very sorry that I am unable to attend the conference to hear the other papers today and to speak to the delegates both formally and informally. But my officials from HS are here today, and they are here to listen and to take part. I hope that you leave today inspired by the papers and discussions to move forward together not only to bring benefit to the historic environment but to bring the benefits of the historic environment to a wider constituency.

Caring for our historic environment:

- for our countryside and our towns;
- for our great historic buildings and our tenements;
- for our archaeological sites and landscapes;

is about managing change intelligently.

- it's about protecting an investment;
- it's about protecting assets of immediate and future value - social, cultural and economic value;
- it's about living sustainably;
- and it's about maintaining and building communities.

Scotland's historic environment is a rich legacy, an asset of immediate and future value in every sense. It is not a legacy that our generation can squander, but one we must enhance and pass on. It reflects our shared past and our shared future. I am glad to be working with you all to safeguard and promote that shared heritage.