

ADDRESS TO HEACS CONFERENCE: CELEBRATING AND PROMOTING OUR HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT, 20 MAY 2009, EDINBURGH

LIZ DAVIDSON, SETTING THE SCENE

When I saw the line up for today's conference – which covers the spectrum of HEACS work over the last few years I wondered what possible function I could have – other than acting as a kind of embodied *index* page for the rest of the day when the more expert individual presentations will be laid before you. But in speaking with Liz Burns earlier – she made it clear that she wanted me to also touch upon whether HEACS has met and risen to the 'expectations' of the historic environment sector and indeed of the general public, through its performance. ***How well has it done?*** And that is a much harder issue to gauge.

So this presentation will list *and* attempt to appraise the impact of their work.

Basics:

The Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland was established in 2003 **'to provide Scottish Ministers with strategic advice on issues affecting the historic environment'**.

Specifically it was charged with providing advice on:

- The state of the historic environment
- How the historic environment is identified and protected
- How the historic environment is identified and promoted to foster public understanding, enjoyment and support
- How the historic environment contributes to the wider context: for instance, education, the economy, tourism, arts and culture, leisure and the promotion of social justice; and
- How an adequate supply of skills, materials and resources is ensured to safeguard the historic environment for future generations

These challenges were laid down by Ministers with advice from Historic Scotland

The remit was extended 2 years later to allow it to:

- Develop its own wider agenda of strategic issues
- Develop lines of communication with key stakeholders
- Act as an advocate for Scotland's historic environment

A bright new future – Not so.

By January 2008 it became one of the casualties of the Scottish Government's desire to de-clutter the public sector landscape of a range of Non Departmental Public Bodies. Henceforth, Ministers would be advised directly by Historic Scotland, which in 2004 had opened up its own board to 3 external, non-Executive directors in a move towards greater openness and

transparency. I think it is fair to say however that Historic Scotland's board remains fundamentally a management and accountability tool for the running of the organisation however – and not a strategic or visioning body - and in recognition of this perhaps, Scottish Ministers have created flexibility in the future to bring in advice from external experts on an ad-hoc basis.

So HEACS has had a five year lifespan. What on earth can you achieve in that time?

Quite a bit

1. 2004 : The Need for a Heritage Audit in Scotland
2. 2006: The Criteria to Assess whether a Property should be taken into State Care
3. 2006: The Role of Local Authorities in Conserving the Historic Environment
4. 2006: The Availability of Traditional Materials and Professional and Craft Skills
5. 2006: Whether there is a need to Review Heritage Protection Legislation
6. 2008: Report and Recommendations on the Infrastructure of the Historic Environment
7. 2009: Report and Recommendations on the Economic Impact of the Historic Environment in Scotland
8. 2009: Report on the Engagement of Young Adults in the Historic Environment in Scotland
9. 2009: Report on the Ecclesiastical Heritage

In addition it has made formal and lengthy comment on over 30 separate consultation documents from the daft Culture Bill, the Ratification of the Hague Convention and the Common Agricultural Policy, the Review of Land Managed by the Forestry Commission. Designed Landscapes, Community Engagement, the Marine Environment and Treasure Troves – the last two especially giving me strong images of swashbuckling high jinks and lashings of rum – which brings me to the **conference** and study tour circuit – meandering from the Borders, Caithness, Argyll, the Isle of Lewis and Harris, New Lanark, Inverurie, St. Andrews, Glenesk, Dryburgh, Perth, Dumfries, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee, and Inverness, and Clydeside regeneration.

We have to ask ourselves – what other field could muster the voluntary input and expertise of such an august panel of members – award winning architects, urban regeneration supremos, voluntary sector chiefs, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Scotland, leading lights in the museums and archaeology world, renowned conservationists and historians, senior local authority executives, and down right trouble makers.

Very few public sector organisations could afford this level of first class, continual consultancy on its books. Liz Burns has analysed this in the Annual Report presented to you today – and it's been estimated that despite the basic number of days that board members commit to – that in reality trustees spent

about 40 days a year on HEACS work. If you take that over 5 years x 12 trustees being charged out at a going rate of say £500 per day – this would have resulted in an excess of = £1.2M of ‘in-kind consultancy’ and this does not even begin to take into account the considerable other expert opinions that HEACS invited onto its working group sub panels– so it might not even be too outrageous to suggest a commercial charge out of between £1.5 - £2 Million.

Of the impact from its reports– I will perhaps try to score:

HERITAGE AUDIT

There was no baseline for how bad, scarce, exemplary or cash strapped the situation was.

The Historic Environment Audit was established almost immediately and has been evolving as the bedrock for all subsequent decisions

Final Score: 10 out of 10

WHETHER A PROPERTY SHOULD BE TAKEN INTO STATE CARE

This addressed the concern that property acquisition decisions had been made by Historic Scotland using procedures that had been developed internally without public consultation and without an explicit framework and policy objectives. Astonishingly I learnt that there are 345 Properties in Care (PIC’s) in Scotland – only fractionally less than the whole of England which has 412 PIC’s – but the policy – driven by genuine altruism was deemed to be reactive and not strategic nor accountable.

The Minister agreed with the recommendation to form an acquisition policy subject to public consultation and validation but unsurprisingly declined the kind offer of HEACS to come up with a list of suitable candidates for state care combined with changes to the statutory powers to take emergency cases of Buildings at Risk into care .

Overall score – a still respectable 7.5 out of 10.

THE ROLE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES

It was agreed that the main battleground for the protection and the sustainable regeneration of the nations’s historic buildings actually lies within the territory of the local authorities – hard pressed, under resourced, and in some cases awful remote from the high ideals of the centre. The HEACS report concluded with a raft of some 21 recommendations – key being:

- Need for Local Authorities and other public bodies to have a statutory duty of care towards the maintenance of historic buildings
- Independent Survey of Local Authority Capacity,

- Linkages to the funding streams and strategy of Community Planning Partnerships.
- The funding by HS of specialist staff within certain local authority teams
- Key Performance Indicator's for local authorities for the historic environment and ALSO for
- Historic Scotland in making connections with Local Authorities.

This was a very robust and rigorous report, but disappointingly - on the key recommendation of the Statutory Duty of Care – the Minister declined - not 'wishing to impose new duties on local authorities' however the door was not closed completely and the discussions for voluntary concordats drafted by HS has been strengthened by the re-establishment of the **Local Authorities Historic Environment Forum** working through CoSLA.

So disappointing on the central point – but qualified or full agreement with others – gives this a score of 15.5 out of 21 – and everyone here – find out who is your representative on the Local Authorities Historic Environment Forum – and lobby them!

TRADITIONAL MATERIALS AND CRAFT SKILLS

Set against a continuing decline in traditional apprenticeships allied to the major structural changes in the construction industry and the difficult of the small to medium sized company in underwriting training and competing with the larger one-size fits all companies.

RECOMMENDATIONS: 20 recommendations in this report ranging from re-opening slate and stone quarries, skills audits, centres of excellence for craft skills apprenticeships, making accreditation of contractors a condition of grant aid (a proposal that ran foul of European competitiveness rules almost immediately), conservation internships, new National Certifications in traditional building skills, and a clutch of maintenance proposals including the setting up of a new Loan Fund for Maintenance Projects.

Ministerially there was a great deal of support towards the stimulation of the indigenous Scottish, stone and slate industry through trial excavations, snatch quarrying etc., but somewhat guarded provisions that the industry and the market must nevertheless remain the driver for this whilst HEACS clearly wished that Scottish Ministers would take a more proactive stance in driving the market

Very positive commitments however to reinvigorating the Scottish Traditional Buildings Liaison Group – what has happened to this? – continued support for the Scottish Stone Liaison Group, the Glasgow Project skills and materials audit etc. and to working with the CITB's Construction Skills to develop new qualifications in conservation skills.

All in all 19 of the recommendations out of 20 receiving full or qualified approval – a great score. Although what WAS all that absolute non-sense for most of 2008 – with the uncertainty over the future of the Scottish Lime Centre which necessitated the disbanding of the Masonry Training Squad?!

HERITAGE PROTECTION LEGISLATION

This was one of the most strident of the group's reports – it took extensive evidence from the development and construction industry, the voluntary and community scene and conservation and local authority levels. This was set against a background where, quote 'no previous assessment has been made of heritage protection legislation in Scotland as a whole'.

It felt strongly that the feedback it gathered was unanimous on the failures and weaknesses in the system ranging from the situation where local authorities did not or could not use the legislation provided such as Urgent Works Notices or where crazy anomalies still persisted such as the rule whereby a Repairs Notice had to be set against the owner of a property rather than the site itself; it covered the need for heritage impact statements, the call for a new designation of cultural landscapes, action on the impenetrableness of Article 4 Directions.

Unfortunately this was just too radical a proposal – and in effect suffered from being behind England in the 'let's wait and see what happens to their Bill first' inertia. Granted – legislative change can be a long process – but such a recommendation had clearly not taken lightly by the group. NIL POINTS

THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT –

This report is set against the extraordinarily wide and diverse make up of the heritage sector –some **383** organisations – some UK national – but mostly Scottish – were canvassed in the data collection side of the survey. The huge value both financially and socially of its voluntary sector was revealed together with a widespread view that the sector lacked core support. It also delved deep into what it believed to be the inherent weaknesses of the sector - that it lacked a coherent single or unified voice acting as an intermediary between grassroots and government – and that as a result any campaigns it led on were more accurately needling of authority than spearheading a charge, hence its main recommendation for the need of a suitably funded national intermediary body –whose role is obviously even more critical today.

The incredibly useful data that this report was based on was provided by 3 specially commissioned independent pieces of research, revealing statistics such as the fact that nearly 200 million hours a year are given voluntarily to the heritage industry at a value if costed at around £28 Million, hundreds of thousands of people are members of bodies from tiny local preservation societies to the National Trust for Scotland. The historic environment matters to a lot, a lot of people.

There is a very striking sentence within this report that states:
'The History Scotland Corporate Plan 2004-7 stated that the agency would
"Support the Scottish Ministers in championing the historic Environment and
in acting as an advocate for the historic environment explaining its importance
and the contribution it makes to the economic and social well being of the
people of Scotland' - Such aims are absent from the current Corporate Plan.

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT IN SCOTLAND

Finally – what's it all worth – all this heritage nonsense, old fashioned
buildings and an even older fashioned conservation lobby trying to keep them
standing.

Like the previous report – the use of consultants in this case ECOTECH –
briefed by HEACS to look specifically at quantifying the figures involved and
the investment made in the historic environment sector – have resulted in
pioneering and incredibly useful data that will be of considerable use to the
sector and hopefully to government – contributing headline figures of £2.3
Billion pounds to the local economy and supporting overall more than 60,000
jobs in Scotland – with the spin offs and indirect benefits of in-work
households as opposed to workless ones.

Two further pieces of research are being unveiled today from HEACS -

1. **Engagement of Young Adults**
2. **Report on the Ecclesiastical Heritage**

And as the next two presentation will give you and in depth critique of their
contents, I will not dwell on them here.

CONCLUSION:

9 Major pieces of research, numerous supporting base studies, real results –
already making an impact, many more where Ministers have undertaken to
continue exploring ways of taking forward recommendations and engaging
with other strategic players. A culture of open debate, serious intellectual and
professional study of issues that have frustrated the sector for many years, an
accessibility and responsiveness and a profile and gravitas that has enhanced
our movement.

I tried to think of other creatures that achieve so much in just 5 years.

The most characterful I could find was the life cycle of the dragon fly – which spends an astonishing 4 years gestating until emerging for a purple patch of hedonistically dizzy activity overflying inland waterways. It's a little fanciful I know but the associations of dragonflies have some resonance –

- they have the largest eyes of the insect kingdom – and have probably the furthest and widest spectrum of vision for this famously myopic species;
- they are the fastest flying insect and are seen as a valuable predator on pests, midges, mosquitoes, and other things that you just want to swat – such as red tape and downright flawed systems and procedures; and
- in Eastern mythology they are associated with renewal, a positive force of change, a growing maturity and - as it has such a short life span – with a drive to live life to the full.

So has HEACS been a success? In the paraphrased words of Oscar Wilde when asked by a theatre critic, whether he thought his new play would be a success :

“The play IS a great success – but it remains to be seen if the audience will be a disaster”. – which might be taken as a typically flippant or even arrogant comment from Wilde – but is also putting some of the responsibility for the success of the work onto the public.

And in the same way pretty well everyone in this room shares the responsibility for whether or not HEACS has succeeded in challenging issues and in issuing challenges - ... and in making a difference.

Personally I would like to thank HEACS for their extraordinary level of activity and output and the superb work that they have achieved and to thank Historic Scotland for their support and that of their – probably knackered – Secretariat.

I should add that to return in my final slide with to the exotic life cycle of the dragonfly – it should be remembered that although it only lives for 5 years – it only dies after successfully mating and giving birth to a new generation – so I guess the question from today is indeed what next? Or put another way – if you had HEACS for another 5 years what else would you like them to do? Address issues of funding, tax and other fiscal incentives for the historic environment?, the future for building preservation trusts in these difficult times, the issues of rural regeneration? Someone should be looking at these issues. Answers on a post card please – and perhaps by the end of the conference we may have some idea of where to send them.

“My interest in the future is that I am going to spend the rest of my life there”