

TRANSCRIPT OF THE SPEECH GIVEN ON 20 MAY 2009
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AFFAIRS AND THE CONSTITUTION
AT PAST FORWARD, THE CLOSING HEACS CONFERENCE

Liz, thank you for that introduction and thank you for the invitation to speak here today. I will refer later on in what I'm going to say to this being the final HEACS conference but can I at the outset offer thanks to you and your colleagues for the work that you have done. It has been significant work, it has been important work, and in my recent engagement with you, particularly in your recent report to me on the economic impact of the heritage sector, I think it has been very influential work that is certainly influencing my thinking and the thinking of government.

It is a surprise to hear myself referred to as 'newly appointed', I have to say. There are some people in this room that I have seen in the last few months more often than I have seen my family but I am, I think, slowly working my way into what I regard as a fascinating part of my role; that is, dealing with the bodies and individuals within this room as colleagues, and I want to address them in that way today.

What I want to talk about today is some of my own thinking about this sector and how it should move forward. I shall specifically at a certain stage talk about the role of Historic Scotland, and the way in which I want Historic Scotland to change and develop to match the challenges that it faces. But I want to structure what I say today around some key and important words for me; words like: celebration, patrimony, enjoyment, commitment, enthusiasm, roots and fitness for purpose. Those are, by and large, positive words and, at the very outset, I want to make it clear that I think this sector and what this sector does should be celebratory and should be positive. We should show passion and enthusiasm and our job is to communicate that to the people of Scotland. The historic environment is a key part of our national culture and the words 'national culture' perhaps

have not been used enough in Scotland. They're not now, they're not inward-looking, they say where we are rooted, where our feet stand as we stand up and look out at the world. I am proud of the work that the bodies in this sector have done, both those in the public sector, such as Historic Scotland and the Royal Commission, and the voluntary bodies and individuals including the owners of properties. It is their passion and their commitment that has got us to where we are today.

We have exceptional things to celebrate at this moment in time. The Royal Commission's Treasured Places campaign has been a huge success and I think has opened up the whole sector to people who haven't touched it before. Of course, we now have five World Heritage Sites in Scotland and whilst they are sometimes relegated to an also-ran in thinking about Scotland, to have World Heritage Sites is something that Scotland should celebrate very strongly and very loudly. We are in the year of Homecoming, which is not just important in the sense of bringing people back to us, but in another sense: the year of Homecoming should remind the people of Scotland what is important here, what they want to celebrate within Scotland, what they can discover and re-discover within their own country.

So I always think about Scotland in domestic, European and world contexts; and in that context our built heritage is important in each area - in each of those circles we have something to celebrate. We contribute to the world; what we do reflects what we have done and what we want people to know about us; and that word patrimony, which I'm going to come back to, is a word that means a lot to me. The word patrimony needs to be celebrated by local communities, individuals, voluntary bodies, businesses. A whole range of Scottish society needs to celebrate what we have and to make sure we take it forward.

Now I don't use the word heritage overmuch, other than in the expression 'World Heritage'. It is a word that's easy to pigeonhole and sometimes it expresses what it's like to live in the past. I prefer to use the word

‘patrimony’ and I am going to use it in this contribution. It is, of course, in its literal definition, an inheritance or legacy from an ancestor. It is something about value which, perhaps, is greater than the word ‘heritage’ can portray. And it is of immense value to us. It’s of value to us in our education, and in the continuing development of the people of Scotland of all ages. It is valuable, as we know, from the work that we have been doing in the Government’s core purpose of sustainable economic growth; and it is valuable in that numinous way, and numinous is a good word, because it expresses who we are, where we came from, where we find ourselves and, to some extent, what we are going to take forward; because it is at the heart of our culture, that living culture that we have.

Our built heritage, if I may use that phrase, is not frozen, it is not static, it is part of the dynamic of our culture. It sits alongside our music, our oral traditions, our languages, our collections, our history, it sits alongside our landscape, of course, and it is one continuum. So what we have is something we want to celebrate; it’s something we need to acknowledge is part of us; it’s something we need to take forward; it is our physical, intellectual, spiritual and emotional, not baggage, but a burden we are fortunate to carry. I have an holistic view of our national culture, as you can see. I think what you do is part of the wider cultural celebration we have to do in Scotland and I want to treat it in that way. And the Scottish Government is going to treat it in that way. It is going to join up this issue with other issues and I think you can see that, for example, outlined in the Scottish Marine Bill where the issues of marine patrimony are protected and celebrated within the overall context of what we are trying to do within the Marine Bill.

Now, let’s look at the economic business first then. Historic Scotland is the largest operator of paid attractions in Scotland; it attracted over 2.9 million visitors last year and generated an income of £23.6 million. Historic Scotland, that is the Government, has invested significantly in those properties, to enhance visitor experience while maintaining essential

authenticity which we know the visitors value – not just because visitors value it but it's one of the key elements. The private sector made a contribution through the 45 member properties of the Historic Houses Association, owned by individuals, trusts and businesses, that are opened to the public; and they attracted a million visitors last year. And the National Trust for Scotland is the largest non-governmental body in the sector. It mobilises many volunteers; it attracted 2 million visitors. It is important that all those parts, those key parts of what we are doing, work together; and if there is a difficulty in one part then the other parts have to try and assist. Certainly I have been very keen to make sure that the Government's concerted support is given to the National Trust in its difficulties. I hope that as those difficulties work themselves out, the National Trust will also realise that they are part of a wider sector, and work with Government to make sure that we are all going in the same direction.

Now the importance of working together is stressed by the report that we are talking about today. HEACS' *Report on the Economic Impact of the Historic Environment*, conservatively estimates that the tourism and construction elements of the sector contribute about £2.3 billion Gross Value Added. That is about 2.6% of Scotland's total economic output, which is a very significant contribution; and the sector directly supports 41,000 full time equivalent employees, about 2.5% of Scotland's total employment, and indirectly supports a further 19,000. So this is no minnow, this is no amateur activity, this is not an add-on, this is an important player within the Scottish economy and needs to be recognised as such.

So, patrimony, if I can go back to that word, patrimony is central not just to our culture, it not only defines our culture, it is actually important for our economy too and needs to be recognised as an economic driver. And there are other agendas that we play to as well: we support economic development through the use of building skills and craft skills, developing and continuing craft skills that otherwise might not exist. Some of the work of the bodies that I have mentioned, in particular Historic Scotland, has been

instrumental in preserving skills that would have disappeared otherwise. So there is an element in terms of our construction industry to which this sector is central as well.

So we've got a cultural contribution and an economic contribution. We have also got a contribution in terms of well-being and health: the concept which is well known to all the bodies in here, that volunteering contributes not just to the intellectual development of individuals but also to their well being and to their health. Volunteering is increasingly recognised as one of the ways in which one can contribute and society can take a positive benefit from an input from individuals. We know that the 12,000 active volunteers in this sector contribute over 167,000 hours of work per month with a notional economic value that also has strong benefits in terms of well-being. And there is no tangible value that can be put on something else: which is the commitment and the enthusiasm that this sector brings to wider Scotland; a passion for what you do, a commitment to what you do and an opportunity to explain that to others.

I would like to pay tribute to you and your colleagues in HEACS for that. It is not easy when a body comes to the end of its natural life and I know there are some people in this room who, no doubt, blame the Government for that change. I think in the public sector there is always change, and churn, and development but it is no criticism to say that the fact this body's work has ended is an indication of moving onto another level of activity; and I thank you in particular, Liz, for what you have done and for what you have contributed to that.

Now there is an issue of what we are trying to do and whether it is fit for modern purpose. What I have said up until now justifies what we have been doing and the record of what has gone in terms of culture, the economy and the contribution to well-being, and there is an environmental contribution as well. But every time one looks at an issue one has to ask a basic question, 'what we have now, is it fit for purpose?' Now, I mean by 'fit for

purpose', that the administrative, legal and operational activities of all the parts of the sector are contributing in a way that is both relevant now and appears to be positive for the future. Now, it is vital that we have all the systems in place to do that. The Scottish Government is constantly reviewing whether the organisations and structures we have are fit for purpose. Historic Scotland has been involved, for example, in issues such as the Planning Summit which took place last October. That was designed to make sure that public bodies were aligned; to ensure that the aim of sustainable economic growth is achieved; and in the context of which Historic Scotland and the local authorities are developing joint working agreements. Historic Scotland also proposes to reduce bureaucracy by reducing the requirement for local authorities to notify Historic Scotland in listed building application cases.

Now I'm pushing all this activity up a gear. We have got some new projects that we want to bring forward and there are several strands to those projects: there is immediate legislative reform; there is reform of the wider administrative system; there is a more imaginative look to the future; and I have a particular interest in showing that Historic Scotland is focussed on effective engagement with the sector and its regulatory customers. There is a reputation abroad that the purpose of all agencies in Government is to say 'no' rather than to say 'yes'; to see regulation as a means of stopping things happening rather than encouraging good things to happen. I have never supported that and don't support it in this job, so all the agencies I am working with I expect to be positive in their regulation rather than negative.

Let me start with legislative reform. It is only part of a wider agenda and I am not at all convinced that major changes in legislation are required, but there are some changes that are required. Today I am launching a three month consultation period for a Bill to amend the heritage legislation. Copies of the consultation document, I understand, are going live on the web even as I speak but don't leave yet because I'll tell you what's in it. The legislation will deal with gaps and weaknesses identified by the sector itself.

It will harmonise a number of provisions in the ancient monuments, listed building and planning legislation. It will remove obstacles to the use of existing powers and it will provide certainty for developers through introduction of certificates of immunity for listing. I don't plan to go into full detail here but when you read it I hope what you'll recognise - and we want that feedback in the consultation process - is that it will improve the operation of the system whilst preserving its acknowledged strengths.

I want you all to take part in that process. There will be a number of events planned by Historic Scotland which will be part of the process and I want to hear your views. My strong view in this as in other areas is that amending the law is only one part of the process. What is as important, perhaps more important, is the policy underpinning the law and the way the law is implemented. That is, in actual fact, the interface at which Government is most closely judged: the interface between organisations, non-departmental public bodies, and agencies and the citizen where the judgement comes. That has to be an interface that is positive and one where the citizen feels they are getting value for money.

So I have asked Historic Scotland to do some things, to take forward a programme for change. It is going to undertake a wide-ranging programme to improve its customer service, strengthen its partnerships with other organisations and enhance its communication of the work it does. I know Historic Scotland has been working to improve its services to customers and I know it has had a lot of success in that but too often people do not understand the views it takes or why it takes them. Central to achieving change are a number of projects that I have asked the agency to take forward.

Firstly, owners of buildings and monuments that are designated face a bureaucratic process that emphasises the negatives - what they can't do - rather than the positives; the positive particularly being that those people own and hold in trust, essentially for all of us, a key part of Scotland's

patrimony. I want to change the emphasis so that Historic Scotland will try to understand better what it's like for people who have a building or a monument designated and use that knowledge significantly to improve how they communicate. That is a research activity which will inform future activity. I hope it will also apply to the way in which Historic Scotland gives advice on individual cases and technical matters. I want a better interface, a more positive interface.

Secondly, I want Historic Scotland to focus on problem-solving regulation; changing the emphasis on stopping things happening to historic sites to an emphasis on which problems can be sorted out; working more closely with all those involved to realise the potential of the environment in a sustainable way. A good example of that is the Castles Conservation Register which I launched at the beginning of May, where Historic Scotland is being proactive about identifying castles that are suitable for, and would benefit from, more active conservation through being brought back into use, rather than reacting to individual applications. Not every application will succeed; nobody is saying that. But there needs to be a more positive approach to taking this issue forward.

Thirdly, in terms of pro-activity, I also want us constantly to be looking for new opportunities to engage the whole population of Scotland in a discussion about, and a celebration of, what is special about our patrimony.

And in that programme of change that I have outlined, I am looking to build and develop the links between Historic Scotland and the Royal Commission and a whole range of other bodies including, crucially, bodies in the natural heritage. I hope to do this in a positive way and I hope that we are all going to co-operate in this, because I want these changes to lead to an atmosphere of change within this whole sector, from where the huge energy, commitment and passion of the sector can be released to do positive things and not, as sometimes happens, to argue about negative things. The Scottish playwright, Joe Muir, who I was very fond of, once memorably said

that what Scots wanted was not the freedom of religion but the freedom to persecute others and I think there is a tendency in each sector of Scotland to behave like that. I think we have got to change that behaviour and become positive with each other and then positive with society as a whole.

Now, finally, I want to say a word or two about structure within the sector. HEACS recently reported to me on the infrastructure of this sector. They recommended there should be a bespoke intermediary body that should provide a voice for what is a very large and diverse sector, and to provide a focus for engagement. Now I have responded today to this report. I know Historic Scotland are in discussion with key bodies to identify the intermediary functions that the sector thinks are a priority and to determine how they may be delivered. I do think it is important to say that it is not my place, and should not be Government's place, to impose yet another body on the sector. The sector has to decide how it wants to organise itself, what sort of voice it wants to speak with.

I will, however, make this commitment: that Historic Scotland will provide the financial and other support in the process to help the sector articulate its needs; and Historic Scotland will go on providing that support to the voluntary sector. And I do say to everybody here, if you feel there is a gap, if there is something you are not doing, that there is some way in which you are not organised, please think about it and find a way to take it forward. Find the voice that you need to express it and I will be very willing to listen but do not look to me to tell you how you should be organised. I hope that will be a simplification process; and, of course, Historic Scotland needs to be in a position to relate effectively to the sector and, in addition to the changes I have talked about, needs to adopt a perspective that is more outgoing to its partners within the voluntary sector. I wasn't able to attend the community archaeology conference at the weekend, but I understand from some of the preliminary discussions that there was a view that a great deal of activity was going on and that things will change. I am delighted about that but it's still got some way to go; and certainly the third part of what I am trying to

do is to say to Historic Scotland it's relationship with the voluntary sector must be one of partnership rather than domination. There must be clear partnership in the sector.

The enthusiasm in the agency (and there is tremendous enthusiasm - the people I have met and worked with in Historic Scotland are the most enthusiastic and knowledgeable I know) that enthusiasm needs to be liberated into the entire sector but first of all liberated within the organisation itself. I want the organisation to be on the cutting edge of advocacy, but as part of the process, not simply as somebody who says 'no'. These changes are going to be expressed in a new Statement of Values for the agency and its staff and in the objectives I've set. That Statement of Values, which will be a public document and which we will all have access to, will commit Historic Scotland to work better with partners, including the voluntary sector; to improve its services to customers through providing better guidance and advice; to communicate more positively, for example, through promoting informed debate about post-war listing and modern design and issues of that nature, in which some wonderful work is being done; and to build up the joining up that is already transforming the face of public services, and I have an enormously strong commitment to that. I drove forward with others the SEARS [Scotland's Environmental and Rural (Delivery) Services] project within the environment sector. A project that brought agencies together - not in a very complex set of mergers with all the difficulties involved in that - but actually in working together on the ground so that each agency could essentially substitute for another; where everybody shares obligations and responsibilities, and back- and front-office functions; where somebody from one organisation is proud to say that they are also working with another organisation and didn't hide it away. We are going to take the SEARS approach to this sector and make it work.

Now, Liz, in summary, I hope what I have indicated to you is a passion for the patrimony that we share; a view that it is very much within our cultural tradition and fits very happily with the work that I do; a view that it is of

great importance to the economy, particularly in this difficult economic environment – and any sector that contributes 2.5% or 2.6% is a key player and at a time of a recession will remain a key player which has to contribute as positively as it can; a view that the sector contributes to our well-being and a whole range of less tangible issues; and a view that there are opportunities for the sector to work positively together which can come about with comparatively minor changes of attitudes; and, insofar as I can guide those attitudes, that I have indicated how I am guiding them through my work with Historic Scotland and with the Royal Commission.

I hope all those things give you the positive message I am trying to give. I believe in the intrinsic value and the cultural value of what we are all doing. I believe that what we are doing provides roots and opportunities for communities and that is very important too. I believe that those who are its custodians are appreciated and are worthy of support. I believe it is managed and regulated reasonably well but there are changes that are required in the legislative framework and in some of the operational activity. And I believe, most of all, that what you do and what I do is appreciated and valued by our fellow citizens, and that if we do it better, if we go on doing it better, then we are making a positive contribution to every single one of those fellow citizens.

You refer to me as the new Minister: I have now had three months and perhaps it is impertinent of me after three months to draw all these conclusions today; but I will hazard one final conclusion. I have always been passionate about the history and the heritage and the patrimony of the country that I live in, not in any narrow way but in a very open and inclusive way. I believe that the opportunity to make that even more valuable to Scotland lies ready for us to take. I believe that the talents of the people in this room and elsewhere can take it. I think, now, I am committed and I think you are committed to take it, so let's get to work together. Thank you.