



HEACS
Longmore House
Salisbury Place
Edinburgh
EH9 1SH

6 May 2008

HEACS WORKING GROUP ON ECCLESIASTICAL HERITAGE – INVITATION TO SUBMIT EVIDENCE

I am writing to you to draw your attention to the work of the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland (HEACS) and its Working Group on “The Future of Scotland’s Ecclesiastical Heritage in a Time of Demographic Change”. You are invited to submit written evidence to the Group, which comprises four Council members - James Simpson, (chairman), Peter Burman, Eila Macqueen, and Andrew Wright - supported by the HEACS Secretariat.

HEACS is an advisory public body, which provides independent strategic advice to Scottish Ministers on the historic environment. The Council’s advice generally takes the form of reports with recommendations to the appropriate Minister. For further information on HEACS please see www.heacs.org.uk

HEACS has been asked to *provide advice to Scottish Ministers on how best to secure the long-term conservation of Scotland’s rich and diverse ecclesiastical heritage in a time of demographic change.*

The Working Group is now researching this subject and is taking written and oral evidence from interested organisations and individuals. A report will be prepared, which, once finalised and approved by the Council, will be submitted to the Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture, Linda Fabiani.

The Group’s provisional definition of ‘ecclesiastical heritage’ is a broad one. It includes: churches and meeting places of all denominations and faiths currently used for religious purposes; religious structures and sites no longer in ecclesiastical use; redundant and ruined churches; ancient and early Christian sites and burial grounds. Consideration will also be given to the interiors, fixtures and fittings of buildings and to the settings of all such sites.

The Group offers no formal definition of ‘demographic change’. However, consideration will be given to the composition, age-structure and distribution of the population, as well as to changing patterns of religious adherence and practice.

Respondents are invited to address these and any other aspects they consider relevant.

Subject areas to be covered will include:

- the nature, extent and degrees of significance of religious structures and sites, in relation to other aspects of heritage, and their place in the historic environment as a whole;
- the history of the ownership of churches and the legislation which governs current arrangements for different denominations and faiths, including financial arrangements;
- comparison with arrangements elsewhere in Europe, acknowledging that the threat to the ecclesiastical heritage is Europe-wide, that arrangements vary considerably, both in nature and in outcome, from state to state;
- the ways in which the ecclesiastical heritage is valued by the responsible denominations and faiths, by communities and by the nation as a whole;
- the historical reasons for the provision of churches in Scotland, and the assessment of current and likely future needs;
- the current and the likely future extent of redundancy of church buildings and risk to the heritage;
- the extent to which there is a will, on the part of communities and of the nation as a whole, to ensure the preservation of religious structures and sites of heritage value;
- the suitability of different types of structure for conversion to secular use, the propriety of doing so and the types of use which might be thought suitable and proper in different circumstances;
- the appropriateness of current arrangements for protection, through the internal arrangements of the responsible denominations and faiths and through listing and scheduling, and the appropriateness of the 'ecclesiastical exemption';
- the appropriateness of current arrangements for ensuring regular and systematic inspection, maintenance and repair; and
- the appropriateness and adequacy of current arrangements for the external funding of the ecclesiastical heritage.

The topics identified above are not meant to limit the Working Group's study. However, the Group would welcome evidence on these topics. You do not need to address all the topics listed: you may wish to provide written evidence on only a few. You may also wish to provide evidence on other topics, which you feel to be of relevance to this study.

Please note that your response may be quoted as evidence in the report to be presented to the Minister.

The Group would be most grateful for your response by Friday 27 June 2008. It should be posted to the address above or emailed to malcolm.bangor-jones@scotland.gsi.gov.uk. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Bangor-Jones, HEACS Secretariat