

Appendix 2: Summary of comments made at Conservation Areas Seminar, September 1999

Peter Cope questioned how far the information gathered on spending patterns represented a true picture, pointing out that different budgets would include spending (in rather than on) conservation areas, beyond specific allocations or grants.

Jason Evans questioned whether the money spent in conservation areas (for example by a Highways Department) was always valuable in conservation terms. There need to be mechanisms to ensure that expenditure is purposeful,

Nick Lloyd stated that it was important to identify funding specifically dedicated to management and enhancement programmes rather than funds from other sources. He pointed out that the Vale of Glamorgan has, post local government reorganisation, reduced resources for conservation areas owing to the pressure of other budgets; the nil figure cited in the Vale's return was accurate.

Sandra Williams The definition of "specific" funding depends on how you define "conservation"—in Cardiff there is no longer a specific conservation areas budget and resources are sought from other strategies that will bring benefits. The issue is whether we can make positive use of the funds that are drawn down when work in a conservation area is part of a wider project within urban design. Half of my work is urban design policy work. We therefore need to see enhancement as part of a bigger picture.

Several comments to the effect that money was not always well spent in conservation areas and that spending by Highways departments could be a particularly good example of this issue. **Jason Evans** suggested that it was therefore all the more important that there were coherent links within organisations to ensure effective working with other project teams. **Nick Lloyd** questioned how far the skills available within a local authority were being used together; diversity of skills and experiences can create tension within management structures, and take things away from a conservation programme.

Sam Romaya reflected that within this context it was important to find ways of measuring input against achievement, and to consider how management structures could contribute to effectiveness. Should a conservation area team be part of a built environment group combining urban design and conservation skills? It was commented that it was just as important, potentially, to link conservation, economic development and town planning skills, and that that corporate working was often hindered by the fragmentation of technical services into separate departments.

Phil Roach pointed out that such corporate links could not be achieved in a National Park context since these specialisms were not present in the Park authorities. He also reflected that while activity was relatively easy to measure, (quality of) output was less tangible.

Nick Lloyd rejoined that this was an issue that highlighted the need for effective national guidance in

order to ensure a uniform approach to quality and design issues. To achieve this it was currently more helpful to make use of English Heritage guidance in the absence of specific guidance from Cadw. He thought that the focus of Cadw's role on historic buildings and archaeology meant that their concerns were primarily for individual buildings rather than on spaces or area regeneration. A fundamental issue in Wales was the need for an overview that combined better Welsh guidance and enabled more appropriate allocation of resources. There was no clear picture of how Cadw prioritised resources and he had experienced frustration in achieving funding for projects. Different criteria might need to be applied in selecting buildings or groups of buildings for treatment, and there was a need for a balanced allocation of resources.

Sam Romaya stated his view that conservation and urban design needed to balance each other in order to create an environment as a whole rather than to focus on a specific aspect of the environment. Would there be professional differences of view regarding this as an objective? Were area studies of the kind undertaken in Birmingham by Tibbalds a way forward? Could one envisage categories of conservation areas each having guidelines for good practice? If so would it be right that these should not be based on a grading system but on a typology (for example, rural, suburban, urban... etc.)? Can guidelines be developed that would be helpful from this point of view?

Philip Roach agreed that there was a need for national good practice to be identified. It was not apparent that Cadw perceived this as its proper role. He noted also that Cadw grant aid targets outstanding secular and ecclesiastical buildings. Town Scheme grant prioritises individual buildings rather than the quality of a conservation area. The loss of Conservation Area Grant that has been signaled during the recent conservation exercise on grants to historic buildings is disturbing, and will be harmful to the general public seeking resources to assist the maintenance of their properties. Are there specific issues relating to the definition of Cadw's role which inhibit the promulgation of guidelines? Would Cadw argue that the gap that was being identified in the course of this discussion was met by Townscape Heritage Initiative grant?

Nick Lloyd The present discussion was valuable and was one that was not readily possible in the context of the Built Heritage Forum. There is a need for an overview of built heritage and environmental issues, and conservation area management and enhancement was a key aspect of this need. Should the issue be addressed by the National Assembly in order to assist in the definition of Cadw's role?

Peter Cope considered that from the view of the WO/NAW conservation and urban design were local not central government issues. Was the best way forward for local authorities to work together to build up advice and good practice or should this be a matter for the Assembly? Several speakers noted their preference for national guidance and policy tools. Sam Romaya felt that the easy way to deal with article 4 directions was for these to be entirely a local matter.

Phil Roach suggested that there should be a national vision for the built heritage; and that public concern and understanding could not do the job without the tools. Sadly there was no champion in Wales for the historic built environment, or a governmental voice that promoted awareness as part of sustainability. Sandra Williams noted that the Urban Task Force had reflected on the need for environmental awareness and the importance of Built Environment Education in the curriculum. The Urban Design alliance was very much English-based.

There was agreement about the importance of BEE in schools; and that the lack of public appreciation of the built historic environment was a cultural issue for Wales. Buildings were considered to be very low down on any list of factors identified as part of a "Welsh Heritage".

Lindsay Cuddy returned the discussion to the issue of defining "evaluation criteria".

Sam Romaya responded that there needed to be a means of measuring whether a job had been well done, but traditional means of doing this were not adequate, and current practice could be considered to be too subjective. Should we depart from "scientific" definitions of "special architectural and

historic importance"? does a concern for aesthetic quality downgrade the legal requirements? How far should we move beyond empiricism? Should appraisal and evaluation criteria be part of primary legislation? If so, how can this be related to the practical objective of getting cash?

Phil Roach recognised diversity within the Welsh historic environment but suggested that there were rhythms that bound the nation together on which national accord could be possible. A simple exemplar would be treatment of overhead cabling.

Matthew Griffiths highlighted the potential value of feedback from this seminar and from the study; issues were being raised that we should find a means to discuss and promote at a national level.

Peter Cope returned to structures within local authorities. He noted that Planning Departments were tending to be absorbed within larger structures — sometimes with a fragmentation of traditional planning functions to different corporate centres. The issue of how conservation and urban design can be managed within corporate structures was important? What impact was internal reorganisation likely to have on local authorities?

Jason Evans commented that part of the problem was the higher awareness within English councils of the need to allocate staffing and cash resources for the care of the historic environment. This might be a good time to go to the Assembly. Conservation Areas were at the heart of our communities, and they deserved a place in the national regeneration context. There was a danger of the conservation function being isolated, and, once again, a need to get away from the mentality that conservation was achieved through concentration on the individual building.

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