

The Welsh Historic Environment: Towards a Strategic Statement

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This document was produced by the Historic Environment Group,
an advisory forum of the Welsh Assembly Government



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

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Towards a Historic Environment Strategic Statement

This document is advice to the Minister for Heritage from his Historic Environment Group, an advisory forum of national and local organizations convened for the Minister by Cadw. The aim of this document is to:

- articulate the issues and opportunities facing the historic environment in Wales;
- identify the priorities for possible action by organizations or partnerships; and
- provide Ministers, boards of governors, local authorities and other leaders with a strategic overview.

The document has been produced by the Historic Environment Group with advice from its member bodies and was revised following consultation with the sector at, and after, a stakeholders' conference. The document provides an overview of the diversity, breadth and wealth of Wales's historic environment assets and of its contributors and supporters. It also seeks to illustrate the sector's contribution to the wider priorities of the Welsh Assembly Government, local authorities and institutions in respect of:

- community identity and wellbeing;
- lifelong learning;
- a sustainable environment;
- economic vitality;
- health and personal wellbeing;
- national pride and local distinctiveness.

We welcome your comments on this statement. The full document will be published on our website. To request a hard copy please contact us.

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In summary, the Historic Environment Group concludes that the Welsh historic environment is diverse, distinctive and of exceptional quality. We can demonstrate how it contributes in multiple ways to enriching people's lives, the nation's identity and our economic success. Information for evidence-based policy-making and evaluating progress and impacts could, however, be stronger. All partners in the sector share the vision of a historic environment that is rich, diverse, cared for and accessible to all and that supports our economic, social and emotional wellbeing. This will be achieved through activities of investigation, conservation, active management, interpretation and promotion. Current issues affecting the achievement of the vision fall into a series of themes, articulated in the main document and summarized briefly below. For each of the themes, the document explores the strengths and pressures, and suggests a number of actions for partners in the sector to consider.



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People and communities

In a survey of Welsh residents in 2007 it was encouraging to learn that 91% thought that caring for our historic environment is important. Many people are committed to supporting the historic environment personally, through paid and voluntary action and by participation in activities and attendance at heritage sites. A large minority, however, experience barriers to access — physically, logistically, intellectually or attitudinally. The Historic Environment Group concludes that a pan-Wales approach to interpretation is needed, that we must take account of people's different opinions of significance and relevance, and that we should use every tool at our disposal, including electronic delivery, to break down barriers to access and appreciation.

Evidence base and learning

The historic environment is increasingly appreciated as a great learning resource — for formal and informal education, for vocational and personal fulfilment. Our knowledge about the historic environment is constantly being developed and refreshed by research and discovery. There is considerable scope to innovate in delivering information, learning resources and interpretation, including using ICT. Traditional craft skills and conservation expertise in the professions is, however, in increasingly short supply and we must promote these skills and encourage new entrants.

A sustainable environment

The historic environment is a major component of Wales's environment and its prospects for sustainable development. There is a sound planning regime but, in spite of this, some 10% of listed buildings are 'at risk' and issues relating to climate change constitute a significant cause for concern. The Historic Environment Group urges a co-ordinated approach to monitoring and mitigating climate change impacts and to seeking solutions to sites at risk. Existing investment is considerable but the need for financial and fiscal help continues.

A prosperous society

The historic environment is a fundamental economic asset, helping to create and sustain an attractive country in which to live and work, and to visit. The sector employs some 23,000 people directly, many in skilled and specialist roles. Both prosperity and decline can threaten the historic environment and the Historic Environment Group is committed to making an evidence-based case for the economic contribution of the historic environment and the value of heritage in regeneration.

Organization and delivery

The historic environment sector in Wales is performing well because there is good co-operation between public, private and third sector



Acknowledgements

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contributors. The third (voluntary) sector is vibrant, but there is perceived to be a shortage of local historic environment champions and the infrastructure to support them. The heritage designation regime is effective, but the quality of designations and guidance needs to be maintained as heritage protection reforms are implemented in the years to come.

A confident nation

Few would argue that the historic environment has a key place in the nation's sense of identity and pride. We have sites of international, and World Heritage, status. Despite all this, local distinctiveness is under threat from globalization and the Historic Environment Group recommends that we work together to develop public understanding of the internationally important themes in Welsh heritage and the need to preserve local distinctiveness through better planning, design and maintenance of the historic fabric.

Priority actions

The document contains forty-seven action points and consultation to date indicates a broad willingness to contribute to their implementation. A smaller number of actions have been identified as having the greatest potential impact or urgency and are highlighted for particular attention.

People and communities

Increase opportunities for active public engagement to improve understanding of the historic environment.

A sustainable environment

Monitor, record and mitigate climate change impacts, ideally with assistance from a dedicated Historic Environment Climate Change Impacts Co-ordinator.

A prosperous society

- Encourage recognition and enhancement of the quality and distinctiveness of the built heritage and landscape as an economic driver, especially in tourism.
- Maintain a robust planning system supporting the character of individual historic assets, historic towns and landscapes by encouraging high quality new design, sympathetic alteration and sensitive development.

A confident nation

Develop public understanding of and enthusiasm for the national identity of Wales as expressed by its historic environment.