

AGENDA ITEM 9

THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT POLICY STATEMENT AND PLANNING GREEN PAPER

To: Countywide Archaeological Advisory Committee

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A PURPOSE

- 1 To report the Government's policy statement on the historic environment and the potential implications of the Planning Green Paper for the historic environment.

B PROPOSED ACTION

- 2 **The Committee is invited to:**

- a) **NOTE the potential implications of the Planning Green Paper and Historic Environment Review**
- b) **ENDORSE the Future Actions listed in paragraph 15 below.**

C RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 3 No immediate costs but there may be some arising from new arrangements or initiatives.

D SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4 The Planning Green Paper was published by DTLR on Wednesday 12 December and followed the next day by a policy statement from the DCMS entitled "*The historic environment: a force for our future.*" The latter document is the product of a consultative process initiated by the Government in February 2000 and co-ordinated by English Heritage. The two documents are explicitly inter-linked to the extent that Stephen Byers MP of DTLR has co-authored the foreword to the historic environment policy statement alongside Tessa Jowell MP of DCMS.
- 5 "*The historic environment: a force for our future.*" is a strong statement of support for the historic environment recognising its value to the environment, culture education, tourism and the economy. It states:

“We are publishing this Statement at a time when the public’s enthusiasm for the past is increasingly evident, not least in the strong media focus on archaeology and history. New, more creative approaches are being used to present historic sites and buildings to visitors and to engage a wider audience. Our heritage continues to be a massive draw for tourists. As such it makes a major contribution to the economy and underpins huge numbers of jobs, importantly in rural and deprived communities as well as in traditional economic centres. There is, however, much more to be done. Indeed this sector can be regarded as something of a sleeping giant both in cultural and economic terms. We need to find new ways of reaching and empowering excluded individuals and communities. We need to develop new policies to realise economic and educational potential through modernised structures and improved service delivery.”

The Government’s vision for the future is summarised as:

- *public interest in the historic environment is matched by firm leadership, effective partnerships, and the development of a sound knowledge base from which to develop policies;*
- *the full potential of the historic environment as a learning resource is realised;*
- *the historic environment is accessible to everybody and is seen as something with which the whole of society can identify and engage;*
- *the historic environment is protected and sustained for the benefit of our own and future generations;*
- *the historic environment’s importance as an economic asset is skillfully harnessed.*

- 6 The policy statement comprises five main sections entitled: Providing Leadership, Realising educational potential, Including and Involving People, Protecting and Sustaining and Optimising economic potential. Fifty four Action Points are identified – the most significant ones for Buckinghamshire are listed below:

Providing Leadership

1. The historic environment will become part of the remit of Green Ministers (paragraph 1.2);
2. The DCMS, as lead sponsor Department, will involve the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in discussions about the strategic direction of English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund (paragraph 1.2);

4. The Government looks to local authorities to adopt a positive approach to the management of the historic environment within their area and monitoring its condition. It urges them to appoint champions for the historic environment within their management structures and to ensure that elected members have access to training in respect of the historic environment wherever it is needed (paragraphs 1.3 and 1.4);
9. The Government will produce a consultation paper on a range of options for enhancing Sites and Monuments Records in the summer of 2002 (paragraph 1.14);

Realising educational potential

11. The Government will explore with English Heritage how best to develop initiatives such as Heritage Open Days and whether this approach might now be extended to the historic environment as a whole in the form of an annual Historic Environment Week (paragraph 2.3);
12. The Government will at an early opportunity consider, in consultation with relevant outside interests, how the principle of encouraging children to visit national museums and galleries by providing free access might be extended to the historic environment sector (paragraph 2.6);
18. English Heritage will work closely with its partners in the sector to develop the place of education within the historic environment. The Government will propose targets for increased activity in this area in English Heritage's Funding Agreement for 2002-03 (paragraph 2.14);

Including and Involving People

25. The Government urges the sector at both national and local level to get together with the operators of local information websites to develop the opportunities for disseminating intelligence about the historic environment (paragraph 3.11);
28. The Government wants to ensure that local policy-making on the historic environment takes proper account of the value a community places on particular aspects of its immediate environment. The Government commends character assessment to local authorities both as a useful tool in itself and as a way of encouraging greater involvement by local communities in conservation issues (paragraphs 3.16 and 3.19);

Protecting and Sustaining

29. The Government remains fully committed to the policy principles set out in *PPGs 15 and 16* (paragraph 4.5);

30. The Government remains firmly committed to the maintenance of an effective framework of statutory protection for all elements of the historic environment (paragraph 4.6);
31. The Government will initiate a review of the case for integrating the present array of heritage controls into a single regime (paragraph 4.7);
35. The Government will undertake a further review of the ecclesiastical exemption and will also bring forward a new Ecclesiastical Exemption Order to make permanent provision for Anglican peculiars and the various other special cases which retained the exemption on an interim basis following the 1994 exemption reform (paragraph 4.11);
36. The Government commends English Heritage's publication *Informed Conservation: Understanding historic buildings and their landscapes for conservation*. The Government fully endorses the increasing importance attached to the preventative maintenance of historic fabric. The Government will explore how this might be reflected in English Heritage's grants programme (paragraphs 4.12 and 4.13);
38. English Heritage will issue advice to local authorities on the care of historic buildings, ancient monuments, historic gardens, parks and designed landscapes in their ownership (paragraph 4.17);
40. The Government is introducing an interim grant scheme which will have the effect of reducing to 5% the VAT rate of 17.5% for repairs to listed places of worship. This will come into operation by the end of 2001, and grants will be available for repairs begun on or after 1 April 2001 (paragraph 4.21);
42. In order to secure the maximum benefit from the Rural Development Programme, and the Leader+ Programme, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and English Heritage will continue to work together (paragraph 4.28);
44. The Government looks to English Heritage to ensure that the necessary high standards are maintained in the examination and recording of archaeological sites (paragraph 4.35);
45. The Government will extend the definition of treasure in the Treasure Act 1996 to cover hoards of prehistoric base-metal objects, thereby giving protection to an important new category of finds (paragraph 4.36);

Optimising economic potential

53. The Government encourages Local Authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships, in preparing their community strategies, to consider the role of the historic environment in promoting economic, employment and educational opportunities within the locality (paragraph 5.13);

The Planning Green Paper

7. The Planning Green Paper expresses a clear commitment to sustainable development and includes a statement that the reformed planning system will value the countryside and our heritage while recognising that times move on. The national planning guidelines covering the historic environment and archaeology (PPGs 15 and 16) are to be reviewed as a matter of priority but the fundamental principles enshrined in them will continue. The proposed replacement of Structure and Local Plans by Local Development Frameworks linked to Community Strategies and Local Action Plans would have significant implications for county-based historic environment services, especially if the LDFs were to be the sole responsibility of District Councils. A greater emphasis on e-business and pressure to speed up decision-making will present both challenges and, hopefully, opportunities to under-resourced services. The recognition that planning departments require additional resources from planning fees and charging for discretionary advice is welcome if a proportion of those resources were to be made available to historic environment services. Proposals to introduce standardised “planning checklists” and application and administration procedures for a wide variety of different consent regimes could be beneficial, especially if applications with inadequate documentation were to be refused registration. Arrangements for a development tariff to replace legal agreements could provide resources for conservation and interpretation of the historic environment.

Comments and Implications

8. Despite wider concerns about the Planning Green Paper, its co-ordinated publication with the historic environment policy statement is potentially a welcome example of “joined up thinking” from central government. Particularly encouraging signs are the reaffirmation of the management principles set out in PPGs 15 and 16 and the close link between DCMS, DTLR and DEFRA. Although no major new historic environment legislation is planned, whatever changes are eventually made to the planning system it seems clear that the weight attached to historic environment conservation will be at least as great as at present whilst encouragement will be given to realising the various social and economic values of these assets. The proposed wider “spatial” remit of the new strategic planning documents is to be welcomed as is the continued support for historic landscape characterisation studies (to be started in Bucks this year with English Heritage funding). Unfortunately there is no clear indication that the Government intends to close the loophole in the planning system

which allows the demolition of unlisted historic buildings outside Conservation Areas without consideration of the need for prior recording.

9. In some respects, Buckinghamshire is well placed to heed the Government's exhortation to local authorities to adopt a positive approach to the management of their local historic environment. The County is implementing its "Archaeological Management Plan". This committee is broadening its membership and considering broadening its remit to provide holistic coverage of the whole historic environment. Members of this committee should be recognised as "champions" for the historic environment whilst the committee provides a forum for training for elected members in historic environment issues.
10. The threat to archaeological remains (especially earthworks) from arable agriculture has still not been brought under adequate control. A consultation proposal to include archaeological earthworks within the definition of "uncultivated land" covered by new Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations was not implemented in final version. There will be an opportunity to lobby DEFRA on this matter in a review of the regulations to be undertaken in 18 months time.
11. There is surprisingly little in the policy statement which refers to the function of museums in education and promoting public interest and appreciation of the historic environment as well as the care and display of archaeological and other historic collections. The proposal to extend the remit of the Treasure Act to cover prehistoric base metal hoards is welcome and will involve the County Museum.
12. Local authorities will need to consider the guidance to be issued by English Heritage on the care of historic buildings, ancient monuments and designed landscapes in their ownership. The work of the Buckinghamshire Countryside Services Strategic Initiatives Team at Langley Park and Whiteleaf Hill are good examples of what can be achieved but an inventory of the all councils' historic assets is needed to identify all important sites and assess their condition.
13. There is strong support for local Sites and Monuments Records, both as a planning tool and education resource, for their accessibility by electronic means and for their enhancement into comprehensive Historic Environment Records covering historic buildings and landscapes as well as archaeological sites. A consultation paper on options for creating Historic Environment Records is promised in summer 2002 – it will be essential for this to address the vexed issues of funding and statutory status which have been avoided thus far. A critical decision will be whether there should be a single database for New Buckinghamshire, presumably based on the existing SMR and maintained by the County Council.
14. If the Structure Plan were to be abolished and virtually all responsibility for built development vested in the District Councils then it will be important to ensure that the CAS continues to be properly recognised and adequately resourced to deliver planning advice. One option might be to develop a formal joint-funding and

management arrangement linked to the development of an Historic Environment Record (HER) and continuing improvements to the planning advisory service.

15. Future Actions

To respond to the Planning Green Paper and Historic Environment Policy Statement, the Committee is asked to:

- a) Welcome the Government historic environment policy statement but continue to impress upon Ministers the need to provide adequate resources and a statutory basis for local government historic environment services and to improve protection of sites vulnerable to ploughing or demolition without the need for prior consent. Highlight the risks of detaching county-based archaeological services from planning departments
- b) Promote an holistic view of the historic environment and a programme of initiatives to improve co-ordination across the sector.
- c) Participate in the reviews of PPGs 15 and 16.
- d) Participate in the review of SMRs and work to develop a viable model for an Historic Environment Record (HER) for Buckinghamshire
- e) Consider initiating and co-ordinating training for elected members with responsibilities impinging on the historic environment – e.g. an annual historic environment training event hosted by this committee to which all elected members would receive personal invitations.
- f) Consider creating an inventory of the councils' historic environment assets.
- g) Implement the Action Plan set out in Buckinghamshire Archaeological Management Plan giving top priority to the Historic Landscape Characterisation and Unlocking Buckinghamshire's Past Projects.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

"The historic environment: a force for our future." Government Policy Statement

Planning Green Paper. Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change

Environmental impact assessment for the use of uncultivated land or semi-natural areas or semi-natural areas for intensive agricultural purposes. DEFRA Guidelines.

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