

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy

Response from The Pembrokeshire Historical Society

Dear Mrs Jones

Thank you for your letter of 31st May inviting our views. The Pembrokeshire Historical Society was founded in 1983 and exists to promote the study of the history, archaeology, antiquities and folklore of Pembrokeshire and to encourage research and dissemination of knowledge.

How appropriate and successful are the current systems employed by the Welsh Government for protecting and managing the historic environment in Wales?

What role do local authorities and third sector organisations play in implementing the Welsh Government's historic environment policy and what support do they receive in this respect?

Previous reviews have concluded that the current systems employed by the Welsh Government are appropriate and fit for purpose with clearly defined roles for Cadw, the Royal Commission, regional trusts, local authorities, national parks and the National Trust. Some improvements could be made:

- i. The quality of the contribution made by Cadw would be improved by the ministerial appointment of a body of external experts meeting regularly with a brief to advise on their work.
- ii. It is patently ridiculous that all management works – however minor – to scheduled monuments should be overseen by a Cadw official based in Cardiff. The Minister should consider awarding delegated powers to approved bodies who have their own heritage expertise and workforce so that they may manage monuments in their care through agreed work programmes.
- iii. The keystone for effective heritage management is the planning system. The Minister should consider a review of current arrangements to ensure that they are transparent, adequately resourced and located. It is essential that local authorities take heritage considerations into account when taking decisions and that they have direct access to professional expertise and the records on which that advice is based. There are indications that this activity is under resourced at present.

What would be the advantages and disadvantages of merging the functions of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales with the functions of other organisations including Cadw?

The Commission's remit as the investigation body and national archive for the historic environment gives it a role which is quite distinct to that of Cadw which is to conserve and sustain the historic environment and promote access to it. This society supports the findings of the Welsh government's Chitty report (2011) that in Wales "provision for the historic environment is admirable in its scope

and supports an organisational structure particularly suited to the economic realities” and that “there is value for users in retaining separation”. While a merger with Cadw inside Welsh government may seem an obvious step, with potential benefits to staff and some resilience through size, it is also fraught with difficulties regarding cost, operations, innovation capacity and loss of public trust. Splitting the services of the Commission between Cadw and the National Library or Regional SMRs would be a worse option as it would be unlikely to achieve any savings and would be highly damaging to outcomes.

Our preferred option is to create a new model that builds on the strengths of the existing organisations by bringing them together in a single body with charitable status, a new identity and shared accommodation. Working towards such a model would require enhanced strategic partnerships between the Commission, Cadw and other delivery bodies to co-ordinate work programmes and transfer functions where appropriate. This option could be started relatively swiftly and simply with minimum cost and risk and implemented over a period of time. Potential benefits of this model include greater flexibility, eligibility and attractiveness for additional sources of funding, stronger public involvement and trust in a charitable body and flexibility in sharing services with multiple partners.

How well do the Welsh Government’s policies promote the historic environment in Wales?

Cadw has a well-earned reputation for excellence in interpreting and promoting the historic environment in Wales.

I should be grateful if the Pembrokeshire Historical Society could be listed as a consultee on future occasions and that we are kept informed of progress on this Enquiry. In particular we should be grateful for a copy of the historic environment strategy when it appears.

Yours sincerely

Professor G J Wainwright MBE, FSA, FLSW
President, Pembrokeshire Historical Society