

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy

Response from Trysor

Trysor is a small partnership of Jenny Hall & Paul Sambrook, who have both worked within the Welsh heritage sector for over 20 years.

Both partners worked for one of the regional Archaeological Trusts, which are charities/businesses acting both as curators and contractors, with grant-aid from Cadw acting as core funding. Since 2004 we have been a private partnership working within south and mid Wales. We undertake work within the scope of archaeological field survey, watching briefs, desktop assessments, historical research, heritage interpretation and community enablement. Our clients have included community groups, private business, local authorities, government bodies and enterprise organisations. We have been active members of IfA Wales/Cymru (Institute for Archaeologists) and continually strive to improve our working practice and our knowledge and understanding of all aspects of Welsh heritage.

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

Positives include the existence of the well-established National Monuments Record and four Regional Historic Environment Records (HERs). The fact that the HERs are used as the information base which informs decisions in the planning process across Wales is also advantageous. The statutory tools used to protect sites and buildings of national importance, Scheduling and Listing, are also generally easy to understand and have merit.

Negatives are that there is a lack of consistency in the standards which underpin the NMR and Regional HERs, and Cadw's Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Listed Buildings Registers. There are great variations in terminology and quality of record. It is also evident that there are significant gaps in the various records which make it unrealistic to assume that they are comprehensive records of the Welsh historic environment.

There is a clear need for a lead body to set data standards (including terminology) which all heritage bodies and practitioners are expected to follow – an All-Wales Data Standard. The RCAHMS has taken such a lead in the past, through initiatives such as ENDEX and the grant-aid to the Historic Environment Records. It would appear that they remain the best body to set such standards at a national level, due the nature

of their role and the expertise of their staff, and that these standards should extend to Cadw.

How well do the Welsh Government's policies promote the historic environment in Wales (for instance, in terms of interpretation, accessibility, attracting new audiences and tourism)?

We believe that the Welsh Government's policies in this matter are often wrongly directed. The focus is on attracting "new audiences and tourism" when in reality it is the existing audience (the people of Wales) who are most relevant to the protection and promotion of our national heritage. The priority should be to ensure that people are better informed about the heritage of their own communities and regions to ensure that in future they become the natural ambassadors for Welsh heritage.

Moreover, the Welsh government is, unwittingly perhaps, overreaching itself. Most of the Welsh landscape and most of Welsh heritage lies outside the remit of government organisations such as Cadw. It is quite appropriate that Cadw sets policies for the promotion and management of sites under its remit, but it should have no role in setting parameters on interpretation or promotional projects which are undertaken by private business, local authorities, third sector partners or community groups, other than in an advisory role or as an optional source of information. The remit of Cadw is to *conserve Wales's heritage, help people understand and care about their history, and help sustain the distinctive character of Wales*. There is another branch of the Welsh Government whose role is tourism and there seems to be overlapping and duplication between the two with the high profile Cadw projects being aimed at tourists and not the people of Wales.

Arguably, there is an over-emphasis on big projects, for big themes, at big sites. The Welsh Government seems to be missing the point that Welsh heritage is woven into the very fabric of our communities and cultures in all parts of Wales, not just at high-profile sites such as castles and abbeys.

How well do the policies for the historic environment tie in with wider Welsh Government policy objectives (such as the regeneration of communities)?

The methodologies are not in place to achieve sustainable community regeneration through historic environment policies. Again, Cadw's remit only reaches a limited percentage of the Welsh historic environment. Outside those areas, heritage projects are designed and delivered by a combination of private, local authority, community and third sector organisations. The key role played by the Welsh Government/Assembly is in the capacity of a funding body in many instances, but at arms length on the whole. It seems that a much more holistic approach to encouraging innovation and activity, drawing together the skills of all sectors, should be aimed for, rather than a top down policy which tries to micro-manage or influence heritage projects.

The Welsh Government rarely seems to acknowledge the fact that the private sector plays an important role in the investigation, management and promotion of Welsh archaeology and heritage. Considerable expertise lies within this sector today.

A Heritage Bill for Wales should explicitly recognise the diversity of the heritage community in Wales. This community includes private sector, third-sector and public sector organisations, as well as the academic and community sectors. A commitment to promote the well-being of each sector should be included in the bill and an objective set to maintain this diversity and encourage co-operation across the heritage community. It is particularly important that a spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation is fostered if the true value of Welsh heritage resource is to be realised for the cultural and economic benefit of the nation.

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 loss of the RCAHMW's distinctive role in archaeological investigation, standard-setting, the management of the National Monuments Record and provider of Wales' only national archaeological archive would be a serious step backwards for Welsh archaeology and heritage.

There seems to be a general failure to appreciate the importance of ongoing archaeological investigation to the continued improvement in our management strategies to protect the historic environment. The RCAHMW play a crucial part in that investigative work.

They also provide an archive for archaeological work with no artefacts, taking both the written report and the archive of material related to it. The incomplete network of archaeological archives remains a large problem in Wales, particularly where artefacts need to be stored as well as the digital/paper record.

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?

From a position outside the Local Authority or third sector, we have no observations on this point beyond stating that Local Authorities can play a key role, through the planning system, in protecting the interests of the historic environment. They can consult the Curatorial Sections of the four regional archaeological trusts, largely funded by Cadw, in determining historic environment needs in association with any planning matter.

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