

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy

Response from Amgueddfa Cymru

Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales welcomes the opportunity to input to the Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment policy. We would like to express a number of statements of principle which define the context in which our response is made.

1. We use a broad definition of heritage which encompasses archaeology, history, arts and the natural sciences and how they relate to people and the past. We believe that the interpretation of the heritage of Wales should encompass all of these elements. Amgueddfa Cymru is one of the three national bodies in Wales concerned with the Historic Environment and the primary body in Wales for the study, interpretation and preservation of artefacts from historic landscapes and sites across these disciplines.
2. The heritage of Wales should ultimately be developed and interpreted for the people of Wales and therefore the Historic Environment Policy should be people-focussed.
3. Wales is a small country and it needs its lead heritage organisations to work in collaboration if it is to be most effective at serving the people of Wales.
4. The Welsh Government has played a key role in facilitating such collaboration e.g. through Peoples Collection Wales.
5. At a time of restrictions on public expenditure, it is vital that we work together to leverage funds from outside Wales including for example, HLF, Research Councils and the European Union.
6. Heritage lies in the stories, lives, memories and experiences of the peoples of Wales, past and present as well as in artefacts and sites held by public and private institutions. There is a particular need to ensure that the voices of underrepresented and forgotten individuals and communities are collected and made available to future generations.
7. Ways in which the people of Wales can benefit from heritage include education, sharing and developing skills, the preservation of traditional skills, and the social and economic regeneration of communities.
8. Heritage is a key element in the development of and critical reflection on identity. Our primary responsibility in this respect is to the people of Wales but we also believe that it is essential that we interpret Welsh cultural identities for people of other nations.

Consultation Questions

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

Amgueddfa Cymru works closely with Cadw, RCAHM, the National Trust and other bodies in Wales through the History of Wales Public Engagement Group. In addition, Amgueddfa Cymru is co-ordinating the work of the heritage sector in Wales in commemorating the First World War.

We recognise the importance of maintaining a programme of scheduling monuments and archaeological sites, and developing management agreements with landowners and farmers to safeguard the historic environment. Both the Royal Commission and Cadw play key roles – the former in maintaining the National Monuments Record, and its skilled staff, and latter in taking advice from the Royal Commission, Welsh Archaeological Trusts and other bodies to advise on policy and manage the historic environment, while caring for guardianship sites and providing public access to historic sites and monuments. We have always seen this collaborative approach as one that is efficient and offers high professional standards.

Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales plays a key role in relation to the historic environment represented by portable antiquities and artefacts from excavations (often the only surviving record on battlefield sites), in providing independent advice on the ‘historic artefact environment’ and its study, as well as advice on promoting standards of archaeological artefact storage. Amgueddfa Cymru also plays a key role through its work on the Portable Antiquities Scheme and reports to coroners (Treasure Act), and its own fieldwork programmes in support of the national strategy for archaeology in Wales.

The protection and management of the marine historic environment (though the information gathered and maintained by the Royal Commission is an important advance in this respect) will need to ensure that there is public access to the maritime archaeological record and locational information and that this is carefully managed to minimise the risks of increased salvage of this finite resource.

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)?

There is potential to enhance this by a continuing commitment for organizations to develop shared interpretation through Coflein and the People’s Collection Wales – of which Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales is a lead partner. Museums have a major role to play in delivering interpretation, accessibility, attracting new audiences and tourism, and in particular the future role of Amgueddfa Cymru, has been to some extent understated within the Welsh Historic Environment Assessment Exercise.

For example, £25.5m plans to develop St Fagans: National History Museum as a participatory museum to engage with visitors to tell the stories of Wales is a core component of Welsh Government Policy and a key commitment in the Programme for Government.

St Fagans: National History Museum will act as a gateway to Wales' historic environment (including Cadw sites). As a Participatory Museum, St Fagans will be an inclusive museum where everyone can share knowledge, collections and skills. This transformation will use

cultural heritage to enable people – particularly children and young people in poverty and at risk – to discover new talents, raise their aspirations and develop life skills.

It is our ambition that St Fagans: National History Museum, as it develops as Wales' National Museum for history, covers the wider range of stories of the heritage of Wales than has been the case up to now. For example, there is a need for us to tell the story of the social origins of Wales including the social history of industrial communities, the development of the trade unions and labour movement, the Suffragette movement and the emergence of the welfare state.

Amgueddfa Cymru is currently managing a scoping study for a People's History Museum for Wales being conducted by an external consultant on behalf of the Welsh Government. The Museum welcomes CyMAL's initiative to support and develop storytelling in museums and the wider heritage sector as a valuable means of developing and promoting the interpretation skills, increasing accessibility and attracting new/non-traditional audiences to the heritage environment.

At St Fagans: National History Museum, a programme of collaboration and co-curating displays provides one platform to engage with hitherto unrepresented communities and excluded audiences and a recent example is the Refugee House exhibition in partnership with Oasis Cardiff.

Across the national museum sites, our audience development action plans identify priority audiences which include families and tourists. These plans have strategies for attracting both existing and new audiences within these groups. Furthermore, the marketing strategy for the St Fagans Making History project includes an objective to grow visitor numbers by attracting more tourists. The redevelopment will reinforce St Fagans' position as a must-see attraction and the gateway to tourism in Wales.

At all national museums, there is extensive work on collaborative marketing with other historic attractions and tourism consortia in the areas within which they are located. We are also a member of the Welsh Government led Cultural Tourism Partnership.

Amgueddfa Cymru is committed to the retention of traditional heritage skills and has a number of apprenticeship schemes in place and continues to work in partnership with a range of organisations to support these.

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

There is a key role for the historic environment and heritage to support the regeneration of communities. This is supported by the role that the National Waterfront Museum Swansea, opened in 2005, has played in the regeneration of the Swansea Waterfront and the role of Big Pit: National Coal Museum, within the World Heritage Site, has played in the regeneration of Blaenavon.

All of Amgueddfa Cymru's seven national museums provide linkages into communities and support community cohesion, a key objective for Welsh Government. We welcome the Minister for Housing, Regeneration & Heritage's announcement on a review of Regeneration Strategy over the forthcoming year and will work with the Minister to ensure that the Welsh Government provides support to local communities for projects relating to regenerating local historic environments.

There is a strong case for more intervention to ensure council tax and other costs can be varied to encourage creative industries - most of which are very small scale enterprises - to help to save and regenerate historic areas (such as the Arcades in Cardiff, which seem to be teetering on the brink at the moment).

Amgueddfa Cymru is committed to providing pathways to cultural participation for children and young people in poverty - many of these are through links with the historic environment. For example, Amgueddfa Cymru has recently worked within Communities First areas across Wales to deliver the 'Bling' project. Funded by the Welsh Government's Communities First Outcomes Fund this project has innovatively combined the arts, museums and the Communities First vision framework to provide new opportunities for young people, including accreditation through the ASDAN Activities Award*.

There is also potential to link in with broader Welsh Government policy objectives, through an increased emphasis on using the Historic Environment as a means of improving literacy and numeracy skills. Amgueddfa Cymru is currently developing CPD initiatives for teachers with a focus on using museums to improve literacy.

The Museum's 'Transforming Children's Futures' strategy for tackling child poverty outlines our own plans for using museums to help break the link between poverty and underachievement, whilst a conference we are hosting on this subject is intended to encourage others in the heritage/historic environment sectors to explore ways in which they can work together to support the Welsh Government's anti-poverty plans.

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?

We have an excellent working relationship with both of these organisations. Both the RCAHM and Cadw play essential roles in relation to the historic environment and both bodies have high credibility with the public, users and other stakeholders. Whatever the outcome of the discussions regarding future structures, Amgueddfa Cymru will continue to work closely with both functions.

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?

Local authority and third sector organisations have a key role to play in supporting the implementation of Welsh Government's historic environment policy. CyMAL have successfully developed and are implementing a Museums Strategy for Wales which ensures that local, regional and the National Museum are all implementing Welsh Government policy.

The key to its success is the support that is being provided at all levels and the key role of the Federation for Museums and Galleries in Wales in ensuring that this is communicated and accessed. A similar model which provides a strategy for community engagement in the historic environment across Wales would be welcomed. As a key part of this, local museums are well placed to become hubs for support within communities and Amgueddfa Cymru has a pan-Wales perspective of value in guiding policy in this area. The Portable Antiquities Scheme, which is run by Amgueddfa Cymru in Wales is an excellent example of enabling third sector and individual organisations to contribute to Welsh Government policy.

Amgueddfa Cymru believes that the added value achieved through shared funding and collaborative projects with local authorities and third sector organisations is of key importance. A recent example at the Museum is funding from the Paul Hamlyn Trust for the *Our Museum: Communities and Museums as Active Partners*, to explore with a range of third sector organisations in Wales the ways in which community engagement can be placed at the heart of St Fagans: National History Museum's work into the future.

Conclusion

We believe that public engagement in heritage is vital for the future social and economic well-being of Wales and that the cultural sector has an essential, and in our view, undervalued contribution to made to a wide range of government policies. We warmly welcome the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry and hope that we will have the opportunity to contribute further as the development of the Heritage Bill goes forward.

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