



Communities, Equality &
Local Government
Committee -
Inquiry into the Welsh
Government's Historic
Environment Policy

July 2012



WLGA • CLILC

INTRODUCTION

1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales, and the three national park authorities, the three fire and rescue authorities, and four police authorities are associate members.
2. It seeks to provide representation to local authorities within an emerging policy framework that satisfies the key priorities of our members and delivers a broad range of services that add value to Welsh Local Government and the communities they serve.
3. The WLGA welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee on the Inquiry into the Welsh Government's historic environment policy.
4. The WLGA response is based on the consultation questions
5. How appropriate and successful are the current systems employed by the Welsh Government for protecting and managing the historic environment in Wales?
There is presently a myriad of legislation that local authorities and a number and range of statutory organisations e.g. CADW, National Parks, CCW, Forestry Commission, National Trust implement to protect, conserve and manage change to the historic environment that have been in place for many years. The legislation is in the main well managed and understood by professionals but due to the number of partners involved can be open to different interpretation and decisions can often be seen to lack clarity, incoherent and confusing to our citizens who are less familiar with the legislation.

The WLGA therefore welcomes the inclusive approach to the proposed reform of the legislation by including the many different organisations, individuals, and owners to preserve and promote heritage in Wales through the horizon scanning and planning workshops lead by CADW.
6. 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 are some excellent examples of where key sites are well promoted, are accessible with good interpretation facilities but due to the fact that there are a number of different "owners" responsible for the sites there are not necessarily the joined up approach to the marketing etc of an area to highlight all of the opportunities available.

One issue that needs to be considered is the approach taken by the "owners" to attract different age groups.

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

There are a number of areas that WLGA believe policies could be better aligned when looking forward.

- (i) Heritage Skills 30% of properties in Wales are pre 1919. There is a lack of a skilled workforce to maintain and improve these buildings and at present there is an expensive niche market which has developed to fill the void.
- (ii) Climate change ,in particular energy conservation and energy generation can conflict with current history environment legislation

Therefore, just from these two examples it can be seen that policies around economic development, sustainability and the historic environment need to be better aligned.

In Wales it is impossible not to consider the historic landscape / built environment when determining regeneration policy and projects and therefore any policies on the Historic environment will need to be aligned with the regeneration policy review being undertaken by Welsh Government

8. 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 WLGA is working with all of the Partners involved in the area of the Historic environment on a scoping document on how collaboration can be improved in response to the Simpson Compact agreement signed up to by local authorities and Welsh government in December 2011. The scoping document is due to come forward in September 2012. It is anticipated that this work and the work being undertaken on horizon scanning with Cadw and all of the partners will better inform a future debate on the advantages and disadvantages of any potential mergers.

9. 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?

In respect of the protection of the historic environment the main role that local authorities undertake through the present policy is through the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Local authorities have to determine listed building consent applications. Support is gained from CADW if the local authority intends to approve an application and may recommend a "call in" of such applications from those local planning authorities to whom this function has not been delegated. The designation of conservation areas also brings some protection to some unlisted buildings and areas within local authority boundaries.

The main issues faced by local authorities is that by their very nature conservation areas will all be different and will have their own particularly difficult issues that have to be dealt with.

Buildings at risk are a very difficult issue that local authorities have to deal with. In many areas the buildings are owned by private owners and the local authorities themselves and often they do not have the financial wherewithal to make the necessary repairs.

It is also difficult for local authorities to intervene in cases where there is a need to "stop the rot" as it is often not possible for local authorities to make the necessary repairs and then to try to recover the cost from the owner.

There are however a number of many positive examples where local authorities have and are working with the third sector to protect and enhance historic buildings. In many cases the buildings have been transferred to the third sector where they are then able to draw down funding which is not available to the local authorities themselves.

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