



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Heritage Inquiry
Productivity Commission
PO Box 80
Belconnen ACT 2616
Australia

My Ref: JF\Internat\Australia05.1
File Ref: AA004035/___
Room 219, SR
Tel: 3025 Fax: 3249
E-mail: john.fidler@english-heritage.org.uk

25th July 2005

Dear Sir or Madam,

The Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places Productivity Commission Issue Paper May 2005

English Heritage understands that your Government is reviewing its role and policies in relation to the conservation and sustainability of Australian heritage. Whilst English Heritage has absolutely no locus in, or comment upon, your country's domestic affairs, we hope that the following reflections on the English situation may be helpful in your Commission's deliberations.

For background information on English Heritage see our website www.english-heritage.org.uk. For the relative scope, shape and size of England's heritage, and for assessments of its welfare provided through statistics, please see *Heritage Counts* (2004) <http://www.heritagecounts.org.uk>.

The following notes are set out as per your consultation document's headings:

1.0 Why Government intervenes

- 1.1 As you may know UK heritage legislation goes back to the 1880s and the first Ancient Monuments Act. English Heritage's current *raison d'être* comes from *Power of Place* (2000) <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.001002005002001> and research which shows that the English public are interested in and wish to see their local historic environment preserved and enhanced.
- 1.2 Our current Secretary of State, Tessa Jowell MP, has written an essay on why the UK Government should involve itself in heritage. See *Better Places to Live: Government, Identity and the Value of the Historic and Built Environment* (2005), see http://www.culture.gov.uk/global/publications/archive_2005/better_placesto_live.htm

2.0 Current policies

- 2.1 The current British Government's views on involvement and action are expressed in *The Historic Environment: a force for our future* (2001), see http://www.culture.gov.uk/global/publications/archive_2001/his_force_future.htm.
- 2.2 All parties in recent years have supported the tightening of development control legislation and using grant aid to support the heritage where private sector interests fall short. The gift of property to the State in lieu of death duties is still encouraged, though now mostly works of fine art and manuscripts are the donations of choice and reside on public display in museums.
- 2.3 On occasions the Secretary of State uses her powers, or asks English Heritage to stand as her proxy, to compulsorily purchase Grade I listed buildings as an action of last resort where owners of Buildings-at-Risk have failed to take any action – including the sale of the property at reasonable value. We are involved in the rescue of Apethorpe Hall with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport at the moment, the property being passed into our temporary care whilst emergency works are carried out. We intend to sell the property onwards to a new owner in due course. Please see http://www.culture.gov.uk/global/press_notices/archive_2004/dcms109_04.htm?month=August&properties=archive_2004%2C%2Fglobal%2Fpress_notices%2Farchive_2004%2F%2C
- 2.4 Development control regulations have been challenged in the last year by the illegal demolition of a statutorily listed 20th Century building, and the claims by the owner of the site that his Human Rights were being infringed by his inability to maximise profit from the land due to the listing of his property. As I understand it, the Courts fined the man for illegal demolition, and this month the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (which is in charge of planning matters) refused retrospective consent for demolition and refused permission for any new building to be erected on the site – refuting finally any connection with Human Rights legislation. Please see reports on this on the ODPM website <http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/england/professionals/en/1115312143194.html>

3.0 Trends for policy: an international context

Here is English Heritage's take on international trends in heritage conservation:

- 3.1 **Construction:** over 57% of all construction in the UK is conservation, repair, maintenance and improvement (CRMI). This amounts to approximately £79B of turnover worth more than 4% of GDP. Heritage conservation accounts for about £3.5B. In this market place, there are significant changes of emphasis taking place in the UK in contracting methods and funding arrangements, not all of which are beneficial to heritage protection.
- 3.2 In England we have labour and skills shortages for heritage work. In a workforce of 88,000 craftspeople, we need an extra 6,000 workers next year

to sustain repairs. Research shows an even greater problem in that within 15-20 years time, a demographic dip in 35-45 year olds in traditional building will reduce vastly the number of mentors and trainers for young apprentices. We call this the retirement time bomb. See the National heritage Training Group report that we helped to fund <http://www.nhtg.org.uk/newsItem.asp?newsID=19>

- 3.3 The UK also has skill shortages amongst its professional and technical groups involved in conservation. Great damage is done to the heritage by well-meaning though ill-informed and inexperienced agents working for owners of listed buildings. English Heritage, Historic Scotland and the Heritage Lottery fund are therefore requiring improvements in professional services through the better definition and peer reviewed proof of competencies in conservation. Schemes now exist for architects <http://www.aabc-register.co.uk> , for engineers http://www.ice.org.uk/knowledge/specialist_document_details.asp?Docu_id=984&FacultyID=15 , and for surveyors – see http://www.rics.org/AboutRICS/RICSforums/RICSBuildingConservationForum/RICSBuildingConservationForumaccreditation/accreditation_info.html
- 3.4 There is no doubt that the conservation of historic buildings is a time-consuming and expensive business. However in terms of ecological sustainability, building conservation makes sense to conserve the embodied energy or carbon of past production, and to maintain it.

4.0 Persuasion

Besides regulation and fiscal incentives (see below) the UK government empowers English Heritage to help build national capacity through a range of systems described below:

- 4.1 **Standards:** we support the delivery of British Standards to set benchmarks for codes of practice and the use of materials for example
- BS7913: 1998 Guide to the Principles of Conservation of Historic Buildings
 - BS8221/2: 2000 The Cleaning and Surface Repair of Buildings
 - BS EN 459: 2001 Building Limes
- 4.2 **Guidance:** we deliver an enormous range of literature for the public and specific target audiences including:
- *Practical Building Conservation* Technical handbooks – world best sellers
 - *Timber Decay in Buildings: the conservation approach to treatment*
 - *Informed Conservation* (values led assessment of heritage significance)
 - *Period House how to repair, restore and care for your home*
 - *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance* (forthcoming 2006)
- See <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.1629>
- 4.3 **Education:** we have a well-developed education and outreach department that supports and works with the schools system and others to enshrine heritage conservation and appreciation in all aspects of the national curriculum. See <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/conWebDoc.2096>

5.0 Funding

- 5.1 English Heritage provides £40m annually to repair the historic environment through grant programmes. It also works with the Heritage Lottery Fund (see <http://www.hlf.org.uk/English/>) which spends £130m annually on grants for projects, 40% of which could be seen as heritage based.
- 5.2 However under EU rules, the Government employs Value Added Tax (VAT) levied at 17.5% on all works of conservation, repair and maintenance (but not on new construction) which is a disincentive to heritage conservation. Steps are in hand to persuade the UK Government and the European Union to exempt places of worship from this tax.
- 5.3 Unfortunately, the UK does not have a Tax Incentive scheme like that employed in the USA since 1976. This provides developers with tax holidays against investing in the rescue of otherwise derelict historic buildings to certain standards. The products of this US policy are that
- new investors have been brought into property development
 - urban regeneration has taken place
 - the buildings have been mostly converted from factories to housing
 - traditional crafts have been supported with new commissions
- See <http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/tax/brochure2.htm>

I hope that these few thoughts and references may be helpful to you and your team? Please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail, letter or telephone if you need further information or explanations.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Fidler', written over a horizontal line.

John Fidler RIBA
Conservation Director
English Heritage

