

Built Heritage Ministerial Summit

29 May 2013 - 9:15 – 2:00

Belfast City Hall

Notes



Minister's Summary

It's not about reinventing the wheel – but about looking at what we can capture quickly. Look to address 'low hanging fruit' to establish approach and credibility.

1. Structural

- Cultural change on-going in NIEA, in terms of strategic vision – senior staff to be 'freed up' to deliver change and engage across sectors.
- New cross-sectoral model needed for heritage works and management.
- Create an all-island development group.
- Centre for refurbishment excellence needed.

2. Government estate

- Government should be leading by example in using heritage assets (a good example is the opportunity for new Councils to use historic buildings).
- Go beyond Heritage Crime Summit issues.
- Where planning comes in.

3. Funding Sources / Use

- Help Trusts set up and develop business plans.
- EU funding possibilities
- Gather data
- New funding opportunities (for example, the HLF Heritage Enterprise programme).
- Work needed to get other Departments to relate to the heritage agenda / use their budgets on heritage.
- Establish a one-stop shop for heritage advice on funding.

4. Tourism

- Six out of ten visitor attractions are built heritage (and churches are most visited).
- Need to consolidate our signature projects and look for big growth opportunities, for example, St. Patrick and our Christian heritage.

The Summit should meet again after the summer to determine work streams and determine progress.

Introduction by the Minister

- Growing recognition within the Executive of the value of heritage / heritage as an asset.
- Still huge potential for growth in this area. Think of, for example, Dunluce Castle, Carrickfergus Castle, Dundrum Castle – these have relatively low visitor numbers (for potentially very high prestige sites) that we could grow with better management and investment.

The All Island Heritage Perspective - presentation by Prof Gabriel Cooney (Chair of HMC)

- There are many links between North and South. From an outside perspective, people tend to view the island as one – ‘Green Ireland’. Heritage is/should be included in this ‘one-ness’ – potential for an ‘island heritage economy’.
- Potential blockages to an all island perspective
 - How well is heritage represented at a cross-Departmental level?
 - We suffer from the ‘silo’ approach – for example, we tend to separate / compartmentalise natural and cultural heritage. We should take a landscape perspective which incorporates both.
- Areas of potential collaboration:
 - Formal, sustained contact
 - Shift from product-led to interpretation-led heritage tourism
 - Portal to Ireland’s heritage – challenge of technology and exploiting it in the right ways (interactive heritage apps, etc.)
 - World Heritage – the best global brand?
 - Thematic approaches would be beneficial in the promotion of heritage across the island – for example, the Christian heritage of Ireland.

Discussion

- Concern over the shift from product-led to interpretive-led tourism? There is a balance needed – we can’t move too far away from the heritage object itself, which should be central.
- The product that we offer and the knowledge that flows from it doesn’t necessarily reflect up-to-date, relevant information. Getting the interpretation of heritage objects right and current is very important. Good interpretation will engage visitors.
- Cultural heritage and global change will form a funding programme under Horizon 2020 (some lack of awareness of this around the table – information available on). We need better information of what might be available to us through European funding. (Weak around FP7 draw down)
- There is a need for more cross-border discussion at senior level in terms of the tourism agenda and also nurturing and exploiting research links.
- With a little more investment / interpretation / promotion, many undervalued sites could become wonderful assets to us.

- Idea of an all-island 'heritage card', providing holders with access to heritage sites around Ireland. Something like this would be a strong indication that we are moving in a positive direction in terms of the island heritage economy.

The Role of Heritage in the Economy – presentation by Paul Mullan (HLF)

- In difficult times, heritage can lose out to other things that are perceived as more important because they provide gain in the short term. This meeting is about challenging that assumption – heritage, with appropriate investment and support, will bring prosperity.
- The cultural value of heritage excites the imagination of visitors. If we are to sustain visitor numbers at, for example, Titanic Belfast, we need investment to broaden the Titanic 'story (industrial heritage)'.
- Giant's Causeway visitor centre and Dunluce Castle visitor centre could gain the north coast a critical mass of tourists to support a flourishing and sustainable industry.
- A compelling narrative is needed to showcase our heritage to the best of our ability – we should communicate who we are and why it matters.
- HLF report (*'Investing in Success'*) provides evidence for the contribution of heritage to the economy. Economic growth is strongest in cities with a rich historic environment. Without old buildings and historic fabric, cities lose their distinctiveness and hence their competitive advantage.
- If heritage is to be sustained it needs to be valued (isolated acts of conservation are not enough).
- Heritage increases cohesiveness of communities – people and their participation in heritage valuing and management.
- We do ourselves no favours by ignoring potential economic value and social value inherent in our heritage. What we need is creativity and investment to unlock the potential.
- Simply conserving an old building is not enough.
- Protecting heritage cannot be done by legislation alone.

Discussion

- We need to keep developing the product (complementing with technology, etc.).
- There is merit in developing Dunluce because its story is so compelling – it could result in it being our biggest attraction.
- Profit should not be a 'dirty' word. There is a new HLF scheme open to developers (Heritage Enterprise programme), allowing developers to work with and through HLF (who can make sure the heritage is properly protected). Developers want to make profit, and that is why they will get involved.
- There needs to be organisational / institutional change. Integration needed at all levels (for example, all-Ireland heritage pass idea, natural and built/historic heritage seen as one thing).
- 'Everyday' heritage – what people encounter in their daily lives – is what really matters. Using old buildings creatively in everyday surroundings – accommodation, office space,

shopping. People enjoy being in and having beautiful and historic structures around them. See HLF report, *'New ideas need old buildings'*.

- The scale, wonder and beauty of our heritage is unparalleled in these islands – even the 'everyday' heritage that we don't tend to appreciate around us in, for example, Belfast.
- It is very good that people from the construction sector are present – heritage needs to be mainstreamed. 'Everyday', 'un-pretty', heritage offers big developer opportunity. Whilst the tourism product potential is huge in NI, let's not lose sight of what we can do with our 'everyday' heritage.
- Heritage and 'sense of place' are not just about tourism – they are about civic pride. NI should not just be seen as a place to visit, but a place to live, to come to study, etc.
- We need to work to develop stories that will excite visitor imagination. 3 levels of attraction:
 - Demand generator – things, like Titanic Belfast, that people come specifically for.
 - Support generator – secondary things that people do because the demand generator brought them.
 - 'Hidden gems' – surprise factor. Not as 'sexy', but huge potential here for raising profiles and putting them together as part of a 'package' with the above attractions. Coordinated approach using all 3 'tiers'.
- To develop and communicate stories there is a need to engage with the arts and creative sector.
- The single most catastrophic event in the life of a building is abandonment. Falling out of use leads very quickly to disrepair and consequent de-valuing in the eyes of the public. We should consider meanwhile / interim uses of vacant historic buildings more fully – getting organisations / people into listed and protected buildings to ensure that they are used and cared for and are not perceived as a nuisance.
- Local groups should be able to easily approach authorities for support – structures need to be in place to allow this to happen freely.
- Government should lead by example in protecting their own historic estate – by occupying historic buildings with public sector Departments. Opportunity here with decentralising, regionalising local government.
- Importance of the 'heritage cycle' – understanding heritage leads to valuing heritage which leads to care and enjoyment of heritage, which leads to a desire to understand it more fully.
- 'Everyday' people (i.e. not just people working for heritage organisations) need to be talking about heritage and the place in which they live. NI has the highest visitor enjoyment score in the National Trust regions – why? The answer lies in people – we need to invest in people and utilise people as an asset alongside our heritage sites and buildings. Highlights the need to work with communities – bringing local people with passion on board in projects.
- The construction industry is the instrument by which a lot of these things can be achieved (though strategy should be developed at a high level). Industry is ready, capable, and very much involved.

Creative Partnerships for Buildings at Risk – presentation by Lorraine Robinson (UAHS)

- BHARNI partnership between NIEA and UAHS.
- Additional funding has been provided (since 2012) through the NI Executive's Economy and Jobs Initiative, increasing the rate of listed building grant-aid from 35% to 45%, and the cap for grant-aid from £150K to £500K
- Enforcement can act to protect (60 Urgent Works letters, 31 positive responses and action).
- Campaigning has been successful in saving buildings due to be demolished (for example, the Merchant Hotel).
- Civic leadership is important in restoring and re-using historic buildings and environments.
- Social housing (for example, Mersey Street, East Belfast), driven by community need, can bring renewal to an area.
- Building Preservation Trusts can work to promote the rescue and sustainable use of historic buildings at risk.
- Importance of 'meanwhile use' – creativity in using historic structures over short-term periods. Idea of 'pop-up' shops and cafes in historic structures and contexts.

Built Heritage Works – presentation by Dawson Stelfox (RSUA, Consarc Design Group)

- Many people say, 'I support built heritage, *but...*'. People are cautious about works – cost, difficulties involved in restoring and retrofitting historic structures. We need to overcome the 'but's.
- When does it work? When you have strong community, community need, a derelict building, and appropriate funding – all of these are needed for successful projects. Consider financial income from the finished project. Listed buildings have a consistently higher rate of return than unlisted.
- Lots of public-sector buildings are being abandoned – government not currently leading by example.
- But most buildings are in the private/commercial system. Important issue of developers knowing their way around the issues of property allowances, tax, VAT – the information is not generally known. There is a need for the production of a 'commercial guide' to historic buildings restoration and retrofitting aimed at communicating the right information to the private sector.
- A lot of concern about the 'how' in terms of retrofitting – we need to understand the best techniques and research and then promote it widely and simply to overcome the 'but's.
- There is a need for a NI 'centre of refurbishment excellence'.

Discussion

- Possible source of advice for industry is Chris Barrow, at Scion, whose expertise lies in property allowances and tax issues. Potential for organising some capacity building in this area.
- A guide on retrofitting cost-effectively, helping developers to 'find their way' around the system would be useful from the point of view of the construction sector – the appropriate information would encourage developers to take advantage of heritage development opportunities. Shift from enforcement to good business sense.
- Archaeology is important for quality of life – it is the document of human life since we began to populate the island – we should not forget it. 18,000 monuments, 1,800 scheduled, 190 in state care.
- Role for archaeology in contributing to peace and reconciliation, and understanding of social history.
- Mainstreaming of heritage is needed – we need to demonstrate that it is an economic driver and get it on the Executive table.
- The third sector has brought enthusiasm and passion, but we now need a coordinated cross-sectoral approach drawing on the skilled workforce of the construction sector.

Proposed Way Forward – Terry A'Hearn (NIEA)

- The link between built and natural heritage is critical – the Antrim coast, for example, provides both seamlessly.
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency are:
 - Moving away from the silo structure and mentality – build on success / bring together Natural Heritage & Built Heritage.
 - Promoting partnerships – MOU between agency & NITB for example.
 - Starting transformational (mind-set) change – develop a set of principles for responsible investment & how to package that.
 - 'Freeing up' the time of senior figures within NIEA away from processes and programmes and toward transformation and engagement across sectors. An example of this is the Strategy Unit becoming a Directorate and focusing on transformation (under Stephen Aston).