

News

from English Heritage

The Delivering Sustainable Communities Summit

This issue of *Conservation Bulletin* will be launched at a three-day conference, 31 January–2 February 2005, at the G-Mex Centre in Manchester. Hosted by the Deputy Prime Minister, the Rt Hon John Prescott, MP, the Summit will be the largest ever gathering in the UK of leaders and professionals engaged with the provision of services and policies that help to create ‘sustainable communities’ – places where people want to live and work, now and in the future.

Coming two years after the launch of the Government’s Sustainable Communities Plan and its successful Urban Summit, this Summit will provide an opportunity to show how sustainable communities are being delivered on the ground and provide a forum to discuss the programme ahead.

The Sustainable Communities Plan is a long-term programme of action backed by £22 billion of investment to achieve housing supply and demand goals, and to foster the building of sustainable thriving communities through planning, transport, infrastructure and regeneration policies.

Low Demand Housing and the Historic Environment

This position statement, a free publication (Product Code: 50977) published in January 2005, is a contribution to the debate on areas of low-demand housing and the role of the historic environment in the regeneration of these areas. The position statement is of particular relevance to those parts of midland and northern England where the Government has established Pathfinder Partnerships (see pages 7–8) to tackle the problem of housing market failure.

A combination of written evidence and case studies demonstrates the importance of the historic environment in providing sustainable long-term solutions. The undertaking of assessments of the historic environment is highlighted as part of the analysis underlying the masterplan and design process. The document concludes with a ‘historic environment checklist’ and stresses the need

for those preparing strategies for the future of these areas to work with the local community, the local authority conservation officer and archaeologist, and English Heritage.

Low Demand Housing and the Historic Environment includes a model brief, which provides guidance on how to commission and undertake work to assess historical significance in areas of low demand housing. The model brief is also available from www.english-heritage.org.uk/regeneration.

HELM: Historic Environment: Local Management

English Heritage’s new training initiative has been set up with DCMS, ODPM and Defra funding. Together with a wide range of partners – including the Institute of Historic Building Conservation, the Association of Local Government Archaeologists, the Planning Officers Society and the Local Government Association – English Heritage aims to raise awareness of the historic environment across the range of local authority responsibilities.

HELM will provide the tools for local authorities to manage change in the historic environment with skill and confidence. It is designed to encourage members and officers who have little or no experience of the historic environment to consider it when making decisions. HELM promotes the need for properly resourced and actively consulted conservation departments. A programme of 18 HELM seminars organised by the English Historic Towns Forum begins in late January 2005, with contributions from regional and local conservation staff who are delivering the training.

As part of a related initiative, we are campaigning for Historic Environment Champions at a senior level in all local authorities. With over 120 champions so far, does your council have one? A support network and training events are being set up together with CABE, and a CD based on the website has been mailed to all local authority councillors in England.

The HELM website (www.helm.org.uk) also provides a useful resource for local authority conservation staff, including a library of English Heritage policy and guidance, as well as a list

of advice produced by local authorities on historic environment topics. To keep the website up to date, we rely on the input of heritage professionals. Case studies illustrating good practice in this area are welcomed from both the private and public sector, as are reciprocal web links. For further information, please contact catherine.cavanagh@english-heritage.org.uk.

Save Our Streets

English Heritage's Save Our Streets campaign was launched by Bill Bryson on 14 October 2004 (see also the Places of Worship issue of *Conservation Bulletin* 46, Autumn 2004, page 45). Along with the Women's Institute, English Heritage joined forces with the Department for Transport to reclaim the beauty and elegance of England's streets. The campaign highlighted the blight caused by the everyday clutter of unnecessary street signs, road markings and bollards. It also asked Women's Institutes, other local groups and members of the public to carry out a Street Audit of redundant local street furniture and send it to their local councillor.

There has been a tremendous response from the public, press and other concerned organisations. The response from local councils has been particularly heartening. Many are keen to acknowledge that something needs to be done and are planning to remove clutter and improve public spaces.

English Heritage will soon publish regional Streets for All manuals, giving practical guidance on managing streets. The manuals will be sent to all highways departments, as well as to conservation and environmental services officers. For further information, please visit www.english-heritage.org.uk/saveourstreets or contact saveourstreets@english-heritage.org.uk.

Greenside Public Inquiry

'Greenside' was a listed building built in 1937 in the Modern Movement style beside the Wentworth golf course in Surrey. It was completely demolished in 2003 before consent was granted. Rather than allow the local council to decide the consent application, the Deputy Prime Minister determined that a public inquiry should be held to hear the case for and against demolition.

At the inquiry, which ended on 1 December 2004, Runnymede Council argued alongside the owner that his human rights would be contravened if he were not allowed to replace the building with a new, more comfortable and more valuable building. English Heritage,

working closely with the Twentieth Century Society, argued that such a decision could jeopardise not only the listed building legislation but also the whole edifice of the planning process.

Modern Movement buildings still have the power to shock, but they illustrate clearly the inter-war ideas about living space, the rejection of historicism and the excitement of new building materials. The best examples are rightly listed for their protection. The outcome of the inquiry will not be known until Spring 2005, but on this decision may hang the future of many other important listed buildings.

The Gorton Project: Learning from and reviving a Pugin masterpiece

The magnificent monastery and church of St Francis of Assisi – one of the finest examples of High Victorian Gothic architecture in Britain – is the theme and joint venue for two inter-related national conferences on 21 and 22 April 2005. Delegates can attend for one or both days, which will include a series of lectures by specialists on education, training and conservation at Manchester Town Hall, and a tour of the church and monastery together with practical demonstrations of conservation and craft skills in action. The two conferences present a unique opportunity to discuss such issues as access, education, training, standards and practical conservation matters:

21 April – Day 1. The Gorton Project: Chapter and Verse. Lessons from Conservation: public access, education and training in building conservation projects.

22 April – Day 2. The Gorton Project: Dedicated to Training: raising professional, technical and craft standards for better building repair and maintenance.

The conference should be of interest to anyone working in the built heritage sector, including clients, specifiers, estate managers, conservation officers, architects, building surveyors, conservators and funding bodies.

Cost: £45 for either of the single days or a special reduced rate of £60 for delegates attending both conferences. For further information and registration details, please contact James Stevens: Tel 020 7973 3212; james.stevens@english-heritage.org.uk.

Unlocking Heritage Information: Review of the NMR

The results of English Heritage's Review of the National Monuments Record (NMR) were published on 15 November 2004. The Review's

recommendations include a major corporate commitment to providing more NMR information online.

The recommendations have been formally endorsed by English Heritage's Commissioners; a series of programmes aimed at delivering them within three years will be launched in Spring 2005, as part of English Heritage's next Corporate Plan. The recommendations include:

- vastly improved access to NMR archives and information on the world wide web;
- a new and vigorous portfolio of digital services and products;
- a drive to develop new audiences and partnerships.

The review also covered the NMR's relationship with local historic environment records. As a result, English Heritage will work with local partners to deliver a 'Heritage Gateway', or portal to historic environment records in England. The NMR's role in the sector will be refocused to ensure that standards continue to be developed and disseminated, inter-operability between records is enhanced, and the capacity for local authorities and others to manage this information is improved.

To support these developments, 10–15% of the NMR's £2.8 million budget will be redirected towards the new initiatives, and a new team will be charged with specific responsibility for driving the changes forward.

To mark these commitments, on 15 November 2004 the NMR also launched PastScape on the world wide web. PastScape contains summary information on every archaeological site in the NMR: around 400,000 sites, buildings, finds and excavations. It is the most complete account of England's archaeology available on the world wide web (www.english-heritage.org.uk/pastscape).

'The National Monuments Record makes a fundamental contribution to every aspect of the work of English Heritage,' writes Sir Neil Cossons, Chairman of English Heritage, in the Review. 'It is vital to our mission to understand, protect and enhance the historic environment.'

The review's conclusions are published in *Unlocking Heritage Information*, available on request from English Heritage Customer Services on 0870 333 1181 or www.nmrreview.org.uk.

New guidelines for the treatment of excavated human remains

Guidance for best practice for treatment of human remains excavated from Christian burial grounds in England was published jointly by English Heritage and the Church of England on

25 January 2005. It is the product of three years' deliberations by a Working Group convened by these two organisations. (See the Places of Worship issue, *Conservation Bulletin* 46, Autumn 2004, pages 36–7.)

A major practical recommendation is that a standing national advisory committee be set up, which would comprise clergy, archaeologists and other professionals involved with human remains. This committee would offer advice on any aspect of the treatment of human remains from Christian burial sites, particularly in cases that are problematic or controversial: when, for instance, from the scientific point of view it is desirable that a collection of skeletal material should remain accessible for research, while other parties with legitimate interests, such as the Church or local public opinion, desire that the remains be returned to consecrated ground. The guidelines suggest that a possible solution in such cases may be deposition of remains in disused crypts or redundant churches, and recommend that a working party be set up to pursue this option.

Copies of the guidelines are available from English Heritage (www.english-heritage.org.uk) or the Church of England (www.cofe.anglican.org) websites.

Professional training courses

- Building conservation masterclasses and professional conservators in practice. West Dean College, near Chichester, West Sussex. A collaboration in specialist training between West Dean College, English Heritage and the Weald & Downland Open Air Museum, sponsored by the Radcliffe Trust. For details, please contact West Dean College, West Dean, Chichester PO18 0QZ; Tel 01243 818294; bcm@westdean.org.uk; pat.jackson@westdean.org.uk; www.westdean.org.uk.
- Professional training in the historic environment 2004/5. A wide-ranging programme of one- and two-day courses at the Oxford University Department for Continuing Education, in association with the AFT, the IHBC and the IFA. For details, please contact Dr Alison MacDonald, OUDCE, 1 Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JA; Tel 01865 270366; alison.macdonald@conted.ox.ac.uk.