

A PROPOSAL TO DEVELOP A UK RESEARCH STRATEGY FOR THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT AND ITS SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT

It is proposed that a UK-wide research strategy for the historic environment and its sustainable management be established by collaborative action.

1. English Heritage suggests that public and charitable bodies funding research, research networks and end-users of research combine together to share their perceptions of the key threats and opportunities confronting the historic environment over the next five to ten years, and of the key research questions needing to be solved, in order to assemble a common research framework, shared strategy or alignment of strategic research plans to help prioritise and co-ordinate action and resources for the common good.
2. We offer our own publication, "*Discovering the Past, Shaping the Future: the English Heritage Research Strategy 2005-2010*" (English Heritage, October 2005) to the discussions only as a means to focus interests and to help shape but not in any way dictate debate. We are also offering to help co-ordinate joint activities such as horizon-scanning and foresight group meetings to develop the concept and formulate ways forward.
3. The need for more evidence-based policy development and for a co-ordinated approach to research across the historic environment sector was recognised in the Government policy document, "The Historic Environment: A Force For Our Future" (DCMS/DTLR, 2000). English Heritage has been commissioned to undertake this co-ordination for the English historic environment sector with the aim of ensuring that research needs are clearly identified, priorities established and duplication avoided.
4. But in establishing contacts to take this work forward, it became clear to us that there were constituencies across the UK, particularly our sister heritage organisations in the devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and in fields only loosely or not at all associated with the historic environment sector that also had an interest in the development of a co-ordinated approach to research in this and adjacent areas. Bodies with cultural and environmental interests clearly have common ground. But in many academic research disciplines (arts, humanities, science, engineering and technology) where the historic environment provides interesting research questions for study, and in industries related to the historic environment (eg agriculture, construction and tourism) where common answers to common questions are sorely needed, there appear to be wider synergies that make the idea of a more ambitious research strategy more appealing.
5. With this in mind, we now wish to embark on detailed discussions with potential stakeholders with the objective of forming a plan and delivering a common strategy (or overlapping suite of strategies) before the end of March 2007.

6. Already components of a common plan are beginning to take shape. For example,
- Long-standing national and regional research frameworks in archaeology in England are being refreshed
 - English Heritage signed a Sector Skills Agreement with CITB-ConstructionSkills in December 2004 and similar agreements are anticipated between CITB-ConstructionSkills, Historic Scotland and Cadw committed to periodic socio-economic research with the construction industry's sector skills council to develop labour and skills in the heritage area
 - A concordat is being agreed between the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and English Heritage to work together on the Council's directed research theme of "Landscape and Environment"
 - With the Construction Research and Innovation Strategy Panel (*n*CRISP) English Heritage and Historic Scotland have been party to the assembly of a common heritage component of the construction industry's own research strategy
 - The UK Historic Environment Research Group (UKHERG) of non-departmental public bodies, agencies and charities with cultural and environmental portfolios - led by the Heritage Lottery Fund – have established common areas of socio-economic research and defined priority research needs
 - An Historic Environment Research Meeting (HERM) has been established with English Heritage by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), and
 - English Heritage continues to draw together and publish research data and analysis on the historic environment and its sectoral interests in England in the annual *Heritage Counts* for the Heritage Forum and its Historic Environment Review Executive Committee. Similar vehicles are being considered or are underway in the other home countries.
7. We invite expressions of interest in the development of a UK-wide research strategy for the historic environment and its sustainable management, and seek views on who should be involved in its development and on what the strategy should contain.
8. Initial responses can be made to John Fidler, Conservation Director, English Heritage at conservation@english-heritage.org.uk or in writing to UK Research Strategy Feedback, c/o James Stevens, Conservation Department, English Heritage, 23 Savile Row, London, W1S 2ET. Telephone: 0207 973 3212, Fax: 0207 973 3249, Email: james.stevens@english-heritage.org.uk

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