

Prevention not cure: common sense makes economic sense

Much of the need for capital expenditure on the historic environment is the result of poor maintenance.

The single greatest challenge facing conservation is the lack of adequate maintenance.

Save Britain's Heritage

Britain is the only European country not to allow taxation relief for maintaining heritage property.

Historic Houses Association

53 Regular, systematic condition surveys and planned routine maintenance are essential if the money spent on major repairs is not to be wasted. The Church of England's system of five-yearly inspections by qualified architects or surveyors provides a model of responsible long-term stewardship. Secular owners need to be encouraged to adopt a similar approach, tailored to the needs of smaller historic buildings.

54 Private owners of listed buildings have an implied duty of care, since failure to maintain them can lead, in time, to compulsory acquisition. This is both inefficient and ineffective. Actions can only be taken when buildings are in serious disrepair and costs have risen accordingly. Consideration should be given to making this implicit duty explicit, provided it can be balanced by appropriate fiscal incentives and grants.

55 Public bodies too should have a more explicit duty of care towards the historic environment, and should be made accountable for their stewardship through annual monitoring of their performance.

Recommendation 6

Encourage better maintenance

For the Government:

- a Introduce a statutory duty of care on owners of listed buildings, scheduled monuments and registered parks and gardens, provided it is supported by fiscal incentives and the wider availability of grants
 - b Make public bodies accountable, through regular monitoring, for their performance in maintaining their historic estate
-

For the heritage sector:

- c Promote a shift from cure to prevention, by encouraging regular condition surveys and planned maintenance and piloting self-help initiatives and low-cost insurance schemes
-

For owners:

- d Carry out routine maintenance and regular condition surveys

Investing in skills

56 There is a serious shortage of traditional building skills in many parts of the country. Horticultural skills are also at risk. The House of Commons Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee noted that the dismantling of local authority parks departments had virtually brought to an end the tried-and-trusted system of horticultural apprenticeships which provided the trained staff on which the maintenance of our public parks used to rely. Opportunities for training, particularly craft apprenticeships, are needed to meet future demand, and employers, particularly construction and landscape management contractors, need to be given an incentive to provide training. The public sector should take a company's training policy into account when awarding contracts.

57 The Urban White Paper, *Our Towns and Cities: the Future*, proposes regional centres of excellence to bring together regional and local bodies to improve skills and training relevant to regeneration. These could become powerful agents for a new, better integrated approach.

68 Many different educational and professional bodies are involved at different levels in professional and craft training relating to the historic environment. The resulting complexity of qualifications is confusing for owners, practitioners and industry alike. A national conservation training forum would bring together the institutions providing training and

validation, remove inconsistencies and prevent duplication. Equal opportunities issues also need to be addressed. There are still far too few women, people from ethnic minorities and people with disabilities employed in the historic environment sector.

69 There is a widespread feeling that the training of conservation officers needs to be broadened. Two particular types of expertise are thought to be lacking: an understanding of historic landscape (which leads to buildings being considered in isolation from their setting) and knowledge of the property market. Planning officers, conservation officers, surveyors, architects and archaeologists would all benefit from a shared understanding of historic environment and urban design issues.

60 Owners, developers and local authorities would all benefit from help in identifying appropriately qualified and experienced specialists.

Recommendation 7

Promote conservation training and craft skills

For the Government:

- a Require public bodies to take training policies into account when awarding contracts
- b Support regional centres of excellence for skills training and development

For the heritage sector:

- c Set up a national conservation training forum to bring together all training and qualifications initiatives and promote equal opportunities in the historic environment sector
- d Broaden the training of conservation officers to encompass related specialist professional skills
- e Provide help and advice for private owners on whom to ask for advice and where to find experienced consultants and skilled craftsmen



Photo: Geert Van Lierlandijk

**Case Study 9
Monumentenwacht
at work**

The success of Monumentenwacht, a scheme started in the Netherlands in 1973, has led to a pilot programme in the UK, *Maintain Our Heritage*. Owners are helped to keep their historic properties in good condition and to be systematic about maintenance by buying into this non-profit service, which offers regular inspection, first-aid repair and a maintenance plan for each property.

**Case Study 10
Thatching**

Half of the 50,000 thatched buildings in England are listed and there is a high demand for the skills of the country's 800 thatchers. Attendance is not mandatory at the only training school, Knuston Hall, run by the Countryside Agency, which needs support to expand its activity. Few thatchers undergo formal training so accelerated development, recognition and adoption of National Vocational Qualifications to Level 4 are now needed.

**Masonry students at
West Dean College,
Chichester**

Skills such as stone masonry, gilding and wood carving are in great demand. Yet changes in the training of craft apprentices in recent years mean that the depth of knowledge and technical skills gained from former apprenticeship systems are no longer achieved.



Photo: English Heritage



Photo: West Dean College