



CABE and the Historic Environment

This paper sets out CABE's approach to historic conservation. It explains the approach we take, and how we work with English Heritage, and explains relevant expertise within CABE programmes.

CABE, Good Design and the role of Historic Conservation

CABE works to improve the quality of the built environment. Most of this environment has a built legacy - some of it good, some of it not so good – but generally seen by users as part of a seamless whole. By recognising and using what is valued and cherished from this legacy, we believe historic conservation can play an important part in every urban renaissance. After all it is the historic environment that largely defines sense of place and ensures local distinctiveness.

New buildings are not placed in a vacuum but will become part of an existing place. Good design needs to start with an understanding and clear analysis of a development's context, of which the historic environment plays an important part. Development should respond to and support valued local historic character.

For CABE this does not mean necessarily copying or being subordinate to every component of the historic environment just for the sake of it. It means the design statement or contextual analysis supporting the proposal should explain and justify the relationship between existing historic buildings, street patterns or spaces and the development. Furthermore, it means being very specific about the development's impact upon them.

Developments should offer a positive response to historic context alongside other important issues such as how easy it will be to get the development, and how it will compliment other facilities around it. A good case needs to be made to show how the development's design will improve its locality and how its design learns from what has gone before.

The importance of understanding and valuing the historic environment goes beyond the design of individual projects. We are constantly learning from what we see around us, evaluating how it works, how people use it, and how well it lasts. We have a very rich heritage of buildings, spaces and development patterns to help this process. CABE believes that good design transcends style or age. Starting from the understanding that it is generally the best from previous eras that has survived, there are many important lessons to be learnt from what already exists and is valued. The good design of today becomes the heritage of tomorrow.

CABE's Key Principles for Historic Conservation

The primary focus for CABE is the design of new buildings and spaces, but we recognise the fundamental link between this focus and historic conservation and so the following guiding principles have been developed.

- Good design should encompass principles of historic conservation as part of the overall evaluation of local context and policy
- Historic buildings and areas have always changed, and our expectation should be that they will continue to change and evolve, to house new uses and meet new priorities. Change should not be taken as automatically undermining the integrity of the historic building or place.
- The special and valued characteristics of an historic place or building should influence the way it is managed. Special historic character, whether visual, functional, or socially important should be evaluated. A vital first step is to understand the cultural and historic resource within a particular area. This assessment should be undertaken at the earliest opportunity and before detailed proposals are drawn up
- In designing for historic environments it is important is to achieve high quality design which adds to the quality of what exists, rather than getting bogged down in questions of style. Designs should be developed for present-day needs, in a holistic manner that responds to all relevant considerations and local circumstances. This does not predispose that designs have to be of any particular style, use any particular materials, or have a specific 'look', either copying older buildings or looking particularly modern.
- Designation should be a springboard for improvement in the quality of buildings or public spaces in any area. It should not stifle it. CABE understands that the criteria used to decide if a building or place will be designated as an historic asset do not include economic factors, and that such considerations are addressed through management decisions made after designation. However, this may not always be the most pragmatic way to proceed. CABE suggests that the designation of historic assets, for example listing buildings or creating conservation areas, should take account of the regeneration context and community worth of the structure or place under consideration. Such consideration may conclude that designation will help stimulate local regeneration or viable economic use for buildings. If this is not the case, what may happen after designation should be weighed against the need for protection

CABE and English Heritage

CABE and English Heritage are separate organisations with separate remits, responsibilities and priorities. However as we both deal with the built environment, we often touch on the same projects, for example when we assess planning applications, comment on planning or other policy, or through our training programmes and publications. We liaise frequently, have a good working relationship, and look to work jointly wherever it is appropriate. For example we jointly produced *Building in Context*,¹ a publication that explains how to achieve good design in historic areas, and we have produced joint guidance on tall buildings² and seaside towns³. We have jointly funded a learning programme for local authority Design and Historic Environment Champions and English Heritage sat on the steering group for the recent CABE learning programme for Highways and Transportation engineers.

CABE has jointly published *Building Sustainable Communities: Actions for Housing Market Renewal* with English Heritage, the Environment Agency, the Commission for Integrated Transport and the Sustainable Development Commission. English Heritage is also working with CABE in the Design Task Group, which is a best practice-sharing forum for the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders to discuss design quality, sustainability and heritage issues.

We also join together through the Urban Panel. This comprises a wide range of independent experts including historians, architects, urbanists, archaeologists and engineers. The Panel visits historic towns and cities with staff from EH and CABE to consider major regeneration initiatives, masterplans and high profile schemes. The Panel firmly believes that successful regeneration schemes are based on a thorough understanding of the past.

Whether working together or separately, CABE will take forward responsibility for our own remit, and retain our individual integrity. This may mean that at times we take a different view from English Heritage. It will be wholly appropriate for this to happen, as each organisation will be reflecting its distinct purposes and responsibilities. CABE will be focusing on the quality of architecture and the built environment; English Heritage will be focusing on the protection and enhancement of the historic environment. Different views do not mean that one or other of our organisations is wrong, but that decision makers have to come to a view as to what considerations have priority in the particular circumstances.

In terms of comments made on development proposals, neither organisation makes decisions on planning applications but both offer advice to those who do. It is up to those who decide applications to balance and act on the advice we provide. This is what the planning system is designed to do and generally does successfully. Both organisations are committed to engaging in the development process as early as possible. We want our advice and expertise to be as helpful as possible, not only in securing high quality development, but also by smoothing the passage of a development through the planning process, saving time and money.

CABE Expertise in Historic Conservation

CABE's Commission

CABE's team of commissioners oversees the corporate strategy and guides the organisation as a whole. It contains a high level of experience in the historic environment.

Anthea Case, who was appointed as CABE's new heritage Commissioner in November 2004, is currently chair of Heritage Link, which represents voluntary bodies in the historic environment. Anthea was also Chief Executive of the National Heritage Memorial Fund/Heritage Lottery Fund for nine years until 2002 and was awarded a CBE for services to heritage in 2003.

Les Sparks, a CABE Commissioner and Chair of the Design Review Committee is also a commissioner for English Heritage, former Chairman of the Historic Built Environment Advisory Committee and Deputy Chairman of English Heritage Advisory Committee. Les's vast experience in this area includes having been Chairman of the Heritage Lottery Fund's Expert Panel on Historic Buildings and Land from 1999 to 2001.

Sophie Andreae, Emeritus CABE Commissioner and Chair of CABE Education, also has strong connections with English Heritage.

Several commissioners also have a high level of practical skills in historic environment. Sunand Prasad, for example, who recently worked on the refurbishment and remodelling of Snape Maltings in Suffolk, a concert venue established by Benjamin Britten and created out of a 19th century maltings complex.

Design Review

CABE's Design Review programme offers free design advice to designers, developers and planners on a wide range of schemes, ranging from small public buildings such as the new Library/Walk-in centre in Wareham Conservation Area in Dorset, to masterplans for the redevelopment of whole city quarters.

Design Review often assesses schemes that impact on valued historic environments. Although Design review will not focus on this issue alone, it will always be taken into account. For example Design Review objected to a development proposal in Coppergate, York, arguing that harm would be done to the special historic character of the area. The application was called in by the Secretary of State, CABE gave evidence and planning permission was refused.

Design Review Committee includes Taryn Nixon, the Managing Director of the Museum of London Archaeological Service and John Worthington, Deputy Chair of Regeneration through Heritage. The committee also includes practicing professionals with wide ranging conservation experience such as MJ Long who is currently working on the Centre for Conservation at the British Library, an Education Centre at Hampton Court Palace and the Pallant House Gallery in Chichester.

The Design Review staff team is also highly skilled and experienced in conservation and heritage issues. It includes two former Local Government Conservation Officers, both currently members of the Institute of Historic Buildings Conservation, and a part time Architectural History lecturer.

Enabling Panel

CABE's Enabling Panel helps those commissioning and designing projects to achieve good quality results. Many schemes will involve historic conservation issues. The Panel includes many practicing professionals that are active in historic conservation. Martyn Best and Peter Williams are both advisors to the Heritage Lottery Fund, and Chris Blandford is author of World Heritage Site Management Plans. Additionally, Charles Wilson, a CABE enabler an architect and a planner specialising in conservation, regeneration and development of historic areas, has been a member of English Heritage's Advisory Committee and it's predecessor, the Historic Buildings Advisory Committee, since 1987. He also sits on their Urban Panel

The Enabling Panel also focuses on the restoration and rehabilitation of existing public spaces, such as parks and public squares, a great many of which are of special historic interest. This aspect of the Panel's work is assisted by CABE Space, the department within CABE which deals with the regeneration, promotion and development of urban green spaces. Panel members provide a wealth of expertise in the conservation of historic open spaces and include Dr Stewart Harding, who set up the Urban Parks Programme of the Heritage Lottery Fund and instigated the Country Parks Renaissance Programme for the Countryside Agency. David Lambert, also on the panel, was also closely involved with the establishment of the Heritage Lottery Fund's Urban Parks Programme and served on its advisory panel from 1996 to 2004.

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CABE's purpose is to demonstrate the ability of great architecture and design to transform people's quality of life. Through practical advice and public campaigns, we seek to raise the aspirations, capacity and performance of everyone involved in creating and maintaining buildings and public space across England.

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