HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND BILL – CALL FOR WRITTEN EVIDENCE

1. How will the creation of Historic Environment Scotland help to improve the overall management and promotion of Scotland’s historic environment? Will it help to make Scotland’s historic environment more attractive to communities, families and tourists?

The creation of Historic Environment Scotland (HES), along with ‘Our Place In Time’, the Scottish Government’s new Historic Environment Strategy for Scotland should make a significant contribution to managing and promoting the historic environment. It is this Council’s view that HES will take the lead role in driving the aims and objectives of the new Strategy over the next 10 years, which will help to promote the necessary long-term strategic approach to functions.

The merger of the two existing bodies, Historic Scotland and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, if executed properly, should result in a more focussed organisation, with the potential for overlap and duplication removed and resultant economies of scale.

2. Are the functions proposed for Historic Environment Scotland the correct ones or are there any omissions? Are the outcomes expected of the new body ambitious enough or could they be strengthened?

In broad terms, the functions proposed for the new organisation are consistent with what we would expect them to be.

We note that one of the key aims will be to investigate and record our historic environment to continually develop our knowledge and understanding. An appreciation of what lies beneath the ground is essential to that.

Unfortunately, whilst East Ayrshire Council has put procedures in place to ensure that members of the public can access the archaeological record, it is our experience that not all local authorities have done so. We would recommend that the Joint Working Group should explore what arrangements Councils have in place for updating archaeological records and obtaining archaeological advice when required as part of the planning process.

3. Does the Bill establish a clear and appropriate relationship between Historic Environment Scotland and all other public and private bodies with an interest in Scotland’s historic environment?

This Council expressed a number of concerns during the consultation period. These related to those specific proposals that altered the balance of work that currently exists between Historic Scotland and planning authorities in relation to the procedures for determining planning applications for listed buildings.

Since the consultation closed, a number of discussions have taken place via the Joint Historic Environment Group to ensure that the interests of planning authorities are taken on board.
The explanatory notes that accompanies the Bill includes a section on ‘Costs to Local Authorities’. The Council does not anticipate any additional costs, a view which is generally accepted by other local authorities. However, there may be some minimal costs to the Planning Service to introduce the new arrangements.

4. **In what ways will the Bill help you/ your organisation to better manage and promote Scotland’s historic environment?**

East Ayrshire Council has delivered and continues to deliver a number of area-based conservation-led regeneration schemes, which are helping to drive the economic recovery of our communities. It is our expectation that the Bill will support such approaches and will recognise that the Historic Environment should not just be protected, but can in many instances, be enhanced and improved to contribute fully to the vibrancy of local communities.

5. **Are there any areas of the Bill that you consider could be strengthened or improved?**

The Explanatory Note to the Bill states that the new organisation ‘will be working with local authorities to manage transition to the new system and to build capacity within local authority partners’. As a Council which is currently reviewing its Planning staffing resources, we would anticipate opportunities for our Planning staff to participate in training, which will allow them to enhance their heritage design and conservation skills. As part of this review the Council would appreciate receiving guidance on the range of skills and competencies HES would expect staff dealing with applications for listed building consent or other heritage matters.

We would also suggest a strengthening of the links between regeneration/economic growth and the historic environment. The continued use and re-use of historic buildings can be an important element of successful regeneration schemes, helping to breathe new life into communities and maintain and expand a local sense of place and community.

6. **Do you consider that the Bill’s Policy Memorandum adequately sets out: the Bill’s policy objectives; whether alternative ways of meeting the objectives were considered; the consultation undertaken on the objectives; the Bill’s effects on equal opportunities, human rights, island communities, local government and sustainable development?**

From our review of the Policy Memorandum, it is clear that cognisance has been taken of the views of key stakeholders. This Council, along with many others, participated in the consultation process and has also engaged through its membership of COSLA. We look forward to continuing to work together as the new body becomes operational and as the Strategy is rolled out over the next decade.

7. **The Scottish Government’s newly published historic environment strategy also seeks to improve enjoyment and understanding of Scotland’s historic environment. The Committee does not wish to repeat the extensive consultation undertaken on the strategy, but would welcome your views on whether it and the Bill together:**
• establish clearly who is responsible and accountable for delivering the strategy;
• will involve appropriately all those public and private bodies with a role in improving the historic environment;
• lead to demonstrably better access to, and enjoyment and management of, the historic environment.

The potential establishment of collaborative working groups will have to be managed closely; any discussions on this should fully take on board any resource implications for local authorities, at a time when resources and budgets are under extreme pressure. It must be ensured that there is no further delegation of responsibilities to local authorities, unless there is confidence that the adequate resources are in place.

Please also add any further comments that you consider would assist the Committee’s scrutiny of the Bill, including on more specific areas such as:

• the possible benefits and disadvantages of Historic Environment Scotland being granted charitable status;
• the implications for staff in Historic Scotland and RCAHMS of the creation of Historic Environment Scotland;
• whether the Bill will improve existing policy and practice in relation to grants and loans; scheduled monuments; and listed buildings.