SUBMISSION FROM THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT FORUM SCOTLAND

1. Built Environment Forum Scotland is the strategic intermediary body for Scotland’s historic environment sector. The Historic Environment Working Group within BEFS wishes to draw the Committee’s attention to the front line role that Local authorities play in safeguarding Scotland’s historic environment. We also provide data on levels and trends in relation to staffing capacity in the current economic climate.

Role of local authorities in safeguarding Scotland’s historic environment

2. The former advisory body on the historic environment, the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland (HEACS) reported to Ministers on the role of local authorities in managing the historic environment in 2006¹. This report highlighted the fundamental role that authorities play in the stewardship and management of Scotland’s historic environment. They have responsibility for determining applications for listed building and conservation area consent (with delegated authority on decision-making for C(S) and more recently, in some authorities, B listed buildings - those of regional importance); statutory duties on the designation, preservation or enhancement of conservation areas; enforcement and grant making powers including identifying opportunities to make use of compulsory purchase orders. Scottish Planning Policy² highlights that ‘Planning authorities should support the best viable use that is compatible with the fabric, setting and character of the historic environment’. The Scottish Historic Environment Policy³ states that ‘Scottish Ministers look to Historic Scotland to work with local authorities which are key agents in protecting the historic environment and in harnessing the potential of the historic environment to contribute to Scotland’s economic and social success. Scottish Ministers expect local authorities to play a full role in achieving their objectives for the historic environment’.

3. It is important to remember that 95% of our historic environment is not protected by statutory designation. So alongside the tightly defined regulatory functions, the Conservation Officers and Archaeologists working for local authorities have a wider-ranging remit in respect of the undesignated historic environment - the unlisted traditional buildings that make up the core of Scotland’s cities, towns and villages, the vast majority archaeological sites, battlefields and gardens and designed landscapes.

The historic environment – why is it important?

4. Overall, the historic environment sector is estimated to contribute in excess of £2.3 billion to Scotland’s national GVA⁴, directly supporting 41,000 FTE (full-time equivalent) employees. The greater share of economic impacts relate to tourism

¹ http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/42823.aspx
² http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/02/03132605/8
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expenditure attributable to the historic environment (representing nearly £1.3 billion in respect of GVA). Furthermore, we know that conservation of the historic built environment acts as a real catalyst in leveraging in private finance. For example, in Edinburgh’s World Heritage Site each £1 of public money used for conservation of the historic built environment anchors £5 of private funding, while ensuring high standards of repair and staving off future expense.

5. The historic environment is not only a major contributor to the Scottish economy, but also sits at the heart of place-making – acting as a catalyst for regeneration and an opportunity for people to get involved with their local ‘place’. Research in 2008 identified that 12,449 volunteers carry out a total of 167,721 hours per annum — a clear indication of peoples’ enthusiasm for the historic environment. The historic environment provides the context for achieving quality places that are valued (and therefore valuable), that work for people and that are distinctly Scottish.

Historic environment expertise – why is it necessary?

6. The historic environment gives value in so many ways and it is therefore important to ensure that expertise is available at local level to advise and guide decision-makers and the public alike on its appropriate care and protection. Expert advice is essential in helping communities safeguard and appreciate local historic buildings, archaeological sites, battlefields and cultural landscapes. Understanding what is significant or valuable about a building or site is essential to inform the management, protection and enhancement of these important places. In the absence of appropriate information and expert advice, understanding is reduced, to the potential detriment of the historic environment.

7. HEACS identified the breadth of contribution that historic environment professionals make in terms of regeneration initiatives, project development, briefing and specifying contract work, awareness-raising, education and advice. These are summarised as:

- Management – for example process consent applications and monitor implementation, advise on development impacts, specify developer funded contract work, take part in public inquiries, take enforcement action, provide advice on, and monitor condition of, designated and undesignated historic environment assets, work with partners in central government, public bodies and third sector.
- Information - maintaining information records on the local historic environment.
- Policy – for example input into policy framework and providing guidance to for example developers and local community groups, conservation area character appraisals.
- Implementation – for example initiate and manage conservation projects and contribute to regeneration schemes, seeking funding and administering grants, advising on the disposal of heritage assets.
• Promotion and education – for example outreach and publicity, advise on non rescue-led archaeology for interpretation purposes, participate in award schemes, participate in Doors Open Day and Archaeology Month.

Joint working between Historic Scotland and local authorities

8 The role of local authorities in safeguarding Scotland’s historic environment is becoming increasingly important given the roll-out of Joint Working Agreements between Historic Scotland and local authorities. These agreements implement the expectation that Ministers have for local authorities to work in partnership with Historic Scotland to deliver objectives for the historic environment, within the context of modernisation of the planning system. In this context it is relevant to recognise that Historic Scotland has taken arguably a disproportionate cut in the draft budget announcement, its **budget reducing from £47M to £37.5M** over the next three years which is disappointing. Historic Scotland is confident however that it can offset this reduction through income generation and efficiency savings, and BEFS members will work closely with Historic Scotland in striving to secure the best outcomes possible for Scotland’s historic environment.

Staffing levels

9. Research carried out during 2008-9 on local authority resources for the historic environment in Scotland conveyed a picture of fragmentation of responsibilities with a core of services concentrated in planning services. It indicated a workload focus on meeting statutory requirements only, but not without difficulty, and enforcement as a key area of under-activity.

10. In 2010 BEFS advocated in the context of the Historic Environment (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill that local authorities should have access to appropriate information and expertise on the historic environment. By this we were not necessarily advocating that every authority employ an appropriately qualified historic environment professional, since there is scope for different models for delivering advice, for example through shared services or external contracts. However, against the backdrop described above, **finding ways to ensure good quality advice (supported by information) on Scotland’s historic environment is becoming all the more imperative**. The following data indicates current capacity - which it is argued is already very modest.

11. In terms of Conservation Officers, data from the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) records 177 IHBC members in Scotland, of which 92 are fully accredited to IHBC professional standards. **51 individuals work in local authorities** and the coverage is not across the board – 18 authorities employed full members, while 12 authorities had no IHBC member (full or affiliate) working for them. These figures represent the position in November 2010, and the IHBC will be undertaking a re-survey in the Spring of 2012. Despite the statutory duties referred to above in relation to conservation areas, just five authorities had conservation area management plans in place in July 2010. In terms of archaeology, data from the Association of Local
Government Archaeological Officers in Scotland show that staffing levels for professional archaeological staff have fallen during the period 2008-2011 by 31% from 31.6 to 21.7 FTE. It is not only numbers but also knowledge and experience that is an issue – the response submitted by BEFS to the Christie Commission highlighted the loss of key highly experienced individuals within the field to early retirement, with little or no succession planning.

**Conclusion**

12. These figures illustrate that **management of Scotland's historic environment rests on few shoulders - it is a sector which punches well above its weight.** Accordingly the impacts of cuts in this area, while perhaps not immediately obvious, will become apparent over the longer-term as less well-informed decision making will start to result in increased (irreversible) damage to the historic environment. **Once lost our historic environment is lost forever.** Consequent implications for tourism, and also more subtle negative impacts on society and connection with 'place' and ‘identity’ represent long term outcomes that are foreseeable, but preventable.

**Ongoing investment in Scotland's historic built environment and the staff that safeguard this most valuable asset must remain a priority in the expenditure of local authorities.**

13. I trust these comments are useful – please get in touch if you have any questions or require additional information.

**Built Environment Forum Scotland**

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1 Scotland’s historic environment audit – a review of existing information for Scotland’s historic environment audit (Historic Scotland)
2 Economic Impact of the Historic Environment in Scotland (Ecotec, 2008), 
3 Volunteering and the historic environment (Volunteer Development Scotland, 2008), 