

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE - 21 OCTOBER 2003

REVIEW OF STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS OF HISTORIC SCOTLAND

Report by Director of Development Services

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1** To advise on a consultation paper entitled 'Review of Structure and Function of Historic Scotland' prepared by the Education Department of the Scottish Executive and to homologate an officer response on the consultation.

2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1** The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport has announced the establishment of a review to look at the structure and functions of Historic Scotland. The review is being carried out independently of Historic Scotland itself and the terms of reference of the review are:

- to consider the range of functions currently discharged by Historic Scotland;
- to consider options for the future accountability of these functions; and
- to make recommendations to the Scottish Ministers that take account of the financial and practical implications of the options considered.

- 2.2** Specific questions are asked in the consultation paper regarding the role and strategy of Historic Scotland, the organisation's planning and structure, its performance and its relationship with partners and shareholders. The views of the Council on the questions posed in the consultation paper were requested by 17 September 2003 and an officer response was provided by that date.

3 THE CONSULTATION PAPER

- 3.1** The consultation paper gives a synopsis of the aims and objectives of Historic Scotland and details the means by which these aims and objectives are currently achieved. This synopsis is then followed by a series of questions designed to obtain opinion on the various issues raised. For the purposes of this exercise, detailed responses have not been made on each and every one of the questions asked. Rather, a number of general observations have been made on the overall structure and function of Historic Scotland based on the Council's past dealings with the organisation. The officer comments made to the Scottish Executive are as follows:

- (i) East Ayrshire Council recognises the valuable role that Historic Scotland plays as a guardian of the nation's built heritage and recommends, subject to the comments detailed in section (v) below, that this role is maintained through any review.
- (ii) One general comment that the Council would wish to make, however, is that, based in Edinburgh, the organisation appears overly centralised and remote, especially in the more peripheral, rural parts of Scotland. In this regard, it is suggested that a more devolved structure could be considered as part of the review process, through the establishment of more local offices dealing exclusively with all built heritage matters in the particular area concerned.
- (iii) It is considered that any review of the Historic Scotland organisation should consider the role and function of all other national organisations directly providing similar or related functions, such as the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments in Scotland (RCAHMS) and the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland. It may well be the case that some consolidation of the functions carried out by these bodies could be better carried out through the offices of a single, reconstituted 'Historic Scotland' body addressing all built heritage and environment matters presently addressed by the various individual bodies concerned.
- (iv) The overall aims of Historic Scotland in encouraging visitors to properties in Historic Scotland care, working to attract visitors from home and abroad and promoting the built heritage as an integral part of the Scottish Cultural experience are to be welcomed. These aims and objectives are fully in line with the aspirations of the Council's Community Plan and also the aims and objectives of the Ayrshire Economic Forum's Strategy for Economic Development.
- (v) It is considered that much higher priority should be given in any reviewed structure and function of Historic Scotland, to recognising and promoting partnership working and the role that the organisation can play in expanding and diversifying the national and local economies. All too often, Historic Scotland has taken such a focused approach to the preservation of historic buildings that other elements or aspects of the project are often ignored or given very little attention. At times, this approach has resulted in new uses of historic properties being turned down and subsequent benefits to the local economy and townscape being lost. Often these buildings have continued to deteriorate, some to the stage that they have had to be demolished on the grounds of public safety. There is an increasing threat of vandalism during this period and many buildings are being damaged or lost as a result. A more positive and proactive emphasis on the contribution that the nation's heritage can play in achieving other governmental economic objectives needs to be recognised and promoted within the organisation, with priority given to finding practical solutions to enable more historic buildings to be reused.

- (vi) It is considered that any review of Historic Scotland should ensure that the new organisation should be independent of the Scottish Executive. It is considered that the present arrangements, whereby Historic Scotland is an integral part of the Executive organisation, can lead to situations whereby the Executive can be both judge and jury on a particular development proposal, creating conflict between the advisory role of Historic Scotland itself and the decision making role of the Executive.
- (vii) It is considered that, in some instances, Historic Scotland can be somewhat intransigent in adopting new technologies to achieve modern building standards. For example, rigid adherence to the rejection of double glazing proposals in sensitive buildings can result in new development failing to meet the requirements of the building acts regarding certain types of development.
- (viii) In general terms, it is considered that the working relationship between East Ayrshire Council has been reasonably good over many years and it is hoped that this will continue well into the future in any reorganised structure.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no financial implications for the Council as a result of this consultation exercise.

5 LEGAL / AUTHORITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no legal or authority implications for the Council as a result of this consultation exercise.

6 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no personnel implications for the Council as a result of this consultation exercise.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 It is recommended that the Council agrees:
 - (a) to approve the contents of this report and to homologate the actions taken as detailed under paragraph 3.1 above; and
 - (b) to submit a copy of the report to the Scottish Executive as representing the formal views of East Ayrshire Council on the consultation paper.

Stephen Chorley
Director of Development Services
16 September 2003 JL/JL

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Scottish Executive Education Department Consultation Paper; Review of Structure and Functions of Historic Scotland: June 2003

For further information on the contents of this report, contact John Lilley, Principal Planning Officer, on 01563 576754

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