

A Report on the 'Conservation Areas At Risk' Seminar held at the Centre for Mathematical Sciences in Cambridge on 26th June 2010.

The seminar began at 9.30am with a welcome from **Peter Landshoff**; Chair of the East of England Civic Societies and Vice-Chair of the RSA East of England Region. The event, organised with English Heritage, took place at the Centre for Mathematical Sciences in Cambridge and attracted around 50 people representing civic groups, professionals and local residents.

The first speaker was **David Grech**; the Historic Areas Adviser at English Heritage (EH). He began by saying that English Heritage only produced guidance in accordance with government policy; they did not make the policy. He outlined the new planning policy PPS5 (published March 2010) that had replaced PPG15 & 16 and which covers all 'Heritage Assets'. He stated that conservation is not simply about preserving heritage assets 'in aspic' but about them evolving and remaining relevant, that we must establish the assets importance or significance and provoke 'interest' in them.

David then went through parts of the new PPS5s 12 policies numbered HE1 to HE12. HE1 deals with climate change and the balance between preserving heritage and mitigating climate change (e.g. the siting of a wind farm near a church tower). EH had produced guidance on energy conservation and generation, this includes guidance on building regulations as the new regulations cannot always be applied directly to old buildings.

HE2 establishes that Planning Authorities must have a Historic Environment Record along with management plans for historic assets and Conservation Area appraisals. HE4 deals with Article 4 Directions which can remove permitted development rights. David thought that these should always be targeted rather than general. EH is currently in the process of amending its advice on Article 4 Directions.

HE6 establishes that any planning application affecting a heritage asset must include a proper assessment of the asset's significance otherwise the application should not be 'validated' by the Planning Authority. David felt that a major problem was that planning applications were often registered by staff without the training or knowledge to make this judgement.

EH has produced an advice document called 'Conservation Principles' on assessing a heritage assets significance and another called 'Understanding Place: Historic Area Assessments': This shows the three levels of assessment which are; Outline (level 1), Rapid (level 2) and Detailed (level3).

HE7 states that development must be 'sustaining' and 'enhancing'.

HE9 establishes a presumption in favour of the conservation and protection of heritage assets. As a Conservation Area is a heritage asset then harm to any of its buildings constitutes harm to the heritage asset.

David then listed other publications from EH that might be of interest and were available at: <http://www.helm.org.uk/>

In a short question and answer section David was asked how street safety measures square with conservation. The answer was that Highways have extensive permitted development rights. However, some Councils, including Suffolk County Council, have

managed to reduce signage and other aspects of schemes. The problem is that traffic engineers see a traffic solution and are 'all or nothing' about its implementation.

The second speaker was **John Preston**; Historic Environment Advisor with Cambridge City Council. He said that Local Authorities had statutory duties to preserve and enhance Conservation Areas and to formulate and publish proposals for this. Conservation Areas began with the 1967 Civic Amenities Act and are 'a local designation with statutory force'. However, the Shimizu case (1997) meant Conservation Area consent only covered demolition although many people are under the impression that controls are more extensive. While money has disappeared for Conservation Area schemes the National Lottery remains as a source of funds. John spoke of the lack of Conservation Area Appraisals with only 25% of the total carried out by Local Authorities. There were 11 Conservation Areas in Cambridge and the work involved in Appraisals was time-consuming and costly. New Appraisals were happening though including Cambridge suburbs and approach roads. John described various examples including Mill Road in Cambridge. John closed by speaking on Article 4 Directions and the Historic Towns Forum.

In a short question and answer section John was asked how local communities could be involved in Conservation Area Appraisals. He replied that workshops could be held to invite residents to help, though the current appraisals on Mill Road and West Cambridge were at the draft stage for consultation.

The third speaker was **Diana Oviatt-Ham**; the Principle Arboricultural Officer with Cambridge City Council. Diana started by stating the importance of trees to many Conservation Areas where they contribute to the area's character. She warned though that a Conservation Area is not a SSSI or Nature Reserve. The protection of trees in a Conservation Area is not to do with the environment or climate change but is rather about their appearance. In Conservation Areas tree work must be notified and approved in order to prevent bad pruning or damage. The removal of a tree cannot be given consent on the condition that another is planted, but the Local Authority can make a Tree Preservation Order to protect it, although this can't be done for trees that are dead or dying, a nuisance to a third party, a commercial orchard, too small or covered by permitted development. In a short question and answer session Diana was asked about the problem afflicting Chestnut trees and gave general advice but stating that the trees weren't dying. She was also asked about the case of the National Trust being sued for a falling branch and whether this was causing problems. She said that a new inspection regime had needed to be introduced in public places. Lastly she agreed with the view that people should be warned about the potential size many trees could grow to.

The fourth speaker was **Oliver Caroe**; of Caroe Architecture Ltd and an Associate of Cambridge Architectural Research. He spoke on the subject of the 'Environmental Challenge' and the dangers of climate change. He believed that changes to prevent climate change and design must find an accommodation and that design should be 'delightful'. He worked in the area of reconciling the changes required to buildings with preserving the historic environment. Oliver does a lot of work for the Church of England whose website on the subject is called 'Shrinking the Footprint' at:

<http://www.shrinkingthefootprint.org.uk/>

Oliver thought that all buildings, including those in Conservation Areas and Listed, should be included in meeting the challenges presented by climate change. Oliver went on to describe various projects on he was working on including the Grade 1 listed Bishop's House in Ely. See: http://www.artworkersguild.org/members/oliver_caroe/

The final speaker was Carolin Gohler; the CEO of CambridgePPF. Carolin spoke on how many aspects of Cambridge and the surrounding villages are changing for the worse with inappropriate infill buildings and poorly maintained streetscapes. Local pubs are also being lost at an alarming rate. Cambridge PPF is working to counteract these trends by lobbying hard and broadening the debate.

Peter Landshoff then chaired a short discussion.

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