



33 Barony Street, Edinburgh, EH3 6NX
Tel: 0131 556 5353 Fax: 0131 556 3306
Email: info@befs.org.uk Website: www.befs.org.uk

Scottish Executive
Architecture Policy Unit
1-B(N) Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ

27th July 2006

Dear Sirs

A POLICY ON ARCHITECTURE FOR SCOTLAND PUBLIC CONSULTATION – REVIEW OF POLICY

Thank you for consulting on the review of the Policy on Architecture for Scotland. The Built Environment Forum Scotland (BEFS) is a forum that brings together non-governmental organisations – both professional and voluntary – that work within the built environment sector. A unique aspect about the membership is that it includes both voluntary sector organisations and professional institutes. In addition, BEFS is aiming to bring together in one forum representative organisations from both the contemporary and historic built environment sectors. The purpose of BEFS is to raise awareness of policy issues within the sector, encourage debate and share information, with a view to influencing policy and legislation.

In response to the consultation document, BEFS arranged a workshop which focused in on the following themes within the paper:

- Raising Design Standards and Building Quality
- Public Engagement and Community Involvement
- Place-making/Urban Design/Landscape
- Procurement
- Managing and Understanding Change in the Built Environment

The workshop was attended by members of BEFS and individuals from interested stakeholder organisations¹. In addition a number of BEFS members have indicated support for this responseⁱⁱ. This response should be read in conjunction with the workshop report which is enclosed. The report can also be viewed on the BEFS website at www.befs.org.uk/latest. A few additional points made by BEFS Members outwith the workshop are included below.

Key issues arising in the workshop were as follows:

Purpose and Delivery

Participants felt that the purpose of the policy needs to be more clearly articulated, and steps to ensuring the delivery of the policy set out through objectives, targets, indicators etc. An independent evaluation of the benefits of the policy (and supporting funding programmes) to date could usefully inform development and delivery of the policy. In terms of implementation, there was much discussion on aspects of the planning system which highlights the significance of

planning in delivering the aspirations set out in the policy. It was noted that planning is still seen as a barrier rather than an enabling process.

Co-ordination and Cross-Cutting Issues

This policy must relate to other policy areas within the Executive, and be used to promote issues on architecture, design, place-making within other parts of the Executive. In particular, stronger linkage with the Planning Division is sought. Participants also welcomed A+DS' work with the Executive's Health Department in promoting design champions on health boards.

Raising Design Standards and Building Quality

It was observed that there is no mechanism within the planning system to improve poorly designed buildings, where consent is likely to be granted. Participants sought a greater emphasis on the design brief and involvement of the community or end user at an early stage. In addition, it was felt that more needs to be done to measure the quality of design and success of a building or scheme. Codifying elements of a design would enable measurement against standards which in turn would help to promote awareness of design quality and good (and bad) practice. Resources must focus on raising standards overall – it was noted that 'the best is sometimes the enemy of the good'. The establishment of A+DS was welcomed as a key achievement. Participants endorsed the work of A+DS – stressing that this must be supported and the existing program of early design reviews and research etc enhanced.

Public Engagement and Community Involvement

Ensuring local community input into the planning process was identified as a key consideration. Concern was expressed over the relatively low level of public awareness and aspiration for quality in the built environment - there is much scope to inform and engage the public. It was noted that there are good models of community engagement within the NGO sector and that these should be examined and promoted. Support was given to architectural awards. It was suggested that these might have a broader value if the wider community of players in the design process were recognised – for example the client, community, craftspeople – as well as the designer.

Place-Making/Urban Design/Landscape

Participants urged for a shift away from a focus on individual buildings to 'area based' contextual design; to think in terms of good places with emphasis on context and layout.

Procurement

A cultural change is needed to move away from a service delivery approach in order to bring about longer term capital investment in places. Reference was made in particular to the need to focus more attention on the links between the physical environment and health, and to promote the existing research in this area.

Managing and Understanding Change in the Built Environment

The challenge is to relate together existing and new development, to ensure that the development of an existing settlement recognises the historical context of the place and nature of the urban fabric. This requires more emphasis on understanding what is of value and use of tools of assessment and appraisal.

Education

The stronger interdisciplinary focus referred to above was also highlighted in discussions on training. Ideas were put forward on promoting a more holistic approach for training of professionals working with the built environment, that may touch on a range of disciplines (for example architecture, planning, urban design, landscape, infrastructure, environment, community, contextual design and place-making) – in order to develop understanding of a broader range of perspectives. Training of local authority planning committee members was considered a priority.

Additional Points

A number of additional points received from BEFS Members cover:

- The role of archaeology in understanding the existing built environment
- The role of Historic Scotland in supporting management of change
- The need for better appraisal – in particular strengthening the efficacy of conservation areas
- A suggested requirement for use of Environmental Statements in proposals
- The use of local materials in generating sense of place

I hope these points are useful – if you have any questions please get in touch. I would be grateful if you could keep me informed of the outcome of the consultation process.

Yours sincerely

Jo Robertson
Forum Co-ordinator
Built Environment Forum Scotland

Enc: Workshop Report
Respondent Information Form

ⁱ The workshop was attended by representatives from the following organisations:

Angus Council; Architecture and Design Scotland; Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland; Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland; East Renfrewshire Council; Edinburgh World Heritage; Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland; Institute of Historic Building Conservation; National Trust for Scotland; Perth & Kinross Council; Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland; Royal Town Planning Institute in Scotland; Scottish Natural Heritage; Scottish Stone Liaison Group; Scottish Civic Trust

ⁱⁱ This response has additional support from the following members of BEFS:

Council for Scottish Archaeology; Institute of Field Archaeologists (Scottish Group); Institute of Historic Building Conservation; National Trust for Scotland