



## Briefing Note to Meeting of the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee Meeting 16<sup>th</sup> January 2008

### Introduction to the Built Environment Forum Scotland (BEFS)

Established in June 2003, BEFS is the only **membership forum** in Scotland that brings together voluntary and professional bodies across the spectrum of the contemporary and historic built environment sector. The Forum comprises seventeen Member organisations and eight Subscriber organisations – both types are listed at the end of this paper<sup>1</sup>.

Our vision is to achieve successful, **sustainable place-making in Scotland** that reflects the passion and skill of those caring for and creating good places for people. Issues relating to the built heritage are addressed, along with those of urban design and sustainable building, within this broader context - for example in relation to attracting investment; to sense of place and well-being; to reducing Scotland's carbon footprint.

Performing an **intermediary role**, BEFS exists to support its members by raising **awareness** of, and facilitating **joint working** on, strategic issues of common interest. Through collaborative action, BEFS **influences and promotes** relevant issues to policy-makers and decision-makers and relates built environment issues to **other policy agendas**.

BEFS' Corporate Plan is available at: <http://www.befs.org.uk/BEFSCorporatePlan2006-9finalrev1.pdf>

### Current issues for Scotland's built heritage

#### *Supporting the built heritage in place-making FOR PEOPLE*

- A key focus for the Forum is achieving, through effective policy and good practice, a high quality built environment for people which **keeps the best of the past, while accommodating change in an informed and sensitive way**. BEFS seeks means of enabling **better connection** between the existing building stock and new development; the former providing context for the latter, which in turn forms the heritage of the future.
- Our heritage is a **reflection of our culture** and our management of the heritage expresses how we value our past. As a reflection of local pride, our heritage, well-managed, has significant attraction for tourists and therefore economic value.
- Strategies are required to ensure the **effective management** of historic neighbourhoods, town and city centres as the foci of community, business, cultural life and tourism.
- Members of the Forum are keen to **promote an understanding** of built heritage issues to the general public and to demonstrate opportunities for delivering **learning outcomes**.

#### *Tackling policy weaknesses and loopholes*

Since 2003, there has been discussion within the sector over the need for a review of the policy and legislation that protects Scotland's heritage. Much of this discussion was generated in the context of the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland's (HEACS) work in exploring these issues. In 2006

HEACS recommended<sup>1</sup> to the then Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport that a review of heritage legislation is necessary. The current Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture has recently responded that, rather than promoting the need for major legislative reform, energy should be focused towards improving the workings of the current system. There is scope for significant improvement in policy, procedure and resource allocation to this end. The key issues include:

- Managing the historic environment in a holistic way. The system focuses mainly on particular sites or buildings, yet there is a **need to value the common-place as well, which is often eroded through incremental change**.
- Improving transparency and accountability in the decision-making processes in managing assets that are designated – including **improving understanding of why a building or site has been afforded a degree of protection** through the listing or scheduling systems.
- Completing the current **audit** of the historic environment and plugging **gaps** in coverage of protection (for example there is no protection for ‘cultural areas’ or for battlefield sites).
- Introducing a **statutory Duty of Care for the Historic Environment** which would parallel the Duty of Care applied in relation to biodiversity.

### ***Reducing Scotland’s carbon footprint***

- The sustainable management of much of our built heritage in the form of the existing stock of unlisted pre-war housing must play a crucial role in reducing carbon emissions, first and foremost through **energy conservation measures**.
- The charging of **VAT on repair and maintenance**, but not on alteration work and new build, acts as a disincentive to reuse, repair and maintain, existing buildings. This has been a long standing problem which undermines efforts to reduce, reuse and recycle. There is a need to explore options on how to rectify this anomaly.

### ***Strengthening Scotland’s historic environment sector***

- The proposed merger between the RCAHMS and Historic Scotland is a matter on which the Members of BEFS would expect **public consultation** as a minimum requirement.
- Scotland’s historic environment sector is made up of a rich and diverse range of organisations, many of which rely on volunteer effort. This **pluralism is a strength** which must be respected and supported.
- Members of BEFS and wider stakeholders have identified the need for a champion for the sector and see BEFS as undertaking this type of activity. There is a need to develop a clearer champion role and find ways of **developing capacity within the sector** for working together, engaging with strategic issues and supporting the cross-cutting policy of the new Government.

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<sup>i</sup> Members: Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland (AHSS), Association of Preservation Trusts - Scottish Committee (SAPT), Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS), Council for Scottish Archaeology (CSA), Garden History Society in Scotland (GHS), Historic Houses Association for Scotland (HHA), Institute of Field Archaeologists – Scottish Group (SGIFA), Institute of Historic Building Conservation – Scottish Branch (IHBC), Landscape Institute in Scotland (LI), National Trust for Scotland (NTS), Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS), Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors in Scotland (RICS), Royal Town Planning Institute in Scotland (RTPI), Saltire Society (Saltire), SCAPE Trust (SCAPE), Scottish Ecological Design Association (SEDA), Scottish Civic Trust (SCT), Scottish Stone Liaison Group (SSLG), Society of Antiquaries of Scotland (SAS)

Subscribers: Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers in Scotland (ALGAO), Central Scotland Forest Trust (CSFT), Edinburgh World Heritage (EWH), Glasgow Caledonian University – Heritage Futures (GCAL), Homes for Scotland (HfS), Natural Stone Institute (NSI), Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust Ltd (SUAT), Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in Scotland (SPABis)

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<sup>1</sup> *Report and recommendations on whether there is a need to review heritage protection legislation in Scotland* (HEACS 2006) <http://www.heacs.org.uk/documents/2006/heritageprotection.pdf>