

Buildings at Risk Register for Scotland: what next?

BEFS workshop 27/10/14

SUMMARY

- The neutral position of the register is greatly valued by stakeholders but it therefore requires greater promotion by other national and local agencies.
- Local authorities need to undertake a prioritisation analysis of buildings on the register.
- The use of category A listed buildings on the register as a national indicator has an overall negative impact upon the historic environment.
- While it is stated that being on the register is not a prerequisite for funding from Historic Scotland or the Heritage Lottery Fund, both organisations ask if properties are on the BARR which gives the perception that buildings on the register may be treated preferentially.
- Integrating the register with other functions of Historic Environment Scotland as well as other agencies' agendas would be a positive step.
- Potential of the database as a research resource remains unexploited.
- Link the BARR to other agendas e.g. Empty Homes, Town Centre First
- Success is finding new uses for buildings.

1 Introduction

- 1.1** The [Buildings at Risk Register for Scotland](#) was established in 1990 in response to a concern at the growing number of listed buildings and buildings in Conservation Areas that were vacant and had fallen into a state of disrepair. It was held by the Scottish Civic Trust and is now with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. Following the passing of the Historic Environment Scotland Bill the register will be maintained by Historic Environment Scotland. The percentage of A-listed buildings on the register is currently a [National Indicator](#) for Scotland Performs but this is likely to change in an ongoing review of national indicators.
- 1.2** In the context of these changes to the operational landscape BEFS invited key stakeholders and BEFS members, listed below, to a workshop that would enable participants to:
- Learn how the BARR currently operates
 - Look at the BARR prioritisation methodology of Scottish Borders Council
 - Explore challenges associated with the use of the BARR
 - Discuss the potential of the BARR
- 1.3** Iain Anderson (RCAHMS) & Isobel Fry (RCAHMS) set the scene with a presentation on how the BARR is currently run and what potential they see it offering. Mark Douglas (Scottish Borders Council) explained how the local authority has created a prioritisation matrix for their buildings at risk and Sarah MacKinnon (Association of Building Preservation Trusts in Scotland) looked at how

the register was of use in the BPT field. John Sanders (Simpson & Brown Architects) shared information on the different approach taken by English Heritage's 'Heritage at Risk Register'.

- 1.5 Participants then discussed three questions in four break-out groups and then came together in a plenary to share feedback.

2 What do we like about the BARR?



- 2.1 The neutrality or objective nature of the BARR was emphasized by all groups reflecting its position within the Scottish Civic Trust and, more recently, RCAHMS. It is viewed as easily accessible and is often the first port of call in building research for some stakeholders. The thorough and up to date development history is also useful in making initial assessments and the details are used in report writing. The staff are helpful and having the same group make the assessments contributes to the confidence stakeholders have in the register's neutrality.
- 2.2 The fact that the database is searchable for keywords is liked, along with the links to Canmore and the List Description. The national coverage can be useful for identifying trends and patterns or issues specific to regions.
- 2.3 The use of the number of category A listed buildings on the register as a national key performance indicator is useful to some participants as some funders (primarily EU or UK) give weight to this.

3 What don't we like about the BARR



- 3.1 The use of the number of category A listed buildings on the register as a national key performance indicator was highlighted as particularly problematic. The category only comprises 8% of listed building and is not truly representative: removal from the register by any means (reuse or demolition) reads as success. The resurvey of A listed building means that the focus is on the monument/icon rather than on the historic buildings that comprise most of Scotland's settlements. Inclusion of buildings that are unlikely to find a viable new use (eg doocots) means their removal through successful restoration is unlikely: are there buildings on the register that are an accepted loss rather than at risk?
- 3.2 Although the register is national, the coverage is inconsistent across local authority areas and there are likely many more buildings that are at risk than on the register. Inclusion on the register itself is not a solution and how it is of use to local authorities is unclear. In feedback following the workshop one participant commented that they struggled to see the value of a database that has no proactive application.
- 3.3 The lack of a consistent record of who owned a building was also identified as a failing. While the register is visible to professionals it is has a much lower public profile.
- 3.4 An up to date entry on the register can highlight how out of date a List Description may be. It should link to other surveys e.g. the Housing Condition Survey.

4 BARR potential?



- 4.1 Prioritisation of the buildings on the register was identified as a key need. There was some discussion regarding the level this should be undertaken, national or local, and given the model illustrated by Scottish Borders Council local prioritisation was seen as preferable. Prioritisation would fundamentally direct public spend which would require those not prioritized to be given a higher profile for private, commercial or community rescue.
- 4.2 The register requires are higher profile and there was some suggestion that this would involve stepping beyond the neutral position currently taken. The move to Historic Environment Scotland could result in better integration with other functions which may assist in a more proactive approach.
- 4.3 The low level of identified owners of buildings was seen as a key piece of information that requires to be rectified which could encourage greater public engagement in finding new uses. While the register's resources may not permit time to search for ownership, local authorities may have easier access to publicly available property ownership records which could be shared with the register team.

- 4.3** Greater use of the data gathered for the register as a research resource was highlighted, examining successes and failures. The data could also be used in understanding the impact of climate change on historic buildings. This may require data for buildings removed from the list to be made available. Greater data integration could assist in it being a more useful tool to local authorities and projects such as the Empty Homes Partnership in addressing wider issues such as social deprivation or skills shortages.
- 4.4** Other suggestions included linking the register with Town Centre First Principle and presenting it as a contributor to placemaking and regeneration not just heritage at risk.
- 4.5** Some participants called for a greater categorization of the database but the Advanced Search facility would seem to already permit this. It could plot the buildings on a Scotland wide map.

5 Further point

- 5.1** One participant queried why the service agreement that required the Building at Risk Register for Scotland to go out to tender in 2010 has not required it to go out to tender again. Clarity on this from Historic Scotland would be helpful.

6 Summary

- 6.1** The majority of participants held the Buildings at Risk Register for Scotland to be of value to the heritage sector but it needs a higher profile to be of use to communities and public bodies and the private sector.

- The neutral position of the register is greatly valued by stakeholders but it therefore requires greater promotion by other national and local agencies.
- Local authorities need to undertake a prioritisation analysis of buildings on the register.
- The use of category A listed buildings on the register as a national indicator has an overall negative impact upon the historic environment.
- While it is stated that being on the register is not a prerequisite for funding from Historic Scotland or the Heritage Lottery Fund, both organisations ask if properties are on the BARR which gives the perception that buildings on the register may be treated preferentially.
- Integrating the register with other functions of Historic Environment Scotland as well as other agencies' agendas would be a positive step.
- Potential of the database as a research resource remains unexploited.
- Success is finding new uses for buildings.

7 Acknowledgements and participants

- 7.1** The event was organised by Built Environment Forum Scotland with support from Historic Scotland and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.
- 7.2** Thanks go to everyone who participated in the workshop, and in particular to Isobel Fry and Iain Anderson (RCAHMS), Barbara Cummins (HS), Sarah MacKinnon (APT), Mark Douglas (SBC) and John Sanders (Simpson & Brown Architects) for speaking, John Pelan, Jo Robertson, Euan Leitch (BEFS) and Neil Gregory (RCAHMS) for facilitating and Anne Wilkinson (BEFS) for administration of the event. Individuals from the following organisations participated in the event:

The Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland
Built Environment Forum Scotland
City of Edinburgh Council

Development Trusts Association Scotland
East Lothian Council
Edinburgh University
Glasgow Building Preservation Trust
Glasgow City Council
Glasgow City Heritage Trust
Historic Scotland
Institute of Historic Building Conservation
National Trust for Scotland
PAS
Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland
RSA Fellows' MCICH Network
Scottish Borders Council
Scottish Futures Trust
Scottish Government
Scottish Historic Buildings Trust
Scottish Land & Estates
Scottish Redundant Churches Trust
Shelter
Simpson & Brown Architects
Society of Antiquaries of Scotland
Stirling City Heritage Trust
Strathclyde Building Preservation Trust
The Architectural Heritage Fund