



ENGLISH HISTORIC TOWNS FORUM
Notes from the Strategy Meeting
8th October 2008

Present:

Ian Ayris	Newcastle City Council	Michael Loveday	HEART
Kim Bennett	Canterbury City Council	Sean O'Reilly	IHBC
Ian Brown	Canterbury City Council	Mark Parsons	Anthony Short & Ptnrs
David Burton-Pye	South Staffs Council	Alastair Clark	Salisbury Civic Society
John Preston	Cambridge City Council	Maureen Roberts	Lichfield District Council
Sean Coghlan	Lichfield District Council	Gordon Somerville	Independent
Jamie Gosden	Jacobs	David Thomas	Medway Towns Council
James Gregory	Individual Member	Richard Tuffrey	High Peak Borough
Vanessa Gregory	Individual Member	Peter Wadham	Exeter City Council
Chris Hargreaves	Birmingham City Council & EHTF Vice Chair	Chris Winter	EHTF Director
Sam Howes	Chichester District Council & EHTF Chair	John Wrightson	Worcester City Council
Gareth Hughes	Broadland District Council	Tony Wyatt	Ryder Architecture Ltd
Brian Human	EHTF Vice Chair	Bruce Young	Pop Up Power Supplies Ltd

1. Introduction

Sam Howes (Chair) stated that the aim of the meeting was to seek consensus for the way forward and to set the programme for the next two years.

2. The Business Plan

2.1 Richard Tuffrey reported that the ***Business Plan 2007-09*** had set the Strategic Priorities and from this an Action Plan had been developed, which in turn directed the management of the organisation and its activities. This will be rolled forward taking account of the outcomes of this meeting and the AGM.

2.2 The Mission statement, he said, was short and to the point:

“To promote the prosperity and sustainability of historic towns and cities”

2.3 Four objectives were set to realise this:

1. Promote an integrated approach to the planning and management of historic towns and cities.
2. Facilitate a network for practitioners.
3. Develop, promote and disseminate good practice.
4. Influence government and other policy making bodies on issues affecting its Members.

2.4 Essentially the '*USP*' is an organisation which represents practitioners running Historic Towns and Cities – no other organisation operates quite like this.

2.5 The Strategic Priorities are arrived at as a result of a Strategy Meeting held approximately every 2 years, together with a survey of the Membership.

2.6 The achievements of the current Strategic Priorities can be seen on the updated **Action Plan**, which was presented to the meeting.

3. The Membership Survey

3.1 Brian Human presented a summary of the Survey (carried out in August 2008) which generally indicated:

- Members were happy with the quality of the documents and events; reasons for non-attendance were lack of time and resources, not because of value to Members, fees etc.;
 - There was support for additional workshops / training;
 - Membership Fees were considered to be good value;
 - There was support for more formal links with Scotland, Wales & Ireland;
 - The website is easy to use, although not many use it; this is an area which needs attention;
 - Re the Newsletter: there is a preference for hard copy and electronic versions to be available and to maintain the current frequency;
 - There were several offers of support, which will be followed up.
- He thanked everyone for their responses.

3.2 Indications for future focus (See the Strategy Survey Results paper)

The emphasis on quality in design cut across all areas of work.

Key areas of concern were:

- Conservation & historic environment protection
- Retail development
- Quality public realm
- Transport
- Housing growth (there is currently a 'pause', which offers a good opportunity for reflection)
- Tourism

Potential for further guidance on:

- Heritage protection
- Conservation area management
- Managing growth
- Park & Ride update

BH added that it should be borne in mind that in the past year the Forum has carried out work (guidance or conferences) on: - retail development, historic streets, tourism and transport.

4. Opened discussion

A number of issues were raised by delegates:

- I Ayris The impact of the new Heritage Protection and the integrated regional and sub-regional strategies was difficult to understand:
- how will the changes impact on Historic Towns?
 - how will major development / urban growth impact on the capacity of the town(s)?
- It may be a good time to look at the growth agenda in order to develop a view in the lull in activity due to 'credit crunch'.
- V Gregory Seconded. The importance of retaining the sense of place
- J Preston Support that; & Heritage Protection & delivery, capacity & skills. Also recruitment, retention and succession planning, which is a big problem. There is insufficient Government awareness of the lack of skills.
- M Loveday Support for points on growth & local distinctiveness; this is vital when shaping the new development – i.e.: design should still be distinctive.
- G Hughes Placemaking skills: – people are not involved in the planning for large developments; there is a lack of joined up thinking and a lack of integrated approach. RDAs look at the infrastructure not the social and environmental impact/implications. This is the wrong way round.

- A Clark Salisbury is developing a visioning document; this helps to tie all elements together. Delivery is most important but the move to Unitary Authority status has meant that everything is on hold!
- S Howes Agreed this is difficult to achieve – especially on cost grounds! However we should push for enhancement.
- J Preston It is essential to translate good design into outcomes on the ground.
- S Howes Conservation Area Management was raised in the Survey; did Members present have a view, especially on issues such as resources, the BVPI, additional work as a result of the HPB? Conservation Area Management Plans will be statutory, which raises the question of capacity, which should be referred back to DCMS.
- I Ayris How effective are Conservation Area Management Plans? We need follow through on this.
- J Preston The wider scope of HPB – artistic & archaeological etc - is significant.
- R Tuffrey Referred back to Strategic Priorities: Historic Towns as sustainable communities & local distinctiveness – although some others will lead on aspects of this. EHTF needs novel approach.
- M Loveday Local distinctiveness is *vital* to what we do. EHTF is unique in bringing together a broad range of practitioners – we can deliver local distinctiveness.
- J Preston Endorse this but Harry Reeves (DCMS) will say (at the Conference) that there is no mention of conservation & local government in the Bill. EHTF should give this maximum profile.
- C Winter Representing EHTF on HEREC (Historic Environment Review Executive Committee) she is the only ‘voice’ of Local Authorities! There has been wide ranging consultation but not with LA officers.
- Unidentified speaker: Regarding the streetscene – both rural & town councils have concerns; streets are not ‘managed’ coherently; engineers need to be more involved.
- C Winter In both *Focus on the Public Realm* and *Manual for Historic Streets* EHTF advocates the appointment of a ‘streets person’ to oversee all activities.
- S O’Reilly Would support getting all practitioners together – IHBC + IHE + EHTF – at a conference on signs/signage; it is vital to engage with engineers.
- R Tuffrey There are sympathetic engineers; it’s getting to the unsympathetic ones that is the problem. Might include AXA (insurance – it’s all about risk etc)?
- M Loveday We need to aim at CXs & senior politicians – to get them on board as it needs to be driven from the top (e.g.: Kensington High Street).
- S Howes Updating Park & Ride guidance was supported by the Survey: the last edition was in 2000; this topic needs to be revisited as it may be the right solution for large towns, but is more difficult to assess for smaller places? It would be useful to focus on successful schemes in smaller places – e.g.: Salisbury & Winchester.
- A Clark Parking generally needs to be explored, i.e.: in the City centre; Park & Ride should be seen as part of an integrated parking strategy.
- Unidentified speaker There is also a debate to be had regarding sustainability; Park & Ride can be seen as reinforcing car use.
- AOB**
- J Preston Requested that a benchmarking questionnaire re capacity be circulated to delegates, which it was.
- S Howes With no other issues raised, SH thanked Members for their participation and closed the meeting.

Chris Winter
23 October 2008