

ENGLISH HERITAGE'S EUROPEAN HERITAGE SUMMIT: 27

APRIL 2006

- Like to thank Sir Neil Cossons and Simon Thurley for inviting me to be here today and, on behalf of the UK government, to welcome you to this prestigious event organised by English Heritage.
- This is a tremendous opportunity for Heritage Ministers and professionals from all over Europe to come together to consider the management and protection of the historic environment, how far the challenges we face are common across the European Union and whether shared solutions can be found. One thing is clear – that history really matters and we all have responsibility to make sure that our past has a future.
- These days, we think about heritage - or the historic environment - in much broader terms than we used to. Sir Neil has already spoken about re-defining the ideas of heritage – that it is not simply about places to visit - but something far greater. Something that has social significance and special

value for both today's communities and future generations and that can help us to shape the way national and international identities develop.

- All of us here will have very clear and possibly also personal ideas of what national heritage means. And the important thing is that this recognition of national heritage is a unifying force. It helps bind us together as citizens, give us a sense of place in history and a sense of belonging. It is something we can all share and is particularly important when viewed in the context of a multi-cultural and multi-national identity. This is what we are here to explore.
- Today, I am in the company of experts, and I am sure that we can all agree that governments and professional alike have a key role in articulating and developing a common understanding of our heritage.
- If I may be allowed for a moment to draw on an example close to home, to help determine what that means for England, recently my Department funded, as part of our Culture Online programme, the ICONS of England project. I

was amazed at the diverse places, cultural forms, concepts and ideas which people considered important. These ranged from the iconic and indisputable such as Stonehenge which we share with the World as a unique connection with our ancient forbears through to the British cup of tea.

- All of our nations will have their own icons which contribute to what we mean by heritage. What this event does is begin the process of helping us to identify what we share and have in common, what is special and unique and how we can learn from each other.
- We can see this in very tangible form through the work in which we are all involved with on World Heritage. Last year, as every year, across Europe we saw some of the most amazing places being inscribed as World Heritage Sites.
- I would like to draw attention to one such site - the Bridge of Mostar. The inscription of this unique site on the World Heritage list was not only right and recognised the outstanding universal value of this place, but was also a defining moment in history with the bridge acting as a

symbolic marker of re-unification - bringing together previously divided communities. The inscription of this important Site marks the beginning of a new chapter. This is the power of our heritage.

- There can be no doubt that people across Europe value, enjoy and wish to know more about their rich national heritage. I know, from the research that Simon Thurley undertook in his recent study tour, that there is much we have in common in terms of the way we currently protect and maintain the historic environment. We may have common goals but there is still much we can learn from each other.
- All of Europe has also taken part in the recent UNESCO World Heritage Periodic Reporting exercise. Over the coming months we will all no doubt be drawing on the lessons to be learnt from this work and again we can think about how we might want to work together to explore common themes and share experience. The network which is being created through participation in this event, will give us the chance to find new ways of working and expanding those which have begun.

- Again, drawing on examples from World Heritage, I fully support the recent trend towards inscription of ‘trans-national’ sites. Delighted that UK able to work with Germany to nominate German Limes [*pronounced Lee-mez*] to join with Hadrian’s Wall to form the first part of the cross European Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Site. There must be many more opportunities to work on these kind of nominations and in so doing demonstrate our shared history and heritage in tangible form.
- A further example of collaborative working - this time in a global context - is climate change. Last month, the UK funded and took a leading role in an expert meeting in Paris on the impact of climate change on World Heritage Sites.
- Over 50 experts from 16 countries across the world took part. The meeting brought together, for the first time, experts in environmental issues, climate change, natural and cultural heritage and representatives of all the key advisory bodies.

- The outcome of this successful event was agreement on a high level strategy which will be presented to the World Heritage Committee at its annual meeting in July this year. And the approach clearly demonstrates what can be achieved by working together.
- If I may be allowed to dwell on the UK for a moment, the importance of the built heritage, to experts and citizens alike, was strongly signalled in a sector wide review and public consultation on historic environment policy which resulted in the publication of ***Power of Place - The Future of the Historic Environment*** in 2000.
- In response, the Government published the policy statement ***A Force for Our Future*** which set out our vision for how over time the historic environment in the UK would contribute to the delivery of more attractive towns and cities, a prosperous and sustainable countryside, world class tourist attractions, new jobs and learning, vibrant and self confident communities.

- So this document not only made the case for the historic environment, in terms of our responsibility to protect and sustain it for future generations it was also a hard headed economic reasoning for why our Government should take the heritage seriously.
- And to do this we need to be sure that we have adequate protection for the heritage. In the UK we are committed to reform of the heritage protection system. This, of course, presents both a challenge and an opportunity - and again we will be looking across Europe for examples of what happens elsewhere to inform our thinking.
- In the UK we are proud of what we have already achieved to protect our heritage. But, almost inevitably, the heritage protection system we have today has built up piecemeal over time. The first legislation to protect ancient monuments was introduced over a century ago; the listing of buildings began following the destruction of the Second World War; while protection for our historic parks and gardens was introduced in the 1980s.

- This has led to a situation where the system can appear cumbersome and confusing to those who need to operate it. It can be difficult for property owners and managers, local authorities, and even for the heritage sector, to understand.
- So we are moving towards a system which no longer differentiates between buildings and architecture – and a more holistic approach to protecting our heritage. Our reforms are designed to achieve this by streamlining regulation where we can, and by introducing greater openness and flexibility to the system as a whole.
- We are taking forward our reforms in two ways - making changes within existing legislation to improve the system now and developing plans for longer-term and more fundamental reforms that will need new primary legislation.
- Our longer-term proposals involve fundamental change. There are three key areas where we think the current heritage protection system can be improved:

- On designation, we intend to unify the different systems of listing buildings; scheduling ancient monuments; and registering parks, gardens and battlefields into a single Register of Historic Sites and Buildings of England. This will help people to find out what is protected and why it is important, make designation decisions easier to understand, and help owners to manage historic properties more effectively. And for the first time in England it will mean that World Heritage Sites are included in the register.
- On consents, we want to introduce a single heritage consent, replacing scheduled monument consent and listed building consent. This will streamline the consent process, particularly for owners or managers who have to look after a range of historic assets.
- On management, we want to introduce a new option of Heritage Partnership Agreements, statutory management agreements that will enable a proactive approach to managing large historic sites and reduce bureaucratic burdens on owners and local authorities.

- Since July 2004, English Heritage have been running a series of pilots to test out our key proposals for change. We are awaiting a final evaluation of the pilots, but results so far are positive. We have also commissioned research to look at how our proposals might be delivered at local level.
- This Review represents the biggest change to heritage protection legislation in a generation. These are complex changes, and it is important to get them right. We hope to publish a White Paper in the autumn building on the English Heritage pilot projects, public consultation and our own research. We will be happy to share our thinking with you as our ideas develop and welcome the opportunity to learn from you.
- So there is much to do and much to discuss. The pressures on our common heritage and the response through our respective legislative frameworks and planning systems, management of heritage in a way local communities can understand and support – perhaps as a way of promoting European citizenship and a force to bring Europe closer together - and the positive management of change while

maintaining the integrity of our heritage, are all areas to explore.

- I am sure that there will be much lively and interesting debate over the next two days and I look forward to hearing about the outcome of your deliberations.