

Heritage Summit at Duddingston House – An Overview

A unique event took place on the 1st May at Duddingston House. Edinburgh's Heritage bodies and commercial development companies came together to discuss openly their concerns and aspirations for the city's future. For the first time in years the forum provided an opportunity for past differences to be set aside and a new spirit of co-operation to emerge.

The evenings proceedings were stimulated by presentations given by Ron Hewitt of the Chamber of Commerce, Malcolm Cooper, Chief Inspector of Historic Scotland and Dave Anderson recently appointed head of Edinburgh City Development.

Edinburgh's future prosperity will depend on its ability to compete on an international stage and to do this much will depend on its ability to strengthen and enhance one of its key assets – its natural beauty recognised through its status as a World Heritage Site. All agreed that a level of common understanding needs to be exhibited by Heritage bodies to ensure a clear message in approach is given to prospective investors.

Although various initiatives are being promoted by CEC through the Partnership Board for the City Centre it was generally recognised that to be effective the proposals had to have support from all parties at a strategic level - "upstream implementation!". It was agreed that while there seemed to be a general consensus on approach to heritage specific objectives from each organisation has often led to conflict between heritage custodians in the past. Differing objectives had all too often been played out in the public arena to the disbenefit of Edinburgh and had acted as a potential disincentive to prospective investors.

It was suggested that in future it will be important that all combine to give a clear, unified message to external investors which is both consistent and transparent at the consultation and implementation stage – the forum to provide such advice could be similar to Glasgow's Urban Design Review Panel under CEC direction but for major heritage related projects only.

To be effective any such forum should consider the following –

- What was of value? This could be undertaken through a statement of significance. This process should identify the absolute minimum standards and levels of intervention permissible in the built environment. (Malcolm Cooper made reference to this form of approach in the two mills case study)
- Consider how appropriate an architects competition would be to ensure the very best in design and jointly be involved in briefing stage and the eventual winning selection in conjunction with the proposer.
- Designs should be presented to the forum at pre-application stage to ensure full engagement by all with feedback recorded by CEC to proposers.

- Agree jointly the process to be adopted; timescales; identity of individuals from each organisation; form a project panel bringing representatives together from all sides to take each project forward.
- Additional funding to assist such an approach could come from proposers.

The above steps could form the next stage of discussion between heritage organisations as kindly suggested by Charles Mckean to discuss in advance the key issues and objectives coming out of the presentations and most importantly agree jointly on how to progress matters on a united front.

Overall the evening was seen by most as a good start - a good opportunity to continue - and probably most of all a real opportunity to change the way we currently approach heritage issues to the overall economic benefit of the city.

Thank you for your participation.

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