



The setting of heritage assets

A response by Civic Voice to English Heritage
October 2010

1. Civic Voice welcomes this opportunity to shape English Heritage's guidance on the setting of heritage assets. We are the new national charity for the civic movement. Civic Voice works to make the places where everyone lives more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive. We promote civic pride and we talk civic sense. Civic Voice speaks up for civic societies and local communities across England. We believe everyone has the right to live somewhere they can be proud of. We know how people feel about places because we feel the same way. Civic Voice has been joined by over 258 civic societies in its first six months, with over 68,000 members between them.

2. Civic Voice considers effective guidance on the conservation and improvement of the setting of heritage assets to be essential to our mission to help make places more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive for everyone. We welcome the draft guidance and make a number of suggestions to improve it. The primary need is to address questions of urban design and place making much more fully and consider the public realm as well as the significance of buildings. We also encourage an approach which is focused on implementation of national planning policy and the needs of those implementing the guidance rather than conservation professionals and the more esoteric English Heritage conservation principles.

3. Our comments address the main issues raised in the document:

Conformity with Government policy and guidance

4. The guidance appears quite narrowly drawn and relates largely to PPS5 on the historic environment. As a result it fails to address wider issues of key importance for the historic environment, notably on urban design in PPS1, and wider questions of design and the quality of development. This is of fundamental importance when defining significance or considering issues around the setting of historic buildings and places.

5. The style and vocabulary used in the draft guidance appears aimed at conservation professionals and is less suitable for the development managers, developers and built environment professionals who will be responsible for implementation or for the communities affected. We would encourage a more practical focus.

Use of English Heritage Conservation principles

6. We do not find it helpful that the draft guidance relates more to English Heritage's own conservation principles than the Government's spatial planning policy and urge

much closer consideration of PPS1 and PPS5 in particular. We do not find the conservation principles helpful outside a small group of conservation experts.

7. The conservation principles would need substantial rewriting into a more suitable language and approach if they are to integrate well with spatial planning – moving beyond being an almost academic discussion of conservation to become a practical tool for development management, place making and policy development.

Breadth of application

8. We recognise the challenge of producing guidance that will cover the full range of circumstances but urge that more consideration is given to questions of urban design which are of fundamental importance in considering setting.

9. The guidance makes no mention of urban design, the Government's policy on design or of design terminology (from *By Design* and other guidance documents) such as enclosure and continuity, definition of streets and spaces, active frontages, quality of the public realm, movement and activity etc. It is essential that the guidance appreciates that considerations of setting are often about good place-making practice.

10. We are also keen to see the final guidance address the economic impact that development within the setting of historic buildings and places can have. Development within the setting can affect and even compromise the potential for reusing historic buildings. This is a serious issue for the guidance to address.

Assessment framework

11. We are concerned by the limited approach to urban design beyond "views" despite their importance to consideration of setting.

Cumulative impact

12. We share concerns about the cumulative impact of change whilst recognising that historic buildings and places are in a constant state of flux and much change can be beneficial. We support the use of local designations, policy and guidance to help address cumulative impacts.

13. We hope this is helpful and should be happy to contribute to further discussions.