

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy

Response from Adfer Ban a Chwm

Dear Committee Clerk,

Adfer Ban a Chwm (ABC) is a Building Preservation Trust whose aim is to restore derelict vernacular buildings in rural Wales, with a subsidiary purpose of providing affordable housing in the first instance, or some other community use should this be more appropriate.

I am responding to the **first 3 consultation questions** as one. It is absolutely critical that included in the definition of 'historic environment' are the traditional historic rural buildings that fall through the gaps because they are not protected by listing, and are not given any access to funding for repair and conservation. These are the disused/derelict vernacular stone buildings that are scattered throughout the rural landscape (in one area alone in western Carmarthenshire, within a radius of 5 miles, we have mapped 35 such buildings) and represent the heart and soul of rural Wales: the farming community, its heritage, culture, history, stories and the traditional building skills that grew out of them. As these structures are not listed, and because a huge proportion of them lie within the National Park where planning is more restrictive, they are being allowed to fall into serious dereliction. Once they become little more than a pile of stones, they will be lost forever and will take with them all the intrinsic values and embodied energy that they represent. Time is running out...

So the answer to these first 3 questions is no, the WG is not protecting, managing or promoting this aspect of the historic environment, nor do the policies tie in with regeneration of communities: these buildings are the perfect tool for regeneration. The WG needs first of all to acknowledge the importance of these buildings and secondly to provide a system which encourages, by means of positive enabling and appropriate grant aid, these structures to be brought back into community use – to benefit the community in perpetuity, and to celebrate their roots and what they continue to represent – the traditions and heritage of rural Wales. This is the opportunity to save these significant and valuable assets and to recognise that Wales will be a much poorer nation without the regeneration of these important buildings. In the case of former dwellings, whether isolated houses or farmsteads, we believe the opportunity should be taken, where at all possible, to allow them to be used as affordable housing for local people.

In response to **question 4**, the pros and cons of merging of the functions of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales with CADW and others, ABC is concerned about the high cost and low savings of the merger and about the protection of the National Collection. But overall, we agree with the recommended option as spelt out in the Operating Models Analysis for Services Provided.

In response to the **question 5**, where do the National Parks fit into this role? A huge proportion of the historic environment is held within the boundaries and under the auspices of the National Parks. Should not the local authorities, the National Parks and all relevant 3rd sector organisations be working together on implementation of this policy? This is not happening.

Yours, Joanie Speers

Joanie Speers, founder/director, ABC