

Council for culture conference
Challenges and opportunities in the 21st century
28 November 2009

Heritage group workshop: summary report
-Stephen Harrison (Chair of the Workshop sessions)

The workshop discussions were in two parts with the first session in the morning followed by a "conclusions" session in the afternoon.

Approximately 40 people attended representing the majority of heritage, language and landscape interest groups in Jersey. The Minister participated in the first session, and the Assistant Minister was present for the second session.

Clear focus was provided for the workshop by the Department's stated wish to develop a new Governmental policy and plan for the Island's cultural heritage.

The Chairman provided a list of discussion questions which workshop members agreed were particularly relevant to debate in the light of the Department's new initiative in this area.

The questions were as follows:

1. What is the public perception of the "heritage community"?
2. What is the political perception?
3. What do you think is done well and not so well?
4. What should be given greater/lesser emphasis?
5. Is heritage promoted strongly enough by government - educationally? – for tourism?
6. Do you think there is a heritage "champion" in government?
7. Could you present a list of your six priorities for more government assistance?
8. Are there areas where you think it would be helpful to work in partnership projects with other heritage organizations?
9. Is there any possibility of reaching a consensus across all organizations of the 20 main issues which we would like to see in the new government policy for heritage and culture?
10. Would you be willing to participate in further discussions like this to establish a common agenda over the next few months?

The points made in relation to each of these questions were:

What is the public perception of the “heritage community”?

- Most people felt that the public perception of the work undertaken by the various heritage organizations was high.
- However, it was agreed that the picture for many was fractured by a lack of co-ordination and co-operation between the various groups and societies.

What is the political perception?

- There was a general, if reluctant, agreement that the political perception of the heritage community was one that was important for the community, but that attempting to lead the cultural heritage agenda was seen as a troublesome issue with heavy cost implications.
- It was suggested that the fragmented nature of the various groups led to a political perception that the community as a whole might not be receiving “best value for money” in some areas of the Government investment
- However, others felt that there was a miss-match between what the Government has publicly stated in relation to the value of heritage, and the money made available through the Department to support it.
- There was general agreement from all sides that a new “vision” and practical Government co-ordinated plan for heritage would be a helpful new initiative.
- The separate considerations of “Arts” and “Heritage”, was seen as a necessary process initially in order to provide a clear focus in each area, but ultimately, the synergy benefits of a union of the two areas for the community were seen as important for the future.

What do you think is done well and not so well?

- Each group represented felt that their contributions were important, but that their effectiveness was restricted by lack of available funding
- It was also recognized that effectiveness in progressing the heritage agenda was hampered by the lack of any expressed cohesive view from the sector.
- It was generally felt that the “historic landscape” of Jersey was a prime community asset (as revealed by the recent States of Jersey Statistics Unit survey on Heritage) and one of the most strongly valued aspects by the public

- However, it was agreed that the implications of this were not adequately reflected in the priorities and programmes of the work of the various heritage groups
- It was recognized that the quality of the work of the various individuals and groups was high, but that more could be achieved by greater co-operation and planning.

What should be given greater/lesser emphasis?

- Again, emphasis was suggested for greater working together in accordance with a new Government level plan for the Island's heritage
- Several representatives indicated a dissatisfaction with previous meetings and discussions about the heritage agenda, and that now was the time for action
- Several speakers felt that access to adequate project funding was very difficult for people who were not formally part of a particular organization
- for example, contemporary documentary film-makers.
- There was a perceived lack of pooled-funding which could be generally accessed
- It was recognized that the previously published Cultural Strategy was not proving as effective as had been hoped, partly due to the fact that it lacked clearly defined funding and strategic priorities.

Is heritage promoted strongly enough by government
- Educationally? – for Tourism?

- It was generally agreed that a stronger definition of leadership of the cultural heritage sector from Government would be appreciated.
- It was felt that not enough credit and value had been attributed by Government to the contribution made by heritage to the Government's education and tourism agendas.
- The lack of a cultural-heritage tourism strategy was seen as a lost opportunity for added value from the sector.
- It was felt that there could be more co-ordination between different Government Departments in relation to an holistic heritage agenda.

Do you think there is a heritage "champion" in government?

- There were mixed feelings in relation to this.
- Whereas people recognized the conduit of support through the Department of Education Sport and Culture, there was a strong perception of a lack of political

leadership of the cultural-heritage agenda

- It was felt that the political appreciation of the sector was much less than the public appreciation of the sector.

Could you present a list of your six priorities for more government assistance?

- Most representatives seemed to accept that while they were pursuing clear objectives within their own organizations and societies, these objectives had not yet been made sufficiently clear to Government.
- There was a general willingness to try and provide a clearer picture of the perceived priorities to assist the new Government plan
- Assistance was requested in developing a clear format for submitting these priorities in a way which could subsequently be co-ordinated and prioritized within the wider plan for cultural heritage.

Are there areas where you think it would be helpful to work in partnership projects with other heritage organizations?

- All those present agreed that there were areas of work where greater co-operation and joint working would be helpful.

Is there any possibility of reaching a consensus across all organizations of the 20 main issues which we would like to see in the new government policy for heritage and culture?

- While accepting that this would be a new way of approaching the sector's requirements, and recognizing that making contributions to the creation of a co-ordinated Governmental level plan would be as new experience and process for many, it was generally felt that clear and co-ordinated priorities could and should emerge from such an exercise.
- The goal of "a unified voice" for the sector was seen as being achievable, but with a recognition that the individual identities, integrity and independence of the various organizations should be preserved.

Would you be willing to participate in further discussions like this to establish a common agenda over the next few months?

- There was a general enthusiasm to be involved with the new initiative by the Department to formulate a new plan based on discussions to establish a prioritized agenda.
- People felt encouraged and appreciative of the Minister's and Assistant Minister's presence at the workshop.
- Where it would be linked to the clear momentum of progressing such a plan, there was a general enthusiasm to take part in further such meetings.

- However, there was also a strong feeling from many that previous meetings were not perceived to have resulted in actions and progress of any consequence and there was a reluctance to be involved in further meetings which might not have as clear a focus as this particular workshop.