



The home of the conservation professional

HTF IHBC Conservation Practice survey 2016: Summary

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Summary

A joint survey between the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) and Historic Towns Forum (HTF) into current issues in Conservation Practice from January to February 2016 elicited responses from 103 people from a wide range of backgrounds and professional areas.¹ A series of statements were given and respondents were asked to say how much they agreed with the statement.

The respondents agreed very strongly with statements such as;

- Managing and enabling appropriate change is fundamental to conservation practice.
- Heritage protection requires an understanding of traditional building construction
- Professional conservation practice is about reconciling 'significance' or special architectural interest' with using and adapting heritage buildings and places
- Heritage has social and economic value in addition to cultural value.

In general most statements suggested were agreed with by respondents. The only one generating any major disagreement was 'Historic environment legislation and procedures can be an impediment to growth'.

The other statement that generated a degree of disagreement was 'Heritage conservation is mainly about understanding significance'.

The key current challenges and issues in conservation practice identified by respondents were:

Practice

- Shortage of professional skills and capacity in local government.
- Lack of technical and craft skills in the construction sector
- Lack of political support and understanding in local government
- Inflexible application of health, highways, building and other legislation and standards.

Values

- Misconceptions that heritage is a barrier to growth.
- Vagueness of the term 'harm' in the NPPF in England
- Differing legal interpretations of the term 'significance' in policy, guidance & practice

Funding and Economics

- Lack of mainstream funding for heritage projects.
- Limited heritage specialist funding for projects.

¹ <http://ihbconline.co.uk/newsarchive/?p=11886>

1. Survey Participation

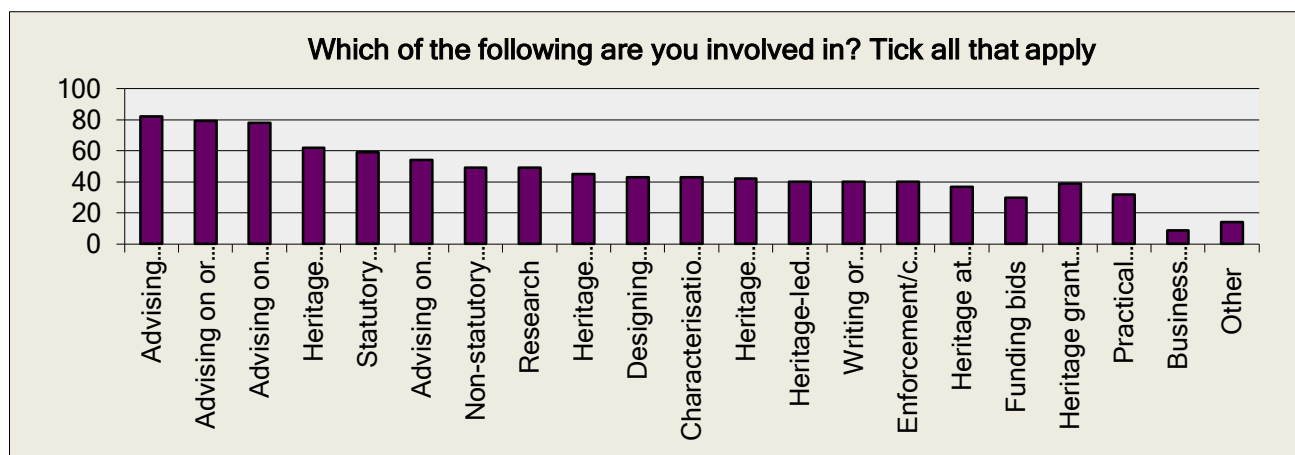
A joint survey between the IHBC and the Historic Towns Forum sought to elicit views on conservation practice today, and how it fits in with wider planning, place-making and management of the built environment.

Responses were collected for a month in January – February 2016 and 103 people across responded to the survey which was publicized by HTF and through the IHBC NewsBlog. The majority of respondents came from the IHBC with over 96% being IHBC members and 3.66% from HTF member bodies.

The responses were from 103 people across the spectrum of conservation and heritage practitioners. The respondents came from a variety of professional areas and many, as might be expected, had more than one area of activity. Most were conservation and planning professionals. Those who chose the other category included an interesting mix of other areas such as archives, Town council, Materials analysis, architectural writer, stone masonry & Building management.

What is your Professional Discipline?	
Conservation	86
Planning	52
Architecture	19
History	21
Urban design	21
Building Construction	18
Archaeology	17
Regeneration	15
Surveying	12
Professional or craft skills teaching	9
Historic Landscapes	7
Engineering	3
Other	9

The survey aimed to establish current views about conservation in practice in the UK. Gathering this evidence will help with responses to practitioners' concerns, including with future training events, research notes and strategic career and CPD support as well as wider advocacy.



Other areas of work identified were

Impact assessment and historic building recording
Working with artists as part of heritage led regeneration schemes
Historic Building Condition Surveys & Single Defect Assessments
Heritage management within agri-environment schemes
Policy
Condition surveys, Single Defect Analysis, Damp issues
Conservation theory, academic lecturing and engagement with a wider public through writing.
Stone restoration and stonemasonry
Training, education etc

2. Identifying the issues

A series of statements were given and respondents were asked to say how much they agreed with the statement

In general all statements suggested were agreed with by respondents

The only one generating any major disagreement was "Historic environment legislation and procedures can be an impediment to growth".

The other statement which generated a larger degree of disagreement was "Heritage conservation is mainly about understanding significance".

The tables below show the responses and are colour coded with the highest number of responses in the darkest colours progressing down to lighter colours.

Practice - How much do you agree with the following statements?					
	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure /neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Conservation is a creative activity.	52	35	8	4	0
Historic areas can often be a focus for creative industries and small enterprises.	48	44	5	3	0
Managing and enabling appropriate change is fundamental to conservation practice.	74	22	3	0	0
Heritage helps cities, towns and rural settlements to regenerate.	62	31	5	0	0
Historic areas and buildings have a key role in helping places to adapt to modern needs.	52	35	11	1	0
Heritage protection requires a good knowledge of planning law and policy.	63	30	4	1	0
Heritage protection requires an understanding of traditional building construction	69	25	4	0	0
The heritage professional must consider conservation against a wide social, economic & environmental context.	59	28	11	0	0
Refusal of poorly considered proposals for change can be a positive to maintain good standards	66	26	4	1	1

Values - How much do you agree with the following statements?					
	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure / Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Good practice (and legislation) recognizes the presumption in favour of preservation	28	45	17	5	1
Professional conservation practice is about reconciling 'significance' or special architectural interest' with using and adapting heritage buildings and places	52	40	4	0	0
Heritage conservation is mainly about understanding significance	13	40	25	20	0
Professional practice in conservation work is about reconciling a wide range of competing factors ie understanding significance is only the starting point.	40	41	12	5	0
Professional practice is about reconciling significance with a wide range of requirements under other regulatory regimes	31	48	17	2	0

Funding & Economics - How much do you agree with the following statements?					
Answer Options	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure / neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
A good understanding of development economics is important to conservation practice.	12	53	26	3	0
Conservation area renewal can be a powerful economic driver	37	47	10	1	0
Heritage can deliver more inclusive kinds of growth.	21	38	31	3	0
Historic environment legislation and procedures can be an impediment to growth	1	17	33	34	8
Heritage has social and economic value in addition to cultural value.	54	37	3	0	0
Heritage-led enabling development must be carefully managed to deliver the appropriate conservation benefits	51	44	0	0	0
Quality of environment is closely aligned to quality of life.	53	38	3	0	0
Quality of environment is closely related to an area's ability to attract investment.	34	41	14	5	1

3. Current challenges for conservation

The principal challenges and issues identified (those which over 50 respondents agreed to be an issue) were:

Practice

- Shortage of professional skills and capacity in local government.
- Lack of technical and craft skills in the construction sector
- Lack of political support and understanding in local government
- Inflexible application of health, highways, building and other legislation and standards.

Values

- Misconceptions that heritage is a barrier to growth.
- Vagueness of the term 'harm' in the NPPF in England
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Funding and Economics

- Lack of mainstream funding for heritage projects.
- Limited heritage specialist funding for projects.

Practice - What are the current issues and challenges relating to conservation professional practice?	
	Responses
Shortage of professional skills and capacity in local government.	84
Lack of technical and craft skills in the construction sector	69
Lack of political support and understanding in local government	66
Inflexible application of health, highways, building and other legislation and standards.	53
Adapting to climate change	45
Insufficient understanding of development economics in the public and third sectors	37
Lack of environmental awareness and education especially among younger age groups	36
Confusing terminology in the NPPF compared to heritage protection (planning) legislation in England	35
Shortage of professional skills and capacity in private practice.	34
Shortage of professional skills and capacity in the community (third) sector.	31
Insufficient scope for capacity building in the third sector	25

Values - What are the current issues and challenges relating to conservation professional practice?	
	Responses
Misconceptions that heritage is a barrier to growth.	71
Vagueness of the term 'harm' in the NPPF in England	54
Differing legal interpretations of the term 'significance' in policy, guidance & practice	51
Disparity of language between legislation and guidance (for example Acts of Parliament v. NPPF)	49
Narrow focus of some heritage bodies on 'significance'.	34
Lack of case law on e.g. "urgent and temporary"; "partially occupied" etc.	21

Funding & Economics - What are the current issues and challenges relating to conservation professional practice?	
	Responses
Lack of mainstream funding for heritage projects.	66
Limited heritage specialist funding for projects.	56
Complexity and bureaucracy of grant applications for third sector applicants	49
Weak land/property economies (viability issues).	37
Weakness of revolving-fund trusts to deliver on Heritage at Risk	35
Lack of economic and business planning skills.	34