

Heritage and Future Cities
Farrell Review of Architecture and the Built Environment
September 2014

Introduction

The Farrell Review of Architecture and the Built Environment, commissioned by Ed Vaizey for DCMS, was authored by Sir Terry Farrell with the support of panel. The review did extensive consultation and released its report earlier this year. Intended as a guide for future activity and policy across the sector, Ed Vaizey and Sir Terry Farrell have asked a number of panel members and others to prepare papers covering specific topics covered in the Review. Hank Dittmar has agreed to prepare a paper outlining actions steps to take forward the Reviews Findings and Recommendations in the area of Heritage and Future Cities and is engaging with others to identify next steps.

Findings and Recommendations

One of the major watershed moments in the panel's discussion came with the realisation that after many years, the old distinction between heritage and modernity had broken down. For many architects, the realisation that the buildings of the modern movement(s) up to and including high tech architecture by practicing architects were now considered heritage, brought home the realisation that there is a continuity and not a severance between the past, present and future. The group realised that for present generations, the division between tradition and modernity was no longer meaningful, and the idea of a dead past and a current zeitgeist held no allure for a generation for whom both are valid..

At the same time, contributions from English Heritage and others broaden the scope of heritage consideration from important buildings to the broader context of neighbourhoods, towns and cities, and stressed the importance of place making, urban design and context. The NPPF broadened heritage considerations to address wider social impact and heightened the importance of quality design in planning.

The Farrell Review thus called for a closer relationship between English Heritage and the new process called PLACE Review, which is proposed to replace design review, both in planning for new building and growth, and in the designation of local heritage areas and conservation areas. PLACE Review will bring together all of the disciplines engaged in making towns and cities around the common goal of using design to make great places. It also proposed a greater engagement of the public in designation, particularly those of local importance, both to elicit valuable input and to attract greater support for heritage assets.

This idea has already caught fire with many, with Design Council CABI announcing they will do PLACE Review and many other design review panels considering the idea. PLACE Review would not supplant existing heritage processes, but it would ensure that issues of urban design, context and setting are considered alongside other design considerations.

The Review also noted that new buildings need to be considered as our future heritage, and built for the long term, and that existing buildings (the vast majority of which will remain in place for the foreseeable future) should be retained and retrofit. The idea of building and repairing for long life, loose fit and low energy should be applied both to new build and retrofit, and the current VAT disincentive for retrofit should be removed.

Next Steps

The country is in the midst of a great debate about the need to provide new housing at affordable prices and accommodate growth. Current projections for housebuilding don't come close to meeting the demand, and there are proposals to build at greater density in existing cities and add even more towers to London, to build stand alone new garden cities and towns and to expand existing towns and cities. These proposals all impact heritage in some way, whether it is the setting of World Heritage Sites like the Palace of Westminster, or the Tower of London, treasured landscapes, or the setting of Cathedral cities and historic towns. How to balance among these competing interests and how to build in a way that enhances rather than undermines heritage assets and townscapes is both a planning and design issue and the better integration of English Heritage with PLACE Reviews and with planning is part of the answer.

The Kenwood House Dialogue about protecting Cathedral cities and historic towns is an important input for the Farrell Review and it is hoped that some joint activities can be identified, as is the concomitant understanding that protection in one place must mean accommodation of growth in another.

English Heritage has proposed a series of actions which might address the challenges of insensitive growth in Cathedral Cities and historic towns. A number of these might offer an opportunity for implementation of Farrell Review recommendations. In particular, there is the proposal to identify a number of places that are clearly heavily impacted by growth that represent vital heritage assets and target them for concerted assistance. One way to do this might be through bringing PLACE Reviews plus Heritage to bear at a scale which allows a look at both the threats from development and the opportunities for more sensitively placed growth. There was also a proposal to single out worthy towns for special acclaim and others for approbation, and a proposal to produce a report on the threat. This might feature the Farrell Review recommendations as next steps

The institution of the "New Model" for English Heritage/Historic England offers another opportunity to better integrate planning and heritage and to embrace the new realisation that heritage is a living thing, and as much about continuity and context as about preserving individual buildings. The mission, duties and activities of the new Historic England ought to embrace these challenges without retaining a grip on the core duties of the organisation's history.

The Heritage and Future Cities paper is being prepared in September, and it will provide a framework for follow up activities throughout the autumn and beyond. Immediate next steps will involve meeting with English Heritage's Simon Thurley and Chris Smith to discuss how the Farrell Review findings can inform the frame of reference for Historic England, and with Simon Murray of the National Trust, who expressed interest in pilot projects that carried forward the findings of the Farrell Review in places where they are hoping to create 'Future Heritage.'

Vitaly, though, if there is to be a targeted effort to address the ongoing threat to Cathedral Cities and historic towns from insensitively planned growth, the idea of Place Review Plus Heritage could become a key part of the tool kit, both in helping to address the broader issue of where growth should go, and to address the protection of heritage assets and setting. English Heritage's Simon Thurley expressed his support for the idea, and if Minister of Culture Ed Vaizey were to agree that these might serve as useful pilot projects, then this part of the Review would be demonstrated..

Hank Dittmar