

HE 17

Y Pwyllgor Cymunedau, Cydraddoldeb a Llywodraeth Leol

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Bil yr Amgylchedd Hanesyddol (Cymru)/Historic Environment (Wales) Bill

Ymateb gan: Adfer Ban a Chwm

Response from: Adfer Ban a Chwm

Adfer Ban a Chwm [ABC] is a buildings preservation trust whose aim is to re-instate derelict and redundant vernacular buildings to provide affordable homes for local people in rural Wales. Our focus is on buildings that usually have no statutory protection, but nevertheless play a fundamental part in defining the character of the rural Welsh landscape.

The Historic Environment Bill (May 2015) recognises the contribution made to the nation's economy by the historic environment, and its role as a catalyst for regeneration in both urban and rural areas. The built historic environment is attractive to visitors and underpins much of the revenue generated by the tourism industry in Wales. Historic buildings are identified as providing foci for regeneration projects, which increase community confidence and attract inward investment, stimulating development and economic growth.

Our traditional buildings contribute substantially to the character of Wales' unique and cherished historic landscapes. The Bill identifies the imprint of the historic environment on our national culture and identity, and stresses the contribution this makes to local distinctiveness and community pride, people's sense of place and belonging, and ultimately the well-being of the people of Wales.

Adfer Ban a Chwm feels it is important to recognise the contribution made to this by our domestic traditional buildings which are not protected by statute (ie. those which are neither listed nor scheduled). Many are still occupied, many have been abandoned, but they account for a large proportion of our built heritage. Careless or unwitting damage occurs more often to buildings with no statutory protection that have survived for generations, and even small changes which erode original fabric will eventually cause the loss of some, and the decline of others. The overall effect will be incremental but if left unchecked will eventually have an enormous impact on the historic landscapes of Wales.

Aside from the impact on the historic environment, the wider environmental benefits that appropriate care of traditional buildings could bring have only just begun to emerge from ongoing research. More research will ensure that the innate advantages of traditional construction are fully explored and understood. The rapid changes in 21st century Wales are noted as reason for careful and 'sustainable' management of the historic environment in order to retain its special qualities. The term 'sustainability' has wide appeal, but in Wales this has particular importance as we have the highest proportion of existing housing stock made up of traditional buildings in Britain, and much of Europe. Improving energy efficiency in our existing housing cannot rely on a single strategy, but it is becoming increasingly clear that traditional buildings perform much better environmentally when well-maintained using appropriate materials and techniques. This makes 'best practice' and the approaches used for listed buildings relevant to many more buildings in Wales than currently have direct access to guidance on the subject.

The memorandum attached to the Bill notes the educational opportunities associated with the historic environment, and these opportunities are clear in relation to traditional buildings. They offer chances to learn from the past, and to develop skills for the future. Disregarding the role our un-listed traditional buildings could play in this would be an opportunity missed. Training enough people with appropriate skills to ensure that our traditional building stock is properly maintained will bring social, environmental and economic benefits, allowing the potential locked up in our un-listed traditional buildings to be fully recognized and acted on in order to create opportunities within Wales.

Encouraging appropriate treatment through education, greater public understanding of and engagement with our un-listed traditional buildings would ultimately give more effective protection to listed buildings as well. This would have a major impact on the number and quality of traditional buildings which survive into the future, and serve to enhance the effectiveness of existing mechanisms for the sustainable management of the built historic environment.

ABC would like to see greater emphasis on educating the public about traditional buildings, and encouraging best practice. These buildings (grass-roots heritage) could make a huge contribution to the strong focus on promoting community and identity, and opportunities for learning within the intended outcomes of the Bill.

We also ask that the independent advisory panel to be established on historic environment policy and strategy at a national level in Wales includes representation for un-listed traditional buildings, so that their crucial role within the historic environment is recognized and adequately reflected.

Thank you very much.