

HE 51

Y Pwyllgor Cymunedau, Cydraddoldeb a Llywodraeth Leol

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

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

Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas Gŵyr

Response from: The Gower Society



THE GOWER SOCIETY

Reg. Charity No. 258372

Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism  
Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

16<sup>th</sup> June 2015

Dear Sir

### **The Historic Environment (Wales) Bill 2015 Response by the Gower Society**

In my capacity as Chairman of the Gower Society, following consultation with my committee, I make the following comments on the proposed Bill. The Society, which has a current membership of circa 800, is grateful for the opportunity to comment. The Gower Society's constitution was adopted in 1956. In the document the key aims of the Society are:

- a. to encourage an appreciation and love of Gower.
- b. to preserve its character and antiquities, and to oppose any threat to its amenities.
- c. to safeguard rights of way and open spaces, and to ensure public access to its coast.
- d. to further the study of its antiquities and history.
- e. to record its features.
- f. To promote an environmentally friendly, sustainable rural economy.
- g. To co-operate with other charitable organisations whose aims are similar.

You will note from the above aims (b and d) that the Gower Society considers that the understanding and protection of the historic environment of Gower is fundamentally important to the well being of our area both for today and in the future. The Society has an excellent track record in supporting and promoting the understanding and protection of the historic environment of Gower and will continue to support all measures that achieve these aims.

In general the Gower Society welcomes the proposed new legislation, which reinforces and expands on the statutory measures currently in place and lays the foundation for further Government requirements. In many ways the problems of enforcing the protection of our historic assets was highlighted by the case of the damage recently carried out to Offa's Dyke in North Wales. However, we have been aware of previous damage to ancient monuments, which has not been acted on by the relevant conservation authorities or law enforcement, and which would, had conviction for wilful damage been achieved, have set example and precedent to others who may be considering impacting adversely on our fragile and non-renewable ancient monuments.

### **The Value of the Historic Environment to Wales**

We note that research has shown that the historic environment supports over 30,000 jobs and adds around £840 million to Wales' Gross Value Added. We

also note that the historic environment and historic attractions account for one-fifth of total tourism expenditure in Wales.

These are clearly important statistics particularly for an area like Gower which annually sees a huge influx of visitors and tourists. We believe that these figures are important indicators of the value of a well protected and accessible historic environment and that these should be better known in Wales. Indeed we consider that this demonstrated value of the historic environment should receive greater weight in determining planning applications than is currently afforded.

#### **Scheduled Ancient Monuments; Part 2, Sections 2-17**

The Gower Society fully supports the sections of the proposed Bill which will make it significantly harder for those who have damaged scheduled ancient monuments to claim that they were unaware of the statutory status or location of a nationally important monument. We note that there were 119 cases of damage to scheduled ancient monuments between 2006 and 2012, on average 20 cases per annum, only one of which was successfully prosecuted. We trust that the new Bill with sufficient resourcing for Cadw will see a reverse of these appalling statistics in future.

We also note that the new Bill will empower Welsh Ministers to take immediate and effective action if a scheduled ancient monument is threatened and will also oblige owners who have damaged ancient monuments to undertake repairs at their cost. Again, we support these new measures.

#### **Listed Buildings; Part 3, Sections 23-32.**

The Society notes and welcomes the intended provisions with regard to the statutory protection of listed buildings, such as the enablement for authorities to act more quickly to prevent threat to listed buildings. Too often we hear of buildings being lost because authorities were unable to act with due speed. The provisions in the Bill which prevent historic buildings from falling into disrepair by allowing local authorities to take action to halt decay and provide them with the means of recovering costs of any urgent works, is also fully supported by the Gower Society.

We also support the new provisions that make it easier for owners or developers to create sustainable new uses for historic buildings and also to allow owners of historic assets to negotiate Heritage Partnership Agreements (Sections 11 and 28), which, as long-term management plans, will eliminate the need for repeated consent applications for similar works. Clearly, however, appropriate resourcing and monitoring arrangements by professional staff need to be in place.

#### **The Historic Environment Records of Wales; Part 4, Sections 33-36.**

The Gower Society notes and welcomes the proposed changes relating to the Historic Environment Records (HERs), which are maintained regionally by the four Welsh Archaeological Trusts. These records, which are accessible to all those empowered with the protection of Wales' historic environment, to developers which seek early information and advice on their proposals, to planners who need to consider these development proposals and to researchers and the general public, are of fundamental importance. The Bill

will require local authorities to create and maintain HERs though we expect and recommend that most authorities will rely on and improve the existing arrangements with the professional staff of the Welsh Archaeological Trusts.

**Registered Parks and Gardens; Part 2, Section 18.**

We note the intention to create a statutory register of Wales' historic parks and gardens, The Gower Society supports this proposal.

**Establishment of an advisory panel for the Welsh historic environment; Part 4, Sections 37-38.**

The Gower Society supports in principle the creation of this independent advisory panel, though it is not clear to us how this body will integrate with the existing Historic Environment Group (HEG) or whether representation by regional conservation bodies such as the Gower Society is anticipated.

**Resources**

In summary, the Gower Society welcomes and supports the provisions of new Bill, which should meet the Welsh Government's aims to "improve the management of our historic environment making it clear, effective and flexible, enabling us to protect our past for the Wales of tomorrow".

These are clearly important aims and improvements. However, and particularly in view of the established value of the historic environment to the economy of Wales, quoted above, our main concern is that these required changes may ultimately fail if commensurate resources are not made available to the organisations empowered to protect our historic environment and cultural heritage. Local Authorities, Cadw, the Welsh Archaeological Trusts, etc must be placed on sound resourcing foundations if they are, through joined-up thinking and working in unison, to be able to deliver on the important provisions of the new Bill. We trust that this funding issue will not be overlooked.

Yours faithfully

A. R. King