Mainstreaming conservation issues in Northern Ireland was the focus of the recent visit and reception there by the council of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC). The IHBC, the UK’s professional body for conservation specialists, set conservation at the heart of intensive discussions that took place over nearly three days. It hosted private dinners with senior figures in government and the civil service, including Northern Ireland’s First Minister Peter Robinson MP MLA, and Minister of the Environment Sammy Wilson MP MLA. The IHBC also held a one day conference on ‘Conserving Northern Ireland’s Historic Places’, at which Cynthia Smith, Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Planning Service, provided the keynote presentation.

More than 80 guests were greeted at the reception closing the IHBC’s 10th anniversary celebrations, which took place at the distinguished and historic government residence, Hillsborough Castle, Co Down. Eddie Booth, newly elected IHBC President, introduced the evening, and guests enjoyed a welcoming speech from Minister Sammy Wilson as he highlighted the many benefits arising from conserving historic places and their proper care. IHBC President Mr Booth reported that he was ‘delighted by the warm welcome, and the enthusiastic appreciation of the IHBC’s experienced officers and volunteers’. Dave Chetwyn, IHBC Chairman, said ‘Setting out our conservation philosophy in such a sympathetic environment was very exciting and very timely. Decentralising planning to local authorities will bring many opportunities, but will also raise challenges. Local decision makers will need access to a range of skills to manage the conservation of historic places for the benefit and the quality of life of citizens, visitors, and future generations. The IHBC is the professional body that can best help & advise on historic environment conservation.’

Sharon Brown, event organiser and IHBC Council member for Northern Ireland, endorsed the event’s importance, as ‘seminar delegates especially appreciated the wide-ranging yet practical demonstrations of conservation issues by visiting council members, as well as Cynthia Smith’s holistic review of the planning issues, which are so central to conservation here’. Sharon also identified critical issues for conservation in Northern Ireland’s historic places, including minimising the loss of historic buildings and fabric and ensuring that new development fits within historic settings.

References: The IHBC is the UK’s professional body for historic environment conservation specialists see: www.ihbc.org.uk
Queries: Seán O'Reilly: (0131) 5583671; director@ihbc.org.uk
Sharon Brown: (028) 97542323; northernireland@ihbc.org.uk