

Good morning everyone. Malcolm has asked me to come and speak to you today about Heritage Link. Well I cannot think of anything more boring for you than having to listen to me tell you what a wonderful organisation it is. So instead of detailing Heritage Link's many undoubted merits, I am going to do the opposite – by playing devil's advocate and asking 'who in heaven's name needs yet another heritage umbrella body?'

I mean, don't we already have enough? At a rough guess our sector already has around a hundred umbrella groups or national heritage bodies. We've got HEF and the Joint Committee, the IFA and IHBC, SCAUM and ALGAO.

We've got umbrella groups for archives and historic libraries, for farm buildings, milestones and seaside piers, for parsonages and church organs, for factories, fortresses and floating heritage, for canals and railways, for historic tools and trades, for parks and gardens and even for subterranean heritage – everything from caves to nuclear bunkers and missile silos.

We have even got organisations that serve as umbrellas of umbrellas, like the CBA, which George Lambrick, the Director, likes to say embraces 'the buried, the built, the terrestrial and the marine' – that does leave out the celestial, of course ... but I am sure that George is working on that.

Above all these umbrella bodies, at the pinnacle of the umbrella-group pyramid, we have the Historic Environment Strategic Review Group. Some of you might recognise this better by its old name, the Power of Place Steering Group.

This group consists of the Chairs and Chief Executives of all the bodies that impact the historic environment, including

- government departments, such as DCMS,
- government agencies, such as English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund,
- large conservation charities, such as the National Trust and the Civic Trust
- and organisations that wouldn't call themselves heritage bodies but that are major stakeholders in the historic environment – like VisitBritain, the Church of England, and the British Property Federation and NFU.

Chaired by Sir Neil Cossons, this high-powered umbrella group has enjoyed a considerable renaissance since taking over responsibility for the State of the Historic Environment Report – currently known as SHER but likely to be renamed as 'Heritage Counts' when the 2003 audit is launched this November.

So where does Heritage Link sit within this structure? The answer is – nowhere that is immediately obvious. As the Director of Heritage Link, charged with building a new umbrella organisation for the historic environment, it is pretty daunting to survey this crowded field and to discover that there is no obvious gap that demands to be filled.

If that is the case, why did anyone ever conceive of setting up Heritage Link in the first place? What aspirations did people have for Heritage Link when it was first dreamed up?

The idea of forming Heritage Link originated with the Joint Committee's Castle Ashby conference, held in 2000. Delegates to that workshop expressed a sense of malaise at what they saw as the lack of leadership and of debate within the sector.

They perceived what can best be described as institutional failure – the failure, for example, of English Heritage or DCMS to give the sector a clear lead, and to raise the profile of the historic environment within the governmental sphere. Delegates asked why the **natural** environment was taken into consideration in political decision making, but not the **historic** environment. They wanted to know where was our Swampy? Where were the youthful idealists prepared to sit in front of bulldozers to protect the historic, as distinct from the natural, environment?

Their concern at the lack of leadership and co-ordination led to the setting up of a steering group to do something about the problem, and out of that, some 30 months later, Heritage Link was officially born on 12 December last year.

Those of you here who attended that launch will know that it was a heady occasion. Speaker after speaker hailed Heritage Link as a heavyweight organisation that would at last put the heritage on the map.

But after the launch, when all the rhetoric has blown away and the newly elected trustees are faced with the hard task of turning aspirations into actions, it doesn't look quite so easy.

Just look at what **else** happened over those 30 months while Heritage Link was being planned.

Neil Cossons and Simon Thurley were appointed as Chairman and Chief Executive of English Heritage with a mission to shake the organisation up and make it fit for the twenty-first century. For the first time in its history, the government's lead body for the heritage is headed up by historic environment professionals rather than by career civil servants. For the first time English Heritage is genuinely developing partnerships with the rest of the sector rather than behaving in its old imperialistic manner. For the first time, English Heritage is serving as a beacon for the sector on many different fronts, and is daring to get involved with campaigns that might not necessarily fit with government policy.

At the National Trust, Fiona Reynolds has been appointed as Director General. Fiona inherited a strategic review process that, under her management, has turned the Trust back to its radical people-centred roots, grabbing it back from the would-be gentleman farmers and fine-art specialists who had monopolised it since the 1950s.

Civil servants have climbed out of their bunkers, and are now attending our meetings. They are keen to build strong channels of communication with key stakeholders. Government now seeks our advice as part of the policy-making process and before legislation is drafted.

What is more they now go direct to the stakeholders. In the bad old days, English Heritage acted as gatekeepers to the political process, and they had

their own Byzantine internal hierarchies. If you could find anyone in English Heritage who considered your case to be worth supporting, they then spoke to civil servants, who then might speak to politicians. At every stage in this chain of communication, there were plenty of opportunities for messages to be watered down and subtly altered in emphasis.

Today, that has all been swept away, and the opportunity to engage directly with civil servants, MPs and peers is now very much greater than it was in the past. The lines of communication have been radically shortened, and messages are clearer and more relevant as a result. As evidence of that, consider the fact that we are all gathered here today to respond to three separate consultations set in train by DCMS and ODPM. That sort of consultation didn't happen before, and civil servants – like Rob John, who is with us here today – did not to expose themselves to the bright glare of public seminars in the past.

Another change is the recognition by the sector of the importance of policy and public affairs. Not long ago, public affairs might have formed a small part of the job description of the Chairman of the National Trust. Now the Trust has a team of twenty specialists in different aspects of public affairs – transport, agriculture, planning, community affairs and so on. The same is true of English Heritage, which now has a large public and parliamentary affairs department – including policy affairs specialists within each of their eight regional offices.

What else has happened in the last two-and-a-half years? Other catalytic – not to say cataclysmic – events include:

- foot and mouth disease, bringing home forcibly how much of the nation's prosperity and income derives from the historic environment via tourism
- the maturing of the Heritage Lottery Fund, which has pumped hundreds of millions of pounds into the heritage
- the publication of *Power of Place, A Force for our Future*, and *SHER*, this providing us with a strategic plan for the sector and an evidence base for engaging in political argument over the value of the heritage and the rate at which it is being eroded
- the formation of APPAG, sparked by Lord Redesdale, who was so incensed by the omission of archaeology from *Power of Place* that he dubbed it a *Pile of Pants*, and then succeeded in recruiting 10 per cent of all the MPs and Peers in Parliament to his All-Party Group, thus doing a huge amount to rekindle parliamentary interest in the historic environment
- the forceful awakening of our sector to issues such as inclusion, access, education, outreach, communication, communities, hidden histories and multi-cultural interpretations of the past
- the shock to our system of a raft of radical government white papers and consultations on land-use planning, aviation, PPGs 15 and 16, the role of the Heritage Lottery Fund, of agri-environmental stewardship schemes, aviation, regional spatial strategies, designation and so on – all of which are major public issues impacting our sector that cannot be ignored and that demand serious and time-consuming consultation, and response.
- the first beginnings of the formation of a skills and training council specifically for the cultural and heritage sector, the formation of a

research council (at last) for the arts and humanities sector, and the first steps towards pinning down exactly who is doing what research in our sector, as a baseline from which to develop a sectoral research strategy.

Talk about ‘a Changing World’. Those thirty months since summer 2000 have seen a massive awakening in our sector. Many of the assumptions that were made when Heritage Link was first conceived have now proven to be false – such as that politicians are not interested in the historic environment, or that it is impossible to talk to or influence senior levels of Government.

There is now a very healthy level of dialogue and creative thinking in our sector, and it would be very difficult to characterise it as moribund today – in fact, there is more going on now in terms of public debate and political engagement than at any time since the campaigning heyday of the mid 1970s.

But, I hear some of you say, that dialogue is messy and unco-ordinated. We are notorious as a sector for being divisive, prone to creating new organisations at the drop of a hat, to letting personalities dominate policy agendas, to competing ferociously amongst ourselves, to carping at success and to putting the needs of our individual organisations above those of the sector as a whole.

Surely Heritage Link was set up to wave the magic wand that would transform this mess into a tidy coalition of like-minded people singing from the same hymn sheet. Did not Charles Nunneley, Chairman of the National Trust, said that Heritage Link ‘*represents an unprecedented opportunity for*

the sector to work together ... to create one Lennox Lewis out of a gymnasium full of flyweights'.

Yes, all that was said – and for a very long time I struggled with this as Heritage Link's mission. I even managed to encapsulate this aspiration in a mission statement that you will still find on our website. This says:

Heritage Link brings people together who care about our heritage to formulate policy, influence opinion and achieve change on issues of common concern.

That statement was framed to make people feel warm and unthreatened. But words like 'bringing people together' and 'common concern' signalled a belief that the sector would be more successful and deliver more benefits as a well-organised team than had been the case with the solo efforts of the past.

Well, I have taken many knocks in the last twelve months, in trying to build an organisation with co-ordination as its objective. I am a great deal wiser now, and I can now tell you uncategorically that:

Firstly: the sector does not want to be co-ordinated, thank you very much. In fact it resists co-ordination with enormous vigour, which is pretty much what Kate Clark warned me would happen when she said that my job was like trying to herd cats.

Heritage organisations don't like having someone tell them what to say and think. Nor do they recognise Heritage Link as a body that speaks for the sector. They want to represent themselves and not be represented by Heritage Link or anyone else.

Secondly: the Government doesn't actually want us to be too co-ordinated, despite what Tessa Jowell has said to some of us privately about the fissile nature of the sector. Any theory that the Government might want a single body to speak for the heritage as a whole is disproved by their actual behaviour. When DCMS instituted a review of Designation, did it come to Heritage Link and ask us to sound out members and come back with a co-ordinated response? No, of course it did not – it instituted a very wide-ranging review, talking directly to the widest possible spectrum of stakeholders, of whom Heritage Link is merely one amongst many.

And quite right too, because my third and final point is that co-ordination can be counter productive – I now realise that our very **diversity** is our strength. The plurality of voices and the sheer number of different organisations clamouring to be heard is **not** a weakness. It is an indicator of the robust good health of our sector and of the strength and passion with which people fight to protect many different aspects of the historic environment from erosion, neglect and destruction.

I now fundamentally believe that you cannot **delegate** passion and commitment – nor can you corral it, tidy it up, fence it in or co-ordinate it. It is vital that it be heard, even in its messiest and rawest forms – or perhaps I should say **especially** in its rawest forms, because there is much that

passionate and outraged people can achieve that more measured people cannot.

So should Heritage Link simply pack up and go home? Was it an idea that was right for the time, but that took so long to get it off the ground that it has been overtaken by events? I have been trying to answer these questions myself, in order to write a three-year business plan for Heritage Link. I am now going to give you a privileged insight into my conclusions, because even the Trustees haven't met to discuss this yet.

When they do meet in early June, my message will be that that the sector is in rude good health – messy but robust – and it doesn't want or need Heritage Link pontificating about policy for the sector. Instead of focussing all our resources on the historic environment sector, Heritage Link should in fact turn round and face the other way – to address the rest of society. In anthropological terms, we've been trying to be endogamous – now is the time to get exogamous!

To encapsulate this idea, I have had another go at writing our mission statement. This new one is a great deal shorter than the old. It simply says:

‘Mainstream the Heritage’

What does it mean? It means that we need to put the historic environment at the heart of national life. A test of where we are now would be to ask a politician or a person on the Clapham Omnibus for their view on GM crops,

global warming, disappearing sparrows, or marine by-catch. I bet they'd know what you were talking about.

OK, maybe not the last one – I put that in to check that you were still awake. But if instead of 'marine by-catch' one were to ask 'don't you think that it is terrible the way French fishermen are killing dolphins by using illegal fishing nets' then I bet they would have a view. I am not saying that it would be an especially informed view, but they'd be happy to debate the issue with you.

Now try it on the historic environment. The equivalent question would be: 'don't you think that it is terrible the way that farmers are destroying archaeology by ploughing and draining ancient monuments'. I wonder whether anyone would know what you are talking about.

Or ask a politician 'what is your party's policy on the historic environment?' Well I **have** asked that question of **many** politicians and I can tell you that they do not even understand the question – though they do if the question is about their policy on the **natural** environment.

Now what has any of this agonising and soul searching to do with the Designation review? The answer is that the Designation Review is the perfect vehicle for beginning to change this lamentable situation. After all, if Designation is **not** about mainstreaming the heritage, I don't know what is. It is the primary piece of legislation that we have in this country for protecting the historic environment – you cannot get more mainstream than that.

Nor can you get more mainstream than the built environment itself – is the backdrop to everyone’s daily lives. Our person on the Clapham Omnibus only has to look out of the window to see the historic environment everywhere: buildings, parks, pubs, pillar boxes and street signs, railings and fanlights, baroque bank buildings with lead cupolas, a church, and a cemetery – in fact, even the bus itself and the bus stop and the signs are potentially part of our heritage.

We all live our lives within a complex mesh of historical influences and shaping forces. Just as everyone is made up of the DNA that we have inherited from our earliest common ancestors – the Adam and Eve of *Homo sapiens* – so we live in an environment that consists almost entirely of inherited features – and we can only create new ones by reaction to, and working, with inherited traditions.

At the heart of the Designation Review are several big questions: ‘what aspects of that all-pervasive heritage do we wish to protect and sustain? Who decides? How do we enforce those decisions? Where do the resources come from to underpin an effective Designation system?’

In answering that question, we also have to ask ‘and how will this play with the electorate or the citizens of Liverpool? Will politicians buy into this? Would a class of fifteen-year-olds studying citizenship come to the same conclusions?’

‘Rubbish’, I hear some of you say: ‘Why should we care about the unformed views of immature teenagers? We are specialists, long-studied in our field. It is our job to rise above popular prejudice or ignorance and provide an informed, objective and expert view’.

Agreed, this is true, and I am not suggesting that we should seek democratic popularity for its own sake or dilute our core values. But I do see the Designation review as a public trial of our values. We need not only to articulate our **own** assumptions and put into words what is ‘taken for granted’ in our **own** minds – we also need to make conscious what is unconscious in the way that people at large think about the heritage – for there is plenty of evidence that they do care – it is just that we don’t have a language in common with people who value their churchyard, war memorial park or pub. They don’t yet have a notion of heritage that embraces the commonplace, seeing heritage rather as being about big houses for toffs.

In this sense, the Designation review is a communication exercise as well as an opportunity for fresh thinking. The task is not necessarily to change the rules, but rather to restate them in ways that are relevant to the twenty-first century and that reach out to people who value the heritage, albeit in an unfocussed way. We have to convince the community at large that we are doing this on their behalf, and that we are not just a bunch of fanatics standing in the way of change.

Of course, we are very lucky in the timing of this review: DCMS has said that it will publish its consultation document in July. The deadline for responses will be three months later – ie in late September.

By sheer coincidence, the BBC is planning to broadcast a new series called Restoration during August and September, featuring thirty buildings at risk and drumming up the nation's enthusiasm to vote for the restoration of one of these buildings. The winner will be announced at a televised gala dinner that will also mark the launch of Heritage Open Days in mid September, when some of the best examples of historic architecture will be open to the public.

Now this is not going to be some late-night broadcast for people of exotic or esoteric tastes, tucked away amongst Open University broadcasts. The BBC has hired Endemol to make these programmes – and Endemol makes programmes like 'Big Brother', 'I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here' and 'The Greatest Briton'. Endemol thinks big and it thinks popular. The Greatest Britain had the nation debating the merits of Brunel and Newton, Churchill and Princess Diana. This autumn, the BBC and Endemol want the nation debating whether a Victorian synagogue or a suite of Turkish baths in Manchester is the most worthy candidate for restoration funds. The programmes will be broadcast twice weekly, with a whole host of celebrities saying why they care passionately about the historic environment.

Quite honestly, if Tessa Jowell had launched the Designation review last December with the intention of weakening the system or dismantling it, she could not have timed it worse. At exactly the moment when the public consultation on Designation takes place, the whole nation will be sensitised to the issue of the historic built environment – and this gives us a golden

opportunity to state clearly what we stand for and why it matters, in a way that appeals to the public imagination.

Our Designation review must mesh with what people themselves value in their communities, the features that they would feel much poorer without – and ideally it should give them the language, the concepts and the vision to make Designation their own tool – not just one that is reserved for the experts.

Mainstreaming the heritage so that ordinary people engage with it consciously and actively is not something that can be achieved overnight by means of a big bang conversion – it results from a long and cumulative series of actions, in which we all have a part to play – and I mean everyone. Three million copies of a magazine are being printed to distribute to English Heritage and National Trust members and for sale in W H Smith. The magazine will contain information about organisations that work to protect the historic environment. It will be linked to a website that will list events throughout the summer with a heritage theme.

Heritage Link is working with English Heritage, SPAB and various organisations to run a summer-long press campaign to highlight the issue of buildings at risk. We will be feeding case studies to the local media of successful restoration projects and of buildings at risk in each region. Simon Thurley is going to tour the country addressing audiences on the Designation review and linking it to the Restoration programmes.

So, back to the theme of this conference: Designation and Guidance in a Changing World. I have taken you on a journey through the last thirty months that shows that we do indeed live in ‘a Changing World’. But I hope I have convinced you that the changes are positive and have a powerful momentum.

I have outlined the challenges that face us all in mainstreaming the heritage – and I have suggested that the Designation review requires us to do this not only to win support for the **concept** of designation and to win support for specific designation **criteria**, but also to ensure that we secure the **resources** that will be necessary to make a new and modernised Designation stem work.

I have also told you that Heritage Link will refocus its efforts from inward-looking ‘co-ordination’ to outward-looking communication activity – with the aim of getting people talking and thinking about the historic environment. I’ve said it’s a mission for Heritage Link, but actually it’s a core task for us all

For me this offers an exciting, effective and enfranchising agenda for the future that engages with the real world and has the capacity to inspire fresh thinking and renewed campaigning zeal.

Thank you all for listening to me so patiently.

[To give you a flavour of their diversity, they include the Historic Environment Strategic Research Group, the Historic Farm Buildings Forum, the Heritage Publicity Forum, the Conservation Course Directors' Forum and the English Historic Towns Forum.]

[Then there is the Historic Environment Forum. This informal grouping of heads of professional and academic associations includes the Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers, the Association of Local Government Archaeologists, the IFA, the IHBC, the Society of Antiquaries – all working very hard to put archaeology on to the political agenda. HEF also campaigns very vigorously for statutory provision of local authority conservation services. It is also seeking to ensure that all the major political parties include a policy on the historic environment in their manifestos for the next election.

HEF in turn has a close relationship with the All-Party Parliamentary Archaeology Group. This is the political wing, if you like, of the historic environment sector. APPAG does excellent work in both houses of parliament to raise the profile of the historic environment in political debate. It's members spend a lot of time scrutinising new legislation for its impact on the historic environment.

By these means, our parliamentary colleagues have succeeded in setting up the Treasure Act and the Portable Antiquities Scheme. Currently they are focussing on Richard Allan's private members bill – the one that will make it a criminal offence to trade in stolen antiquities.

On the buildings, parks and gardens side of the historic environment, we have the excellent Joint Committee of the National Amenity Societies. This is the umbrella group for all those bodies – such as SPAB, the Georgians, the Victorians, the 20th-Century Society, SAVE and the Garden History Society – who are statutory consultees under existing planning law.

The Joint Committee is campaigning to eliminate the 17.5 per cent VAT levy on historic buildings repairs. Another of their campaigns is highlighting the plight of buildings at risk.]