

Maintenance and Management of City Walls

Chester conference report - 27 April 2006

Wednesday evening early arrivals enjoyed a tour of the City Walls, which was followed by a reception, sponsored by the Virtual Chester website (www.virtualchester.org), and held in the Water Tower – a part of the historic walls rarely visited by the public.

Councillor Dave Challen welcomed delegates, and was thanked for the City Council's hospitality by **Sam Howes**, on behalf of EHTF. An evening 'Gastronomique' followed at Chez Jules.

On Thursday, Sam opened the conference with a reminder that at one time the City Walls served to draw a clear line between the types of development that was permitted in- and out-side of the walls. However, it is no longer that case that 'anything goes' outside of the walls; it is the whole context of the historic environment that needs consideration.

He hoped that a wide range of uses for the walls would be explored during the day, together with funding issues – for management, maintenance and promotion.

Keith Emerick, Inspector of Ancient Monuments at English Heritage, Yorkshire Region, said that fundamental to a good management plan was an understanding of the place and its capacity for change. There is plenty of evidence for the changes made to city walls over the centuries, reflecting social and economic development. Using this, and by "building backwards" he said, it is possible to generate interest in local monuments and by relating them to peoples' own experiences and those of their predecessors, to engage with the past. Values and ideas change over time but monuments transcend these changes and heritage managers must capture the cultural significance in order to develop a conservation plan which in turn underpins projects which might generate funding.



Harrie Boekwijt, the Historic Buildings and Monuments Advisor at s'-Hertogenbosch District Council in the Netherlands, explained the history of the town of s'-Hertogenbosch and its walls, the use of which had changed from defensive many years ago to a barricade against water, which it still remains. With 200,000 visitors a year, the local authority has developed an innovative scheme to fund management and maintenance of the walls. 1€ of every 5€, paid for the popular boat trips on the river, is used for this purpose. The reason

for the restoration programme was to attract tourists therefore the two are inextricably linked, as are all of the departments across the authority. The huge programme is also supported by state funding, and makes use of diverse ideas including bio-diversity, public access to archaeological excavations, competitions to swim across the moat and to climb the walls. Harrie used the simile of hardware and software: the physical structure of the wall is the unchanging hardware, and the uses – which change over time – are the software. This latter can be managed in a way which will not damage the walls.

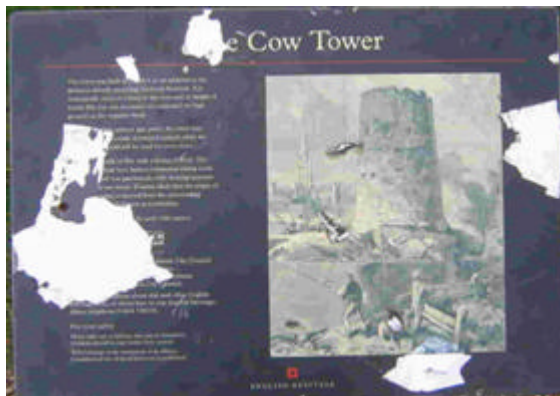
Thanking Harrie, Sam added that it is vital that the walls are seen as an integral part of the conservation plan for the whole town.

Stephen Johnson, Director of Operations for Heritage Lottery Fund, showed examples of city walls across Europe in order to explore the value of heritage to the public, as it is the public which funds Lottery Grants. He considered that by funding smaller local projects a wider public might be engaged with the historic environment. Research had shown high levels of local pride which could be generated and skills which could be drawn on. Specific projects to engage local people had included stained glass workshops, history in photographs and story-telling. All of these, which in different ways, document the history of a place, and offer a sense of ownership in present day residents and interest from visitors.



The life-cycle of interpretation panels was an issue raised from the floor, and although maintenance can not be funded by HLF, it was suggested that 'bringing back to standard' could be included in a project remit. It was also suggested that *two* might be manufactured out the outset to provide a replacement, ie: build replacement into the cycle.

It was also suggested that having accepted that the public *do* value the historic environment, the Government needs to be encouraged to fund core activities.



and of the children's ability to influence society. Surprising ideas have come from projects based on the Chester City Walls which have led to improvements in accessibility, by seeing another point of view.

Stephanie Wadson, introduced the Schools Education & Environment Network, which has a rolling programme of projects with young people who work alongside professionals, and which helps to formulate opinions and ideas and to stimulate interest in their surroundings. Projects are resourced and tailored to match the curriculum and the children involved, and frequently draw in family members, neighbours and friends. Active learning helps to create a sense of place



Mike Hardman, Education Officer from Chester City Council, who works with Stephanie, explained that using assets to learn from was not a new concept in Chester. The Grosvenor Museum had been set up in the 1880s and inspired 'informal' learning for many years. The city walls in particular can illustrate the living history, especially when linked to a range of events and activities. Formal learning – linked to the curriculum – can also be enhanced using the city's

assets, for the pupils and the teachers' training programmes, at the same time drawing visitors to the city.

John Oxley, the City of York Archaeologist, talked of the 2000 years of history captured in the 2 miles of the York City walls and of the cultural shift from conservation and maintenance to access and learning. He outlined the long and varied history of the walls, which retain their popularity, with 25% of the four million annual visitors including the walls in their visit. In partnership with English Heritage a management plan has been agreed addressing a wide range of points of view on the walls. Together with a full survey, this forms the basis for a programme of work for maintenance and management. Funding issues have slowed progress but with third party funding from Yorkshire Forward, plans to enhance tourism in the region are underway. To achieve local



ownership, the plan will be adopted as SPD with aspirations for the professionals to hand over to the community. The fabric of the walls, John said, is good, but information for visitors is not readily available. To address these issues, PLB have been engaged in producing the conservation plan and an interpretation and access plan, developing a series of panels, plaques and structures (including seating). There are further plans for interactive displays as public art.

Anne Bone, Heritage Development Manager at Chichester District Council, emphasised the need for the partnerships involved in the conservation management plan for the Chichester city walls, especially as the District Council owns only 50% of the structures. A budget for £8,000 pa has been designated for maintenance and the partnership of local organisations works to improve access, signage and information. Understanding not only of history but also the current relevance of the walls is important, she said, and the process of developing the plan aids this understanding. The structures themselves, although of no actual value, contribute to the £150m pa of tourism revenue. To help to maximize this, issues of access must be addressed and, through consultation, a framework has been developed to guide proposals. Applications for external funding can also be built as part of this process with council members fully engaged. As well as working across all the LA's departments, the appointment of Gifford brought additional skills to the process. A two volume document was produced, one of which was a detailed technical appendix. Unlike some city walls, Chichester does not have very high maintenance costs but needs to develop projects for use and promotion of the walls. Five areas of action have been identified: fieldwork, interpretation, physical works, audience development and training. In order to engage more local people in the process, Anne considered that information dissemination should be increased together with an undertaking to write the stories of the people involved in the history of the walls.



Following lunch, and prior to a tour of the walls, **John Healey**, Historic Buildings Officer and **Howard Dickenson**, Building Design and Conservation Manager of Chester City Council, gave a short history of the walls, together with a summary of the changing attitudes to them. Changes to the City's infrastructure in a latter part of the 20th century had an enormous impact on the walls and the current objective was to achieve a junction between the walls and their context, at the same time enhancing their attractiveness to visitors. Future development in the City will take account to of the walls, and one of the projects to aid this is the analysis of the materials of the walls, to consider when planning for new buildings. In partnership with the North West RDA, a Culture Park is under consideration, which will look holistically at the visitor experience, including arrival, way-finding and the views to and from the walls. Erosion by acid rain and the use of cement-rich mortars have caused damage over a prolonged period and renovation work to the walls has been estimated at £4.5m.



Returning from walking tours delegates were invited to discuss the issues of the day with the panel of speakers and experts. Sam Howes suggested that the conference had demonstrated that there was no lack of good ideas for the management and maintenance of city walls, but funding was always an issue, and we should continue to work to raise the care of heritage assets up the priority list.

Discussions included:

- whether or not assets like city walls should be considered as national assets and therefore funded from national funds or as contributing to local pride of place and the local economy through tourism
- the dilemma caused for local authorities having to choose between this sort of spending and on major services like education and health
- the resource intensive efforts to attract EU finding demonstrated in s'-Hertogenbosch, which also brought together all disciplines in the local authority
- the use of S106 agreements with developers and BIDS to lever in funding
- community engagement in Conservation Plans – which is not a new concept, but which must be adapted for different audiences and from which projects may emerge

- the extent to which HLF is receptive to ideas, although is led by criteria set by Government
- modern uses for historic structures; as long as there is no damage to the fabric (ie: is reversible) and high quality standards are maintained
- generation of local taxes

As an addendum to the conference Cllr James Latham warned of the threat of fire, experienced recently in Chester, and invited delegates to share information and experience in averting the problems. Contact Jim at: j.latham@chester.gov.uk

Sam closed the event with thanks to all contributors and participants.

*Copies of the power point presentations can be obtained from the EHTF office:
tel: 0117 975 0459 or email: ehf@uwe.ac.uk*