

Heritage, Environment & Industry

Common Ground and Conflicts

29th November 2017

Workshop Outcomes

Introduction

In May 2017, the STBA published an essay by Neil May entitled “The Future of the Past”. This essay raised some fundamental questions about the relationship between heritage, sustainability and society as a whole, and concluded that radical change was needed in order to resolve the issues arising.

At the STBA/SPAB conference in June 2017 there was an open debate on this topic, based around two key questions:

- In what ways does mainstream sustainability fail to deliver a built environment which is fit for the future?
- What are the heritage values that we would like to see incorporated in discussions about the future?

Following the conference, the board of the STBA suggested an in-depth discussion was needed among our members to uncover the key issues at stake.

In November 2017 the STBA hosted a workshop in London including the board and guests (attendee list in Appendix). Following presentations from our three co-chairs and two patrons (National Trust and Historic England), the group split into three sub-groups to discuss areas of commonality and of conflict between heritage, environment and industry, then came together for a plenary session and an open debate. This paper summarises the proceedings of that workshop.

Common Ground

A broad view of sustainability has much in common with heritage:

1. We are custodians of the environment - including heritage - for future generations (compare William Morris with Brundtland).
2. Health & Well-being are promoted by heritage and should be core to sustainability.
3. Correct maintenance will lead to longevity of buildings and protect the embodied energy & resources tied up in them. Refer to the IEA research on maintenance of pre 1945 buildings.
4. Life cycle analysis - part of the discipline of sustainability - would make it clear that heritage buildings should be conserved.
5. A sense of place, provided by heritage, is part of identity and should be part of wider sustainability - if it is about people and includes culture. However, the UN's suggested 4th pillar of sustainability - Culture - has failed to materialise.
6. There may be commonality at a detailed level - e.g. an achievable 60% CO₂ target vs 80% notional, if supply is decarbonised.

Residual Conflicts

1. In this context, sustainability is often defined in terms of reducing carbon emissions from buildings in use. All attendees felt that this narrow definition lay at the heart of the problem. We value many other things in connection with buildings, not their energy use:

- Shelter and space
- Health: comfort, good indoor air quality
- Heritage: beauty, and a sense of place

Suggesting that we can evaluate the “performance” of buildings by looking at their energy use is simply wrong. (e.g. “EPBD”)

2. Many attendees felt that economic growth was a poor indicator of prosperity and that “Sustainable Growth” may even be an oxymoron. The drive for growth rests on materialism & vested interests including the media, while heritage speaks loudly of a different set of values. The things that matter most to us all are non-material. Discussions about the future must acknowledge this and that economic growth as currently measured does not value or encourage happiness, health or fulfillment. A different approach is urgently needed.

3. Measurement is clearly part of the issue:

- We measure what is easy to measure (i.e. energy use) and this is easily monetised. This also suits industry.
- We don’t measure and therefore sufficiently value:
 - health & wellbeing (Wales may yet prove to be an exception)
 - moisture
 - air quality
 - water use and drainage
 - the environmental impact of retrofit work
 - the potential for retrofit to deliver regeneration (Again, Wales . .)
- Maintenance is ignored
- Financial value measurement causes problems due to timescales
- Broad measurement is useful at least to RICS level 3
- Heritage significance should be recorded as per BS7913 and EN16881

4. Beauty Matters

- Vitruvius - 3 pillars of architecture - functionality, beauty, strength,
- Agreed that beauty is essential but difficult to define /quantify
- People's responses can be unclear - perhaps they don't have the language
- Changes to vernacular heritage buildings undermine beauty
- Pastiche as a compliment
- Buildings reflect society's values (!)
 - This says something about the 20th century after WW2.
 - We made mistakes and built bad buildings in previous centuries too - and they have largely gone.
 - The remaining traditional buildings still inspire and uplift, and function, and survive.
- The term "Beauty" could be too narrow. We may need to develop a broader set of values around beauty's components.

5. Craftsmanship

- Quality craftsmanship is available but not widespread
- Register of heritage practitioners might help
- Dearth of craft skills in construction - requires link to colleges / skills
- Is there a lack of memory?

6. Heritage is regarded in some quarters as a problem, a negative value, a barrier to growth. The LSE report is a case in point. It also reveals a huge lack of understanding . . . and comes back to what sustainability means. There is also conscious resistance in some circles to protecting heritage - some politicians think that occupants are wealthy and concerned that this will play badly. In fact, people can't afford to maintain properties as they are asset-rich but cash-poor.

7. The current industry approach to heritage buildings is based on new build models (and the same for the supply chain) and does not recognise complexity or diversity. This runs hand-in-hand with a focus on sustainable development rather than sustainability. Industry cost/benefit analysis is primarily financial and does not include heritage. To change this required challenging current opinion, changing perception and demonstrating value/worth.

Suggested key actions

1. Establish a set of Principles on Sustainability and Heritage, based on a broad definition of sustainability.
2. Develop a generic statement for use in consultation responses.
3. Identify the effective levers of change, possibly including:
 - Change approach among opinion formers
 - Engage with the political process
 - Lead by example.
4. Further practical actions might include:
 - A log book for a house would increase understanding of why it was built the way it was, what changes have been made and how and why, and would flag up routine and periodic maintenance requirements.
 - Encourage construction colleges to teach building physics, history and pathology - so that people become properly equipped to assess, repair, maintain and retrofit heritage buildings. New roles, professions and competencies will be required.
 - Innovation should be encouraged within the cultural and cultural heritage sectors themselves so that they are responsive, ready to grow and become attractive to industry.
 - Set up discussion groups separately for Industry, Heritage and Sustainability sectors during 2018.
 - Debate specific aspects of the subject further at the SPAB /STBA conference in June 2018.

Appendix 1: Attendee List

Antony	Gibb	Antony Gibb Historic Buildings Consultants
Rowan	Lloyd	Between Time
Gemma	Birley	Buckingham Palace
David	Pickles	Historic England
Sarah	Freeman	Historic England
Peter	Cox	ICOMOS International
John	Preston	Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC)
Julie	Godefroy	Julie Godefroy Sustainability
Jo	Lugg	National Trust
Richard	Oxley	Oxley Conservation
Alan	Tierney	Picketts Conservation
Peter	Draper	Rounded Developments Enterprises Ltd
Hannah	Prowse	Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd
Michael	Coleman	Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd
Jon	Bootland	Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF)
Debbie	Mauger	Sustainable Traditional Buildings Alliance (STBA)
Nigel	Griffiths	Sustainable Traditional Buildings Alliance (STBA)
Colm	Murray	The Heritage Council

Appendix 2: Discussion Questions

First Group Discussions: Common Ground

1. In what ways does the mainstream sustainability agenda currently acknowledge the value of heritage, and heritage values?
2. Is there such a thing as green growth (or sustainable development)? If so, what does this mean for the existing building stock?
3. Heritage recognises the value of basic maintenance. Conserving buildings makes environmental sense - we need to look after what we've got. How is this reflected in environmental programmes?
4. Industrialists are also members of the general public, and homeowners. To what extent does profit-driven industry acknowledge this in its approach to retrofit?

Second Group Discussions: Residual Conflicts and ways of Resolution

1. Is there a danger that commitments to reduce carbon emissions could cause other environmental damage? Should this be addressed?
2. Does the cult of the measurable encourage an unhealthy focus on energy as a means of assessing building performance? How can this be addressed? (Old buildings will never "perform" in energy terms like modern ones, but does that matter?)
3. Does beauty matter? (Does it matter to industry and to sustainability campaigners?) If so, how can we learn to talk about it in public debates about the future?
4. Is craft valuable? Does retrofit ignore craft and the repair of buildings, and if so how can we change this?

(All 3 groups debated both sets of questions, with a plenary session after each)