

Historic England Response to Rail Delivery Group 2015 consultation

Rail Delivery Group 2015 'Vision for Stations: Nine Principles for the future of Britain's stations'

11 Sept 2015

Historic England is the Government's statutory adviser on all matters relating to the historic environment in England. We are a non-departmental public body established under the National Heritage Act 1983 and sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). We champion and protect England's historic places, providing expert advice to local planning authorities, developers, owners and communities to help ensure our historic environment is properly understood, enjoyed and cared for.

Q1 – Do you broadly agree with the intent of the Vision?

Yes. We would add that the heritage of Britain's railways is of international significance. The railway was first developed in the UK and then exported worldwide. The nation is rightly proud of the legacy of its railway infrastructure and it sits alongside cathedrals, churches, town halls and other civic buildings as being an essential element in this country's built environment. The architectural presence of historic stations, often plays a key part in the 'emotional role' referred to on page 6, and if appropriately managed and adapted for modern needs, the blend of old and new can be very powerful visually and enhance the customers' experience (Kings Cross, St Pancras etc.).

Q2 – Not applicable

Q3 – Does it capture what you think is important about the future management of stations?

Generally, yes.

P1 – Historic station architecture is often quite robust and our experience is that adaptation to meet the needs of customers, with some forethought, is almost always achievable. Where stations are designated as listed buildings, we believe that adapting the original structure (and often stripping out later unattractive elements) can create inspirational solutions. The best way to create a good solution in such circumstances is, from the earliest stages, to identify how the key historic elements can enhance the users' experience.

P2 – Intelligent use of technology includes the sensitive installation and position of such equipment in historic stations. Modern digital technology allows for de-cluttering of

stations eg the removal of unnecessary ducting and cable runs to better reveal the architectural design. Seeking the early input of local authority conservation officers is advisable. In the highest grade of listed buildings (Grade II* or I) Historic England may become involved.

P4 – Where stations are historic, it is advisable to engage with local civic societies as ‘taking them along with you’ as significant changes are being proposed can avoid difficulties and opposition later on in the process. An early involvement approach is more likely to achieve the desired outcome in the quickest time. Under the first bullet it is important not to forget the existence of specialist heritage advice that is normally available in the local planning authority.

P5 – To ‘safe and secure environment’ we would add ‘attractive’. We believe that good design, whether in adapting existing historic structures, or designing new buildings is more likely to result in places that people enjoy being in, and they respect them more. Our experience is that there need be no conflict between safe and secure environments and conserving historic stations and that design solutions in such circumstances need not be significantly more expensive.

P6 – We support the encouragement of entrepreneurial spirit in historic railway stations. It increases the vitality of the places and helps ensure that there continues to be an incentive to invest in the historic fabric. There are, of course, particular considerations when it comes to adapting historic stations, but the historic character of the station can act as a catalyst for the wider regeneration of the area as exemplified in our positive ‘constructive conservation’ approach

P7 – We strongly support seeing stations as ‘sustainable long-term assets’ and recognise the need for flexibility. Almost all historic stations will have been adapted regularly over the years. Some changes, especially earlier ones, can be important in understanding the evolution of the building so it is not always the case that the ‘original’ structure is the only element that is important in historical terms. Determining which elements of a historic station are of value is something that needs specialist advice.

We very much support the development of masterplans. Where there is historic fabric we believe it is very important that the local authority specialists are involved. In the case of the highest grade stations, it may be appropriate to also involve Historic England at an early stage. In the bullet point section, we would recommend adding in reference to the importance of awareness of historic structures, perhaps alongside the reference to climate change. Under bullet point 1 you could add: ‘and to ensure their historic significance is understood and managed

P8 – We very much support bullets 1, 2 and 4. In bullet 5 valuable experience can also be gained from seeing what other sectors have achieved or are planning.



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P9 – We suggest adding a further bullet point along the lines of: ‘where the station building has historic value, how can that quality be sustained and adapted to enhance the customers’ experience?’

Where stations are being proposed for closure, there may be options for their sustainable re-use to benefit the local community. Similarly, where new stations are being proposed, it is important to take account of local character and that they are designed to a high standard as they act as a gateway for the local area

Conclusion:

Historic England is keen to work with the RDG to develop and promote relevant standards and guidance, especially on how and when to engage with the heritage sector.

Historic England would be happy to discuss in more detail with the Rail Delivery Group these ideas and how a positive approach to managing historic stations can be spread more widely within rail delivery companies, local authorities and communities. We could explore with you about how appropriate training could be provided.

Heritage Partnership Agreements, introduced by the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act, is another potentially useful tool which in effect give up-front listed building consent approval for a whole range of works over a period of years. This will be particularly useful when dealing with building refurbishment and regular maintenance for larger more complex buildings. For example one is being worked up for Kings Cross at the moment.

We look forward to presenting these ideas at your national stations conference in October.

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