

13 Conservation of the heritage and environment

13.1. This chapter examines managerial responsibility for and organization of environmental, conservation and heritage work in BWB. It considers how the programme of work emerges from the planning process and the absence of separate cost information on projects (eg the restoration of listed buildings) which have a high environmental/heritage content. It reviews the balance between the probable value of the amenity services provided by BWB, for which it does not charge, and the Grant available.

The waterways environment

13.2. BWB's waterway network is frequently referred to as a 'linear national park'. It is regarded as part of the national heritage, as are many of the structures and sites on BWB land adjacent to the waterways for which it has responsibility. There are 2,050 listed buildings (84 per cent of which are operating structures), 135 ancient monuments and 64 SSSIs on BWB land (see paragraph 11.1). In addition a number of BWB's locks, bridges and aqueducts are of varying importance from the heritage standpoint.

13.3. In its 1992/93 to 1996/97 Corporate Plan BWB describes the waterway network as 'an integral part of the environment which forms a unique part of the national heritage'. An objective of the plan is to continue to improve the environmental value of the network for the benefit of the nation by raising the overall level of maintenance of the waterway, towpath and facilities to levels specified in the Customer Charter. The spirit of this objective is incorporated in BWB's Mission Statement which proclaims that the waterways heritage and environment will be conserved, enhanced and made viable for future generations.

13.4. In 1989 the House of Commons Environment Committee reported on BWB (see paragraphs 2.16 to 2.18). The Committee observed that much of the waterway system is very important as a habitat for wildlife. It concluded that BWB must ensure that appropriate procedures are developed so that conservation issues are adequately addressed and that BWB staff at all levels have a sound understanding of conservation issues.

Environmental and heritage responsibilities within BWB

13.5. Responsibility for environment, conservation and heritage rests with each management level, supported by advice from specialist headquarters units. BWB has two units to advise and provide expert knowledge on matters relating to the environment and heritage. Waterway Environment Services (WES), at Hillmorton near Rugby, is the specialist unit dealing with architecture, environment, conservation, heritage and landscaping. The Environment Scientific Services Centre (ESSC), at Gloucester, is responsible for water policy, pollution and the ecology of the waterways. Between them, WES and ESSC claim to have the necessary skills to meet BWB's normal requirements for environmental/heritage work. WES has a heritage expert, formerly with and until May 1993 part funded by English Heritage. The two organizations are in continual contact and BWB uses English Heritage's guidelines for scheduled monuments. BWB has introduced standards or guidelines for environmental and conservation work and for the maintenance of heritage structures. English Heritage exercises its right to inspect scheduled monuments.

13.6. There is no single focus for environmental, conservation and heritage matters in BWB's management structure. The head of WES reports to the Property Development Manager on development and management

matters and to the Commercial Director on corporate policy relating to environmental and heritage matters. The ESSC is part of the Engineering Department and its head reports to the Director of Engineering.

13.7. BWB's environmental, conservation and heritage priorities are decided, like all its priorities, in the planning context and WES and ESSC participate at all levels of the planning process. The environmental and heritage aspects of proposals are also discussed, as necessary, with local authorities and interested organizations such as the Countryside Commission, wildlife bodies, ramblers' organizations and English Heritage. As things stand BWB has no clearly articulated strategy for environmental, conservation and heritage responsibilities (but see paragraph 13.14(c)). BWB told us, however, that it takes a proactive role in preventing the continuing deterioration of listed structures and specifically undertakes surveys to compile information necessary to support bids for additional grant. The first stage of this process is a comprehensive and accurate assessment of arrears of maintenance, followed by the ranking of the listed buildings. As noted in Chapter 11, arrears are dealt with as part of a planned maintenance programme which also allows for subsequent maintenance to agreed standards. A rolling programme of works is initiated for all operational properties over the plan period to bring them to the standard required under the BWB policy guidelines. WES plans, monitors and co-ordinates this process and if necessary external resources are used.

13.8. Each item of work in BWB's general maintenance programme is tested against BWB's environmental checklist (Appendix 13.1) to ensure that all projects satisfy the requirement to improve the environmental and heritage value of the waterway network. However, separate cost information is not available for work done in SSSIs or on structures and buildings which require costly treatment to meet heritage, environmental or conservation requirements.

13.9. WES, with ESSC if necessary, undertakes surveys to obtain information on environmental, conservation and heritage matters, and advises regional management on how to deal with the requirements of the EPA. It also undertakes a full environmental assessment of all properties included in each region's property disposals list over the plan period.

13.10. WES is currently preparing an inventory of BWB's buildings of architectural historic interest (the architectural heritage survey) as a first step towards the production of a register of such buildings. The survey is mainly urban and is currently about halfway towards completion. Other important WES and ESSC initiatives include:

- (a) a landscape survey (under way);
- (b) the development of targets for water standards geared to the canal classes;
- (c) preparation of advice notes for managers (at the planning stage);
- (d) planned development of guidance notes for Waterway Managers on landscape and ecology; and
- (e) corridor studies (see paragraphs 13.12 and 13.13).

A case study is also being planned in the North East Region. This aims at providing a basis for the development of a heritage and conservation strategy. It is the intention that the lessons learned from this study, coupled with the results of the various surveys and other initiatives outlined above, will enable a strategy to be developed for BWB as a whole.

13.11. Although the WES maintains lists of reliable architects, stonemasons and contractors the main operational problem is still the variability of the standard of workmanship available for the repair and maintenance of heritage structures. In addition we were told that, until recently, the heritage specialist had not been involved in any site-specific work (because he was fully occupied on the architectural heritage surveys) and there is still no formal follow-up on recommendations made or advice given. However, WES is now putting in place a monitoring system for such work.

Corridor studies

13.12. A corridor study is an exploratory exercise which BWB undertakes, usually with the assistance of local authorities, industry and other interests. The objective is to identify, for a particular stretch of canal, potentials for development, joint enterprise and income generation, whilst safeguarding heritage and achieving, if possible, environmental enhancement. BWB's experience is that the total benefit accruing from the integrated development potential identified by the study is greater than the sum of its individual parts. BWB has undertaken 30 of these studies¹ and a further eight are planned in the 1993/94 programme (see Appendix 13.2). These studies usually take about six months to complete. The particular stretches of canal selected for study are generally chosen to meet the needs of the regions, as set out in the regional plans. Co-ordinating the exercise is onerous but it has reaped substantial benefits and improvements to the waterways.

13.13. On completion of the study, it is only the opportunities that are identified. None, some, or all of these may be realized in practice in subsequent years. It calls for considerable follow-up on the part of BWB to generate interest in the various proposals which may emerge from a corridor study. The local authorities (several of which may be concerned in a single corridor) are regarded as key potential partners, since any developments have to be integrated into their plans. Difficulties can arise when, as not infrequently happens, more than one is involved. All potential joint partners in possible commercial enterprises have to be convinced, however, and the environmental and heritage bodies satisfied.

Plans for the future

13.14. BWB sets out its environmental, heritage and amenity plans for the coming four-year period in its Corporate Plan for 1993/94 to 1996/97. These plans are integrated into its business policies, objectives and procedures. In summary they are:

- (a) ESSC to develop revised strategic statements on water quality and ecological conservation by the end of 1993/94;
- (b) ESSC and WES to review corporate environmental policy by 1994/95;
- (c) WES to prepare pilot strategies for heritage, landscape, water quality and ecological conservation by 1994/95;
- (d) WES to issue a position statement and planning and design guidance for the DOT and the highway authorities by 1993/94, having consulted with the major relevant organizations as appropriate;
- (e) WES to discuss and agree with English Heritage, by the end of the plan period, a definitive position on a number of key issues (such as replacement of lock gates, lock ladders, safety signs) in order to achieve consistent national guidance on the suitable treatment of historic buildings and structures for use by BWB and local authority Conservation Officers;
- (f) WES to issue, by 1994/95, its revised Planning Document to all local authorities, seeking imaginative and enlightened policies for heritage and the environment in relation to the waterways within their local, structure and unitary development plans;
- (g) WES to revise, by 1994/95, its Waterway Environment Handbook, incorporating greater design and planning guidance, in response to regional needs;
- (h) WES to bring the Architectural Heritage Survey to 75 per cent completion in 1993/94 and finish it by the end of 1994/95; it will also complete its review of the list of listed buildings, ancient monuments and conservation areas during 1993;
- (i) ESSC to produce strategic statements on water quality and ecological conservation during 1993/94. These will set out how to achieve planned objectives. It is the intention to persuade the NRA and water

¹In four cases there were two parts to each study.

utilities of BWB's need to improve the quality of its water for recreational use. Targets will be set to increase the percentage of lengths of waterways in Class 2 from the current 88.4 per cent to 94.2 per cent by 1997. However, BWB has no powers to ensure this other than the licensing and control of direct discharges into its waterways;

- (j) WES and ESSC to review, during 1993/94, the waterway standards, building maintenance standards and engineering standards to determine their environmental adequacy;
- (k) ESSC to develop a water quality guideline in 1993/94 to aid the siting, management and operation of the facilities being used for water-based recreation; and
- (l) a multidisciplinary team (with members from the regions, ESSC and WES) to propose and publish specifications in 1993/94 for BWB's routine agricultural activities.

13.15. Since the vast majority of BWB's listed buildings and other structures (eg bridges and monuments) are operational, their care and maintenance is integrated into the general maintenance programme (see Chapter 11). The main environmental and heritage actions planned are:

- (a) ESSC and WES to introduce, by the end of 1994/94, a pilot environmental management system to provide a framework for all the environmental decision-making within BWB, with full implementation by 1995/96; and
- (b) BWB to implement a pilot scheme for prioritizing heritage value beginning in the North East Region and to extend it to all regions thereafter.

Examples of heritage sites which are to be substantially improved and refurbished in 1993/94 are listed in Appendix 13.3. These will give rise to a new generation of environmental and heritage projects for 1995/96 onwards.

Funding amenity services

13.16. The Grant is needed to cover most of the cost of BWB's public amenity services, which include drainage and informal recreation, as well as environmental, conservation and heritage services. Public amenity services provided by BWB generate no income. It would be invidious to value these services in this case, but it is a truth universally acknowledged that they provide considerable social benefit. Some have economic benefits, for example one external study estimated the value of surface drainage provided by the BWB waterway system as some £35 million annually at 1992/93 prices. The valuation technique approach assumes that all of BWB's existing drainage system is necessary and, in the absence of the canals, each and every outfall would be handled by some other drainage arrangement requiring investment. In practice some systems might not be replaced, in which case the value is overstated. However, for that part which is replaced there will be an underestimate of benefits since, typically, the value of an investment exceeds its cost. It is not possible to decide whether the underestimates and overestimates cancel out, but it is virtually certain that most drainage which serves agricultural land, urban land and highways would have to be replaced.

13.17. BWB told us that there was no financial recognition by either local or central government of the service BWB provides nationally as a flood catchment and land drainage channel. In a recent review of drainage into waterways in Midlands and South West Region BWB estimated that only 5 per cent of the drainage into waterways was in a controlled manner through piped outlets and that much of the rest came through natural run-off (urban and rural). BWB said that it had no powers to charge for the costs associated with this additional drainage. Furthermore, probably 25 to 50 per cent of the piped outlets were highway drains or public sewers where the powers to charge were contained by statute. Less than £500,000 of the annual wayleave income is from piped drainage covered by commercial contracts. BWB suggested that if it was empowered to levy a charge on all drainage received by its waterways, comparable to the commercial agreements, the potential income might even equate to its annual Grant.

Conclusions and recommendations

13.18. At present the costs of amenity services and of maintaining the heritage and environmental aspects of BWB's waterways and associated structures are not accounted for separately. We therefore conclude that in the absence of this information the cost-effectiveness of the work on heritage, environmental protection and conservation cannot be properly assessed.

13.19. We recommend that the cost of maintenance and other works should show separately those costs attributable to works carried out in SSSIs and areas of outstanding natural beauty, and on buildings and structures whether listed or not, which require more costly treatment in order to meet environmental, conservation and heritage requirements.

13.20. We also recommend that BWB should more actively manage environmental and heritage preservation and maintenance and specifically that the various environmental, conservation and heritage responsibilities be brought together in a single unit reporting to the Director of Engineering.