

MEDIEVAL OR LATER RURAL SETTLEMENT WORKING GROUP

Note of meeting held on Thursday 30th August 2001 in Longmore House, Edinburgh

Present: John Atkinson (Glasgow University) (Chair), Malcolm Bangor-Jones (Historic Scotland), Donald Davidson (Stirling University), Piers Dixon (RCAHMS), Sarah Govan, Lesley Macinnes, Rod McCullagh, Aonghus Mackechnie (Historic Scotland), Ross Noble (Highland Folk Museum), Ian Shepherd (Aberdeenshire Council), Jim Souness (Historic Scotland) Robin Turner (National Trust for Scotland)

Apologies: Jill Harden (National Trust for Scotland), Richard Tipping (Stirling University), Tim Yarnell (Forestry Commission) and Peter Yeoman (Historic Scotland).

The following members of the Advisory Group have not been able to join the working group: Fiona Chrystall (Stirling University), Allan Macinnes (Aberdeen University), Fiona Watson (centre for Environmental History and Policy)

John Atkinson welcomed everyone to the meeting. The minutes of the last meeting were discussed and approved with no amendments.

Role and Remit of the Group

The paper circulated for the last meeting was discussed. The group agreed the need for such a statement, and consideration was given to the draft content. The text was adopted with some changes and now reads as follows.

The Medieval or Later Rural Settlement (MoLRS) Working Group was set up in 2000 and exists to provide a forum for discussion on the understanding, conservation and management of medieval or later rural settlement in Scotland.

Understanding

The Group seeks to identify priorities and encourage action that will enhance our understanding of the nature of the resource. It seeks to take an inter-disciplinary approach, including historical, archaeological, palaeoenvironmental and architectural interests, and also those concerned with conservation and management of the physical resource.

Conservation and Management

The Group seeks to build on acquired knowledge and apply this to the preparation of guidelines for the conservation and management of the surviving resource, whether at a local, regional or national scale. This will build on the work already achieved with the production of the HS Policy Paper (1998).

Awareness Raising and Education

The Group seeks to identify mechanisms with which to raise the awareness of the resource, and to spread its improved understanding, conservation and management to the wider public.

Future Action

The Chairman reminded the group that a variety of actions had been identified at the last meeting,

and that it was important for the group to identify which should be addressed as a priority. RTur emphasised that both organisations and individuals must take responsibility for particular actions in order to ensure definite progress. He emphasised the importance of the group being proactive. The chairman noted the importance of the Discussion Group (DG) and the need to recognise the opinions of the wider group. RN emphasised the importance of being inclusive, both in gaining their support for initiatives and being reactive to ideas. LM also noted the value of a two way process, recognising both local issues and a national overview.

The group was reminded of the priorities discussed at the last meeting, and asked if this would form a basis for moving forward. There was some discussion about the value of existing initiatives and the value in projects such as FESP and local survey projects. At the same time it was also felt that a review of the current position across the MoLRS spectrum would be pertinent. RTur suggested that a vision for MoLRS over the next 20 years might be useful which enjoyed some support. DD noted that the strength of the group was in its multi-disciplinary nature that presented the opportunity for considerable synergy. IAS emphasised the importance of learning from work that has already been completed, and it was agreed that there is an acute lack of synthesis for MoLRS in Scotland.

RTur argued for an iterative process, with the DG as a forum for exploring priorities and opportunities. RN noted that there is currently no feeling of cohesion within MoLRS in Scotland and hoped that the DG would help to resolve this problem.

The chairman thanked everyone for their contribution and suggested moving on the specific initiatives.

Revision of GUARD document: the chairman, as its author, felt that some refinement would be appropriate. Some discussion followed, and the group agreed that it was still very relevant, and that perhaps priority should be given to the dissemination of its contents. RM suggested that a review of its application might be useful, both in the professional community and also in understanding how the work of local groups fits into the broader picture. He agreed to examine HS funded projects against the national and regional research frameworks and to report to the next meeting. RTur agreed to look at NTS projects in a similar light, and DD suggested that RTip might be able to look at Stirling projects.

In considering the range of interests on the group, it was agreed that the School of Scottish Studies should be invited to attend, and the Chair agreed to write accordingly. Parallels with the School of Scottish Studies at Aberdeen were also drawn, and the Place Name Society, Universities and the National Museum were also mentioned, although it was not suggested that they should be invited to the WG at this stage.

Website and Revision of databases (1993): SG explained that HS had funded the creation of Indices in database form of MoLRS Secondary Sources, and also of Researchers operating in the field. While these are now somewhat out of date, the Group was asked to consider whether they should be updated and made available for wider public use. RN noted that he is regularly approached for references by outside bodies and that placing such information on a website would be of considerable value.

The discussion moved onto the value of a website, and PD reported that the RCAHMS would be willing to serve as host and to help in its set-up and subsequent maintenance. It was agreed that a subgroup should be established to take this forward, and RTur, PD and RN volunteered their services. It was agreed that a site should be established quickly and registered under an independent domain name.

It was agreed that placing the indices on the database would be useful, and SG agreed to explore what would be required.

HS MoLRS theme proposal: SG explained that the paper (Sept./ii) had been drafted in response to a discussion within HS examining how to focus attention on particular research themes when applying the limited resources of the Archaeology Programme. While the document had not yet been discussed in detail and was likely to change, the views of the WG were being sought as part of a wider attempt to understand broader funding influences. LM explained that where the 1998 policy paper dealt with cultural resource management issues, the idea of themes is to ensure that archaeological/historical priorities are tied into the process.

DD felt the group should welcome the concept, while querying the detail to ensure that its interests are considered effectively. He emphasised the importance of a collaborative approach. It was agreed that further discussion would follow at the next meeting, when a revised version of the paper would be circulated.

Discussion Group meeting

JA referred to the paper circulated before the meeting (Sept./iii) and asked RN to report on the venue (Highland Folk Museum, Kingussie). He confirmed that 10th November is now booked for the MoLRS Discussion Group, and that the entire site including catering facilities and a selection of meeting rooms will be available.

In response to a query from RTip by e-mail, the group considered whether a meeting in November might be too ambitious, and whether it might be best to delay the first meeting of the DG until early next year. It was agreed that the onset of winter would delay any meeting until April at the earliest, which would clash with the conference. The group felt it important to maintain the momentum, and even if a limited number of people were able to attend, it would establish the Discussion Group and clarify its aims and function to some extent.

It was agreed that invitations should be targeted to certain groups such as the Scottish Local History Forum who would hopefully give positive feedback to their members who may be interested in future meetings.

The theme of the day was discussed. It was agreed that there should be a short indoor session for scene setting and background to the group, perhaps also with a fieldwork and excavation roundup. It was also agreed that the Folk Museum should be used as a means of emphasising the message and issues of the day, and that the focus should be kept clearly on the future of the discussion group and its related issues.

It was agreed that the following format should be adopted:

- General introduction of issues

- RCAHMS introduction to area
- Local history group focus
- Background to specifics of site
- Site visit, with township as key focus (aim to finish by 3pm)
- Discussion re MoLRS issues

RN confirmed that the entrance fee would be waived for the event, and it was suggested that a fee of £10 would be appropriate. It was agreed that in order to enable participants to use public transport, the day should run from 10.30 until 5pm.

SG agreed to liaise with RN and arrange for publicity material to be circulated. Papers would be sent to all members of the WG for further circulation at their discretion.

The issue of membership of the DG was raised, and it was agreed that while this may be appropriate for the future, at the initial stages only circulation mailing lists would be maintained.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting was arranged for the morning of Thursday 28th February 2002 to be held in RCAHMS, Edinburgh.

The chairman closed the meeting with thanks to everyone for their contribution.

Actions

- Analyse projects against national and regional research frameworks in GUARD document (RM, RTur, RTip)
- Invitation to attend to School of Scottish Studies (JA)
- Development of a MoLRS website (RTur, PD, RN)
- Revision of Indices for production on a website (SG)
- Arrangements for venue for Discussion Group meeting (RN)
- Preparation and dissemination of publicity material for Discussion Group meeting (SG)