



Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust

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Dear Mr Hurd

Please find below a response from the Herefordshire & Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust to the Modernising Commissioning Green Paper. I would like to state that, had the consultation period been within the agreement of the Compact, a more extensive response would have been made.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES (p.9)

In which public service areas could Government create new opportunities for civil society organisations to deliver?

The Natural Environment is an area in which new opportunities could be created. There are many locally based professional charitable conservation organisations - (Wildlife Trusts, Geology Trusts and so on) who have a clear understanding and knowledge of the local issues and where work needs to be undertaken in order to improve the Natural Environment. Such bodies could undertake the work more cost effectively, with an increase in the already extensive voluntary contribution to such conservation work. Examples that could be considered which are presently the remit of statutory conservation agencies include:

- monitoring and management of SSSI, Local Sites, Nature Reserves (Local and National)
- management of SSSI & Local Site data
- landscape character assessments
- inland waterways management

Additionally work that is presently the remit of Local Authorities, Devolved Administrations and Regional Assemblies:

- policy making at a sub-national and local level (natural environment, minerals and waste, climate change)
- assessment of planning applications
- local indicators

What are the implications of payment by results for civil society organisations?

For many small civil society organisations, cashflow is an on-going concern; therefore any payment by results should be balanced by the option to provide a certain amount of capital and revenue expenditure upfront, otherwise it may be impossible for the organisation to undertake the work. The involvement of volunteers alongside paid people may however alleviate this to an extent.

Which public services areas could be opened up to more civil society providers? What are the barriers to more civil society organisations being involved? (p.10)

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For many small civil society organisations, cashflow is an on-going concern; therefore any payment by results should be balanced by the option to provide a certain amount of capital and revenue expenditure upfront, otherwise it may be impossible for the organisation to undertake the work. Access to digital information such as Ordnance Survey mapping, Environmental data and landowner information needs to be easier and cheaper, as these are vital tools in any work surrounding the Natural Environment. With the strict data protection and licencing laws, obtaining such data is often difficult and expensive. Presently, only those organisations who can afford it have access to such information, leaving other civil society organisations struggling.

MORE ACCESSIBLE (p.13)

How could Government make existing public service markets more accessible to civil society organisations?

What issues should commissioners take into account in order to increase civil society organisations' involvement in existing public service markets?

Issues surrounding bureaucracy over tendering, awarding and monitoring contracts. Legal documents produced by government agencies to date (for example Natural England and English Heritage) are onerously long and complex, often leading to much discussion over technicalities. This can mean time is spent discussing the contract and agreeing how it is has been met, rather than spent undertaking the contract itself.

The tendering process also needs to become much clearer and more transparent. Examples include the tendering for SSSI monitoring, which is not well publicised and is often just offered out to one or two 'favourable' commercial consultancies. However local charitable organisations, which often have a far clearer understanding of the local issues and conditions of such sites, are left out of the process, when in fact they could undertake the contract to as good a standard and yet use up less public resources.

What issues should Government consider in the development of the Big Society Bank, in order to enable civil society organisations to take advantage of public service market opportunities? (p.16)

- Competitive, i.e. low interest rates on loans, with good credit plans and opportunities for repayment schemes to suit the individual organisation.
- Opportunities for organisations to invest any surpluses, again at very competitive rates, in order to grow their capital in order to re-invest.
- No bank fees for organisations, as this often removes any surpluses and simply goes into the commercial banks' profits, rather than being reinvested into the civil society organisation.

What barriers prevent civil society organisations from forming and operating in consortia? How could they be removed? (p.17)

An obvious barrier is that of familiarity (or lack of) of certain civil society groups (such as the local geological conservation organisations, e.g. Geology Trusts). Central Government (and even local authority) departments are often not aware of the existence of such groups, therefore they would not be aware that these also operate as consultancies (whilst still being not for profit) i.e with paid people and able to deliver to deadlines. Examples include invitations not being made to local groups to tender for SSSI monitoring and other such statutory conservation work.

VALUE (p.18)

How could commissioners use assessments of full social, environmental and economic value to inform their commissioning decisions?

An up to date list of all civil society organisations, their status and capabilities (provided by the organisations themselves).

What issues should Government consider in taking forward the Public Services (Social Enterprise and Social Value) Bill? (p.19)

Ensure that all relevant civil society organisations are given the opportunity to tender for appropriate pieces of work.

CITIZEN AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (p.20)

How could civil society organisations support greater citizen and community involvement in all stages of commissioning?

It is our understanding that the thrust of this green paper is firstly how to get communities to decide their own priorities and secondly for them to commission the appropriate services, in many cases to other local civil society organisations. In the case of the Earth Heritage Trust we would look to work with communities (on behalf of government and local commissioning agencies) to seek their views on designating, managing and using such resources as Local Sites, Nature Reserves etc. It is also possible that the same approach could be used with schools. Work could also be undertaken to explore the health agenda, as increased outdoor activity, based on geology and landscape, would mean less money spent on health issues further down the line. Fine examples locally include the UK's first long-distance footpath based on geology and landscape (the Geopark Way), as well as the Community Earth Heritage Champions Project - encouraging the local community to manage and promote 20 Local Geological Sites across Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

What forms of support will best enable statutory partners and civil society organisations to improve their working relationships? (p.22)

Regular discussions and meetings with all departments and aspects of government - from statutory conservation agencies, to Defra and Local Authorities; however minimum expenses should be made available to the civil society organisation.

I do hope the above responses are of use to you. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind Regards



Tom Richards

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Working to record, protect and promote geology and landscape