



ENGLISH HERITAGE

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DON'T GIVE UP ON THE WEST PIER

- English Heritage Urges Renewed Efforts to Secure Future of 'Queen of Piers' -

English Heritage today (**30 January 2004**) called for new efforts to secure the future of the West Pier.

The call comes after the latest restoration scheme for the pier failed to secure funding. Dr Simon Thurley, Chief Executive of English Heritage, stated: "We cannot turn our backs on this internationally famous Grade I listed building. Our report of December 2003 concluded that, in conservation terms, it is still possible to save the pier. While there is still hope we want to explore every viable option to restore the pier: at this stage we believe a return to the 1866 design for a promenade deck would be the most likely to succeed."

Sir Neil Cossons, Chairman of English Heritage, has spoken personally to the Ken Bodfish, Leader of the Brighton and Hove City Council, to pledge English Heritage support for the West Pier.

The West Pier was the masterpiece of Eugenius Birch, Britain's greatest pier engineer. It was completed in 1866 as a promenading pier and was emulated in scores of seaside towns and cities throughout Britain. It is one of only two Grade I listed piers in the country (the other is in Clevedon in Somerset).

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English Heritage is proposing a series of urgent measures to assess the viability of a number of options including a return to the elegant simplicity of the pier's original design, a design that still has a place in 21st century Brighton. It has set a target of September 2004 to have in place fresh proposals and a new funding package for the pier.

The proposals include commissioning a business plan to assess how a promenade pier could be run and a review of the most recent restoration schemes to identify the potential obstacles. English Heritage also plans to bring together the best of the current generation of engineers to produce costings, including a forward-looking maintenance strategy. Alongside the technical preparations, English Heritage will work with its public sector partners and the owners of the pier to investigate how the new proposals could be funded.

Dr Simon Thurley commented, "The West Pier is more than just a tourist attraction. It is an enduring symbol of Brighton and an intrinsic part of the nation's mental image of the seafront there. We all know it, whether as the spectacular backdrop to broadcasts from innumerable party conferences, or as the setting for a first seaside holiday or even a first kiss. Purely in design and engineering terms, we believe it is the most important pleasure pier ever built.

"It is for all these reasons that between now and 1 September we will be doing everything we can to find the partners and funding necessary to give the pier a future."

[ENDS]

Show your support for the West Pier and email your views to
westpiercampaign@english-heritage.org.uk.

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For more information please contact Helen Nesbitt, English Heritage Corporate Communications, on 020 7973 3855 / 07887 631177 or helen.nesbitt@english-heritage.org.uk.

Photographs are available free on www.papicselect.com in the English Heritage Folder

NOTES TO EDITORS

A summary of the English Heritage December 2003 report is available on request

The report concluded that restoration of Brighton's West Pier is still appropriate in conservation terms. English Heritage reached its conclusion having studied the principles and techniques applied to restoration after disasters at historic sites such as Uppark, Windsor Castle and Hampton Court. English Heritage has also tested its decision against internationally recognised conservation principles contained in the Riga Charter of 2000.

English Heritage is the Government's lead body for the historic environment in England and is responsible for protecting the best of the country's unique legacy of historic buildings, landscapes and archaeological sites for the benefit of this and future generations.