

**COMMUNITY INTEREST: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT  
IN THE GOVERNMENT HISTORIC ESTATE**

**GHEU ANNUAL CONSERVATION SEMINAR:  
WORDS OF WELCOME TO THE SUPREME COURT**

- Welcome to the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom. Immediately before your tea break you heard from Hugh Feilden about the planning and execution of the refurbishment project. It is now down to me to give you the practical perspective on the result!
- We neatly encapsulate the theme of your conference in this building. The challenge for me and my colleagues is to maintain an historic asset, which has been refurbished to a high standard, whilst running an efficient court and supporting the Justices and court users and whilst welcoming many different kinds of visitors.
- Hugh will no doubt have mentioned the high BREEAM rating for the building. And we are trying to refine our running of the building to save on energy usage.
- Even if the Middlesex Guildhall had not been here, this would have been the perfect site for a Supreme Court – opposite the legislature and with the executive and the church on either side. But the sheer numbers of people who pass through Parliament Square everyday has created a number of risks/challenges.
- Our core business is casework. Casework from around the United Kingdom – civil cases from all three jurisdictions and criminal cases from two. And casework, at least 50% of which, involves the executive in one form or another.
- It was no secret that there were mixed views amongst the Law Lords, as they then were, about the wisdom/necessity of moving out of the House of Lords. But I think it is now accurate to say that to a man and woman, they are happy with the accommodation and facilities they have within this building.
- The views of court users have also been almost uniformly positive. Undoubtedly the lawyers who appear in cases have much better facilities here than it was possible to provide at the House of Lords. Not only do they have more space for working, preparation and conferences with clients; but, for example, the building has been Wi Fi enabled on the public side, including the courtrooms.
- From the point of view of the administration there are significant benefits in having a building of our own and real benefits in the co-location of the Supreme Court and the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. The same set of Judges sit in both courts and sensible listing arrangements have been greatly facilitated.
- But undoubtedly one of the major success stories has been the greater engagement with and accessibility to the public.

- You will have seen for yourselves how easy it is to get into the building and to find your way to a courtroom: much easier than it ever was in the House of Lords to find your way from the entrance to the Palace of Westminster to the Committee corridor, and then to the relevant Committee Room in which the Law Lords were sitting.
- I think we have created a welcoming atmosphere in the Entrance. We have both free leaflets and a self-guide which has to be paid for and we have an exhibition area downstairs which you will see during your visit.
- Our plans for increased educational engagement have had to be curtailed for financial reasons, although yesterday and tomorrow we are engaged in pilot workshops with the National Centre for Citizenship and the Law.
- We have also had separate engagement with a couple of schools who have been helping us test out some educational material.
- However, we have been very pleased with the number of general visitors coming to the building. There has been a steady increase in visitors, including organised tours, since we opened in October last year, with a very significant increase in numbers during August. In October 2009 we had 4545 visitors, November and December saw between 3500 and 4000 visitors. But after January 2010 we saw a steady increase and in August we had almost 10,000 over the month. We have also had an increase in organised groups – 375 in total during our first eleven months.
- In addition to routine daily access to the building, we have seven “open days” when we make other parts of the building accessible to visitors – in particular the Library.
- Other ways in which we engage with the public include putting as much information as we can on the website. One of the areas for future development is the possibility of having a virtual tour.
- As some of you are aware, we have also published a book about the building, the architecture, the refurbishment etc.
- Down sides?
  - Wear and tear
  - Resource pressures.

But generally a good building in which to work, and which allows us to deliver a good service to Justices, Court users and the public.