

Good Homes Alliance

London, 18 December 2024

The case for a Public Sector Research Establishment for the Built Environment

www.edgedebate.com

“Successful engineering does not arise from incremental accumulation of successful experience, but rather in reaction to the failures of the past”

H PETROSKI (1992)

We've not been good at learning from failures:
so problems can fester until they become catastrophic

QUOTATION FROM: Carmarthenshire
News Online (28 January 2023):

*“the house used to be perfect
before [the retrofit] ...*

If we are to thrive in the modern world, *The UK urgently needs better-performing buildings, towns and open spaces*

GOVERNMENT, INDUSTRY AND SOCIETY NEED SUPPORT, BUT:

- while the built environment accounts for over 20% of national GDP.
- it gets 0.8% of public university research funding - *ten times too little?*

Long term, big picture, research is needed on vital national issues,
e.g. resources, land use, infrastructure, housing, settlements, climate.
This work will often cross many disciplinary boundaries and scales.

We also need specific services targeted at government, industry and society, *that also maintain and update institutional memory.*

Other G7 countries have bodies that fulfil this role.

The UK has a few, but in other areas, e.g. NICE, NPL and the HSE.

Where can government get its intelligence?

Could an independent, authoritative, public sector research establishment help?

Public Sector Research Establishments (PSREs)

are a diverse collection of public bodies carrying out research.

Their research supports a wide range of government objectives, including informing policy making, statutory and regulatory functions and providing a national strategic resource in key areas of scientific research.

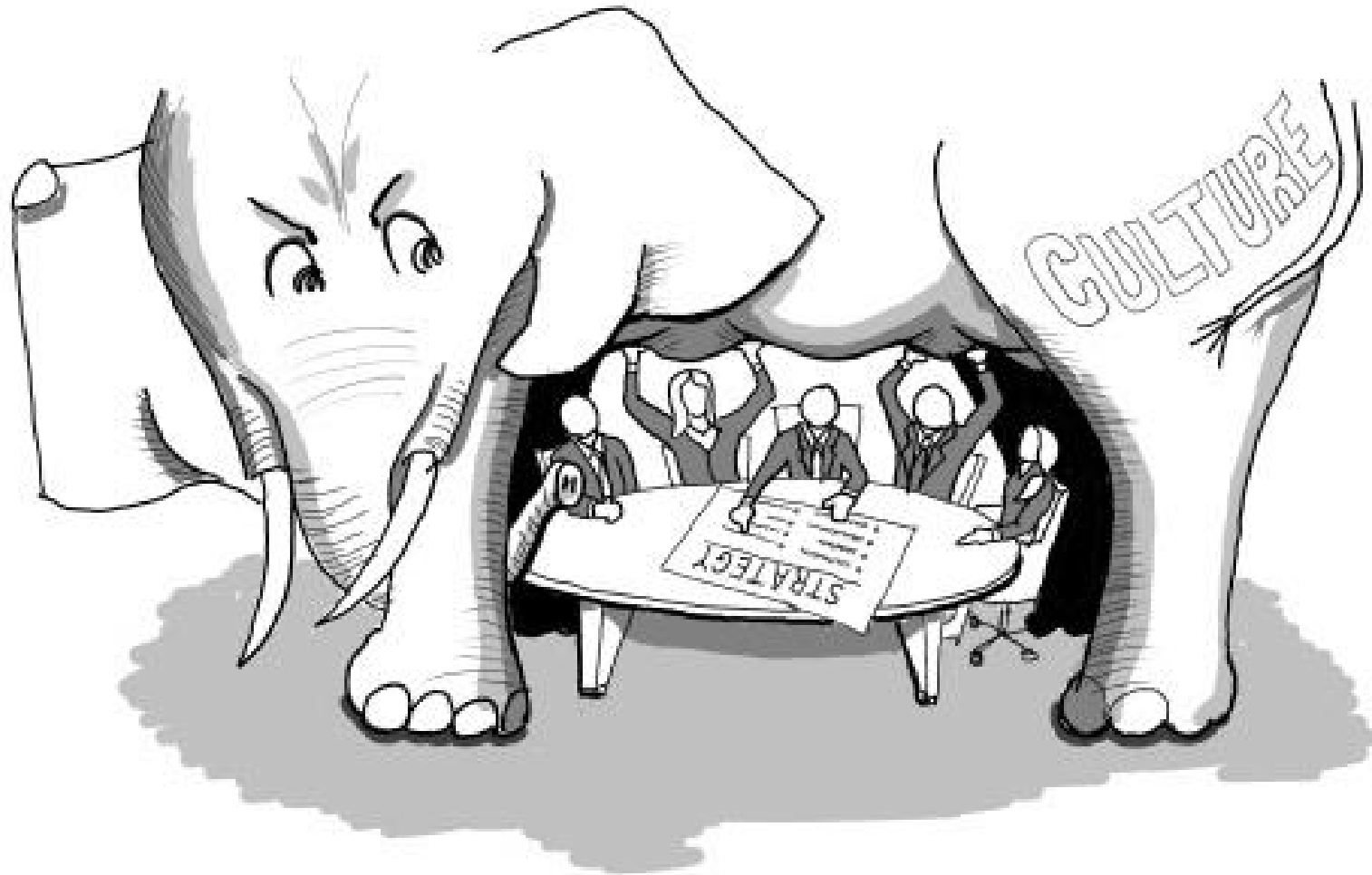
They can also provide emergency response services ... and interact with businesses around a wide array of innovation-related functions.

CABINET OFFICE (2019)

The UK [has] an unusually low number compared to other countries with a similar level of research intensity.

ROYAL SOCIETY (2020)

“Altogether, we are failing to deliver. And I think the whole political system is responsible” – LORD DEBEN



SOURCE: <https://www.politicshome.com/thehouse/article/altogether-failing-deliver-chair-climate-committee-lord-deben-warns-dangers-climate-inaction#:~:text=“Altogether%20we%20are%20failing%20to,is%20responsible%2C”%20he%20says.>

CARTOON: Bruce Flye, 2012, www.bruceflye.com/concept-graphics/illustrations/4092610

Next Steps

The Edge seeks a public discussion about the UK increasing its annual investment in built environment research, and the form of an independent, properly-funded National body with PSRE status that will:

- *bring together existing and new areas of research*
- *provide much-needed continuity of expertise*
- *identify, coordinate and curate research needs and provide advice.*

Well coordinated research and knowledge transfer gives a cost-effective opportunity to improve the quality and resilience of the built environment.

It also reduces risk to the supply side, government and owners by:

- early identification and avoidance of potential problems;
- considered implementation of new techniques and technologies
- improving social and economic performance of the built environment.

Key areas include health, safety, wellbeing, climate and biodiversity.

SOME QUESTIONS:

1. *What organisational form? Can existing organisations be adapted?*
 2. *How can we gain political consensus to ensure long-term continuity?*
 3. *What funding options will be able to maintain its long term viability?*
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