

ICOMOS



## International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage

October 22, 2018

Museums director Tinna Damgaard-Sørensen &  
Mayor Joy Mogensen, president of the museum board  
Vikingskibsmuseet,  
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4000 Roskilde, Danmark  
Att. Vikingskibsmuseets bestyrelse  
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cc. Kulturministeriet/ Minister of Culture Mette Bock  
Nybrogade 2,  
1203 København, Danmark  
Mail: [kum@kum.dk](mailto:kum@kum.dk)

### **Heritage in Danger: Vikingskibshallen, Sankt Clara Vej 41, 4000 Roskilde**

Dear Mrs. Director and Mrs. President of Vikingskibshallen.

It was with great concern that the ICOMOS International Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage (ISC20C) learnt of the Danish Ministry of Culture's decision (August 29, 2018) to remove the Protected Status of the Vikingskibshall (Viking Ship Hall), Roskilde, and that the Museum is now, according to a letter dated 13.09.2018 to the Cultural Affairs Committee of the Danish Parliament, planning to demolish the building in order to build a replacement.

While recognizing that the structural deterioration of the Viking Ship Hall has reached a technically critical stage, we believe that the pending decision to demolish the building will constitute the loss of an internationally recognized architectural masterpiece.

The delisting will damage Denmark's reputation as a state that has always promoted and been proud of the quality of its modern architecture and its international cooperation on modern heritage. Apart from the loss to architecture and heritage, the decision will be seen as a significant failure of Denmark's widely acknowledged social commitment to legislation for the protection and long-term conservation of its cultural heritage and historic sites of all periods, ancient and modern.

#### **The Viking Ship Hall – a Danish masterwork**

Erik Christian Sørensen's Viking Ship Hall, constructed between 1966 and 1969, is a masterwork of modern Danish architecture from a period considered to be the Golden Age of Danish Architectural Tradition.

The exterior is defined by a simple, finely wrought and elegant concrete structure in a very beautiful and deliberately chosen position in the landscape – directly on the shore of the inner Roskilde Fjord. The building forms a perfect setting and aesthetic framework for the display of the five outstanding Viking ships excavated from Skuldelev in Roskilde Fjord.

Without showing as much as a single piece wood in the building itself, Sørensen succeeded in ensuring that the building structure and ships complement and supplement each other. The Viking ships' excellent oak

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wood technology and their elegant forms are displayed and experienced with exceptional clarity and without competition. At the same time, the visible imprint of the wooden shuttering boards demonstrates the use of wood in a modern and equally qualified manner.

### **The Viking Ship Hall – heritage with high international significance**

The importance of the Viking Ship Hall for Danish architectural tradition is demonstrated by the fact that it was the first modern building that was listed in Denmark. The listing was justified on the grounds that the Museum 'represents, in its entirety and landscaping, the excellent architectural values that can justify the listing of a building under the age of 100' years (according to the listing letter of 1997).

Internationally, the Viking Ship Hall stands out as a unique structure that integrates museum, setting and archaeology in a way that transcends historic definitions. Building, ships and landscape interact with the narrative of ancient and modern building technology, art and mythology. The Viking Ship Hall is thus a uniquely important and specific Danish contribution to a globally recognised assemblage of outstanding modern buildings.

### **International concern**

If the Viking Ship Hall is to be demolished, Denmark and the international community will lose an unique and outstanding Danish architectural masterpiece. A historical monument that is strongly based in the internationalism and humanism that formed Danish architects after the WWII and still influences the architecture of Denmark.

The ICOMOS International Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage (ISC20C) regards the decision and the argument used in support of delisting the Viking Ship Hall with the gravest concern. A modern building, no less than any older building, may require costly repair, restoration and special maintenance. The structural issues that have arisen as a result of the choice of building material components are not reasonable grounds on which to base a decision to lift the protected status.

The cited issue of the rising water levels, and the problems that have resulted to the Viking Ship Hall's structure are being experienced in many places around the world (Venice is an obvious example).

### **We consider the Viking Ship Hall a socio-economic resource**

Acknowledging that it is not possible to reverse the decision to de-list the Viking Ship Hall, the ISC20C hereby strongly appeals to the Museum to reconsider its decision and, instead, to accept that the building is of such international importance that it constitutes a unique and valuable resource for the development of the museum and its environment in the future. From a long-term socio-economic perspective, further conservation of the hall's structure is a possibility. It can demonstrate best practice in conservation and develop the Viking Ship Museum as a site of significant historical and social integrity.

The conservation of the building is not a technical impossibility. The technical and materials expertise required can be readily sourced. ICOMOS will be happy to advise in this regard.

In view of the Viking Ship Hall's international significance, it should also be possible to access international funding interest and support. The ISC20C can offer its significant support in and recommendation in any applications for international support for future restoration.

The circular harbour that newly have been put forward as a proposal for securing the Viking Ship Hall are also worthy of mention. It not only offers the required protection against future storms and rising water level in the inner fjord but could also develop the existing creative dialogue between both ancient and modern history. ISC20C also notices that the proposal is fund-financed, proving that there is probably an interest and opportunity to raise funds in Denmark.

A possibility could also be to move the building, like the Vilhelm Lauritzen Airline Terminal in Copenhagen in reinforced concrete from 1939, in 1999 was cut over and moved 3.8 km on inter-connected lorries, with great success. Here a much shorter distance is necessary.



The world looks to Denmark for inspiration in modern architecture, design and excellence in heritage conservation practice. The conservation and restoration of the Viking Ship Hall is not only a question of significant cost; the restoration provides an obvious opportunity to demonstrate the quality of Danish expertise and underpin Denmark's existing reputation within the technical arena of concrete construction repair and conservation.'

We therefore strongly urge you preserve the Viking Ship Hall for the future in respect of the outstanding heritage significance this landmark presents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thomas M. Harboe'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Thomas' being the most prominent.

Thomas "Gunny" Harboe, FAIA  
President, ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage