

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Economic and Community Development PDS Panel
MEETING DATE:	24 January 2013
TITLE:	Bath World Heritage Site – 25 years on
WARD:	Bath and surrounding wards
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM	
List of attachments to this report: None	

1 THE ISSUE

Bath World Heritage Site was inscribed on 6 December 1987. 25 years on, this report gives a brief overview of the impacts of the status.

2 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 This is an information item. The panel are asked to note the contents of this report.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no financial implications in connection with this information report.

4 THE REPORT

4.1 December 2012 marked the 25th anniversary of Bath's inscription as a World Heritage Site (WHS). Aside from celebrating the anniversary, this milestone presented an opportunity to review the impact of the status and to look ahead.

4.2 WH status is a highly significant accolade for Bath, which is one of only 18 sites in England. Inscribed alongside Bath in 1987 were The Acropolis at Athens, The Great Wall (China), and Venice and its Lagoon (Italy), which is indicative of the company that this status places us with.

4.3 Initially, the status had little impact, requiring minimal administration. However, with a growing number of sites the co-ordinating body, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), introduced more stringent requirements.

4.4 In 2000 a WHS Steering Group was established, comprising of senior representatives of local and national bodies. Bath and North East Somerset Council (the Council) employed a fixed-term project officer in 2001, with tapering financial assistance from English Heritage. This post was subsequently retained as a WH co-ordinator.

- 4.5 One of the co-ordinator's early tasks was to produce a WHS Management Plan (adopted 2003) and negotiate a site boundary (not clarified at time of inscription). Given that the principle protection of the WHS is through the UK planning system, and that system needs boundaries for effective implementation, a boundary was essential. It was agreed with UNESCO in 2005. The city wide boundary makes Bath one of the only entire cities to be designated globally, with Venice being the best comparable example.
- 4.6 The construction boom in the early years of the new century raised new questions with regard to the vision Bath saw for itself. Tower cranes, hardly seen for a generation, stood over the city. Major proposals at Southgate, Bath Western Riverside, the Holburne Museum, Thermae Bath Spa and the Dyson Academy all came forward within a very short period. Debate ensued locally, nationally and internationally. The standard UNESCO response was to send a fact finding delegation, or 'mission', to Bath in November 2008. The mission made recommendations regarding some developments, but concluded overall that the site was well managed and the state of conservation was good.
- 4.7 The Council used the opportunity of the 2008 mission to strengthen management of WH. The co-ordinator, who had left the authority, was replaced by a WH Manager, able to operate at a more senior level. The Steering Group was refreshed with appointment of an independent, highly qualified Chairman. A revised WH Management Plan was produced and adopted in 2010.
- 4.8 The mission also highlighted the implications of WH for Bath, some which can be negative. WH adds perceived complexity to the development process, which may be potentially off-putting to developers who fear they may have extra hoops to jump through. It also gives another avenue of complaint for protestors, and if wrongly interpreted can give a false impression that the city is living in the past. It places Bath in the international spotlight, which is good if all is well but resulted in negative national media coverage in the run up to the mission. It does generate some bureaucracy. This Council keeps costs lean with employment of a single officer (rather than teams in some other sites), but enables that officer to work across Council disciplines and the wider community in order to maximise efforts of all stakeholders in preserving and enhancing the site.
- 4.9 The overriding impact of WH is however positive. As stated earlier WH places Bath alongside some of the most famous places on the planet, and is a significant source of civic pride. It can be used to educate children as to the special place in which they live and thus promote future conservation and protection. It also helps conservation in that proposals here attract widespread interest and scrutiny, and WH is a material consideration in the planning process, raising the profile on issues such as 'fracking'. It increases the visibility and profile of Bath generally, with WH being a global brand and Bath being widely recognised as an outstanding and beautiful place.
- 4.10 The economic impact of WH is hard to accurately quantify but is positive. In tourism terms, the city receives 4.5million visitors per year, employing approximately 10,000 people and adding £380m to the local economy. 29% say they visited due to architecture/buildings, giving a crude calculation of heritage being worth a minimum of £110M to Bath. Tourists would undoubtedly visit without the status, but as stated WH is a global brand, which visitors from emerging markets such as China and Brazil will be familiar with. Other competitor

English cities such as York and Chester are envious of the status, which they have pursued without success.

4.11 In terms of local business, WH status reinforces the perception of the city as a highly desirable and stable place to locate. The perceived marketing edge offered by WH is demonstrated by the number of businesses which announce they are 'located in the WH city of Bath' as an opening line in their marketing. Further efforts need to be made to spread benefit across the wider community, but the small grant fund (WH Enhancement Fund) is undertaking over 40 projects, addressing repair which other agencies cannot fund, and has turned £120k of funding into over £400k of work (link to newsletter given below).

4.12 WH can be described as the cultural glue which binds together many activities in the city. It provides a non-political banner which the community and the heritage industry can rally around. It is entirely complimentary with the vision for Bath, in that it promotes quality modern intervention in the historic environment, and it stamps a hallmark of quality on those features which have made the city famous world-wide. The high quality environment provides a backdrop on which to stage numerous festivals and events.

4.13 Looking forward the status has more to offer. In 1987 the inscription predominantly covered buildings and archaeology, but made little mention of the intangible impact which spa culture has stamped on the city. A group of 11 European spa's calling themselves 'The Great Spas of Europe' are approaching UNESCO with regard to WH recognition of this distinct spa culture. Bath is currently part of this 'Great Spas' group, offering greater visibility, profile and tourism benefits to complement the well-being industry that the city, as the UK's only hot springs, excels in.

4.14 Several studies have been completed on the impact of WHS status, most notably by James Rebanks Consulting (2009). Their conclusions confirm Bath's experience in the last 25 years, in that if the status is treated purely as an award to put on the mantelpiece it will return little benefit, but if it is put to work as an aid to marketing, as a banner of civic pride, and to complement our key economic strengths, it can be an extremely valuable asset.

5 RISK MANAGEMENT

5.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations is not considered necessary in this instance.

6 EQUALITIES

6.1 This is an information report, which is not considered to contain implications warranting completion of an Equality Impact Assessment.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 No consultation has been undertaken for this information report.

8 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

8.1 (No decision is sought).

9 ADVICE SOUGHT

9.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer (Divisional Director – Legal and Democratic Services) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

Contact person	Tony Crouch, World Heritage Manager. 01225 477584
Background papers	<p>World Heritage Site Management Plan (2010 -2016): www.bathnes.gov.uk/worldheritage</p> <p>World Heritage Status: Is there an opportunity for Economic Gain? Rebanks Consulting (2009): http://www.lakeswhs.co.uk/documents.html</p> <p>World Heritage Enhancement Fund newsletter 2012: http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/tourism-and-heritage/world-heritage/world-heritage-news</p>
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