

Bath & North East Somerset Council		
MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Cabinet	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	20 May 2025	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E3615
TITLE:	Combined City of Bath and Great Spa Towns of Europe World Heritage Sites Management Plan (2024-2030)	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report:		
1. Combined City of Bath and Great Spa Towns of Europe World Heritage Sites Management Plan (2024-2030) https://secure.bathnes.gov.uk/secureshare/index.php/s/Rj9wLKKMmwqTTnQ Password: WHSMp2430. (please include full stop)		
2. Equality Impact Assessment / Equality Analysis		
3. Risk Assessment		
4. SMG & Council Consultation Response Table		
5. Public Consultation Response Table		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 The Combined City of Bath and Great Spa Towns of Europe combined World Heritage Sites Management Plan (2024-2030).

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to:

- 2.1 Endorse the Combined City of Bath and Great Spa Towns of Europe World Heritage Sites Management Plan (2024-2030) following Cabinet endorsement on 14 November 2024 for an 8-week public engagement/consultation between December 2024 and January 2025 (see section 10: Consultation below).

3 THE REPORT

- 3.1 This report relates to the Combined City of Bath and Great Spa Towns of Europe World Heritage Sites Management Plan (2024-2030) and seeks endorsement of the Management Plan.

- 3.2 The Management Plan is included as a link in Annex 1 to this report.
- 3.3 In summary the report outlines the following:
- Background, purpose and scope of the Management Plan
 - Format and content
 - Council Corporate Strategy and the Management Plan
 - Community engagement
 - Budgetary considerations
- 3.4 World Heritage Sites (WHS) are inscribed and overseen by UNESCO. UNESCO Operational Guidelines (2021) require each site to produce a management plan and reviewed and renewed (in the case of Bath) every six years, describing what the site consists of, why it is of global significance, how it is managed, what challenges it faces, its priorities, and how (through an action plan) these will be addressed. This Management Plan will replace the previous plan that covered the period of 2016-2022 and has been reviewed to include the second Great Spa Towns of Europe (GSTe) WHS inscription. The two-year delay between the end of the previous Management Plan and the new Management Plan is due to personnel changes and resourcing issues. UNESCO requested, when inscribing the GSTe in 2021, that a revised, combined management plan was produced. There are therefore external drivers for the programme to review the Management Plan. This is the first time a double-inscribed WHS has been combined into one management plan, and therefore this is a ground-breaking and unique moment in the history of WHS.
- 3.5 UNESCO WHS inscription remains a highly respected global brand and the highest and most prestigious heritage designation and accolade that can be achieved. Bath is one of only 22 sites out of 1223 worldwide to achieve a double inscription: The City of Bath (1987) and Great Spa Towns of Europe (2021). The benefits it brings are substantial, including economic, deriving from the global status and profile for the city, which is significant, and other comparable UK cities that recognise these benefits have attempted to gain this status so far without success.
- 3.6 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024 recognises World Heritage Sites as designated assets of the highest significance. Associated historic environment guidance states that WHS management plans should inform the Development Plan or Local Plan policies. The Management Plan informs, works alongside and is complementary to the Council's Development Plan. However, it is the Development Plan which guides and influences development proposals, contains planning policies used in the determination of planning applications, and protects land which is valued for a variety of reasons.
- 3.7 The Management Plan addresses the following:
- why the Bath WHS is of global importance and significance

- what its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and the attributes that convey them are
 - how the Site will be protected and managed
 - what the issues are impacting upon its OUV
 - what the priorities are for management and the actions proposed to address these
- 3.8 Bath World Heritage (including reviewing and preparation of the Management Plan) is managed through an Advisory Board, a roundtable bringing together 33 representatives from 21 organisations. The Advisory Board is convened and supported by Bath and North East Somerset Council but chaired independently.
- 3.9 In addition to Council officers and members, representatives from the following organisations sit on the Advisory Board: Historic England, Great Spa Towns of Europe, National Trust, Bath Preservation Trust, ICOMOS UK, World Heritage UK, University of Bath and Bath Spa Universities, The Mayor's Guides, Canal and River Trust, Wessex Water, Local business community, including Bath Bid and Visit West.
- 3.10 The review and preparation of the Management Plan has been undertaken through a collaboration of these organisations led by the Council and the Chair of the Advisory Board. A steering group was established approximately 18 months ago made up of and to represent the Advisory Board to review the format of the Management Plan, consider how this could be updated to include the two inscriptions and, in particular, to review in some detail shared views of the issues, challenges and opportunities for the World Heritage Site in order to establish a new set of priorities and a partnership action plan to address these.
- 3.11 The Management Plan is set out in two main sections. The first part explains the aims of the Management Plan and gives details of both inscriptions and how the World Heritage Site is 'managed':
- Introduction: summarises the double inscription, considers the scope, status and priorities of the Management Plan.
 - Description of the site: this is a scene setting overview of the World Heritage Site, including its location, boundary, setting, history (of the inscription) the condition of the site and some key facts.
 - Significance of the site: this sets out in full why Bath is of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), in respect of both inscriptions, and describes the Attributes that convey or express the OUV of the site. It also sets out the individual Elements such as archaeology, buildings and setting. It provides helpful and easy access to this key information.
 - Management of the site: this addresses the complexities of 'management' which, as Bath is a living, dynamic urban city, has many facets and is dependent upon factors such as land ownership, legislation, governance systems, resources and how the many stakeholders interact. The number of partners involved and the relationships between them are complex.

3.12 The second part of the plan focusses on active management:

- Issues, challenges & opportunities: these have been the significant focus of the partnership work to prepare this new Management Plan, now and going forward, together with the priorities and actions identified to seek to address them. This has resulted in the identification of six headline priorities:
 - Addressing Climate Change
 - Development Management
 - Public Realm
 - Traffic, Transport and Mobility
 - Promotion, Interpretation, Inclusion and Presentation
 - Natural Setting and Nature Recovery
- Action plan: setting out actions, ownership across the partners, resource implications as far as can be detailed at this point, planned timescales and monitoring.

3.13 The Management Plan priorities and process for preparation align well with the Council's Corporate Strategy:

- Tackling the Climate & Ecological Emergencies: two of the six headline priorities identified in the Management Plan relate to these critical issues - Addressing Climate Change; Natural Setting and Nature Recovery, together with actions including research in identifying and understanding the risks posed by climate change, to both the WHS and the community, and the actions and interventions required as a result; also preserving, enhancing and promoting the Green Setting of the WHS, supporting nature recovery initiatives.
- Giving People a Bigger Say: the preparation of the Management Plan though 'participatory means' is a key UNESCO concept and requirement. The 8-week public consultation on the Management Plan was an essential stage of its preparation and provided the opportunity for the local and wider community to have their say and contribute. At the heart of the Management Plan and the World Heritage Site inscriptions is the founding concept of World Heritage Sites being for all, promoting participation, inclusivity, accessibility and equality.
- Delivering for Local residents: the Management Plan recognises that Bath is a living, dynamic city with a local population and community that live within the WHS that, unusually, covers the entire city. It recognises that there are both local community needs as well as those of visitors. Through its priorities and associated actions, the Management Plan promotes and supports many initiatives and projects that improve and enhance the quality of life and well-being of the city's residents, including improvements to both the built and surrounding natural environment.

- Preparing for the Future/Focusing on Prevention: the Management Plan focuses on enhancing and improving the WHS and futureproofing, closely aligning with these two Council priorities and also with Tackling the Climate & Ecological Emergencies.

3.14 The World Heritage Sites Advisory Board endorsed the Management Plan on 25 April 2025, and both the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and UNESCO will be notified following Council (Cabinet) endorsement.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 The preparation, endorsement and publication of the Management Plan is not a statutory requirement.

4.2 Cabinet will consider the endorsement of the Combined World Heritage Sites Management Plan 2024-2030 as an urgent item (General Exception) under Rule 3.5.15 of the Constitution for the following reasons:

- there is a need and pressure to submit the updated plan to UNESCO as soon as possible now that it is completed.
- the previous Management Plan covered the period of 2016 to 2022, and that this Plan covers the period of 2024 to 2030 and into the second year of the Plan period and therefore overdue.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

5.1 The review and preparation of the Management Plan, including public consultation, was undertaken utilising existing resources and within existing budgets.

5.2 The Management Plan identifies actions going forward for the Council and partners. In respect of the Council's actions, many of these will sit within existing budgets, although there will be some that will require the sourcing of additional funding, potentially as part of partnership approaches, and will be reported individually as required and appropriate.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations have been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision-making risk management.

7 EQUALITIES

7.1 Preparation of the Management Plan has been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) which ensures that the Council understands the implications for people with protected characteristics

8 CLIMATE CHANGE

8.1 Climate Change is one of the Management Plan's headline priorities, consistent with UNESCO's own priorities and also with the Council's Climate Emergency and Corporate Priorities. The associated action supports continued research into understanding and identifying the risks associated with climate change to the WHSs and the development of mitigation strategies.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 None.

10 CONSULTATION

- 10.1 Consultation on the Management Plan has been extensive and is the culmination of one and a half years of partnership working with the SMG, consulting with many local, national, and international experts and specialists, and the community during an 8-week public consultation between 2024 and 2025.
- 10.2 Commencing in January 2024 with the Advisory Board's Strategic Management Group (SMG) acting as 'steering group' for the review of the Management Plan in collaboration with the Council's World Heritage Site Manager. This consisted of regular monthly online meetings, with a workshop in May 2024 involving the Advisory Board members, Council officers and invited external specialists and experts, including the Stonehenge World Heritage Site Manager. Council officers were also provided with the opportunity throughout 2024 to offer advice and comments on the draft Management Plan. This consultative, collaborative and participatory exercise in preparing the draft Management Plan for the Public consultation resulted in over 500 comments and substantial and positive amendments (see Annex 2: SMG & Council Consultation Response Table).
- 10.3 On 14 November 2024 Cabinet endorsed the draft City of Bath and Great Spa Towns of Europe World Heritage Site Management Plan (2024-2030) for formal public engagement/consultation.
- 10.4 The public consultation was eight weeks in duration from December 2024 to January 2025 and was well-publicised with the draft Management Plan deliberately presented in a basic text format rather than a fully designed document. This was largely undertaken online on the Council's website, and hard copies were made available including in libraries and the World Heritage Centre. The consultation resulted in nearly 500 responses and comments, and included both local residents and high-level stakeholders, including Historic England, ICOMOS International, ICOMOS-UK, National Trust, and others in the Advisory Board's Strategic Management Group. Again, this resulted in substantial and positive amendments to the draft Management Plan (see Annex 3 Public Consultation Response Table).
- 10.5 Following consultation with the SMG to discuss the amendments to the draft Management Plan a detailed 'in-house' design process was commenced. This was then presented to the SMG for comments, and this resulted in some additional minor amendments including to the images and text. This final designed version was endorsed by the Advisory Board on the 25 April 2025.
- 10.6 In preparing this Report the Cabinet Member for Built Environment, Housing and Sustainable Development, the Executive Director for Sustainable Development, the S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer have been consulted. It has been cleared for publication by the S151 and Monitoring Officer.
- 10.7 This report seeks endorsement for the amendments to the Management Plan following consultation.

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Background Papers	None
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	