

Planning Committee

10am Thursday 1 October 2015

Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site Update

Item number	7.2
Report number	
Executive/routine	Executive
Wards	City Centre, Inverleith, Corstorphine/Murrayfield, Meadows/Morningside, South Side/ Newington

Executive summary

This report provides an update on world heritage issues in the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site.

Links

Coalition pledges	P40
Council outcomes	CO19
Single Outcome Agreement	SO4

Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site Update

Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the content of this report in the context of understanding the means of protecting the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site (the Site) through the planning system and the impact of development on Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).

Background

The Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site

- 2.1 The Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site (the Site) was added to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO's) list of World Heritage Sites in 1995. The World Heritage Committee stated that the Edinburgh Old and New Towns "represented a remarkable blend of two urban phenomena: organic medieval growth and 18th and 19th century town planning."
- 2.2 It is approximately 4.5 square kilometres of the city centre. It takes in the Old Town Conservation Area and the New Town Conservation Area, and includes parts of five others. It encompasses many institutions of national significance including the Scottish Parliament, the courts, the galleries and the University. It has retained its historic urban form and character to a remarkable extent. It contains a wealth of buildings listed for their architectural or historic interest, including the highest concentration of Category A listed buildings in Scotland.

Management Plans

- 2.3 It is a UNESCO requirement to have a management plan for every World Heritage Site. The Planning Committee approved the current management plan for the Site on 19 May 2011. The first Management Plan was published in 2005, the second (current) plan covers the period from 2011 – 2016. It was prepared in partnership with Edinburgh World Heritage and Historic Scotland and was informed by stakeholder workshops. A review, in preparation for the production of the third management plan, will soon be underway. This is to launch on World Heritage Day (18 April) 2017.

- 2.4 The purpose of any management plan is to provide a framework for the preservation and enhancement of the Site's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), as accepted by UNESCO at nomination. At its core, the current document sets out a statement of the Site's OUV – what makes it special.
- 2.5 The Management Plan provides an overview of the challenges, objectives and actions for the key partners and other stakeholders in the future management of the Site.
- 2.6 Chapter 4 of the current Management Plan breaks down the components of the Site's OUV. However, this is not exhaustive and neither does it provide a full explanation of each of the components listed. Appendix 1 sets out the Statement of OUV that was presented to UNESCO at inscription; particular components have been highlighted.

Current Planning Policy and Guidance

- 2.7 The World Heritage Site is protected through a number of designations: it includes scheduled ancient monuments, listed buildings, designed landscapes, and conservation areas. Normal statutory controls for each of these designations still apply, and there are local plan policies seeking to protect them. OUV is also a material consideration in the planning process and local plan policy Env 1 – The World Heritage Site is in place to protect it:

Development which would harm the qualities which justified the inscription of the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh as a World Heritage Site or would have a detrimental impact on the Site's setting will not be permitted.

- 2.8 In addition the Council's wider policies and guidance on the design of development provide detail on issues such as heights, massing, detailing and the appropriateness of materials.

Main report

Introduction

- 3.1 Alongside Bath, the Site is one of only two World Heritage Sites in the UK that cover a city centre with a multitude of ownerships. Edinburgh is a capital city and the quality of the historic environment is key to its success, attracting development and tourism that contributes to its economic growth. World Heritage Site status is recognition of this quality. The management strategy for the Site acknowledges that this creates particular challenges. It is a thriving, living city centre, important for tourism, retail, business and government as well as having a large residential population. These are all positive factors and the strength in the city's economy results in development proposals. Accordingly, the impact of such proposals for change must be assessed in terms of whether they

would add to, or detract from, the ability to understand and appreciate what makes the Site special.

State of Conservation

- 3.2 It is a UNESCO requirement to carry out regular monitoring of the Site as part of the management plan cycle. The 2013 – 2016 Monitoring Report will be presented to Planning Committee at its next meeting in December 2015.
- 3.3 There is also a UNESCO requirement to submit a 6-yearly 'Periodic Report' to UNESCO. This was submitted in July 2013. This document records the changing circumstances of a Site and provides an assessment as to whether the World Heritage values of the Site are being maintained over time.
- 3.4 The State of Conservation is under constant scrutiny – including the recent UNESCO Reactive Monitoring Mission in November 2008. The state of conservation of the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh WHS has been declared 'good' to date. This is attributable to the mechanisms in place - including planning policy and guidance - to ensure the Site's protection and effective management in partnership with Edinburgh World Heritage and Historic Scotland.
- 3.5 However, recently there has been significant press attention surrounding a number of proposed developments within the Site, raising its profile, and attracting the attention of ICOMOS (the International Council on Monuments and Sites) (UK), which advises UNESCO on the impact of proposed change to cultural World Heritage Sites. ICOMOS (UK) will carry out a visit to assess the Site in relation to recent decisions on planning applications. This can take the form of an informal or formal visit. Informally, they may report on its observations. One possible outcome of such a process could be a formal Reactive Monitoring Mission and a recommendation to the World Heritage Committee that a Site is stripped of its WH status.

Current or recent developments in the Site

- 3.6 There have been a number of planning applications considered by the Development Management Sub-Committee in the life-cycle of the current Management Plan which have had, or will have, an effect on the Site once constructed. This is to be expected in a thriving and dynamic city centre and World Heritage status does not seek to prevent change; indeed the OUV recognises this under "Authenticity" (Appendix 1). Developments can have both an individual and a cumulative impact on the OUV of the Site. Therefore, it is not just the larger developments that can change the character and appearance of the site but also the large number of smaller or medium-sized applications that are assessed through the Planning process. ICOMOS is likely to look at all of

these issues in considering whether to make any recommendations to UNESCO regarding the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site. It is clear, however, that the larger developments have the ability to make a more immediate and greater impact on OUV.

- 3.7 Advice from officers is provided in all reports on planning applications that are put before the Development Management Sub-Committee. In some cases the decisions taken differ from the recommendations made. The Development Management Sub-Committee, as the decision makers, can attach different weight to the policy and other considerations, and ultimately come to a different conclusion. This is part of the democratic quasi judicial process of determining development applications.

Policy Considerations and Approach

- 3.8 The planning policy and guidance and the approach to the management of the site as set out in the Management Plan is still considered to be appropriate and fit for purpose; it is robust and allows for an informed decision-making process. Therefore, there is no pressing need to review the suite of policies and guidelines ahead of the current programme.

Measures of success

- 4.1 The protection of the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site from the adverse impact of development by understanding the mechanism for this is through planning policy and guidance.

Financial impact

- 5.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 There are no significant risks associated with approval of the report as recommended.

Equalities impact

- 7.1 The aim of managing the World Heritage Site is to preserve and enhance the quality of the area. This has the potential to improve the quality of life and supports sustainable communities. There are no predicted negative impacts on equalities.

Sustainability impact

- 8.1 Management of the built environment has the potential to minimise the use of natural resources and reduce carbon emissions. The management of the historic environment contributes directly to sustainability in a number of ways. These include the unique quality of historic environments which provide a sense of identity and continuity.

Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 None.

Background reading/external references

[The Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site Management Plan 2011-2016](#)

[Edinburgh Design Guidance](#)

John Bury

Acting Director of Services for Communities

Contact; Jenny Bruce, World Heritage Site Co-ordinator

Email jenny.bruce@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 529 3510

Links

Coalition pledges	P40 – Work with Edinburgh World Heritage Trust and other stakeholders to conserve the city’s built heritage.
Council outcomes	CO19 – Attractive Places and Well Maintained – Edinburgh remains an attractive city through the development of high quality buildings and places and the delivery of high standards and maintenance of infrastructure and public realm.
Single Outcome Agreement	SO4 – Edinburgh’s communities are safer and have improved physical and social fabric.
Appendices	Appendix 1 Summary of the components of the Site’s OUV

APPENDIX 1

Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

The remarkable juxtaposition of two clearly articulated urban planning phenomena. The contrast between the organic medieval Old Town and the planned Georgian New Town of Edinburgh, Scotland, provides a clarity of urban structure unrivalled in Europe. The juxtaposition of these two distinctive townscapes, each of exceptional historic and architectural interest, which are linked across the landscape divide, the "great arena" of Sir Walter Scott's Waverley Valley, by the urban viaduct, North Bridge, and by the Mound, creates the outstanding urban landscape.

The Old Town stretches along a high ridge from the Castle on its dramatically situated rock down to the Palace of Holyrood. Its form reflects the burgage plots of the Canongate, founded as an "abbatial burgh" dependent on the Abbey of Holyrood, and the national tradition of building tall on the narrow "tofts" or plots separated by lanes or "closes" which created some of the world's tallest buildings of their age, the dramatic, robust, and distinctive tenement buildings. It contains many 16th and 17th century merchants' and nobles' houses such as the early 17th century restored mansion house of Gladstone's Land which rises to six storeys, and important early public buildings such as the Canongate Tolbooth and St Giles Cathedral.

The Old Town is characterized by the survival of the little-altered medieval "fishbone" street pattern of narrow closes, wynds, and courts leading off the spine formed by the High Street, the broadest, longest street in the Old Town, with a sense of enclosed space derived from its width, the height of the buildings lining it, and the small scale of any breaks between them.

The New Town, constructed between 1767 and 1890 as a collection of seven new towns on the glacial plain to the north of the Old Town, is framed and articulated by an uncommonly high concentration of planned ensembles of ashlar-faced, world-class, neo-classical buildings, associated with renowned architects, including John and Robert Adam (1728-92), Sir William Chambers (1723-96), and William Playfair (1790-1857). Contained and integrated with the townscape are gardens, designed to take full advantage of the topography, while forming an extensive system of private and public open spaces. The New Town is integrated with large green spaces. It covers a very large area of 3,288 ha, is consistent to an unrivalled degree, and survives virtually intact.

Some of the finest public and commercial monuments of the New-classical revival in Europe survive in the city, reflecting its continuing status as the capital of Scotland since 1437, and a major centre of thought and learning in the 18th century Age of Enlightenment, with its close cultural and political links with mainland Europe.

The successive planned extensions from the first New Town, and the high quality of the architecture, set standards for Scotland and beyond, and exerted a major influence on the development of urban architecture and town planning throughout Europe.

The dramatic topography of the Old Town combined with the planned alignments of key buildings in both the Old and the New Town, results in spectacular views and panoramas and an iconic skyline.

The renewal and revival of the Old Town in the late 19th century, and the adaptation of the distinctive Baronial style of building for use in an urban environment, influenced the development of conservation policies for urban environments.

Criterion (ii): The successive planned extensions of the New Town, and the high quality of its architecture, set standards for Scotland and beyond, and exerted a major influence on the development of urban architecture and town planning throughout Europe, in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Criterion (iv): The Old and New Towns together form a dramatic reflection of significant changes in European urban planning, from the inward looking, defensive walled medieval city of royal palaces, abbeys and organically developed burgh plots in the Old Town, through the expansive formal Enlightenment planning of the 18th and 19th centuries in the New Town, to the 19th century rediscovery and revival of the Old Town with its adaptation of a distinctive Baronial style of architecture in an urban setting.

Integrity

The property encompasses significant town-planning components, including layout, buildings, open spaces and views, that demonstrate the distinctiveness between the organic growth of the Old Town and the planned terraces and squares of the New Town with the wide landscaped valley between. Overall the property forms a remarkably consistent and coherent entity which has developed and adapted over time. It has largely preserved its skyline and extensive views in and out of the property, although as with any modern, living city these have altered and developed over time, while preserving the key attributes of Outstanding Universal Value within the property. The vulnerability of the skyline and the views in and out of the property has been addressed by the introduction of a Skyline Policy.

Authenticity

The level of authenticity in Edinburgh is high. Individually the high-quality buildings of all dates have been conserved to a high standard and the layout of streets and squares maintain their intactness. The property also continues to retain its historic role as the administrative and cultural capital of Scotland, while remaining a vibrant economic centre.