



Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Cabinet

Thursday 13 July 2023

Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site - Supplementary Planning Document

Cabinet Member:	Cllr Richard Overton - Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member: for Homes & Enforcement
Lead Director:	Katherine Kynaston - Director: Housing, Employment & Infrastructure
Service Area:	Housing, Employment & Infrastructure
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Wards Affected:	Ironbridge Gorge and Madeley & Sutton Hill
Key Decision:	Yes
Forward Plan:	14 June 2023
Report considered by:	SMT – 13 June 2023 Business Briefing - 22 June 2023 Cabinet – 13 July 2023

1.0 Recommendations for decision:

It is recommended that Cabinet:-

- 1.1 approve and adopt the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site Supplementary Planning Document for use in determining planning applications in relation to area of the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1. The purpose of this report is to recommend to Cabinet the adoption of the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

3.0 Background

- 3.1. The Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site (WHS) is an internationally recognised area of outstanding universal value and one of seven designated conservation areas in the borough. UNESCO awarded the gorge World Heritage Site status in 1986 in recognition of the areas record of innovation during the Industrial Revolution. The ‘Outstanding Universal Value’ (or OUV) of the area is captured in the many historical sites, landscape, setting of the gorge and the social history of the area.
- 3.2. The value of designation has helped the area maintain a strong visitor economy, promote the wider borough as a place to visit, live, work and invest and has also helped secure investment into ground stabilisation works and conservation projects in the WHS area.
- 3.3. The purpose of the World Heritage Site SPD is to provide locally distinctive planning guidance to help protect the gorge and support sustainable development within the WHS. The SPD clarifies why the protection of the OUV is of such importance and it will form part of a suite of documents including the WHS Management Plan that set out how the area will be protected and managed.
- 3.4. The WHS boundary extends into Shropshire and therefore the SPD will be used by both Local Planning Authorities, following adoption, to help determine planning applications in their respective areas. The document will go to Shropshire Councils Cabinet with a recommendation for adoption on 19 July.
- 3.5. The Council place a high priority on its commitment to protecting the gorge and work closely with key stakeholders to achieve this including the WHS Steering Group, Historic England and Icomos UK.
- 3.6. The Council recognises that the WHS covers a number of well-established communities at Ironbridge, Coalbrookdale, Coalport, Jackfield as well as Broseley with Shropshire. To help these communities the SPD contains property level guidance that will help residents and businesses when bringing forward development proposals including changes then may wish to make to properties.

4.0 Summary of main proposals

- 4.1 The Ironbridge Gorge is a historically significant area and contains a number of scheduled ancient monuments not least the Ironbridge itself. The UNESCO designation of WHS status, awarded in 1986, provides international recognition of the value of the area, this is encapsulated by its Outstanding Universal Value or OUV. The Ironbridge Gorge is also a conservation area and enjoys additional protection under that designation.

“Outstanding Universal Value means cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity. As such, the

permanent protection of this heritage is of the highest importance to the international community as a whole”.

4.2. The overarching aim of the SPD is to provide guidance for protecting and enhancing the OUV of the WHS, preventing loss through deterioration and disappearance of its heritage value. This SPD sets out how the planning system will fulfil the responsibilities and opportunities that arise from WHS status. The SPD helps:

- Protect the WHS
- Conserve the WHS
- Present and transmit to future generations the importance of the WHS
- Encourage investment and development to secure a healthy economy and support regeneration.

4.3. An added benefit of the Councils responsibility to protect and conserve the WHS and conservation area is the contribution of the WHS to the success of the boroughs visitor economy and economy in general. The WHS attracts around 1 million visitors a year and generates an estimated £43m for the boroughs economy. It is therefore important that there is a robust plan for managing and protecting the area.

Opportunities

4.4. The guidance contained in the SPD provides the opportunity to address a range of other matters including promoting and ensuring appropriate repair techniques, bringing redundant buildings back into use whilst retaining internal and external original features, and the repair and reinstatement of historical features

4.5. The SPD also provides an opportunity to address climate change pressures within the WHS / conservation area. There are many listed buildings that have residential and business uses, improving the thermal and energy efficiency of buildings will help tackle climate change and reduce the running costs of such buildings thereby improving there long term sustainability. The SPD provides guidance on where appropriate measures can be put in place to address climate change in the WHS area. The SPD will be coming to Cabinet alongside ‘Climate Change Guidance for Development SPD’.

Planning context

4.6. The planning system affords World Heritage Sites a very high level of protection through the National Planning Policy Framework which states that plan making bodies should aim to satisfy the following principles:

- Protecting the WHS and its setting.
- Striking a balance between the needs of conservation, biodiversity, access, the interests of the local community, the public benefits of a development and the sustainable economic use of the World Heritage.
- Protecting a WHS and its setting from the effect of changes which are relatively minor but which, on a cumulative basis, could have significant effect;

- Enhancing the WHS and its setting where appropriate and possible through positive management; and
 - Protecting the WHS and its setting from climate change but ensuring that mitigation and adaptation is not at the expense of integrity or authenticity.
- 4.7. The Telford & Wrekin Local Plan Policy BE3 provides a robust planning policy protection for the WHS. A wider suite of policies provide protection for assets within the gorge itself including; listed buildings (BE4), conservation areas (BE5), buildings of local interest (BE6), archaeology and scheduled ancient monuments (BE8) and land stability (BE10).
- 4.8 The SPD will form part of a suite of documents covering the World Heritage Site and Severn Gorge Conservation Area. These include the WHS Management Plan, which provides an overarching framework and strategy for how Telford & Wrekin Council and Shropshire Council manage and protect the Outstanding Universal Value of the area. The Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site 'A Guide for Residents' sets out when planning permission will be required for various works in the WHS area. The Council also has an Article 4 direction in place which removes some permitted development rights within the (Telford & Wrekin) WHS area to help manage the cumulative impact of change. The Article 4 will be reviewed and updated in due course.

How the SPD will be used

- 4.9 The Council has the power to introduce SPD's under the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, Part 5. SPD documents provide the opportunity for additional detailed planning guidance over and above planning policy set out in local development plans. This provides residents, businesses and other organisations with certainty when submitting planning applications.
- 4.10 The SPD provides residents, business and organisations that intend to submit planning applications, planning guidance in the following areas;
- within the boundaries of the WHS; and
 - where proposals impact the setting of the WHS.
- 4.11 The guidance helps applicants submit planning applications that take full account of the areas OUV in relation to proposals for development such as:
- Alterations, extensions and refurbishment of existing residential and commercial properties
 - Change of use from one development type to another
 - New development proposals
 - Applications relating to renewable energy

Consultation and engagement

- 4.12 Consultation and engagement, carried out jointly with Shropshire Council, took place between January and February 2023. This has been a key part of developing the SPD and the following engagement activity took place:

- Direct engagement with stakeholder organisations including; ICOMOS UK, Historic England, WHS Steering Group and Parish Councils
- Use of social media channels, Council website; and
- 6 x Public engagement sessions in the WHS area.

4.13 As part of the consultation and engagement process the Council received feedback from the Ward Councillor and local residents around additional support and guidance that could be provided when they are looking to submit planning applications. The property level guidance provided within the SPD recognises that the Ironbridge Gorge is a living and working community and it will help shape proposals, however the Council recognise that all properties in the area, and its setting, will have individual characteristics and therefore early engagement with the Councils planning service is recommended. Responding to residents and businesses feedback and to help facilitate this the Council will be running regular workshops in the World Heritage Site with specialist officers available to answer questions and provide initial pre-application feedback on development proposals.

4.14 As a result of the consultation and engagement process a number of changes have been made to the consultation version of the SPD, These are summarised below:

- The international obligations have been further outlined as well as roles of various stakeholder organisations.
- Stronger referencing to both Council's climate emergency has been included as well further information on Climate Actions Plans within the SPD.
- Descriptive detail regarding the setting, Outstanding Universal Value and how to define it has been included in line with up to date UNESCO guidance.
- Mapping has been made clearer for users.
- Tables have been included to simplify the explanation of the planning process for both Telford and Wrekin and Shropshire Council areas.
- Annex 2 has been moved into a chapter of the main document, this is to provide greater clarity on what the key guidance for residents and businesses submitting planning applications in the WHS area.
- Amendments to the flooding section in terms of land quality and groundwater quality have been included.
- Further information on public rights of way have been included within a sub section under maintenance of Highways, Structures, Bridges and Public Realm.

5.0 Alternative Options

5.1 Protection of the OUV of the WHS is considered to be of paramount importance. The SPD will help do this and also help balance the need for conservation with pressures such as adapting to climate change. Not progressing the SPD could lead to progressive deterioration of the conservation aspects of the area which could ultimately lead to the loss of WHS status and is therefore not an option.

6.0 Key Risks

6.1 The suite of documents including the WHS Management Plan and the SPD will form the framework for protection of the areas OUV. The SPD sets recommendations made in the Severn Gorge Conversation Area Management

Plan for the Gorge into a formal planning document. Not bringing forward the SPD could adversely impact the OUV of the Gorge area and risk its status as a WHS.

6.2. The Council are taking a proactive approach (in partnership with Shropshire Council) to ensure that the risk to the WHS is minimised. UNESCO have, where they feel the OUV is threatened, removed WHS status from sites.

6.3. There are a number of potential risks to the OUV of the WHS that the SPD can help address, this includes:

- **Development proposals that are poorly designed risking the character of the area** – the SPD provides guidance tailored to the WHS area for residents and businesses intending to submit planning applications.
- **Increased risk of flooding events and the need to balance the protection of property and life with the heritage of the area** – the SPD helps provide planning guidance for particular issues such as property level flood defences.
- **The need to conserve and maintain heritage assets whilst encouraging sustainable, low carbon development** – Guidance in the SPD helps support appropriate ‘climate ready’ development such as renewable energy and electric vehicle infrastructure.
- **Minimising potentially negative impacts, associated with a successful visitor economy** – the SPD provides planning guidance on infrastructure and commercial developments.

7.0 Council Priorities

7.1 The report recommendations link to the following Council priorities:

- Every child, young person and adult lives well in their community;
- Everyone benefits from a thriving economy;
- All neighbourhoods are a great place to live
- Our natural environment is protected, and the Council has a leading role in addressing the climate emergency;
- A community-focussed, innovative council providing efficient, effective and quality services.

8.0 Financial Implications

8.1 The Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) will allow the Council to continue to make the most effective use of its resources and support the efficient delivery of the Planning application process. The implementation of the SPD will be met from within existing resources and budgets.

9.0 Legal and HR Implications

9.1 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) should build on and provide more detailed advice or guidance on policies in an adopted local plan. Regulations 11 to

16 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning)(England) Regulations 2012 set out the requirements for producing, consulting on and adopting SPDs. An SPD must not conflict with the Local Plan. The policies within the Council's Local Plan are significant in determining planning applications as proposals are determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The National Planning Policy Framework states that SPD's add further detail to the policies in the Council's Local Plan. They can be used to provide further guidance for development on specific sites or on particular issues and are capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions but are not part of the Council's Local Plan. Approval of an SPD is a Cabinet function.

- 9.2. There are no direct HR implications arising from this report. The proposals contained in this report can be delivered using existing resources.

10.0 Ward Implications

- 10.1 The recommendations contained in this report and attached SPD will bring in additional planning guidance for the wards of Ironbridge and Madeley & Sutton Hill. The guidance will help make it easier and more consistent for residents and businesses when considering whether proposals require planning permission in relation to the WHS.

11.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications

- 11.1 The proposals contained in the SPD will provide additional planning guidance regarding issues such as thermal insulation in homes within the WHS area. This will help reduce running costs, improve the energy efficiency of properties and contribute to the health and wellbeing of residents.
- 11.2. The introduction of planning guidance will help provide businesses with guidance in advance of submitting planning applications. This will help ensure well developed planning proposals can be submitted that will be considered in a full and timely manner. Supporting businesses and the visitor economy will increase private investment, create new jobs and safeguard others, provide supply chain opportunities and increase visitor spend.

12.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 12.1 There are no specific negative impacts related to equality and diversity, or the armed forces community currently.
- 12.2. The SPD reinforces the Unesco principles of diversity, equity and equality, respect for human rights, engagement and consultation.
- 12.3 The Council consulted on proposals as per the Statement of Community Involvement, this included taking account of the needs of the local community who have a slightly older age profile in the WHS area than the rest of the borough. As well as other measures, and included:

- Materials being made available via the Council website including explanations of what the proposals will mean for residents and businesses, and alternative formats will be available on request
- The ability for responses to be received by e-mail, written correspondence and (at public engagement sessions) in person

12.4 Public engagement venues were accessible to the whole community and the consultation was advertised widely within the WHS area using traditional methods as well as digital.

13.0 Climate Change and Environmental Implications

13.1 The following climate change implications are addressed by these proposals:

- **Resource Efficiency** - The SPD document provides guidance on how to improve the energy efficiency of buildings and the appropriate use of renewable energy in the WHS.
- **Climate Change** - The SPD will help to minimise carbon emissions by providing guidance on adapting buildings for climate change.
- **Waste** - No specific impacts
- **Biodiversity** - No specific impacts
- **Travel and Transport Options** - The SPD will help adapt the WHS toward more sustainable modes of travel and includes guidance on the appropriate installation of electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

14.0 Background Papers

- 1 Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site – Supplementary Planning Document (Consultation Version) Cabinet Report – 15/12/22

15.0 Appendices

- A Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site Supplementary Planning Document

16.0 Report Sign Off

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Legal	30/06/2023	03/07/2023	SH
Finance	16/06/2023	16 June 2023	MB