



Briefing Note: Ironbridge Gorge WHS Management Plan

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1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site (WHS) is designated by UNESCO as a site of Outstanding Universal Value and is required to maintain an approved Management Plan setting out the long-term strategy for its protection, conservation and enhancement. The current Management Plan covers the period 2017-2027. The existing Management Plan has been formally adopted by both Telford & Wrekin Council and Shropshire Council and provides the agreed strategic framework for the management of the World Heritage Site
- 1.2 As the current Management Plan expires in 2027, a new plan must now be prepared and adopted to ensure the continued effective management of the WHS and compliance with UNESCO expectations. The new plan will establish strategic objectives and actions for the period 2027-2037 and will be developed in accordance with UNESCO and Historic England guidance.
- 1.3 To inform preparation of the new Management Plan, an extensive programme of public and stakeholder engagement was undertaken during Spring 2026. This included a public survey promoted through social media, local press, community venues and paper copies distributed throughout the World Heritage Site and surrounding area. The exercise generated 640 responses, from residents, visitors, volunteers and businesses. In addition, fifteen stakeholder organisations and community groups participated in detailed discussions to identify issues, opportunities and priorities for the future management of the Site.

2.0 Key Findings

- 2.1 What People Value Most About the World Heritage Site
The consultation demonstrated strong support for the World Heritage Site and its continued protection. Heritage assets, local identity and conservation of the historic environment were consistently identified as the most important positive factors influencing people's experience of the Gorge. Respondents recognised the area's unique role as the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, whilst also valuing its strong sense of community, natural environment and distinctive character as a place to live, work and visit.
- 2.2 Businesses highlighted the prestige associated with operating within a World Heritage Site and the benefits derived from tourism, while visitors identified heritage attractions, outdoor recreation and the area's historic character as principal reasons for visiting.
- 2.3 Key Challenges and Issues
Despite overwhelmingly positive feedback, respondents also identified a number of challenges that affect their experience of the World Heritage Site. Highway capacity, traffic congestion, parking pressures and road safety concerns emerged as the most frequently issues across all user groups and were consistently ranked as the most negative factors affecting use of the Site.
- 2.4 Flooding and transport availability also emerged as recurring themes. Additional issues included pressure arising from tourism, planning and development restrictions, housing

availability, digital connectivity, business viability and environmental concerns such as water quality.

- 2.5 The consultation highlighted the many strengths of the World Heritage Site, with respondents identifying substantially more positive than negative factors, demonstrating the strong regard in which the World Heritage Site is held and the generally positive experience enjoyed by residents, visitors and stakeholders.

2.6 World Heritage Site Boundary

The consultation identified that only around half of respondents were aware of the current World Heritage Site boundary. Whilst most respondents considered the existing boundary to be appropriate, support was expressed for considering extensions into areas including Broseley, Benthall, Buildwas and parts of Madeley and Dawley. Broseley Town Council has formally indicated support for the consideration of extending the designation into Broseley.

The next Management Plan should include a review of the World Heritage Site boundary, buffer zone and wider setting. This would provide an opportunity to consider issues raised through the consultation and build upon the recent review of the Severn Gorge Conservation Area boundary within Telford & Wrekin.

3.0 Progress on the New Management Plan

- 3.1 Significant progress has been made in preparing the new Management Plan. Drafting of sections relating to the World Heritage Convention, site description, significance, governance arrangements and policy context is well advanced. Work is continuing on the assessment of factors affecting the Site, review of Outstanding Universal Value attributes and development of objectives and actions.
- 3.2 The Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site is also the first site in the United Kingdom to pilot Historic England's new World Heritage Site Management Plan Toolkit. Whilst this has extended some stages of the project programme, it will help ensure the final document aligns with emerging national best practice.

4.0 Emerging Priorities & Strategic Themes

- 4.1 The evidence gathered through consultation and stakeholder engagement has identified eight key themes that will form the basis of the new Management Plan objectives and action plan:
1. Highways capacity and transport;
 2. Planning control and development;
 3. Conservation of heritage assets;
 4. Tourism management and events;
 5. Flooding, water management and land stability;
 6. Ecology and biodiversity;
 7. Traditional skills and culture; and
 8. Digital connectivity.
- 4.2 Climate change adaptation and education will be integrated across all themes as cross-cutting considerations.

5.0 Next Steps

5.1 Plan Development and Consultation

The next stage of the project will involve further engagement with Council services, Shropshire Council, Historic England and key stakeholders to develop detailed objectives and actions. Following completion of the draft plan, review will be undertaken by the World Heritage Site

Steering Group and Historic England before formal public consultation and technical review by ICOMOS in early 2027. The final document will then be brought forward for formal adoption by both Telford & Wrekin Council and Shropshire Council later in 2027, followed by its submission to DCMS and UNESCO for their records.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 The evidence gathering exercise has provided a robust and representative evidence base for development of the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site Management Plan 2027-2037. The consultation demonstrates the strong value that residents, business visitors and stakeholders place on the areas heritage, distinctive character and environmental quality. It has also highlighted a number of matters that will need to be considered through the next Management Plan, including highways capacity, transport and flooding.
- 6.2 The findings provide a clear framework for the development of the next Management Plan and will help ensure that future priorities reflect the views and aspirations of local communities and stakeholders, whilst continuing to meet UNESCO's requirements for the protection and management of the World Heritage Site.

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