

**Notes of the Inaugural Meeting of the Blenheim World Heritage Site  
Management Plan Working Party**

**Held on Wednesday 12 October 2016 at 2.00pm**

**In Room G22, Woodgreen, Witney**

PRESENT

**Councillors:** J C Cooper, Mrs E H N Fenton and Dr E M E Poskitt

**Officers:** Christine Gore, Janice Bamsey and Paul Cracknell

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

It was **Agreed** that Mr J C Cooper be appointed as Chairman of the Working Party.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

There were no apologies for absence or temporary appointments.

4. BACKGROUND TO THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Working Party received and considered a Briefing Paper which outlined the purpose and objectives of the Blenheim World Heritage Site Management Plan, provided a copy of the scoping document upon which the review was to be based, set out the projected timescale for the review and illustrated the proposed content of the revised plan.

It was noted that, since publication of the agenda, the formal public consultation had been launched and copies of the consultation document had been circulated to the Members of the Working Party. Comments on the consultation had been invited by Friday 4 November 2016.

Ms Bamsey advised that the Council's Officers had been involved in the development of the original Management Plan and the underlying Action Plan which supported it as a secondary document. She explained that the Council was also represented on the group which reviewed the Action Plan, together with representatives of the Blenheim Estate, English Heritage and Natural England.

The Management Plan had been adopted as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications and was cited as such in the emerging local plan.

Whilst the Action Plan had been subject to on-going review, the current exercise would see a more fundamental review of the over-arching Management Plan.

It was **AGREED** that copies of the original Management Plan would be made available to Members of the Working Party.

Mr Cooper expressed some concern over the disruption to traffic flows that had occurred as a result of major events at the Palace. It was explained that such issues did not fall within the remit of the Working Party which had been established to consider the review of the Management Plan. It was also noted that, whilst the Council had a degree of control over licensable events, this did not apply to those at which licensable activities were not taking place.

The Strategic Director acknowledged that there had been significant disruption as a result of a large scale event held earlier in the year. The organisers had recognised the difficulties that had ensued and undertaken to take steps to ensure that these were addressed at future events.

Mrs Fenton made reference to properties on the estate that remained unoccupied and indicated that it would be helpful if pedestrian egress was permitted at Eagle Lodge gate. She noted that the upkeep of the Palace and grounds presented a significant financial liability which had been cited as a rationale behind recent planning applications.

Dr Poskitt indicated that there was a need to retain a balance between development to support the assets and restraint to ensure their preservation. She suggested that it would be helpful for Members to have the opportunity to visit the site.

Mr Cooper advised that the former Leader of the Council had met with representatives of the Estate to discuss alternative funding streams for the estate to explore and enquired as to the outcome. It was explained that, as any discussions would have been informal, it was unlikely that any notes would exist. Equally, as Sir Barry Norton was no longer a Member of the Council it would be difficult to establish the nature of any discussions but Officers undertook to make enquiries.

It was **AGREED** that arrangements be made to enable Members of the Working Party to visit the site.

Mr Cooper recalled that, when the original Management Plan had been considered in 2006, the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee had drawn attention to the absence of a buffer zone relating to the World Heritage Site and passed a resolution calling for the Strategic Director (Development) to include a worked up option for public consultation in the next Local Development Framework when that process commenced. He enquired why this had not taken place.

The Strategic Director advised that, as she had not been in post at that time, she did not know why the matter had not been progressed but undertook to produce a report for further consideration.

5. EXPECTED OUTCOMES FOR THE REVIEW

The Working Party considered how best to proceed given the projected timescale for the consultation process. It was **AGREED** that Members would feed back their individual comments to Officers for consideration in the formulation of a response.

Once drafted, the Working Party would reconvene to consider the response prior to its submission.

6. FUTURE MEETINGS

The Working Party AGREED that arrangements be made for a site visit to be held during the week commencing 24 October with Members' comments to be submitted to [janice.bamsey@westoxon.gov.uk](mailto:janice.bamsey@westoxon.gov.uk) by the end of that week.

The Council's draft response to the consultation could then be considered by the Working Party at its next meeting to be held at 2:00pm on Monday, 31 October.

The meeting closed at 2.30pm

**Notes of the Meeting of the Blenheim World Heritage Site Management  
Plan Working Party**

**Held on Monday 31 October 2016 at 2.00pm**

**In Room G22, Woodgreen, Witney**

PRESENT

**Councillors:** J C Cooper, Mrs E H N Fenton and Dr E M E Poskitt

**Officers:** Janice Bamsey and Paul Cracknell

2. NOTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 OCTOBER 2016

The Working Party received the notes of the meeting held on 12 October, 2016.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

There were no apologies for absence or temporary appointments.

4. DRAFT RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON THE BLENHEIM WORLD  
HERITAGE SITE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Working Party received and considered the report of the Strategic Director setting out a draft response to the consultation on the Blenheim World Heritage Site Management Plan, together with a paper prepared by Dr Poskitt which offered further observations on the Plan.

Dr Poskitt drew attention to the fact that certain strategic housing sites identified in the Local Plan were within the arc of vistas emphasised as being of particular merit or significance. In response, Ms Bamsey advised that reference to these views did not preclude development within them but meant that their significance had to be taken into account as part of the planning process.

Ms Bamsey indicated that Dr Poskitt's comments could be largely incorporated within the Council's response to the consultation.

Dr Poskitt made particular reference to the need to resolve the problems occasioned by silt in Queen's Pool, indicating that dredging needed to be undertaken as a matter of priority. Mr Cooper advised that the estate had been seeking lottery funding to assist with the cost of this work and Ms Bamsey indicated that Blenheim had been working with Natural England to identify the cause of the problem. This technical investigation had now been completed and provided evidence of the cause of the problem and ways in which it could be managed. Ms Bamsey advised that this investigative work had not been confined to the immediate locality but had looked at the whole river catchment area.

It was **AGREED** that the dredging of the lake should be undertaken as a matter of priority.

Dr Poskitt also made reference to the buildings at 'Furze Platt' which were neglected and in a very poor state of repair. Whilst she acknowledged that there were problems in identifying an appropriate use, she suggested that potential future uses should be considered as a matter of urgency.

Mr Cooper questioned why the property had remained empty for so long when it could have provided a source of revenue for the estate. Ms Bamsey advised that any future use need not necessarily be residential and it was considered that, as the property lay on the Oxfordshire Way, there could be some potential for retail use.

Dr Poskitt indicated that Members had not looked at any specific properties in depth and Ms Bamsey indicated that detailed technical observations fell more within the remit of Historic England.

Dr Poskitt suggested that greater emphasis should be placed upon the history of the site during the period pre-dating the construction of the Palace. The creation of historic trails could be used to promote wider access to more remote areas of the estate.

Members **AGREED** that information provided should offer a better reflection of the total history of the site.

Members noted that traffic management in relation to large scale events at Blenheim remained an issue and Dr Poskitt suggested that a lack of continuity contributed to the problems that occurred. Whilst recognising these concerns, Mr Cooper noted that they were primarily a licensing issue.

Whilst acknowledging the positive contribution made by the estate, Members emphasised the importance of exhibiting greater sensitivity to local views and maintaining a constructive relationship with local communities.

Members noted that the Strategic Director was intending to submit the report on the absence of a buffer zone relating to the World Heritage Site to the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

It was **AGREED** that, subject to incorporation of the observations contained in Dr Poskitt's paper and to the comments referred to above, the draft response to the consultation on the Blenheim World Heritage Site Management Plan be approved.

The meeting closed at 2.25pm