

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - THURSDAY 24 NOVEMBER 2016

BLenheim PALACE WORLD HERITAGE SITE

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR

(Contact: Christine Gore, Tel: (01285-623605)

The report is for information

1. PURPOSE

To review the position regarding the need for the creation of a 'buffer zone' to the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) That the Committee notes the position regarding the need for the creation of a 'buffer zone' for the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site.
- b) That the Committee agrees that there is adequate protection provided by other means and that a formal 'buffer zone' for the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site' is not required.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. The Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site is one of a number of such sites in the UK that do not have a designated 'buffer zone'. The Planning Practice Guidance on Designated Heritage Assets states:

“A Buffer zone is defined as an area surrounding the WHS which has complementary legal restrictions placed on its use and development to give an added layer of protection to the WHS. The buffer zone forms part of the setting of the World Heritage Site”.

It also explains that “decisions on buffer zones are made on a case by case basis at the time of nomination and reviewed subsequently through the WHS Management Plan review process”. Members will recall that it has been reported through the Committee's Work Programme that the Blenheim Palace WHS Management Plan is currently under review and at its last meeting set up a Working Party to formulate a response to the consultation on this review, on behalf of the Council. The Working Party requested that a report on the need for a buffer zone be presented to Committee.

- 3.2. The issue of a buffer zone for the Blenheim Palace WHS has been a matter of discussion for many years. Attached as appendices to this report are

Appendix A: extract from the UNESCO World Heritage Centre website setting out the official description of the Blenheim Palace WHS.

Appendix B: a letter from Blenheim Palace explaining why this particular WHS does not have a Buffer Zone.

Appendix C: a letter from English Heritage dated 5 April 2013 setting out its view on the need for a Buffer Zone.

- 3.3. The clear position of the parties charged with the protection of World Heritage Sites has been that the West Oxfordshire Local Plan contains policies which adequately protect the setting of the Blenheim Palace WHS. The site is bounded by the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the Woodstock and Bladon Conservation Areas and the Oxford Green Belt. Policy EH7 of the emerging Local Plan continues to provide this protection alongside a number of other relevant policies.
- 3.4. It is not the role of the Local Plan to designate a buffer zone, but to include policies which are of sufficient strength to provide protection for specific heritage assets. A formal buffer zone can only be designated through a review of the WHS Management Plan. Proposals to add buffer zones are submitted by the relevant national government for approval by the World Heritage Committee who will consider and adopt the proposals as appropriate.
- 3.5. Officers have previously considered the need for a buffer zone and consulted the relevant bodies on this matter. It remains the view of Officers that sufficient protection exists within national planning guidance and the Council's own planning policies to provide the necessary protection for the Blenheim Palace WHS and that a buffer zone is not necessary.

4. ALTERNATIVES/OPTIONS

The Committee could determine in its view a Buffer Zone is necessary for the protection of the Blenheim Palace WHS. The appropriate way to seek to achieve this provision would be to ask the Working Party to make robust representations in its response to the Management Plan review.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this matter.

6. RISKS

None

7. REASONS

Not applicable

Christine Gore - Strategic Director

(Author: Christine Gore, Tel: (01285) 63605; EMail: christine.gore@westoxon.gov.uk)

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Background Papers: