



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	UPLANDS AREA PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE – 17 MARCH 2025
Subject	BLENHEIM PALACE WORLD HERITAGE SITE (WHS)
Wards affected	Woodstock
Accountable member	Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning Email: hugo.ashton@westoxon.gov.uk
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Summary/Purpose	To respond to the request made at the meeting of the Uplands Area Planning Sub-Committee on 13 November 2023 that planning policy officers produce a full and comprehensive report on the Blenheim World Heritage Site, with comparisons made to other World Heritage Sites, to inform the Local Plan review process.
Annexes	Annex A - World Heritage List – Criteria for Selection Annex B - Schedule of UK World Heritage Sites Annex C - Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV)
Recommendation(s)	That the Sub-Committee resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none">I. Note the content of the report including the proposed Officer actions listed at Paragraph 6.1
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Putting Residents First• A Good Quality of Life for All• A Better Environment for People and Wildlife• Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency• Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO

Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Not applicable.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 At its meeting of 13 November 2023, the Uplands Area Planning Sub-Committee resolved to request that planning policy officers produce a full and comprehensive report on the Blenheim World Heritage Site, with comparisons made to other World Heritage Sites, to inform the Local Plan review process.
- 1.2 This report has been prepared in response to that request and draws on analysis undertaken by the Planning Policy team in the intervening period, as well as discussions which have been held with Historic England both in relation to the emerging Local Plan and more specifically in relation to Blenheim Palace.

2. BACKGROUND

What is a World Heritage Site?

- 2.1 A World Heritage Site is a cultural or natural site recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) for its Outstanding Universal Value. Such sites are considered a shared global treasure, belonging to all people regardless of the country in which they are located, and are legally safeguarded under international treaties.
- 2.2 There are four categories of World Heritage Site – Natural, Cultural, Mixed and Cultural Landscape – with the World Heritage List currently exceeding 1,200.
- 2.3 To be included on the World Heritage List, sites must be of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and meet at least one out of ten selection criteria. OUV is made up of three pillars, all of which are required to show OUV:
1. The site must meet the selection criteria.
 2. The site must meet required standards of authenticity and integrity.
 3. Proper protection and management arrangements must be in place.
- 2.4 The selection criteria are set out in full at Annex A and in summary include representing the diversity of human values, showcasing urban or settlement development, embodying historical or living traditions (cultural), or featuring exceptional natural phenomena, illustrating key geological, biological, or ecological processes, or preserving biodiversity in its natural state (natural).
- 2.5 A Statement of OUV is agreed and adopted by the World Heritage Committee (WHC) for each Site on inscription. For sites that were inscribed before 2008 such as Blenheim, these have been adopted retrospectively. The Statement sets out what is considered to be of OUV about the Site in relation to the World Heritage Convention.

2.6 Statements of OUV are key reference documents for the protection and management of each Site and can only be amended or altered by the WHC.

How are World Heritage Sites protected and managed in England?

2.7 England protects its World Heritage Sites and their settings, including any buffer zones or equivalent, through the statutory designation process and through the planning system.

2.8 Paragraph 2 of the NPPF states that 'Planning policies and decisions must reflect relevant international obligations and statutory requirements'. This includes the UK Government's duties under the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972) - the World Heritage Convention.

2.9 Under national planning policy, WHSs are defined as designated heritage assets in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

2.10 In accordance with the NPPF (paragraph 213) any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting) should require clear and convincing justification with any substantial harm to, or loss of a WHS being wholly exceptional.

How is the setting of a World Heritage Site protected?

2.11 'Setting' is recognised to contribute both to the significance of a heritage asset, and it can allow that significance to be appreciated.

2.12 National policy emphasises that the setting of designated heritage assets such as Blenheim is a key consideration and that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting) should require clear and convincing justification.

2.13 The UNESCO Operational Guidelines make reference to, describe and safeguard, both immediate and wider setting and recommend establishing a buffer zone wherever necessary for the proper protection of the property. A buffer zone is an area surrounding the WHS where complementary legal restrictions on use and development are applied to provide an additional layer of protection. This buffer zone is considered part of the site's overall setting.

2.14 In some cases, alternative measures may be appropriate for preserving the setting of WHS, such as protecting specific views and viewpoints, both to and from the site. Other landscape designations can also be effective in protecting the setting of a WHS.

2.15 Buffer zone decisions are made individually during the nomination process and are later reviewed as part of the World Heritage Site Management Plan under UK Government policy. Governments can submit proposals to add or modify buffer zones after a site is inscribed, which are then reviewed and approved by the WHC as appropriate.

World Heritage Site Management Plans

2.16 Each WHS has a management plan outlining both long-term strategies and daily actions to protect, conserve, and present the site. These plans are created and implemented by Steering Groups, which include representatives from national and local organisations. The local planning authority often leads the group, and public consultation is carried out at key stages.

2.17 Management plans are developed collaboratively, involving all stakeholders, especially those responsible for managing, owning, or administering the site. Each plan is tailored to the site's specific needs and characteristics and incorporates sustainable development principles.

2.18 Key elements of a management plan include:

- Details of the site's location and boundaries
- Strategies to maintain its OUV, authenticity, and integrity
- Identification of key attributes
- Analysis of issues affecting its conservation and enjoyment

2.19 Management plans typically address topics including boundaries, development, tourism, interpretation, education, and transport. Since these plans are crucial for preserving and enhancing the site's significance and OUV, their policies should be considered when preparing development plans or evaluating planning applications related to the historic or natural environment.

UK World Heritage Sites

2.20 There are currently 35 properties within the UK (including overseas territories) which are inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

2.21 These are listed in the schedule attached at Annex B which also includes information on the type of designation (i.e. cultural, natural and mixed) the date of inscription and whether or not each site includes a buffer zone.

2.22 It can be seen that of the 35 properties listed, 13 have buffer zones, and 22, including Blenheim Palace, do not.

3. BLENHEIM PALACE WORLD HERITAGE SITE (WHS)

3.1 Blenheim Palace is set within a picturesque park designed by the renowned landscape gardener 'Capability' Brown. The Palace was gifted by the English nation to John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough, to honour his 1704 victory over French and Bavarian forces.

3.2 Constructed between 1705 and 1722, it showcases an eclectic architectural style and a revival of national heritage, making it an outstanding example of an 18th-century princely residence.

3.3 Blenheim Palace's Statement of OUV is attached in full at Annex C.

Blenheim Palace Management Plan

3.4 The first Blenheim Palace Management Plan was published in July 2006 and established a vision for the future, together with a set of management objectives agreed in conjunction with a steering group. An implementation plan was also set out.

3.5 The management plan was subsequently updated in 2017 and is a pioneering document insofar as it delivers both the requirements of a WHS Management Plan and those of a Heritage Management Plan in one integrated approach.

3.6 Given its importance in helping to sustain and enhance the significance of the WHS, the involvement of key stakeholders and its on-going monitoring and reviewing, the Management Plan is a material planning consideration when assessing development proposals in accordance with relevant policies of the Local Plan.

3.7 The plan:

- Sets out a vision for the sustainable future of the historic, scenic, scientific, cultural and social qualities of Blenheim Palace and Park, such that it will protect both WHS designation and the National Heritage designation;
- Provides guidance to the Estate trustees and their advisers on practical management planning, to help plan and prioritise tasks and to inform annual financial and operational plans;
- Ensures the careful maintenance and conservation (and enhancement where possible) of the Palace and Park, its associated buildings and grounds, informed by continued historical and scientific research;
- Adopts an holistic approach to conservation of the site which balances its many and varied qualities;
- Encourages high standards in the restoration of historic features and design of any appropriate new developments, features or landscaped areas which may be proposed in the future.

3.8 The vision for the Blenheim Estate in the Management Plan is to:

- Maintain and manage the Palace and Park to preserve and enhance their character and, where necessary, repair significant buildings or replant parts of the Park in accordance with the objectives of the Management Plan;
- Use management practices that are consistent with the above and which are designed to conserve the heritage qualities of the plan area and its OUV through appropriate and sustainable policies and practices;
- Protect the existing opportunities for public access including existing public rights of way within the Park and the access arrangements to the Palace and grounds;
- Enhance the qualities of visitor facilities and achieve new levels of excellence in visitor management and related experiences as one of the UK's top tourism destinations;
- Interpret and present the history of Blenheim Palace and Park to a larger and more diverse audience, and continue to promote high quality education programmes.

3.9 The Blenheim Steering Group meets annually to monitor progress and implementation with regard to the 33 stated objectives in the Management Plan and to monitor any issues regarding the OUV of the property (including its integrity, authenticity and attributes).

3.10 Policy EW9 of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 stipulates that in helping to sustain and enhance the significance of the WHS, the Blenheim Palace Management Plan is a material consideration in assessing development proposals. It also states that proposals

relating to the WHS should seek to support the aims and objectives of the Management Plan, drawing particular attention to the importance of areas identified as being of special importance for the preservation of long-distance views to and/or from the Site as shown in the management plan.

Blenheim Palace in comparison to other World Heritage Sites

- 3.11 Part of the request made by the Uplands Area Planning Sub-Committee in November 2023 was for a comparison to be made between Blenheim and other WHS.
- 3.12 Officers therefore met with representatives of Historic England in July 2024 and enquired whether any such comparative analysis already exists.
- 3.13 Importantly, Officers were advised that whilst the WHS nomination process itself includes an element of comparative analysis (i.e. how a designated heritage compares to other assets) there is no single report which covers all sites and compares and contrasts them. Indeed, higher-level abridgements tend not to be helpful or easy to do.

Why does Blenheim Palace not have a buffer zone?

- 3.14 A buffer zone is defined in the Operational Guidelines (and PPG) as ‘an area surrounding the World Heritage Site which has complementary legal restrictions placed on its use and development to give an added layer of protection to the World Heritage Site’.
- 3.15 As recommended by the UNESCO Operational Guidelines, WHS may have buffer zones where necessary and the need for this is carefully examined on a case-by-case basis.
- 3.16 As set out in the schedule at Annex B, Blenheim Palace is one of 22 UK World Heritage Sites that do not have a buffer zone.
- 3.17 The need for a buffer zone at Blenheim Palace has been considered on a number of previous occasions including through the preparation of the initial management plan in 2006 and the subsequent update in 2017.
- 3.18 In the intervening period, English Heritage (now Historic England) confirmed to West Oxfordshire District Council in writing on 5 April 2013 that any impacts from development that might adversely affect the property by detracting from its setting could be adequately managed through other planning policies and that as such, there is no need for a buffer zone in this instance.
- 3.19 The matter was also considered at a meeting of the Council’s Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24 November 2016 where it was resolved that the report be noted and that no further action be taken.

Should a buffer zone for Blenheim be considered in the future?

- 3.20 Officers are aware that a Technical Review report compiled by ICOMOS (the International Council Monuments and Sites) entitled ‘Urban Expansion in the setting of the property’ was provided to the UK State Party to the World Heritage Convention by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in March 2024.

3.21 The concluding paragraphs of the technical review report are set out in full below.

“The two granted development projects (Land East of Woodstock and Land East of Hill Rise) have already led to cumulative negative impacts on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property through an erosion of its setting,

The two projects that have not yet been decided (Land North of Banbury Road and the Land South of Perdiswell Farm Shipton Road Shipton On Cherwell) may further constitute an erosion of the setting of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property and these and other such projects should therefore not be granted until:

- Further studies into the contribution of the setting of the property to the maintenance of its Outstanding Universal Value have been undertaken, and*
- Their impacts on the Outstanding Universal Value have been tested through independent Heritage Impact Assessments.*

ICOMOS further considers that:

- The 2017 Management Plan for the property does not provide an adequate framework for preventing a further erosion of the Outstanding Universal Value through inappropriate changes in its setting in the context of the wider planning and policy context,*
- Offsetting harm to the Outstanding Universal Value against potential benefits through the raising of funding for maintenance is not appropriate to World Heritage properties.*

In general, a greater understanding and awareness of the contribution of the setting of the World Heritage property to its Outstanding Universal Value would benefit the maintenance and transmission of its Outstanding Universal Value.

To achieve the above, ICOMOS additionally advises that a Landscape Character Assessment, specifically focussed on the relationship between the wider setting of the property and its Outstanding Universal Value, be undertaken. Such a Landscape Character Assessment should take the 2017 Setting Study as a point of departure. Following the conclusions, a review of the Management Plan would be appropriate, specifically, but not limited to, ensuring that the maintenance of the setting of the property is given adequate priority.

ICOMOS also expresses its concern at the level of development pressure on the immediate setting and wider setting of the property specifically in this context where the property has no buffer zone defined to provide it with an extra layer of protection. The continued erosion of the landscape character of the immediate and wider settings poses an imminent danger of erosion of the contribution of the setting of the property to its Outstanding Universal Value.

ICOMOS therefore concludes that it would also be appropriate for the State Party to assess the efficacy of the management of the immediate and wider setting in maintaining the landscape character of the immediate and wider setting of the property, especially in the absence of a defined buffer zone’.

4. SUMMARY

- 4.1** In terms of process, any changes to the boundaries of WHS and their buffer zones can only be made by the UNESCO WHC following submission of a proposal from the national government (the ‘State Party’). The same principle would apply to the delineation of a new buffer zone.
- 4.2** In short, the potential delineation of a buffer zone for the Blenheim WHS is not a matter for the West Oxfordshire Local Plan review.
- 4.3** The review of the Local Plan does however provide the opportunity for Officers to consider whether the current policy wording relating to the Blenheim Palace WHS should be updated and refined, underpinned by proportionate, adequate evidence.
- 4.4** In light of the conclusions reached in the ICOMOS technical review report, Officers propose to meet with representatives of the Blenheim Estate to further discuss its findings and to understand the intended timeline for updating the 2017 Management Plan which would provide an opportunity to address the issues raised.
- 4.5** Officers have also taken the opportunity to make representations to the Regulation 19 submission draft version of the Cherwell Local Plan which proposes to allocate one of the four sites referred to in the ICOMOS report. West Oxfordshire’s formal response was agreed by the Council’s Executive on 12th February 2025.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 5.1** None.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1** In light of the findings of the recent ICOMOS technical review report of March 2024, Officers propose to:
 - Meet with representatives of the Blenheim Estate to further discuss the findings of the report and to understand the intended timeline for updating the 2017 Management Plan which would provide an opportunity to address the issues raised;
 - Consider through the ongoing review of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 whether the current policy wording should be updated and refined, including in relation to the issue of development potentially affecting the OUV of the property as a result of activity within its setting;
 - Participate in the forthcoming examination of the draft Cherwell Local Plan.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The report raises no financial implications.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The report raises no legal implications.

9. RISK ASSESSMENT

9.1 The report raises no risks.

10. EQUALITIES IMPACT

10.1 The report has no implications in relation to the Public Sector Equality Duty or Equality Act.

11. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The report raised no implications in terms of the climate and ecological emergencies.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 None.

World Heritage List – Criteria for Selection (note: derived from Paragraph 77 of the UNESCO Operational Guidelines)

- (i) to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
- (ii) to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;
- (iii) to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;
- (iv) to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;
- (v) to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;
- (vi) to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria);
- (vii) to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;
- (viii) to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;
- (ix) to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;
- (x) to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

Schedule of UK World Heritage Sites

ANNEX B

Site Name	Category	Date of Inscription	Buffer Zone? (Y/N)
Blaenavon Industrial Landscape	Cultural	2000	N
Blenheim Palace	Cultural	1987	N
Canterbury Cathedral, St Augustine's Abbey, and St Martin's Church	Cultural	1988	Y
Castles and Town Walls of King Edward in Gwynedd	Cultural	1986	N
City of Bath	Cultural	1987	N
Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape	Cultural	2006	N
Derwent Valley Mills	Cultural	2001	Y
Durham Castle and Cathedral	Cultural	1986	N
Frontiers of the Roman Empire	Cultural	1987, 2005, 2008	Y
Gortham's Cave Complex	Cultural	2016	Y
Heart of Neolithic Orkney	Cultural	1999	Y
Historic Town of St. George and Related Fortifications, Bermuda	Cultural	2000	N
Ironbridge Gorge	Cultural	1986	N
Jodrell Bank Observatory	Cultural	2019	Y
Maritime Greenwich	Cultural	1997	Y
Moravian Church Settlements	Cultural	2015/2024	N
New Lanark	Cultural	2001	Y
Old and New Towns of Edinburgh	Cultural	1995	N
Palace of Westminster and Westminster Abbey including Saint Margaret's Church	Cultural	1987	N
Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal	Cultural	2009	Y
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew	Cultural	2003	Y
Saltaire	Cultural	2001	Y
Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites	Cultural	1986	N
Studley Royal Park including the Ruins of Fountains Abbey	Cultural	1986	Y
The English Lake District	Cultural	2017	N
The Forth Bridge	Cultural	2015	N
The Great Spa Towns of Europe	Cultural	2021	N
The Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales	Cultural	2021	N
Tower of London	Cultural	1988	N
Dorset and East Devon Coast (the Jurassic Coast)	Natural	2001	N
Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast	Natural	1986	N
Gough and Inaccessible Islands	Natural	1995, 2004	Y
Henderson Island	Natural	1988	N
The Flow Country	Natural	2024	N
St Kilda	Mixed	1986	N

**Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site
Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV)**

Brief synthesis¹

Blenheim Palace, in Oxfordshire, was designed by John Vanbrugh. The English nation presented the site to John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough, in recognition of his victory in 1704 over French and Bavarian troops, a victory which decided the future of the Empire and, in doing so, made him a figure of international importance. The Palace sits within a large walled landscape park, the structure by Vanbrugh overlaid by the designs of Lancelot “Capability” Brown from 1761 onwards.

The design and building of the Palace between 1705 and 1722 represented the beginning of a new style of architecture and its landscaped Park, designed by Lancelot “Capability” Brown, is considered “a naturalistic Versailles”.

In tangible form, Blenheim is an outstanding example of the work of John Vanbrugh and Nicholas Hawksmoor, two of England’s most notable architects. It represents a unique architectural achievement celebrating the triumph of the English armies over the French, and the Palace and its associated Park have exerted great influence on the English Romantic movement which was characterised by the eclecticism of its inspiration, its return to natural sources and its love of nature.

The original landscape set out by John Vanbrugh, who regulated the course of the River Glyme, was later modified by Lancelot “Capability” Brown who created two lakes, seen as one of the greatest examples of naturalistic landscape design.

Blenheim Palace was built by the nation to honour one of its heroes John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough, and is also closely associated with Sir Winston Churchill.

Criterion (ii): By their refusal of the French models of classicism, the Palace and Park illustrate the beginnings of the English Romantic movement, which was characterised by the eclecticism of its inspiration, its return to national sources and its love of nature. The influence of Blenheim on the architecture and organisation of space in the 18th and 19th centuries was greatly felt both in England and abroad.

Criterion (iv): Built by the nation to honour one of its heroes, Blenheim is, above all, the home of an English aristocrat, the 1st Duke of Marlborough, who was also Prince of the Germanic Holy Roman Empire, as we are reminded in the decoration of the Great Drawing Room [the Saloon] by Louis Laguerre (1719-20).

¹ As published on the World Heritage List by UNESCO <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/425/>

Like the World Heritage properties Residence of Würzburg and the Castles of Augustusburg and Falkenlust in Brühl, Blenheim is typical of 18th century European princely residences.

Integrity

The property is enclosed by an 18th century dry stone wall which defines its extent and maintains its physical integrity. Within the wall, the layout of the principal buildings remains unaltered since their construction, and the overall structure of the landscaped park layout remains largely as set out by Vanbrugh and Brown. The buildings and Park were laid out over an earlier Roman and medieval landscape, remnants of which are still visible through the Vanbrugh and Brown landscapes. Changes to the landscape and buildings by their owners have continued to the present day though these have not detracted from the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

The Park contains important veteran trees. Disease and time have caused some loss of original tree specimens but these have been replanted with the same species where possible and appropriate. Because of climate change and the greater incidence of drought, adjustments have to be made to the mix of species used in conserving the park landscape.

The integrity of the property is well protected by its enclosing wall but important visual links do exist between the gates, the parkland buildings, buildings in the surrounding villages and landscape, and care needs to be taken to ensure these key visual links are protected.

Authenticity

The overall relationship between the Baroque Palace and its Park is still clearly in place and the Outstanding Universal Value of the property can be very readily understood despite the early 20th century changes to the landscape. The form and design of the Palace and Park survive well and there is a high degree of survival of fabric and indeed original fittings and furnishings.

Protection and management requirements

The UK Government protects World Heritage properties in England in two ways. Firstly, individual buildings, monuments, gardens and landscapes are designated under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act and secondly, through the UK Spatial Planning system under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Acts.

Government guidance on protecting the Historic Environment and World Heritage is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and Circular 07/09. Policies to protect, promote, conserve and enhance World Heritage properties, their settings and buffer zones are also found in statutory planning documents. World Heritage status is a

key material consideration when planning applications are considered by the Local Authority planning authority. The West Oxfordshire Local Plan contains policies to protect the property.

The property as a whole is designated as a Grade I registered Park and Garden and was given National Heritage tax exemption status in 1999 in recognition of its important architecture, its outstanding scenic, historic landscape, and the outstanding importance of the buildings' contents and their intimate association with the property. Forty five key buildings on the site are Grade I and Grade 2* Listed Buildings, with the park wall designated Grade 2. There are 5 scheduled ancient monuments within the Park.

The lakes and High Park are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the ancient woodland and hedgerows are both protected. Part of the setting of the property is within the Conservation Areas of Woodstock and Bladon and part is in the Cotswold's Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

A Management Plan has been in place since 2006 and is monitored on an annual basis by a Steering Group which includes representatives from English Heritage, ICOMOS-UK, DCMS, Natural England, the County Council and the local planning authority. Relevant Management Plan policies carry weight in the planning system. There is a comprehensive and successful visitor management plan. The Steering Group is coordinated by the Blenheim Palace and Estate Chief Executive who has responsibility for implementing the Management Plan Action Plan. There is an ongoing programme of repair and regular maintenance of the buildings and structures. Recent work has included the strengthening and reinstatement of the Blenheim Dam during 2009 to comply with safety legislation.

The Park is open through the year and the Palace and Formal Gardens are open from mid-February to mid-December each year. The property has a long tradition of public access (going back to at least Easter 1950) and it provides the setting for informal recreation as well as a series of activities including sporting events, craft and country fairs and entertainment events such as music concerts and historical re-enactments. The property also offers a very high quality resource for a variety of educational uses.

Firm implementation of existing policies is important to provide effective protection of the setting of the World Heritage property and it will be important to ensure that the management of the Park prioritises conservation of the elements of the landscape that reflect the work of Vanbrugh and Brown. The Steering Group meets annually to monitor progress and implementation with regard to the 33 stated objectives in the Management Plan and to check awareness with regard to risk preparedness and to monitor any issues regarding the integrity of the property – particularly with regard to the continuous monitoring of the key visual links.