



<u>Committee and Date</u>
Cabinet 14 th December 2022

<u>Item</u>
<u>Public</u>

IRONBRIDGE GORGE WORLD HERITAGE SITE (WHS) – DRAFT SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT (SPD) PUBLIC CONSULTATION

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1. Synopsis

- 1.1. This report is seeking approval for Shropshire Council to undertake a joint public consultation with Telford and Wrekin Council on the Draft Supplementary Planning Document (hereafter SPD) for the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site (hereafter Ironbridge Gorge WHS).

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. World Heritage Sites (WHS's) are internationally important heritage assets that receive the highest level of heritage protection in the planning process. Their inscription (or designation) is carried out by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). There are currently 20 WHS's in England.
- 2.2. The Ironbridge Gorge WHS covers 550ha, of which 131ha (around 23%) falls within Shropshire Council's administrative area. The remainder is in Telford & Wrekin Council's administrative area. The Ironbridge Gorge WHS was inscribed in 1986 in recognition of its international importance as set out in its statement of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).
- 2.3. An SPD adds further detail and guidance on the implementation of policies in the Council's Local Plan. An SPD can be a material consideration in planning decisions but does not form part of the Local Plan. SPD's are generally prepared in 3 stages: drafting; public consultation; review and adoption.
- 2.4. Shropshire Council has worked jointly with Telford and Wrekin Council to prepare the Draft Ironbridge Gorge SPD. The next stage is, subject to approval, a joint public consultation in both Council's administrative areas.

- 2.5. The Draft Ironbridge Gorge SPD is intended to provide guidance for those considering development proposals and preparing planning applications within the Ironbridge Gorge WHS and its setting, on how they can conserve and enhance the Ironbridge Gorge WHS. It would also be used by Shropshire Council and Telford and Wrekin Council in the determination of planning applications within the WHS and its setting.
- 2.6. Once adopted, the SPD would form part of a suite of documents, including the Local Plan and WHS Management Plan, that set out how the WHS can be protected and positively managed.
- 2.7. The SPD would also contribute to the achievement of the Shropshire Plan, particularly the Healthy Environment priority, by contributing to the maintenance, protection and enhancement of our outstanding natural and historic environment, promoting positive behaviours and greater biodiversity and environmental sustainability.
- 2.8. The purpose of this report is to present the draft of the Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD (see Appendix 1) to Cabinet and seek approval to undertake, jointly with Telford and Wrekin Council, a consultation and engagement exercise on the draft document with the public and stakeholders for a 6 week period commencing in January 2023.
- 2.9. Following this consultation, responses would be given due consideration and a final draft of the Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD prepared. This final draft would in due course be brought back to Cabinet, to be considered for adoption in the Shropshire Council administrative area.
- 2.10. Telford and Wrekin Council's Cabinet will also be considering the Draft Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD for approval for consultation, at their Cabinet meeting on 15th December 2022. The subsequent final draft of the Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD would in due course also be taken back to their Cabinet, to seek approval for adoption within their administrative area.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. To approve a joint public consultation with Telford and Wrekin Council on the Draft Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site Supplementary Planning Document – see Appendix 1.
- 3.2. That authority is given to the Executive Director of Place to agree any additional minor-changes to the Draft Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site Supplementary Planning Document ahead of this consultation.

REPORT

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. There are a number of potential risks to the OUV of the Ironbridge Gorge WHS that the SPD will help address. These include:
- *Development proposals that are poorly designed risking the character of the area* – the SPD will provide guidance tailored to the WHS 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 will help 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 will help 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 will provide planning guidance on infrastructure and commercial developments.
- 4.2. UNESCO have removed WHS status from sites where they feel the OUV is threatened or has been harmed.
- 4.3. Not bringing forward the SPD could adversely impact the heritage significance of the Gorge area and risk its status as a WHS. In preparing an SPD, the Council are taking a proactive approach, in partnership with Telford and Wrekin Council, to plan positively for the WHS and ensure that the risks are minimised.
- 4.4. An Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) initial screening record has been completed ahead of the proposed consultation exercise; this is at Appendix 2.
- 4.5. At this stage, it is anticipated that the equality impacts will be neutral to low positive across the nine Protected Characteristic groupings defined by the Equality Act 2010. There is potential for positive equality impact for the groupings of Age, Disability, Pregnancy and Maternity, and Sex, in terms of mental well-being opportunities arising for people in these groupings to feel safer on their journeys for education, work or leisure. This is particularly so for families with young children, wheelchair users, and older people who may consider themselves to be vulnerable and less likely to venture out without clear signage and lighting, and pavements that can be navigated safely by them and their carers. An additional grouping for whom there may be positive impacts are people with less visible disabilities or conditions, including people with neurodiverse conditions. A further ESHIA will be carried out on the

final draft version of the SPD, following the consultation and any subsequent amendments, when it is brought back to Cabinet seeking approval for adoption.

- 4.6. From a health and well-being perspective, it is anticipated that the SPD will encourage the submission of well-designed development and infrastructure schemes that protect the OUV of the WHS whilst also encouraging the use of public transport and active travel. This can be maximised through efforts to ensure that there are accessible routes within, to and around the WHS which will be perceived as safe by pedestrians and cyclists, e.g: use of lighting, as well as clear signage, and that green infrastructure is maintained and enhanced whenever possible. There are additional positive impacts in terms of the recognised positive mental well-being that may accrue from employment, leisure, and cultural opportunities.
- 4.7. The Council has also drawn upon strategic policy around public transport infrastructure including Active Travel, and best alignment with economic growth strategy development and with implementation of cultural and leisure strategy actions. These strategies all very much include efforts to promote social inclusion and in so doing achieve equality of opportunity for people in Protected Characteristic groupings to safely access economic, leisure and cultural opportunities in market towns.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. The value of the Ironbridge Gorge WHS designation has helped the area maintain a strong visitor economy, promoted Shropshire as a place to visit, live, work, and invest and has helped secure investment into ground stabilisation works and conservation projects in the WHS area.
- 5.2. The Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD would assist the Council in continuing to make the most effective use of its resources and support the efficient delivery of the development management process.
- 5.3. Public consultation is a key stage in the preparation of an SPD. The activities planned within this report, along with subsequent implementation of the SPD, will be met from existing resources and budgets.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. The draft Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD seeks to promote sustainable development that conserves and enhances the OUV of the Ironbridge Gorge WHS (which include the woodlands and geological resources of the gorge).

- 6.2. The draft Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD includes guidance on renewable energy, energy efficiency, and resilience and adaptation measures that seek to balance development with the need to reduce the impacts of climate change. It is therefore considered that the draft SPD and associated public consultation and stakeholder engagement is expected to have a positive outcome on the climate change impacts listed below:
- energy and fuel consumption (buildings and/or travel) though the provision of guidance on appropriate alterations to existing buildings within the Ironbridge Gorge WHS to improve thermal and energy efficiency and guidance on the design of new buildings within the Ironbridge Gorge WHS.
 - renewable energy generation though the provision of guidance on appropriate renewable energy technologies to integrate into existing buildings within the Ironbridge Gorge WHS.
 - carbon offsetting or mitigation including through the aforementioned guidance on energy efficiency and appropriate renewable technologies of existing buildings and the design of new buildings within the Ironbridge Gorge WHS, and
 - climate change adaptation including through the provision of guidance on flood risk management for new and existing buildings within the Ironbridge Gorge WHS.

7. Background

World Heritage Sites

- 7.1. WHS's are internationally important heritage assets that are inscribed (or designated) by UNESCO due to their OUV. OUV 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.*' (National Planning Practice Guidance on the Historic Environment).

The Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site

- 7.2. The Ironbridge Gorge WHS was inscribed by UNESCO in 1986. It covers 550ha, of which 131ha (around 23%) falls within Shropshire Council's administrative area. The remainder is in Telford & Wrekin Council's administrative area.
- 7.3. The Ironbridge Gorge WHS Management Plan includes a brief summary of its OUV which states: '*The Ironbridge Gorge provided the raw materials that revolutionised industrial processes and offers a powerful insight into the origins of the Industrial Revolution. It contains extensive evidence and remains of that period when the area was the focus of international attention from artists, engineers, and writers. The site contains substantial remains of mines, pit mounds, spoil heaps, foundries, factories, workshops, warehouses, iron masters' and workers' housing, public buildings, infrastructure,*

and transport systems, together with traditional landscape and forests of the Severn Gorge. In addition, there also remain extensive collections of artefacts and archives relating to the individuals, processes and products that made the area so important.'

- 7.4. The Ironbridge Gorge WHS is also a Conservation Area (cross-boundary between Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Council administrative areas) and enjoys additional protection under that designation. It also contains a significant number of other designated heritage assets - not least the Iron Bridge itself which is one of 7 Scheduled Monuments. It also contains 375 listed buildings, many buildings of local interest, and 10 internationally significant museums.

Planning context

- 7.5. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) considers WHS's to be designated heritage assets of the highest significance. Any harm to or loss of significance to a WHS should require convincing justification. Substantial harm or loss should be wholly exceptional. This applies equally to development in the setting of a WHS which is likely to affect its OUV. NPPF defines 'setting' as '*the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced*'.
- 7.6. The Council has the power to introduce SPD's under the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, Part 5 (as amended). There are 3 stages in the preparation of an SPD:
1. Drafting.
 2. Public consultation on a draft document.
 3. Adoption by a Local Authority once responses to the public consultation have been reviewed and any amendments arising from it have been made.
- 7.7. Shropshire Council has worked jointly with Telford and Wrekin Council to prepare the Draft Ironbridge Gorge SPD (Appendix 1). The Shropshire Local Plan Member Group provided oversight and comment on the SPD in the final stages of drafting. The next stage is, subject to approval, a joint public consultation in both Council's administrative areas.
- 7.8. SPD's provide guidance and information to support the implementation of a policy/policies in the adopted Local Plan. However, they must be consistent with policies of the adopted Local Plan, cannot introduce new policy, and do not form part of the Local Plan. An SPD can be a material consideration in the development management process.
- 7.9. The adopted Local Plan for Shropshire consists of the Shropshire Core Strategy (2011), the Site Allocations and Management of Development (SAMDev) Plan (2015) and any adopted formal

Neighbourhood Plans. Planning applications should be determined in accordance with the adopted Local Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

- 7.10. This adopted Local Plan provides a robust set of planning policies for conserving the UOV protection for the Ironbridge Gorge WHS, the most relevant of which include: Core Strategy policies CS3: Market Towns and Other Key Centres, CS6: Sustainable Design and Development Principles, CS16: Tourism, Culture and Leisure, and CS17: Environmental Networks; and SAMDev Plan policies S4: Broseley, MD2: Sustainable Design, MD12: Natural Environment, and MD13: Historic Environment.
- 7.11. The Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD would provide guidance and information to support the implementation of these policies, particularly policies CS6 of the Core Strategy (Sustainable Design and Development Principles) and MD13 (Historic Environment) of SAMDev Plan.
- 7.12. The Council is at an advanced stage of a Local Plan Review (with a draft Local Plan currently the subject of examination). It is therefore important to consider the updated policies that are relevant to the Ironbridge Gorge WHS. These include the following: SP1: The Shropshire Test, SP5: High Quality Design, SP14: Strategic Corridors, DP23: Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment, S4: Broseley Place Plan Area and S20: Former Ironbridge Power Station Strategic Settlement.
- 7.13. The Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD would provide guidance and information to support the implementation of these policies, particularly policy DP23.
- 7.14. Once adopted, the SPD would form part of a suite of documents, including the Local Plan and WHS Management Plan, that set out how the WHS can be protected and positively managed.

Shropshire Plan

- 7.15. The SPD would contribute to the achievement of the Shropshire Plan, particularly the Healthy Environment priority, by contributing to the maintenance, protection and enhancement of our outstanding natural and historic environment, promoting positive behaviours and greater biodiversity and environmental sustainability.

Consultation and engagement

- 7.16. Subject to approval, the following activity is planned as part of the consultation process:
- The use of social media channels and Council websites.
 - Engagement with key stakeholder organisations such as ICOMOS UK, Historic England, the WHS Steering Group and relevant Town and Parish Councils.

- Potential for a public consultation event(s).

7.17. The consultation would comply with Shropshire Council’s Statement of Community Involvement.

8. Additional Information

How the SPD would be used

- 8.1. The aim of the Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD is to provide guidance and information to support the implementation of policies in the adopted Local Plan. It will provide residents, businesses, and other organisations with information on how relevant planning proposals within the WHS and its setting can conserve and enhance the OUV of the Ironbridge Gorge WHS when they are considering preparing a planning application. This includes planning applications relating to:
- Alterations, extensions, and refurbishment of existing residential and commercial properties.
 - Change of use from one development type to another.
 - New residential and employment development proposals.
 - Applications relating to renewable energy.
- 8.2. Once adopted, the SPD would be used by Shropshire Council when determining planning applications within the WHS and its setting within the Council’s administrative area. Assuming it is also adopted by Telford and Wrekin Council, it would be used for the same purpose in their administrative area.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1. An SPD for the Ironbridge Gorge WHS would provide guidance and information to support the implementation of policies in the adopted Local Plan, which will in turn strengthen the way the planning system conserves and enhances this internationally designated area’s historic significance.
- 9.2. The SPD would provide clear and consistent advice across both Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin’s administrative boundaries. It would assist residents and businesses in the submission of relevant planning applications, and both Councils when determining relevant planning applications. This will add to the positive management of the Ironbridge Gorge WHS and provide a greater surety of outcomes for planning applicants and local communities.
- 9.3. The consultation process will ensure that engagement takes place with a wide range of stakeholders and the public, enabling commentary on the consultation draft of the SPD, and ensuring that the final version takes account of any material issues raised.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Shropshire Council Core Strategy 2006-2026 –

<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/8534/core-strategy.pdf>

Shropshire Council SAMDev Plan 2006-2026 –

<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/8503/samdev-adopted-plan.pdf>

Draft Shropshire Local Plan 2016 – 2038 –

<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/21100/sd002-draft-shropshire-local-plan.pdf>

Ironbridge Gorge WHS Management Plan -

<https://www.telford.gov.uk/igwhsmgtplan>

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):

Cllr Richard Marshall

Local Members:

Cllr Caroline Bagnall – Broseley

Cllr Dan Thomas – Much Wenlock

Cllr Claire Wild – Severn Valley

Cllr Richard Marshall – Worfield

Appendices

Appendix 1: Draft Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site Supplementary Planning Document

Appendix 2: Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) for the Draft Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site Supplementary Planning Document