



Committee and Date

Item

Cabinet 19th July 2023

Public



Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site Supplementary Planning Document - Adoption

Responsible Officer:	Mark Barrow		
email:	mark.barrow@shropshire.gov.uk	Tel:	01743 258919
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Richard Marshall, Portfolio Holder for Highways and Regulatory Services		

1. Synopsis

- 1.1. Report seeking approval to adopt the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site Supplementary Planning Document, to provide guidance on application of Local Plan policies and form a material consideration in the planning application process.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The Shropshire Plan includes the strategic objective: *“maintain, protect, and enhance our outstanding natural and historic environment...”* and specifies that one mechanism for achieving this objective is *“providing high quality advice that promotes excellent management, care, and enhancement of Shropshire’s rich and highly varied natural and historic environment.”*
- 2.2. Provision of guidance on the application of Local Plan policies within the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site (Ironbridge Gorge WHS) and its setting within a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and use of this SPD as a material consideration in the planning application process are ways in which the Council can provide high quality advice on the historic environment.
- 2.3. 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.

- 2.4. 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).
- 2.5. An SPD adds further detail and guidance on the implementation of policies in the Council's Local Plan and can form a material consideration in planning decisions – but importantly does not itself form part of the Local Plan.
- 2.6. The Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD is intended to provide guidance on the application of policies within adopted and emerging Local Plan's in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin respectively. It is aimed at those considering development proposals and preparing planning applications within the Ironbridge Gorge WHS and its setting, providing guidance 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.
- 2.7. SPD's are generally prepared in 3 stages: drafting; public consultation; review and adoption. The Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD is at the third stage in this process.
- Shropshire Council worked jointly with Telford and Wrekin Council to prepare a draft Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD.
 - Following approval by respective Cabinet's, the two Council's undertook a joint public consultation on the draft Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD between the 9th January 2023 and the 20th February 2023. This consultation was consistent with Shropshire Council's Statement of Community Involvement. A total of 26 responses were received from local residents, interested individuals, interest groups, organisations, and statutory consultees. A summary of the consultation and responses received is provided as Appendix 1 of this report.
 - Officers from Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council have reviewed these responses and where appropriate identified amendments to the draft Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD. This final draft Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD is provided as Appendix 2 of this report.
- 2.8. The purpose of this report in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations (2012) (as amended) is to seek approval to adopt the Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD (Appendix 2) to provide guidance on application of Local Plan policies and form a material consideration in the planning application process.
- 2.9. 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.
- 2.10. 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.
- 2.11. Telford and Wrekin Council's Cabinet on 13th July 2023 will, have considered a report seeking approval to adopt the Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD within their administrative area. Adoption of the Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD as a material consideration in the

planning application process within the Telford & Wrekin Council administrative area is subject to this decision. A verbal briefing of the decision by Telford & Wrekin Council's Cabinet regarding the adoption of the Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD can be provided to Cabinet on the 19th July 2023.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. In accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations (2012) (as amended), approve the adoption of the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site Supplementary Planning Document (Appendix 2) to provide guidance on application of Local Plan policies and form a material consideration in the planning application process.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations (2012) (as amended) set out the requirements for SPD's which must be complied with. It is considered that the Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD and the process undertaken in its preparation is consistent with these requirements.
- 4.2. Shropshire Council's Statement of Community Involvement specifies the requirements for preparing and consulting upon SPD's in Shropshire and should be complied with. It is also considered that the Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD and the process undertaken in its preparation is consistent with these requirements.
- 4.3. 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.
- 4.4. UNESCO have removed WHS status from sites where they feel the OUV is threatened or has been harmed. Not bringing forward the SPD could adversely impact the heritage significance of the Ironbridge 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.

- 4.5. A further Stage One screening Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) has been completed for the final draft Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD following the period of public consultation. This is provided at Appendix 3.
- 4.6. 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.
- 4.7. An additional grouping for whom there may be positive impacts are people with less visible disabilities or conditions, including people with neurodiverse conditions, and for people with visual impairments. For example, a cluttered space can cause overstimulation for some people with autism, and many autistic people need space around them, which means that narrow passageways can cause stress. Additionally, sensitive use of appropriate lighting such as minimal use of fluorescent lighting, as well as clear signage, will be anticipated to provide further benefits for people with neurodiverse conditions and for others including those with visual impairments.
- 4.8. Both the adopted Local Plan and the draft Shropshire Local Plan include a series of indicators that are utilised to monitor effects. It is considered that these indicators will assist with understanding the effects of the Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD upon people in the nine Protected Characteristic groupings as defined by the Equality Act 2010, with additional recognition of the intersectionality between groupings and for people in a range of household circumstances, considered in our tenth grouping around social inclusion. This then includes people in rural households, people in low income households, and those that we may consider to be vulnerable.
- 4.9. The Council will draw upon the learning from pedestrianisation efforts in market towns in Shropshire, which are building upon Covid-19 measures that led to improved physical access around towns by people in Protected Characteristic groupings and those we may describe as vulnerable. The Council will also draw 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.
- 4.10. 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.

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. The cost of the adoption and implementation of the SPD will be met from existing resources and budgets.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. The 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 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 SPD is expected to have a positive outcome on the climate change impacts listed:
 - 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, the design of new buildings within the Ironbridge Gorge WHS, and the contribution to the positive management of woodland and other habitats within the Ironbridge Gorge.
 - 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) (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. Stage 1: Shropshire Council worked jointly with Telford & Wrekin Council to prepare a Draft Ironbridge Gorge SPD. The Shropshire Local Plan Member Group (including the relevant Local Members) provided oversight and comment on the SPD in the final stages of drafting.
- 7.8. Stage 2: Following approval by respective Cabinet's, the two Council's undertook a joint public consultation on the draft Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD between the 9th January 2023 and the 20th February 2023. This consultation was consistent with Shropshire Council's Statement of Community Involvement. A total of 26 responses were received from local residents, interested individuals, interest groups, organisations, and statutory consultees. A summary of the consultation and responses received is provided as Appendix 1 of this report.

- 7.9. Stage 3: Officers from Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council have reviewed these responses and where appropriate identified amendments to the draft Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD. The consultation responses received and proposed approach to these responses including appropriate amendments were discussed with the Shropshire Local Plan Member Group (including the relevant Local Members), which provided oversight and comment on the SPD. This final draft Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD is provided as Appendix 2 of this report.
- 7.10. The purpose of this report in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations (2012) (as amended) is to seek approval to adopt the Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD (Appendix 2) to provide guidance on application of Local Plan policies and form a material consideration in the planning application process.
- 7.11. 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.
- 7.12. 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.
- 7.13. This adopted Local Plan provides a robust set of planning policies for conserving the OUV of 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.
- 7.14. 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.
- 7.15. 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.
- 7.16. The Ironbridge Gorge WHS SPD would provide guidance and information to support the implementation of these policies, particularly policy DP23.
- 7.17. 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.

The Shropshire Plan

- 7.18. The Shropshire Plan includes the strategic objective: “*maintain, protect, and enhance our outstanding natural and historic environment...*” and specifies that one mechanism for achieving this objective is “*providing high quality advice that promotes excellent management, care, and enhancement of Shropshire’s rich and highly varied natural and historic environment.*”
- 7.19. Provision of guidance on the application of Local Plan policies within the Ironbridge Gorge WHS and its setting within a SPD and use of this SPD as a material consideration in the planning application process are ways in which the Council can provide high quality advice on the historic environment.

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 and in the future the draft Shropshire Local Plan.
- 8.2. 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.
- 8.3. 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 and in the future the draft Shropshire Local Plan, which will in turn strengthen the way the planning system conserves and enhances this internationally designated area’s historic significance.
- 9.2. Provision of guidance on the application of Local Plan policies within the Ironbridge Gorge WHS and its setting within a SPD and use of this SPD as a material consideration in the planning application process are ways in which the Council can provide high quality advice on the historic environment, thereby contributing to the achievement of the objectives of the Shropshire Plan.
- 9.3. The SPD would provide clear and consistent advice across both Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin’s administrative areas. 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 greater surety on outcomes for planning applicants and local communities.

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>

Local Members:

Cllr Caroline Bagnall – Broseley

Cllr Dan Thomas – Much Wenlock

Cllr Claire Wild – Severn Valley

Cllr Richard Marshall – Worfield

Appendices

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

Appendix 2: Final Draft Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site Supplementary Planning Document

Appendix 3: Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) for the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site Supplementary Planning Document