

Future Rejuvenation Strategy for the Pantiles

*Contribution by Dr Philip Whitbourn, OBE, PhD, FSA, FRIBA, FRTPI(Retd)
Formerly Secretary, ICOMOS (UK)*

/ have been invited by the Leader of the Council to speak on this item, in view of my involvement with the World Heritage Site Evaluation Missions at Maritime Greenwich and elsewhere, during my seven years as Secretary of ICOMOS (UK).

- ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, (please see paragraph 1 on page 9(D)-4 of the Officers' Report) is a non-political organisation that advises UNESCO on Cultural World Heritage Sites.

I have read paragraphs 13-17 on pages 9(D)-3 and 4, and 1-10 on pages 4 and 5 of the Officers' Report 08J002/CAB015 which I consider set out the position fairly and realistically on "The Pantiles as a potential World Heritage Site".

I am keen to complement, rather than duplicate, the Report during my three minute slot, and

I think that I can most usefully enlarge slightly on the six bullet points under "Issues and Risks" in paragraph 10 on page 9(D)-5.

- Under bullet point 1 on page 5, if a new Tentative List is drawn up, it is certainly expected that there will be strong pressure from places such as St Paul's Cathedral in London, Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, and the City of York for inclusion.
- Concerning point 2, the six UNESCO Guidelines Criteria for Cultural Sites could be briefly summarised as follows:
 - (i) A masterpiece of human creative genius, such as the Taj Mahal
 - (ii) Exhibiting developments in architecture, town planning etc, such as the historic centre of St Petersburg
 - (iii) A testimony to a civilisation which has disappeared, such as Stonehenge
 - (iv) An outstanding example of a building or ensemble, such as Venice
 - (v) A settlement that has been vulnerable to change, such as Pompeii
 - (vi) Association with events such as the holocaust at Auschwitz

(A full list of the Criteria is appended)

If a nomination for The Pantiles was to be considered (ii) and (iv) would probably be the most suitable.

- On point 3, 878 sites are currently inscribed in 145 countries, an average of about 6 per country. The UK has 27 sites so far, including the well-known Spa Town of Bath.
- With regard to point 4, from the present Tentative List, Telford's iron Pont-Cysyllte Aqueduct in Wales may go forward in 2009; Benedict Biscop and Bede's Saxon monasteries in Tyneside possibly in 2010; Chatham Historic Dockyard possibly in 2011; and the Lake District perhaps in 2012.

A decision on whether and how to review the 1999 Tentative List currently (subject to any re-shuffle) rests with the Culture Minister, Margaret Hodge and her Secretary of State, Andrew Burnham.

- Costs, mentioned in point 5, would include the preparation of a Nomination Dossier, with justification under the criteria, and, very importantly a Management Plan.
- Finally, under point 6, experience shows that the World Heritage Site Management Plan process can be very beneficial in bringing together highway authorities, planners, owners and others involved in sites, and in avoiding bad planning, as well as raising an area's profile.

The Pantiles is a very special place indeed and, regardless of the workings of the World Heritage Convention, it deserves the best protection and management that can be bestowed upon it.

II.D Criteria for the assessment of outstanding universal value

77. The Committee considers a property as having outstanding universal value (see paragraphs 49-53) if the property meets one or more of the following criteria. Nominated properties shall therefore :

- (i) represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
- (ii) 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) bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;
- (iv) 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) 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) 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);

These criteria were formerly presented as two separate sets of criteria - criteria

(i) - (vi) for cultural heritage and

(i) - (iv) for natural heritage.

The 6th extraordinary session of the World Heritage Committee decided to merge the ten criteria (Decision 6 EXT.COM5.1)

Future Rejuvenation Strategy for the Pantiles (081002/CAB015)

To: Cabinet
2 October 2008

Main Portfolio Area: Planning & Development

Author of report: Alan Legg, Principal Design & Heritage Officer

Classification: Non - Exempt

Ward: Pantiles

Executive Summary

A Rejuvenation Strategy for the Pantiles, has been prepared by the new owners, Targetfollow. It provides their vision for future improvements and developments of the area. This report recommends that the general approach be welcomed by the Borough Council, whilst making clear its relationship to Planning Policy.

This report also discusses an option of pursuing World Heritage Site status as a further instrument to the rejuvenation of the Pantiles. In view of the investment and timescales involved, the limited likelihood of success and the uncertain additional value, the report recommends that any bid for World Heritage Site status is evaluated in consultation with experts in the field.

Corporate Priorities

A1 : Promoting and maintaining a thriving and diverse local economy
A2 : Caring for our environment

Report status

For Decision

Route to Implementation/Timetable:

In respect of the Rejuvenation Strategy and World Heritage Site, decisions will be made by Cabinet at the meeting, and will come into effect after call-in period.

The Rejuvenation Strategy itself sets out a series of actions and programme. Short to medium term will be over the next four years, subject to the Local Plan. Longer-term aspects (post 2012) may need to be subject to the Town Centres Area Action Plan.

Report of Head of Planning Continued**Background/Introduction**

1. The Pantiles is very much part of the origins of Tunbridge Wells with the discovery of the waters in 1606 and the subsequent growth into a fashionable resort. The building development in the area took place principally in the late 17c and mid 18c, resulting in a unique environment, the character of which has been retained even though many of the buildings have undergone numerous alterations over the centuries.
2. Most of the structures in the Pantiles are listed buildings, even the paving surfaces.
3. Although the area has been subject to cycles of change it attracts tourists and visitors to the town, however it currently does not maximise its potential. Neither is it physically well integrated as a part of the town centre.

The Pantiles Rejuvenation Strategy

4. The Pantiles and the Tunbridge Wells / Rusthall Commons were put up for sale at the end of last year and subsequently acquired by new owners Targetfollow, a property portfolio company. Targetfollow is a commercial property investment and development company, specialising in major opportunities in city centres and particularly involving urban regeneration. The company has a varied and substantial development and investment portfolio. Under this new ownership they have been developing a Regeneration Strategy to establish a vision and future plan for the Pantiles area. They have engaged consultants to facilitate and prepare this. A consultation draft version copy of the Rejuvenation Strategy is appended to this report. *(Please note that due to the size of this document, it will be forwarded to Cabinet members under separate cover. Other members can obtain a copy on request or view it on the councils web site under Planning Information/Pantiles Rejuvenation)*
5. This strategy is intended to build on the fact that the Pantiles is already a destination for visitors to the town. By improving presentation, marketing, etc it is intended to strengthen the commercial offer and the visitor experience. Through improving the links to the rest of the town and the public realm this can spread the benefits to the town as a whole.
6. Targetfollow are therefore a key partner in achieving the future objectives for improving Royal Tunbridge Wells.
7. The Rejuvenation Strategy itself is a comprehensive document, which describes the current context and sets out a clear vision for the Pantiles. It examines and evaluates the issues and although there are key strengths it identifies threats and weaknesses that need to be addressed and opportunities to be grasped. The conclusion is that there are a number of key themes to tackle, including – movement and links, public realm, building refurbishment and re-use, signing and wayfinding. A number of measures are set out in an action plan.
8. This strategy provides a framework for future changes, whilst protecting the heritage but also allowing greater contribution to the attractiveness and economy of the town.

9. Targetfollow are undertaking a consultation exercise with other key stakeholders and partners in the preparation to ensure that objectives are generally aligned. An introductory briefing for council members has already taken place on 16 July.
10. This Rejuvenation Strategy will inform the Town Centres Area Action Plan DPD which is about to be prepared by the Council as Local Planning Authority. It will also inform wider strategies for the town as a whole.
11. Implementation of the strategy will be primarily through the actions of the developer. However there may be particular projects where a joint partnership approach will be necessary. For example, any key improvements to Nevill Street, facilitating crossing between Charles the Martyr and the Pantiles.
12. There is an important issue, namely the Planning status of this document. As it is not prepared by the Council as Local Planning Authority under the relevant regulations, it will not be part of the Development Plan or a Supplementary Planning Document and does not render these policies out of date. It can be taken into account in the determination of Planning Applications as a material consideration as with any material produced in support of an application. Its status is one of a vision produced by a commercial organisation. As such, the Council may welcome the Rejuvenation Strategy in clarifying the landowner's aims and ambitions for the area.

The Pantiles as a potential World Heritage Site

13. Over recent months there have been suggestions regarding the potential for the Pantiles at Tunbridge Wells to become a World Heritage Site.

Background

14. The concept of World Heritage Sites is at the core of the World Heritage Convention, adopted by UNESCO in 1972, to which 180 nations belong. Through the Convention, UNESCO seeks to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of the cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. The Convention required the establishment of the World Heritage List, under the management of an inter-governmental World Heritage Committee as a means of recognising that some places, both natural and cultural, are of sufficient importance to be the responsibility of the international community as a whole. As a member of the Convention, States Parties are pledged to care for their World Heritage sites as part of protecting their national heritage.
15. Nominations for inscription on the World Heritage List are made by the appropriate States Parties. And are subject to rigorous evaluation by expert advisers to the World Heritage Committee, International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) for cultural sites and/or the World Conservation Union (IUCN) for natural sites. Decisions on the selection of new World Heritage Sites are taken by the World Heritage Committee at its annual summer meetings. There are currently 830 World Heritage Sites in 138 States Parties. Some 644 are cultural sites, 162 are natural and 24 are mixed.

16. Inclusion in the World Heritage List is essentially honorific and leaves the existing rights and obligations of owners, occupiers and planning authorities unaffected. A prerequisite for World Heritage Site status is, nevertheless, the existence of effective legal protection and the establishment or firm prospect of management plans agreed with site owners to ensure each site's conservation and presentation. The Rejuvenation Strategy together with the strong planning context will provide this framework.
17. Inscription as a World Heritage Site is the highest commendation a place can receive – a real recognition of global significance - and brings with it international prestige.

Process

1. For a site to become a World Heritage Site, a nomination for inclusion on the World Heritage List must be made to UNESCO by the UK Government. Nominations are prepared by bid partnerships of site owners and other interested parties working closely with advisory bodies such as English Heritage and ICOMOS UK and in consultation with the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), which leads for Government on World Heritage.
2. Potential sites need to demonstrate clearly that the place in question has Outstanding Universal Value, through the development of Statements of Significance, Authenticity and Integrity in accordance with UNESCO's Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>) and have in place adequate legal protection and appropriate management systems.
3. A pre-requisite for nomination by the Government is inclusion on the national Tentative List of sites likely to be put forward in future years. The current UK Tentative List was published in 1999 with twenty-five sites. Nine of these have since been inscribed, two more have been nominated for consideration by the World Heritage Committee this year and in 2009 and work is in hand on a number of other sites for potential nomination up until 2011.
4. Potential sites, which are not on the current UK Tentative List can not, at this stage, be taken forward as future nominations.

Future

5. The Government however is currently taking a broader look at UK World Heritage policy as a whole, and this is also tied up with the draft Heritage Protection Act, currently proceeding through Parliament. This will include looking at the case for inclusion of new sites on the UK Tentative List (in England and the Devolved Administrations, the Overseas Territories and the Crown Dependencies) as well as considering the position of the remaining sites on the current list. The review will be undertaken in the light of UNESCO's policy on restricting the number of nominations made in any given year by a State Party and the World Heritage Committee's priorities for increasing representation on the World Heritage List of the range and type of sites - cultural landscapes, industrial archaeology, scientific achievement and so forth.
6. The Government also has a duty to establish and communicate the costs and benefits of World Heritage status in the UK before encouraging any new bids to come forward. To this end a study has been commissioned and the DCMS propose to consult widely on the results shortly.

7. Should Ministers decide, following consultation, that a new Tentative List should be drawn up it is then expected that applications will be invited from potential sites - although this in itself is likely to be a lengthy process.
8. DCMS have advised that the process of developing a nomination is a long and costly one with no guarantee of success. Indeed, many unique places of national or even international significance will never become World Heritage Sites because the process is so selective and before moving forward, bid partnerships need to carefully consider whether the perceived advantages of World Heritage status could be achieved in other ways.
9. Officers have also sought the views of Targetfollow on this matter. Their response states. *"We agree with officers of the Council that The Pantiles is an important heritage asset, whose national value and significance is reflected in the extent of listed structures. We do not believe there is a sufficiently strong case to satisfy the criteria for World Heritage Status. Considering the extent of funds and resources which would need to be committed by Targetfollow (as major landowner) the Council (as planning authority) and a number of other private landowners we believe such an application would be counter productive. Any commitment to such an application would be at a cost of resources currently committed to the design, consultation and implementation of the Rejuvenation Strategy. It is important for investment, energy and resources to be focussed on rejuvenation that aims to secure the long term future and enhancement of the Pantiles and the wider town centre. A bid for World Heritage Status would, at this time, distract from making progress toward these objectives whilst having limited prospect of success."*

Issues & risks

10. Taking any bid forward should recognize the following issues and risks –
 - Should the UK Government draw up a new Tentative list there will undoubtedly be strong competition for inclusion,
 - The case for the Pantiles when measured against the UNESCO guidelines is not a strong one,
 - The UK is already well represented on the World Heritage list and it is understood that UNESCO in future wish to focus on less represented States Parties,
 - The timescales involved will be in the order of several years - subsequent to review of legislation, bid to be included on a new tentative List and then awaiting being put forward,
 - Cost an resource implications on a high risk bid, and
 - The benefits would be raising the profile of the area but are otherwise are limited, and may indeed restrict future planning.

Cross cutting issues

Legal

12. Targetfollow's Rejuvenation Strategy is to be subject to the normal planning processes.

Finance and other resources, including ICT

13. No specific issues

Staffing

14. No specific issues

Value for money

15. No specific issues

Risk Management

16. Actions within the Rejuvenation Strategy may not be delivered due to commercial or regulatory reasons.

Equalities

17. No specific issues

Safer & Stronger Communities

18. No specific issues

Health and Well-Being

20. No specific issues

Environment / Sustainability

21. This key heritage asset should be preserved or enhanced in accordance with PPG15, Planning and the Historic Environment, Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the draft Heritage Protection Bill.

Human Rights Act

22. No specific issues

Communication and Consultation

23. Ongoing discussion will be part of implementing the various proposals contained within the Rejuvenation Strategy.

Recommendation(s):

1. That the Borough Council expresses its support for the Rejuvenation Strategy as a vision for the Pantiles by an important commercial organisation, subject to the normal planning process; and
2. That any bid for World Heritage status is evaluated in consultation with experts in the field..

Reason(s) for recommendation(s):

3. To support the appropriate management of a key heritage asset.

Contact Officer: Alan Legg, Principal Design & Heritage Officer

Jim Kehoe

Head of Planning

Robert Cottrill

Director of Planning & Development

Appendices: [Appendix 1](#) - Rejuvenation Strategy (see para 4 note)

[Appendix 2](#) - World Heritage Sites

[Appendix 3](#) - UK Tentative List

Background Papers: none