

Heritage & Regeneration Champion Report 2021

Despite the trials and tribulations of pandemic restrictions and the cessation of public gatherings it has been interesting to see how a number of local amenity societies have embraced 'zooming' and, though my usual hectic round of talks throughout North Somerset and historic Somerset has stopped, some societies have increased participation as a result of on-line participation. Several are now considering how best to offer both virtual and actual programmes. It's also been a delight to hear of some older and frailer members say they can now 'attend' without the need to traipse to a local community hall on a dreary winter's night. Let's be cheerful: Zoom need not be gloom.

Though social media can be a force for rose-tinted glasses wearing negativity it has also encouraged many people, with no more than a passing interest in heritage, to jump aboard the screen sharing ship. The wealth of hitherto unseen photographs and unrecorded anecdotes which regularly pop up on Facebook have sometimes kept the Heritage Champion awake way past his bedtime!

There is no doubt in my mind that an increasing number of people not only want to know more about their localities but also want to become more involved in shaping their futures. For some this means allowing selectively remembered 'good old days' nostalgia to take hold; for others it means using the wealth of our cherished environment to help shape the future. People really do want to belong. This is why my title intentionally links heritage with regeneration.

In conclusion I must sing the praises of professional colleagues who, despite desperate under-staffing, do so much to further the important 'Heritage Matters' message.

Thank you all.

Know Your Place/Sharing Heritage

The Sharing Heritage/Know Your Place North Somerset project has continued to be extremely successful, with volunteers having added over 1000 new records onto the website showcasing the rich history and heritage across North Somerset.

The first national lockdown meant no public engagement would be able to take place, so heritage officers set up Facebook and Twitter accounts to disseminate information in a digital format in March 2020. They worked in collaboration with staff at Weston Museum to produce educational activities, content and videos which were very well received.

The social media channels have allowed for engagement with over 1 million people in the last 15 months and there has also been a marked increase in users of the mapping website itself with local residents adding their own information.

Heritage officers continue to collaborate with Weston Town Council and Weston Museum as the project was extended thanks to funding made available through the Great Weston Heritage Action Zone.

There is also a short exhibition opening at the Museum in June to celebrate National Volunteer Week to display some of the key records the volunteers have added to the website and their research.

North Somerset Historic Environment Record (NSHER)

Externally-hosted database & GIS

Due to lack of accessibility to the HER working from home, the Senior Archaeologist instigated and managed the move to an externally hosted system. This has now been set up and also allows access for the Conservation & Heritage Officer. New system tested and working for all 3 officers (much faster than previous arrangement and now CL can actually use it for first time in over 14 months).

NRHE to HER project

A year-long project to accession data from Historic England's database to the NSHER will be undertaken by the Senior Archaeologist, who will relinquish 1 day a week to complete this. Over 2400 records are due to be accessioned during this period. A pre-requisite of this project is to sign up to Heritage Gateway which allows researchers to search nationwide databases for historic environment data.

Historic England Audit

Work is due to commence on preparation for the audit which takes place every five years. Significant progress has been made in a number of areas regarding procedures and management of the HER, as well as reduction of the considerable backlog of reference material. There are still several areas for improvement.

Heritage Action Zones

Great Weston Heritage Action Zone

Enhancement work on Walker & Ling shopfront commenced in Jan 2021 and the shop reopened on 12 April 2021. Over 40,000 people have engaged with the project on social media.

Other retail premises that are considering enhancement include 8- 10 South Parade and 80-82 High Street.

The Heritage Action Zone work also includes a £45,000 engagement programme. This work supports Know Your Place, Heritage Open Days Marketing support for retailers, and investment in the Weston Civic Society annual awards as well as Chamber of Commerce awards.

High Street Heritage Action Zone

In August 2020 we learned that our funding bid for £1.1 million for a High Street Heritage Action Zone was successful. The High Street Action Zone was launched in October 2020. The new programme area in Weston, which is in addition to the existing Heritage Action Zone (HAZ), focuses on Weston-super-Mare's southern end of the High Street around Oxford Street and Walliscote Road, North for works over four years. Activities include:

- Community engagement – to help shape the delivery and sustainability of the new programme through volunteering and stakeholder initiatives
- Public realm and restoration of architectural features – the restoration and repair of original street features, improved lighting, paving, street furniture and bringing back original architectural characteristics
- Development and management of a shop front enhancement grants scheme, improving the exterior of retail units and reinstatement of historical features
- Conversions to new homes – working with property owners to support the sympathetic, appropriate and high-quality conversion of upper floors, empty units and potentially bringing forward up to 20 new homes in the town centre

- Explore the development of training opportunities in traditional conservation skills, building on the work of the current HAZ, and in partnership with local providers

High Street Heritage Action Zone cultural work-

In April 2021 we learned that our bid for £119,680 to Historic England for a cultural programme has been successful.

Culture Weston will lead on the '21st century super Shrines' cultural programme working with the Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund and the local community.

'21st Century super Shrines' is an exciting programme co-created by professional artists in partnership with local emerging artists and communities for which a series of innovative contemporary 'shrines' will appear on the high street. These shrines will be installations or live arts experiences. Together, the shrines will create a sense of shared values, determining a new sense of 'worth' on the high street.

Coronavirus and its implications for Heritage Action Zone and High Street Heritage Action Zone

During this period the Heritage Action Zone Officer has focused on work that is possible to carry out while working from home. This includes work on:

- the delivery plans for the HAZ and HSHAZ- these have to be redrawn in the light of covid-19.
- developing article 4 directions for stone walls in Weston
- completing monitoring and evaluation reports for Historic England

National Grid Hinkley C Connection Project

The Senior Archaeologist continues to monitor archaeological elements of the National Grid Hinkley C Connection project. This includes weekly virtual meetings via Teams and fortnightly on-site monitoring visits. Currently 5 of the 14 stages are under way in North Somerset alone. Discussions around publication and exhibition of findings for local communities are under way with various stakeholders.

Middle Engine Pit, Nailsea

Several of the dilapidated buildings on the colliery site, which is a Scheduled Monument and contains a number of listed buildings, were successfully repaired at the end of 2019 with funding from Historic England and NSC.

Heritage officers were prepared to engage a volunteer group to control vegetation growth on the site and also clear and remove debris, but this has been postponed due to Covid-19. They hope to hold the initial meeting with volunteers this summer.

Officers have produced a draft management plan for the site which was subject to public consultation in May/June 2021. The results from this consultation are currently being reviewed and the draft management plan amended. Once this has been completed the management plan will be put forward for official adoption. The management plan will then inform funding bids to bring the site into public use.

Conservation Areas

The new Churchill Conservation Area was officially adopted by the Council on 29th January 2020 along with the accompanying Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan.

Work continues on the creation and adoption of the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plans for the remaining conservation areas in North Somerset that currently do not have them.

The Conservation & Heritage Officer is currently working with Banwell Archaeological Society and Banwell Parish Council on the appraisal and management plan for Banwell Conservation Area. The final draft is complete and once a public consultation has been undertaken this will be put forward for adoption.

Worlebury Camp Hillfort

Covid has resulted in some unforeseen delays with the Worlebury hillfort project, not least because there was no funding available between June 2020 and April 2021, and the Forestry Commission took over 2 years to make a decision on the felling licence. This has now been granted and work is under way by a multidisciplinary team to bring together the application for the National Lottery Heritage Fund which will be submitted this summer.

The scope of felling is almost agreed and upon success of being awarded funding that will take place Winter 2021/22. This has been pulled forwards due to significant risks with ash dieback in this area.

Volunteers from the Worlebury Hillfort Group have continued working to clear vegetation across the site when restrictions have allowed, and the group has grown considerably with local residents wishing to engage in outdoor activities.

Unfortunately, whilst Covid meant that more people were exploring their local areas, there was a considerable rise in anti-social behaviour at the hillfort resulting in illegal fires and metal detecting. The Council's Senior Archaeologist has been working closely with Avon & Somerset Police to introduce more regular patrols of Weston Woods to discourage this behaviour.

North Somerset Heritage Forum

Due to the Covid pandemic the last 2 Heritage Forums have been held virtually via Zoom, the last one taking place in November 2020. 22 representatives from North Somerset's local heritage groups attended this meeting to give updates on what they have been working on and hear the updates from the Council's Heritage & Regeneration Champion, heritage officers, HAZ officers and Library staff since the last meeting. The next Forum is taking place in May 2021.

Young Archaeologists' Club (Rusty Club)

Limited events have run due to national lockdowns, but heritage officers have continued to work with Weston Museum staff to provide content and engage with the Rusty Club through Know Your Place.

Heritage Open Days

The September 2020 Heritage Open Days was held as a virtual festival. Over 3,000 people participated. We have gained funding to hold Heritage Open Days in 2021.

Work is just beginning on confirming the activities for this year's event. The project is being led again by the HAZ officers, with heritage officers feeding in with activities relating to the Know Your Place website to allow a digital platform so as the festival can continue for people not able to physically attend events.

Festival of Archaeology

This year's event is planned for 17th July to 1st August this year and heritage officers are once again collaborating with Weston Museum around the theme of 'exploring local places'.

Heritage officers are creating a virtual treasure hunt on the Know Your Place website using the information the volunteers and public have added over this last year to encourage people to explore the local area.

They are also working with Weston Museum to hold a physical family-friendly event for the Festival on 24th July, providing restrictions at that time allow for this.

Development Management and Enforcement

Significantly higher numbers of planning applications and enforcement cases in 2020 required input from heritage officers.

Large applications have included the Clevedon Triangle, 38-40 Birnbeck Road & Lynton House (W-s-M), Birnbeck Pier, Portbury Priors, Old Angel (Flax Bourton) and Claremont Crescent, W-s-M, as well as a bigger enforcement case on a Grade I listed building for the Conservation & Heritage Officer. The Senior Archaeologist has been involved in a variety of applications including Gatcombe Farm (Long Ashton) and Youngwood Lane (Nailsea), multiple applications at West Wick and around Weston-super-Mare and Banwell, Congresbury and Yatton.

Delivering responses to applications whilst adapting to working from home has also been a challenge for the team, especially when site visits were not permitted. Officers were quick to adapt and instigated new methods of working in order to determine listed building applications and to virtually monitor archaeological fieldwork. Despite these challenges, formal comments and input into applications has been accomplished in a timely manner.

Banwell Bypass

Preliminary archaeological investigations have been completed to inform the potential route for the bypass. Heritage officers will need to liaise closely with project team, appointed archaeologists and Historic England to ensure heritage is properly considered during scoping and construction stages, and with the design and details of the spur road which cuts through Banwell Conservation Area.

Local List

The Local List criteria and management procedures have been set out and are being put before the Executive Members for adoption at the Executive Meeting on 23rd June. The report has been to an informal SPEDR meeting and received their support.

If this is successfully adopted the heritage team will work towards producing an official handbook utilising funding from the HAZ. Subsequent to this the launch of the Local List will take place include press releases requesting the public to submit their nominations via Know Your Place North Somerset.

Engagement

Limited public engagement has been viable over the last year, but the Senior Archaeologist has given talks on a number of subjects including her role as a local authority archaeologist, the North Somerset Historic Environment Record, and the Worlebury Hillfort project.