

North Somerset Council

Report to the Council

Date of Meeting: 8 November 2022

Subject of Report: Heritage & Regeneration Champion Report 2021-2022

Town or Parish: All

Officer/Member Presenting: Cllr John Crockford-Hawley, Heritage & Regeneration Champion

Key Decision: No

Reason: Not an Executive Decision

Recommendations: Members are asked to note the report

1. Introduction

Though all amenity and local heritage groups curtailed live meetings during the Covid pandemic it was pleasing to see a substantial number embrace Zoom without much difficulty. Some are now considering how this technology might enable home participation to continue during dark winter evenings.

Since my last report I have given heritage talks to the following groups: Friends of Weston Museum, Portishead Senior Citizens Forum, Milton Methodist Ladies, Weston Homemakers, Tickenham WI, Wells U3A, Cambridge Society of Somerset, Ilminster Literary Festival, Weston WI, Weston Rotary Club, Yatton Local History Society, Gordano Civic Society, Woodspring Ladies Probus, Uphill WI, NHS Retirement Group, Worle Baptist Fellowship, Weston Civic Society, Uphill Village Society, Notable Club, Nailsea & District Local History Society, North Sedgemoor Local History Group, Uphill Friendship Club, Heritage Open Days, Culture Weston Arts & Health Week, Weston College, and The Sovereign. It's always a great pleasure responding to such invitations, for it shows the wealth of interest and concern which exists for our local built, industrial, ecclesiastical, natural and even political and economic heritage.

A walk-about was organised for colleagues from Culture Weston, Weston College, Harmonia Sacra / Costanzi Consort, St George's Bristol and others, to venues with potential for developing further cultural and performance opportunities in WsM (Loves Café, Blakehay Theatre, Grove Park bandstand, All Saints' Church, Weston Museum and Winter Gardens Pavilion), though insufficient time meant we were unable to include the Old Town Quarry, Odeon Cinema, Town Hall Council Chamber or historic hostelrys in our itinerary.

The number of participants from North Somerset societies who attend our regular Heritage Forums is sound evidence of deep local commitment to the discovery, interpretation and telling of this district's fascinating story. Their voluntary work is of real benefit to this council's professional staff.

An understanding of how North Somerset has evolved, particularly within living memory, helps put negativity in context and opens eyes to future pitfalls and possibilities. All North Somerset settlements continue to expand and parish councils, amenity societies, museum and theatres must develop new ways of engaging with more recent residents who will have little visual or emotional recall of things past.

I've gained a sense that whilst live elderly audiences often enjoy reminiscing, they dwell seldom on overt nostalgia for the nebulous 'good old days' so beloved of social media audiences and ill-informed keyboard warriors.

This council's commitment to heritage has been nationally recognised by government, Historic England and the Local Government Association. I'm pleased to see collaborative work expanding with Weston Museum which houses much of the North Somerset Collection and with the South West Heritage Trust which curates the Collection and is the official depository for all North Somerset's records.

January 2022 saw the welcome development of a new Heritage and Design Team within the Place directorate. This brings together conservation, archaeology, historic environment records, heritage projects and urban and landscape design professionals in one team. The team affords the opportunity for coordination of Heritage and Design work across North Somerset. However, planning-related workload continues to be an area of concern with planning appeals as well as general planning work consuming excessive time for officers.

We cannot escape our past; for better or worse it holds us all to account. Understanding it, warts and all, might just help us forge a finer future.

John Crockford-Hawley
Heritage & Regeneration Champion, North Somerset Council

2. Details

2.1 Creation of the Heritage & Design Team

In January, the Council took a significant step forward by setting up a dedicated Heritage & Design Team for the first time. The nine officers that make up the team have between them a vast amount of in-depth knowledge and professional experience covering everything from archaeology, building conservation, heritage and urban design, to funding, project development and management and community development. The value of such a team cannot be overstated and by combining their expertise in one place, this offers the rest of the Council a valuable resource.

2.2 Development Management and Enforcement

Significantly higher numbers of planning applications and enforcement cases in have required input from heritage officers in 2021/2022.

Every week the Conservation & Heritage Officer and Senior Archaeologist review all planning applications validated in the previous week and assess them for heritage interest/harm. Comments are provided within two weeks to the planning case officer (unless further information is required) and both officers continue to liaise with the case officer and other relevant parties (developers/householders) through the process including to discharge relevant planning conditions placed on approved applications.

Large applications have included the Former Royal Pier Hotel Site 55 - 57 Birnbeck Road, large residential sites such as Rectory Farm, Congresbury, Box Bush Farm (Yatton) as well as Felton House, The Odeon and the Fork 'n' Ale, in addition to a large enforcement case on a Grade I listed building, for the Conservation & Heritage Officer.

The Senior Archaeologist has been involved in a variety of large applications including Gatcombe Farm (Long Ashton) and Youngwood Lane (Nailsea), multiple applications at West Wick and around Weston-super-Mare, Banwell, Congresbury, Churchill, Clevedon and Yatton, as well as small householder applications in areas of archaeological interest.

2.3 Planning Appeals & Public Inquiries

There have been a number of public inquiries in the first half of 2022 (and another is planned for the end of the year) which have required or will require the input of NSC heritage officers.

This type of appeal put an extreme pressure on officers as there is only one employed for each discipline. Appeals and public inquiries take months to prepare for and officers are expected to uphold the rest of the responsibilities of their role at the same time.

Butts Batch, Wrington

An application for 61 houses was refused by the Council on landscape and heritage grounds. The applicant appealed the decision, and this was subject to a 6-day Public Inquiry.

The appeal was dismissed on the ground that the harm to the setting of the Grade I listed Church would not be outweighed by the public benefits from the new houses in this location

Front Street, Churchill

An application for up to 62 houses was refused by the Council on heritage and landscape matters. The applicant appealed our decision, and this was subject to a 6-day Public Inquiry.

The appeal was dismissed on the grounds that the harm to the setting of the Grade I Listed St John's Church would not be outweighed by the public benefits of the proposed development, and on harm to the landscape of the area.

2.4 Banwell Bypass

The planning application for Banwell Bypass has now been submitted to the Council and the heritage officers are currently reviewing the accompanying information and are providing formal advice to the planning case officer.

A full suite of archaeological investigation is being undertaken, which will inform appropriate mitigation both before and during construction of the scheme, if the application is approved.

Heritage officers will need to continue to liaise closely with project team, appointed heritage consultants 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.

2.5 North Somerset Historic Environment Record (NSHER)

2.5.1 NRHE to HER project

A 18-month-long project to accession data from Historic England's NRHE database (National Record of the Historic Environment) to the NSHER commenced in October 2021 and is being undertaken by the Senior Archaeologist, who is relinquishing one day a week to complete this. Over 2400 records require manual accession during this period.

2.5.2 Historic England Audit

In October 2021 the HER Officer and Senior Archaeologist engaged with Historic England to commence the obligatory 5-year audit cycle.

The audit highlighted numerous areas in which the HER has undergone significant improvement and enhancement in the last 5 years including the creation and implementation of key policies and procedures, the introduction of a priority services for HER information for commercial customers, creation of a catalogue of sources/grey literature reports and digitisation of the paper records, reduction of the HER backlog by 30%, joining Heritage Gateway and accession of large datasets such as the North Mendip Hills National Mapping Programme and Great Weston Heritage Action Zone Aerial and Investigation Mapping Project.

An action plan has now been agreed with Historic England for the next five years and includes several tasks relating to data quality and enhancement, identifying appropriate storage conditions for the HER reference collection, a review of the staffing provision, further reduce the backlog, production of outstanding policies including a Forward Plan, and seeking formal adoption of the HER by the Council.

2.5.3 Staffing

The Historic Environment Record Officer who had been employed by NSC for c.10 years left in August 2022. It has been agreed that this post is to be modified to include an element of lower-level support for both the Senior Archaeologist and Conservation & Heritage Officer, assisting on projects and funding bids, for example. However, the majority of the role will be focussed on the tasks set out in the agreed audit action plan to ensure up to date information is freely available, specifically to inform development management matters. We hope a new post holder will be in place in the autumn.

2.6 Heritage Action Zones

Great Weston Heritage Action Zone 2017- 2022

The Great Weston Heritage Action Zone ended Sept 2022 it has met its aims, and the programme in the Delivery Plan despite the challenge of Covid. It has been demonstrated how the town's heritage can play a role in the town centre's renaissance. This report provides a snapshot of achievements.

1. **Understanding.** Technical research and evidence gathering including Historic Landscape Characterisation, a Conservation Area appraisal and a buildings listing review to better understand Weston's significance and inform a targeted building repairs scheme and other initiatives.
2. **Protecting.** Two new designated listed buildings- The Railway Station and WH Smiths. The amalgamation of 4 separate Conservation Areas into one 'Great Weston Conservation Area'; their extension to include the town centre, and the adoption of a management plan to help inform positive change and future conservation initiatives in 2018.
3. **Celebrating.** A book, Weston-super-Mare: The town and its seaside heritage, written by Allan Brodie, Johanna Roethe, and Kate Hudson-McAulay, to spread Weston's appeal and celebrate the town's colourful history and heritage. The associated 'sold out' launch event held in The Blakehay March 2019.
4. **Championing.** A series of heritage digital guides and walks including 'In the Footsteps of Hans Price' walk.
5. **Safeguarding.** Planning and heritage management tools including the adoption as policy of: a local authority Heritage Strategy, a Local Heritage List to acknowledge and help safeguard Weston's important local heritage assets; a shopfront guide (assisted by local university students), and an Article 4 Direction preventing the loss of boundary walls.
6. **Connecting communities.** Development of Know Your Place, a free digital mapping resource that enables local people to share information, knowledge and stories and to explore online maps, archive images and linked information.
7. **Conservation.** Physical improvements to the Public Realm and several historic buildings (Walker & Ling, 132 and 134 High Street and 59 High Street) helping provide a more positive perception of the town and a better environment for investment.
8. **Participation.** A programme of heritage and cultural events for a variety of groups and audiences including: four years of Heritage Open Days Festival each September from 2017 to 2021 engaging over 30 organisations in celebration of our heritage, Civic Society led heritage lecture series, 2 major exhibitions on the Grand Pier and 3 exhibitions in The Museum , and a major Place Making exhibition in Sovereign centre featuring the Heritage Action Zone work.
9. **Capacity building.** A programme of training for council members, officers and local retailers.

10. **Local Authority commitment and investment.** The development of A SuperWeston Placemaking Strategy (2020) for the town, demonstrating a commitment to further positive design, planning, heritage and cultural initiatives. It joins individual schemes together in an overarching vision which the council is now delivering.

High Street Heritage Action Zone 2019-2024

Engagement: The High Street Heritage Action Zone delivered a strong programme of engagement work in the past 12 months including: Heritage Open Days Festival, Know Your Place online digital mapping resource, Volunteer recruitment training and management, Reminiscence work in care homes run by Library team, a heritage engagement programme working with local schools run by Weston Museum, two exhibitions in The Museum, training for retailers in marketing skills and training volunteers as walks guides.

Conservation: Shopfront enhancement work carried out on Fork n Ale public House 18 Walliscote Road and on the 'Kendall's building' in the High Street/ Regent Street

2.7 National Grid Hinkley C Connection Project

The Senior Archaeologist continues to monitor archaeological elements of the National Grid Hinkley C Connection project. The Stage 2.1 excavations (Mendip Underground Cable Section) which revealed sites including a Roman roadside settlement were completed in August 2021 and the findings are now subject to specialists analysis to be incorporated into a final report which will take several years to produce.

A programme of community engagement is being established with National Grid and various stakeholders, which will ensure the findings of the archaeological programme will be disseminated appropriately, with opportunities for the local community to engage.

2.8 Middle Engine Pit, Nailsea

The Management Plan for this Scheduled Monument (with listed buildings) has now been officially adopted, which means fully informed funding bids can be submitted to external funders to bring the site into public use.

Work is now starting on putting a budget together for the site so we can move forward in applying for funding for work to bring the site back in the safe public use.

A volunteer group has been set up and their main tasks will initially be to control vegetation growth on the site and also clear and remove debris. Now they have access to the site they aim to go out once a week to maintain the site. Safety equipment and tools have been provided by NSC.

In September 2022 BT will be undertaking a corporate volunteer day at the site, which is being organised by the Avon Gardens Trust & NSC's Conservation & Heritage Officer.

2.9 Conservation Areas

The Banwell Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan was officially adopted by North Somerset Council on 27th September 2021.

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 on appraisals and management plans for Backwell. All three of the conservation areas in Backwell are planned to be completed at the same time and they are currently in the first draft phase.

2.10 Worlebury Camp Hillfort

The volunteers of the Worlebury Hillfort Group are continuing with their tireless efforts to physically uncover the hillfort through the clearance of vegetation and management of the restoration of the rare limestone grassland in areas such as the 'Glade'.

An application for a grant to enable the implementation of the adopted Conservation Management Plan for the hillfort was submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in August 2021 but was unfortunately unsuccessful.

A key priority of the project is still the removal of trees (the reason for the site's inclusion on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register), and this has been reinforced by the presence of Ash Dieback in many of the ash trees present within the hillfort. It is proposed to commence with felling this winter (2022/23), but there are considerable costs involved, especially considering the nature of the site and the limited accessibility for forestry machinery.

Discussions are ongoing with contractors and Historic England to come to a reasonable compromise to prevent both injury to the public and also the nationally important archaeological remains from ash trees in an advanced state of disease.

It is proposed that once the felling is complete a revised application will be submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for a grant to achieve the remaining objectives of the Conservation Management Plan, including community engagement projects and a comprehensive research programme to finally tell the story of the hillfort.

2.11 Castle Batch

In liaison with NSC's Natural Environment Team the Senior Archaeologist arranged for the cutting back of vegetation on the earthen mound of Castle Batch, Worle. This is another Scheduled Monument in NSC ownership, which has unfortunately been neglected until recently.

There are plans to work with local interest groups and residents to ensure the site is cared for and better understood, but also physically revealed to those who use this area for recreation. The work undertaken by heritage officers at Worlebury Camp hillfort and Middle Engine Pit will help to inform the success of this project.

2.13 Birnbeck Pier

While negotiations continue regarding the transfer of the site voluntarily, the CPO process continues with objections from the current owner being scheduled to be heard at the Magistrates Court by the District Judge in early November.

Meanwhile the Heritage and Design Manager and the Principal Project Officer have made significant applications for funding, the success of which will be announced in late October.

2.14 Seafront Shelters

Repair and restoration of the three listed Victorian seafront shelters on Weston promenade is well underway. This work has been generously supported by donations from the Weston-super-Mae Trust, the Civic Society, Howards Motor Group, The Axentis Michael Charitable Trust and The Mead Group.

2.15 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 1100 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 1.4 million people since March 2020, and the Facebook group alone has over 2,100 members.

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. Volunteers have also created two exhibitions to showcase their research including one entitled 'Then and Now'.

2.16 North Somerset Heritage Forum

Due to the continuing Covid pandemic the Heritage Forum meeting in November 2021 was held over Zoom, but in May 2022 it returned to an in-person meeting.

It was very pleasing to hear so many of the forum member groups had restarted their lecture programmes in earnest and how much research they had undertaken during the periods when meetings were not possible.

Heritage officers provided updates on key NSC projects and provided a short training session on the Local Heritage List and Know Your Place.

The next Forum meeting is planned for October 2022 and will include several new groups who have indicated their interest in taking part.

2.17 Young Archaeologists' Club (Rusty Club)

The Senior Archaeologist ran a session in May for the Rusty Club on how archaeologists discover new sites through the planning process.

An excavation is planned in September 2022 at Kingston Seymour with the hope of finding possible Romano-British or Medieval activity, following on from some fieldwalking and geophysical surveys undertaken in 2011 by a local archaeology group. A session will be held in November to clean, examine and record any finds and work on compiling a report for the North Somerset Historic Environment Record.

The Conservation & Heritage Officer is also running a session in October, which will be focussing on the significance of stained-glass windows.

2.18 Heritage Open Days

The September 2021 Heritage Open Days was held as a virtual festival and an in-person event. Over 3,000 people participated in 15 events, and officers also linked up with Culture Weston's Whirligig, which had an additional 3000 visitors. We have gained funding to advertise Weston's programme of Heritage Open Days events in 2022.

This year's festival will take place on 9th – 18th September and 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. Several of Weston's HODs events have been highlighted on the national Heritage Open Days website and social media.

2.19 Festival of Archaeology

The Council for British Archaeology's Festival of Archaeology theme this year was 'Journeys', and the Festival ran between 16th and 31st July.

An in-person event was organised collaboratively between NSC heritage officers and Weston Museum for 24th July and showcased a range of activities and information based around the Festival's theme.

In addition, throughout July information from Know Your Place was showcased via the Facebook group and Twitter account for KYP North Somerset, which had over 32,000 engagements.

2.20 Local Heritage List

The Local Heritage List criteria and management procedures have been successfully adopted by the Council, as has the first tranche of nominated assets.

The first buildings nominated for the Local Heritage List have also now been officially adopted by the Council. A new handbook has been produced with funding from the HAZ.

The heritage officers have held several training workshops to aid local residents in better understanding the nomination criteria and also how to nominate assets themselves. It is proposed to create a short information/instructional video to add to the Council's website/YouTube channel for residents.

2.21 Public engagement and promotion of North Somerset's heritage

The Senior Archaeologist and Conservation & Heritage Officer have provided several virtual workshops to encourage North Somerset residents to nominate buildings and sites of local importance to the Local Heritage List. This is an ongoing programme of work, along with the promotion of Know Your Place.

The Senior Archaeologist continues to regularly engage with local interest groups and schools as part of her role. She has given talks on her role as a Local Authority Archaeologist and showcased recent archaeological discoveries in the district, as well as the Worlebury Camp project, to a range of groups and societies in the last year. These include:

- Mendip Hills AONB Volunteer Rangers
- Blagdon Local History Society
- Banwell Archaeology Society
- Wrington Local History Society
- Nailsea Local History Society
- Bleadon Ladies PROBUS group
- Yatton Local History Society
- Clevedon & District Archaeological Society (tour of Worlebury Camp)
- Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

The Conservation & Heritage Officer and Senior Archaeologist also gave a talk to the Gordano Civic Society, 'Caring for North Somerset's Heritage'.

The Senior Archaeologist was interviewed for the BBC Two series 'Digging for Britain', presented by Professor Alice Roberts, to talk about the discovery of a Roman roadside settlement as part of the National Grid Hinkley C Connection Project. This was broadcast in January 2022.

In addition, the Senior Archaeologist was nominated and shortlisted for the Council for British Archaeology & Marsh Charitable Trust Awards 'Community Archaeologist of the Year' award. Cat was presented with a 'Highly Commended' award, in recognition of her work with local interest groups across North Somerset and Rusty Club Young Archaeologists' Club, as well working with Weston Museum during the Covid pandemic to deliver activities and her work in developing Know Your Place North Somerset. Much of this work has been in collaboration with the Conservation & Heritage Officer.

Authors:

Cllr John Crockford-Hawley

Heritage & Design Team (Rachel Lewis – Heritage & Design Team Manager, Cat Lodge – Principal Archaeologist, Cara MacMahon – Heritage Action Zone Project Officer, Christine Ward – Principal Project Officer, Kate Hudson-McAulay – Principal Conservation & Heritage Officer)