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THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL



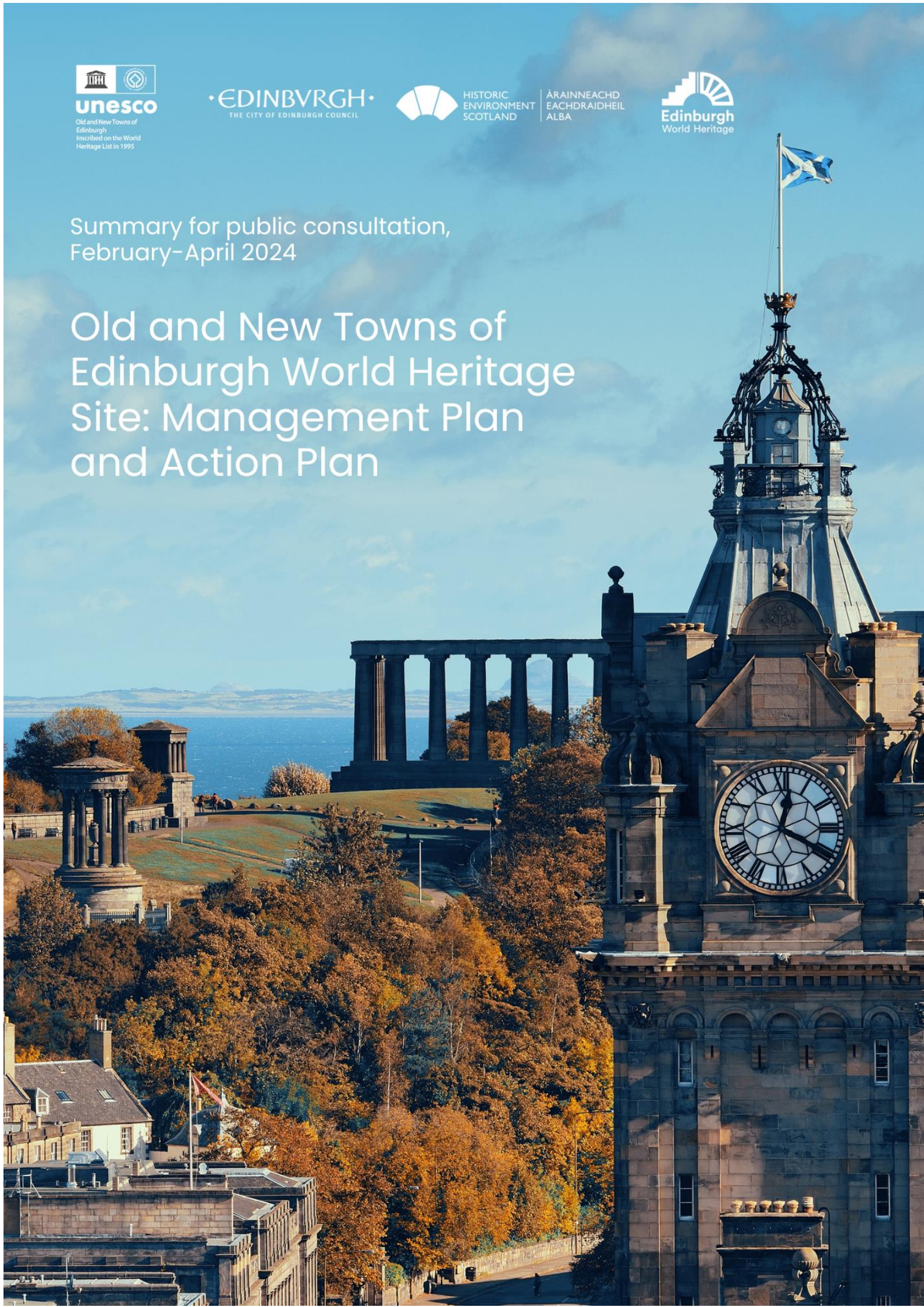
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Summary for public consultation,
February–April 2024

Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site: Management Plan and Action Plan



Introduction

World Heritage Sites are recognized by UNESCO as places of outstanding cultural, historical, or scientific value and are legally protected by international treaties. As of January 2024, 1199 sites appeared on the World Heritage List: 933 cultural sites, 227 natural sites, and 39 ‘mixed’ properties, in 168 countries. For each inscription, the Outstanding Universal Value of the site is described. These are the attributes which make it exceptional from a global perspective.

The Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site was placed on this list in 1995 and is one of 6 in Scotland together with New Lanark, Frontiers of the Roman Empire: The Antonine Wall, The Heart of Neolithic Orkney, The Forth Bridge and St. Kilda.

Description of the Site

UNESCO recognises the striking contrast and quality in architecture between the medieval Old Town and the Georgian New Town. The medieval Old Town has retained its distinctive pattern of narrow passageways, known as closes and wynds. The New Towns are the largest and best preserved examples of Georgian town planning in the United Kingdom and have a large number of the finest neo-classical buildings.

Edinburgh is built on an extraordinary landscape of hills and valleys, formed millions of years ago by volcanoes and ice sheets. Together these factors have created a truly distinctive skyline and stunning views which are recognised around the world.

The Site contains nearly 4,500 individual buildings, of which over 75% are listed due to special architectural or historic interest. The Site also contains Scheduled Monuments, the best known being Edinburgh Castle.

What is the Management Plan and Action Plan for and how does it relate to the 2050 City Vision?

The Management Plan identifies issues and opportunities within the Site covering a ten-year period. Alongside it, the Action Plan presents how the Management Plan will be delivered over a two-year period. Issues include care and maintenance of buildings and streets, and awareness of World Heritage Site status. The plan will help inform the 2050 Edinburgh City Vision and the actions that result from this. Public feedback for this longer-term planning exercise has already revealed the high value residents and businesses place on the quality of the historic built and natural environment in Edinburgh.

Roles and responsibilities

Three organisations (‘The Management Partners’) are involved in the long-term management of the World Heritage Site:

- **The City of Edinburgh Council** is the Planning Authority. It implements the planning system in the city, which is the mechanism for managing World Heritage Sites in the UK. The Council is responsible for providing political leadership and governance for a comprehensive range of services across the city beyond Planning that affects the World Heritage Site. It is also responsible for the provision of a range of [public services](#) that affect day-to-day life within the World Heritage Site, including strengthening and supporting communities, providing jobs and ensuring its residents are well cared for.

- **Historic Environment Scotland** is a non-departmental public body. It is the lead public body established to investigate, care for and promote Scotland’s historic environment. Its board is appointed by Scottish Ministers. It offers technical expertise, support and significant funding to the historic environment via in-house experts and various grants schemes, directly employing the highest number of traditional crafts staff in Scotland and actively fostering apprentice development. HES is also a statutory consultee in the planning process.
- **Edinburgh World Heritage** is the independent, expert charity dedicated to the proactive conservation of the World Heritage Site. It provides grants and advice to unlock a rolling programme of vital conservation work, engage all communities inclusively with their shared heritage, and works to ensure that heritage can play a key part in the solution to the climate emergency. EWH provides independent, expert advice on balanced historic city management to all, enabling a sense of ownership for the care and conservation of the WHS.

Consultation

Between 2021-2023, members of the public took part in a consultation for the new Management Plan and had their say concerning how they felt the World Heritage Site is being run. Engagement took the form of an online questionnaire, stakeholder meetings, community council meetings, social media listening exercises, as well as face to face meetings in libraries, playgrounds, graveyards and hairdressers.

An analysis of this feedback has revealed five themes of relevance to the management of the World Heritage Site. These themes are set out below, together with ways in which the Management Partners plan to tackle any issues and concerns. This forms the basis of the next two-year Action Plan.

Awareness, appreciation of and activity around World Heritage Site status

“People will be looking at all the UNESCO sites across the world and putting Edinburgh on their bucket list” – consultation respondent

Public engagement revealed that awareness of the WHS and its OUV varies through the city, its communities and its visitors and that the qualities that make the WHS unique remain unclear. To ensure that we look after the WHS as best as we can, the OUV needs to be clearly understood by stakeholders, visitors and members of the public.

It is recognised that the management partners must continue to work together to spread the message to as wide an audience as possible, including developing training.

Actions

- Ensure that the qualities of the World Heritage Site are widely understood, including as a resource for learning for all ages including dedicated training for CEC staff.
- Share best practice with other World Heritage Sites in Scotland and beyond.

- Better represent the tangible and intangible value of the World Heritage Site with diverse audiences.

Climate emergency

“Obviously you're aware of the effects of climate change, but not specifically for how it impacted the world heritage site” – consultation respondent

Public engagement highlighted that climate impacts are currently being witnessed, such as stronger winds and increased flooding and erosion to buildings and that there is concern and confusion over retrofitting of buildings to adapt them. Balancing the needs of the city to respond to the climate emergency and to protect its heritage is essential.

The Action Plan seeks to address this by engaging with the work already underway in partnership in response to the climate emergency whilst safeguarding OUV. This includes emerging guidance on [Conservation and Adaptation](#) of historic properties.

Actions

- Engage with the work being undertaken by management partners in response to the climate emergency.
- Safeguard to the city's World Heritage Site status, through both policy considerations and appropriate physical adaptations to historic buildings, public realm and green spaces.

Conservation and maintenance of buildings and public spaces

“I would say some places are better cared for than others -- e.g. income from tourism keeps the Castle and Holyrood Palace and other major attractions keeps them well-cared-for” – consultation respondent

Public engagement highlighted that more can be done for the general state of repair and ongoing care and maintenance of historic buildings and of the condition of road surfaces and drains.

The Action Plan seeks to address this by promoting a range of initiatives to secure ongoing investment in the conservation of the Site and ensure the WHS is a baseline consideration for all Council plans and strategies within its boundary that include alterations to the historic built environment.

Actions

- Build on the work we have been undertaking to maintain the ‘state of conservation’ of the World Heritage Site.
- Deliver the repayable grants programme.
- Advocate for the use of high-quality materials within appropriate interventions.
- Define a protocol for engagement in public realm improvements to ensure that the World Heritage Site is a baseline consideration for all council plans and strategies.

Control, guidance, and contribution of new developments to city centre

“The world is changing, even though we’re trying to preserve the heritage, it’s like giving a new lease of life, bringing something new” – consultation respondent

Policies are in place to ensure that new development is sensitive to historic character. Management partners have a role in raising awareness on how interventions can contribute to the Site’s authenticity. Management partners also have a role in reflecting and interpreting the quality of its surroundings, responding to, and reinforcing distinctive patterns of development, townscape, views, landscape, scale, materials, and quality of the WHS.

The Action Plan seeks to improve the tools available to sustain OUV, sustain effective partnerships that support the management of the WHS and ensure that development embraces the context of the WHS and is of the highest quality in terms of architecture, design and materials. A protocol is in place to ensure early consideration of OUV in the planning process and it is proposed to develop a protocol for the public realm. The attributes (features of interest or traditions) that convey the OUV will be published in the Management Plan.

Actions

- Improve tools to sustain the city’s Outstanding Universal Value by working collaboratively with management partners.
- Work with stakeholders to ensure that development embraces the city’s unique qualities, through policy considerations, relationship building, and early engagement in development proposals.

Sustainable visitor experience

“Tourism is great and should be supported. But the balance doesn’t seem quite right [...] Tourism is only desirable (for everyone including tourists) if there is a thriving local community to support it” – consultation respondent

Public engagement highlighted the importance of tourism to the city, but questioned the balance between meeting visitor needs versus community needs during peak times in the visitor calendar. The management partners recognise the need to support the operational systems in place to ensure that cleanliness of streets and spaces standards are maintained even during peak visitor times. This contributes to people’s sense of pride and ownership of the city. It also creates the impression that visitors take home with them. The management partners also recognise the need to signpost good practice from other WH cities where a Transient Visitor Levy is in place, and how this can benefit residents.

Actions

- Hold effective partnerships to advocate for sustainable tourism throughout Edinburgh.
- Influence decision making on enhancing the experience of both visitors and residents.
- Advocate for conservation and maintenance of the World Heritage Site to be included in the Transient Visitor Levy (tourist tax).

Have your say

The Management Partners for the World Heritage Site are committed to ensuring that the people of Edinburgh have their voice heard when it comes to the management of the World Heritage Site. We'd like to hear your views on this new plan, specifically whether you feel we are doing enough to protect and enhance the Site, and any other ideas or suggestions which you may have.

Please follow this link if you'd like to comment on the plan:

