

**MINUTES OF THE IRONBRIDGE GORGE WORLD HERITAGE SITE STEERING GROUP MEETING
HELD ON Microsoft Teams 23 February 2021**

PRESENT:

Marion Blockley (MB) – Chair

Sir Neil Cossons

Rory Hunter (RH) – Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust (IGMT)

Russell Rowley (RR) – Severn Gorge Countryside Trust (SGCT)

Peter Boland (PB) – Historic England (HE)

Helen Allen (HA) – English Heritage (EH)

Andy Wigley (AW) – Shropshire Council (SC)

Simon Harris (SH) – Shropshire Council (SC)

Joy Tetsill (JT) – Shropshire Council (SC)

Carolyn Healy (CH) – Telford & Wrekin Council (TWC)

Val Hulme (VH) – APT Group (APT)

Andy Gittins (AG) – APT Group (APT)

Rae Evans (RE) – Telford & Wrekin council (TWC)

Penny McKnight (PM) – Telford & Wrekin Council (TWC)

Psyche Hudson (APH) – Telford & Wrekin Council (TWC)

Adam Brookes (AB) – Telford & Wrekin Council (TWC)

Chris Turley (CT) – Telford & Wrekin Council (TWC)

Barbara Johnson (BJ) – Telford & Wrekin Council (TWC)

Barbara Taylor (BT) – Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust (IGMT)

APOLOGIES: Alan Mackenzie – Madeley Town Council, Debra Harris – Ironbridge Business Consortium

1. Introduction

Marion Blockley (MB) welcomed everyone to the first virtual meeting held by the Steering Group and the first full meeting held since February. MB commented that a lot had happened in the 12 months since the last meeting, including extended furlough of the WHS Coordinator and it was good to see everyone today.

2. Purpose of the Meeting

MB informed the wider group that a small sub group of MB, CH, RR, RH and VH had met on occasions throughout the last 12 months. The consensus of opinion was that the format of previous meetings was not working to the benefit of the whole group and it was concluded that more time was needed to focus on the Actions identified in the WHS Management plan, in a similar form to the Action Plan working Group meeting held in 2019. An outline proposal document of a meeting format for discussion was circulated with the minutes and agenda for this meeting.

At this point RH informed the group that the meeting was being recorded and if anyone would rather it was not to make it know. All present agreed to the meeting being recorded.

3. IGWHSSG Terms of Reference

4. Frequency and Format of Meetings

RH uploaded a powerpoint presentation of the newly drafted Terms of Reference circulated to all Steering Group members on 3 February 2021 and briefly outlined the proposals. The quarterly face to face meetings at Ironbridge could be replaced with one annual meeting and monthly phone calls of 15/20 minutes from the WHS co-ordinator to each member to gather updates to be combined and circulated to the whole group. MB asked for comments on these and for comments on the proposed new meeting schedule.

Comments from Steering Group members include:

- HA first thought was that English Heritage (EH) monthly reporting to the WHS co-ordinator was too frequent. HA acknowledged that other members had a wider portfolio on which to report.
- JT underlined the importance of focusing on the actions Against the WHS Management Plan and that the monthly phone calls were too frequent and also she did not in support of one annual meeting, but would rather have 2/3 all group meetings and maybe an annual away day.
- PB strongly agreed with the feedback calls but perhaps on a bi-monthly basis and agreed with the annual meeting/away day.
- MB cited the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct World Heritage Site which have smaller sub groups that feed into the Executive Board on a quarterly meeting basis which works well. She asked AW for his experience of this format, which he said was working better.
- AG suggested the annual meeting could be used for a site visit to the Ironbridge Gorge for those members who do not live in or around the Gorge and that on-line meetings were very constructive and time saving.
- RR reiterated the benefit of visiting areas of the Ironbridge Gorge to assess issues.
- NC remarked that the monthly feedback is probably too frequent and that face to face time needs to be strategic.
- JT commented that a mix of on-line and face to face meetings would be a good combination and good use of member's time.

To summarise, MB deduced that without regular meetings, and this could be smaller focused groups, not enough time would be spent on the actions. The Action Workshop worked well in 2019. Projects were identified and a traffic light system of progress adopted. There was also an urgent need to look at resourcing and writing a business plan to enable the group to apply for funding and to engage effectively with stakeholders. MB asked the group for further comments, which include:

- RH referred to the proposed meeting format paper sent out with the papers for this meeting and underlined that the proposals had come from all of the sub group. RH agreed that phone calls do not have to be on a monthly basis and that 2 workshops could be planned for the year ahead.
- JT and HA agreed that the focus should be entirely on the Actions of the Management Plan with clear targets to work to.
- RR emphasised the crossover between the work of individual organisations within the Gorge and that of the Action Plan of the WHS when applying for funding.
- CH emphasised the role of the WHS co-ordinator in regularly updating and keeping in touch with members and pushing to achieve goals.
- SH agreed that an away day would give greater insight into the work of organisations based in and around the Ironbridge Gorge who work in support of its benefit
- RH emphasised the benefits of less regular but more focused meetings and noted the need to bring together the wider group to include, as an example, the Environment Agency (EA).
- MB added the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) should be represented on the Steering Group.

To summarise, MB concluded that there would be 3 to 4 meetings in one year, with one large strategic meeting and several smaller, virtual and/or face to face meetings focusing on the Actions in the WHS Management Plan and facilitated by the WHS Coordinator.

ACTION: RH to circulate a meeting plan.

5. Power Station Planning amendments

MB commented that, due to the ongoing pandemic and furlough of key staff, there had not been much round table discussion of the latest masterplan updates submitted by the Harworth Group. MB's main concerns is the condition of the Albert & Edward Bridge and the Coalbrookdale viaduct and the implications of this for the proposed programme over several years. She also expressed concern about the long term impact of maintenance of rail infrastructure on residents in Coalbrookdale.

PB confirmed that Historic England does not have any significant concerns about the impact of the development on the World Heritage Site, except for slight concerns around the impact on the Buildwas Abbey site.

At this point PB left the meeting for a pre-arranged appointment.

VH reported that Network Rail were responsible for the Albert Edward Bridge and that plans have been submitted for upgrade works on the Bridge to include support structures, which is likely, if passed by planning, to start in November 2021. The repair process will take at least 12 months. The work could affect the 7 Year plan to remove sand and gravel from the development site. VH is also expecting dialogue soon from Network Rail regarding the Coalbrookdale viaduct. It is the responsibility of Network Rail to make sure that the track is able to support the uphill removal of heavy loads from site which is in opposition to what operated before when heavy loads depended on the gravity of the terrain. VH also reported that the Harworth Group are looking at future strategic use of the line which would benefit the WHS and that both TWC and SC would support any such plans.

RR reported that he had attended a very useful meeting on site with representatives from the Harworth Group regarding the boundary of the development with Benthall Edge who are keen to establish a pedestrian route from the Severn Valley Way, owned by TWC, all the way through the new development for walkers to observe progress on site which could be open as soon as spring 2021, pending Covid 19 restrictions. VH reported that as yet, TWC has not received any dialogue from the Harworth Group, but that she would follow this up.

RR added that it was pleasing to hear that pulverised ash currently being removed from site has been sold to a construction company in the north of England to be used as grouting and that it will not be going into landfill.

Members discussed how to submit comments as a group bearing in mind the potential conflict of interest for the two planning authorities. NC reiterated the importance of submitting comments under the umbrella of the Steering Group and noting that the two local authorities are not part of the discussion. JT requested that the Terms of Reference be amended to include a paragraph about conflicts of interest. RH suggested a sentence to read – 'these are the informed comments of the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site Steering Group not including Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council'.

ACTION: RH reminded the group that if they had any comments on the amended papers added from September 2020, could they send these to RH or BT by Monday 22 March 2021.

6. Flooding

RR gave a short powerpoint presentation on the 3 year £200k DEFRA funded Farm the Flow Research Project. RR explained that the Gorge presents a unique challenge which will require many solutions and multi-organisation input to alter the flow of water through the Gorge. Early research shows that managed farmland presents an opportunity to hold back water, tree planting, albeit on a massive scale and monitoring can alleviate the impact of what is likely to be a severe on-going problem. High rainfall in short periods of time and slow moving thunder storms are becoming commonplace. SGCT and TWC are shortly installing soil moisture monitoring devices in hedgerows above the Lyde Brook area which will be linked to TWC officer's phones as part of background information to help the EA advise Coalbrookdale residents of potential flood risks. The Environment Agency have described the Lyde Brook as the most complicated in the UK.

CH reported that work is underway to increase the amount of Flood Action Groups in a wider area of the Gorge and to distribute the TWC Resilience Funding where it is needed most. A letter has recently been sent to the secretary of State asking for work to be undertaken to look at a longer term solution to the temporary barriers currently used along the Wharfage and to look at tributaries, such as the Tern, and possible solutions to slowing the flow into the River Severn.

AB added that the last four months had been horrific for residents and businesses in the Ironbridge Gorge, but a lot had been learnt over the last 12 months in working with residents on how they can protect their properties. AB reported that all of the TWC flood relief funds come via the EA and it was therefore essential that a representative from the EA attends the Steering Group meetings.

RH commented that there is a need to focus on the Flooding section of the Management Plan and look at bigger more strategic plan in view of recent flooding and major new developments including the Power Station Site and the northern relief road and dam.

MB commented she had discussed with the Environment Agency the importance of them reporting to the Steering Group and AB offered to find out from his contacts who would be the best person to do that.

7. Covid Recovery

CH reported that the recently announced news of a road map out of restrictions offered great opportunities and challenges for the Gorge. As a group and as individual businesses we need to look at practices put in place during the pandemic such as the pedestrianisation of the Wharfage, cordoned off car parks and re-purposed Park & Ride facilities and how we are to reinstate these, or not, and look at the potential effect on an influx of visitors to the area and the reaction from the residents.

PH went over the proposed timetable

8. AOB

MB commented that the short web minutes of the meeting did not fully cover what was discussed within the Steering Group meetings and were therefore misleading.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: TBC

POINT OF CONTACT FOR THE WORLD HERITAGE SITE IS BARBARA TAYLOR

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