

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Report to Select Committee on Heritage and Culture

23rd May 2005

**Submission of Black Country Canals as a
World Heritage Site**

1. Summary Statement

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Select Committee about the possibility of the canals in the Black Country being submitted as a World Heritage site.
- 1.2 The Aspiration for World Heritage Status is supported by the Black Country Consortium and the four Black Country local authorities in addition to British Waterways and many of the sub-regional Canal Trusts.
- 1.3 This proposal is one of the ideas coming from the Black Country Strategy for the next 30 years. If confirmed, it will be considered by Sandwell's Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport who will eventually make a decision on this matter. He has welcomed consideration by the Select Committee, having already chaired such a debate in the Canals Forum for the West Midlands in 2004.
- 1.4 A World Heritage Site is a site which demonstrates 'outstanding universal value' either as a cultural or natural treasure. In 1998 a paper was prepared by the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) which reflected the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO's) concerns about the current under-representation on the World Heritage (WH) List of natural sites, and the over-representation of sites focussing on palaces, cathedrals and historic towns in Western Europe. Thus, the paper gave emphasis to the United Kingdom's (UK) industrial heritage and global influence and to sites reflecting the unique qualities of our natural environment.
- 1.5 The process for a site to be inscribed into the World Heritage Site Register is a long process – a diagrammatic version is provided at the end of the paper. First, the site must be nominated for consideration to the DCMS. The DCMS issued a consultation paper in 1998 as a way of 'calling' for sites to be included on the 'Tentative List'. 400 applications were submitted including the Wrens Nest National Nature Reserve in Dudley.

1.6 In 1999, the then Secretary of State announced that only 25 sites would form the new Tentative List of sites which might be nominated for WH status over the next 5 - 10 years; the inclusion of sites on such a list is a pre-requisite for formal nomination to UNESCO. These included Blaenavon, Derwent Valley Mills, Saltaire, Dorset Jurassic coast and Kew Gardens which have all now been given WH status.

1.7 It can be assumed that the next 'Consultation paper' for prospective sites will not be issued until 2007 or 2008. Following a rule change by the WH Committee in 2000, effective from 2002, most state parties to the WH Convention including the UK are only allowed to submit one nomination per annum for WH site status.

1.8 UNESCO is considering a great number of issues at present in relation to the World Heritage List. The main issues being discussed:-

- * are there too many 'Western World' sites on the World Heritage List ?;
- * Should UNESCO withhold receiving submissions from the Western World so that developing countries can submit sites ?;
- * Should we be encouraging more natural sites – or combined sites ?.

All of these issues may impact on the ability for the UK to nominate sites after 2009 and this may affect the chances of the Black Country putting our nomination to the DCMS.

1.9 World Heritage Status must be a long term aspiration. It is realistic to assume that the process of developing a World Heritage submission – for the Tentative list would take two to three years – possibly longer. Depending on whether the submission was accepted onto the Tentative List, it could take another 5 –10 years for the site to be nominated by the DCMS as the UK's site. The submission would then need to be developed further, with the assistance of the World Heritage Committee partners – a process of 18 months. Therefore it could be between 10 and 15 years before the site is considered by the World Heritage Committee. If the Tentative List for 'Western' countries is suspended, the process could take much longer.

1.10 This is therefore not a process to be entered into lightly. It will take a considerable amount of time and resource – both financially and staffing, to realise. The aspiration will be valuable in itself and the process could be as valuable in raising the profile of the canals with residents and tourists, not to say the image of the Black Country as the end result of the World Heritage Designation.

1.11 The specific area of the potential site needs to be considered and what will actually be included:-

- * is it the canals themselves or the Canal corridor ?;
- * is it the story of how the network began or the buildings/icons built next to it ?;
- * is it the natural heritage that provided the reason for the Canals to be built in the first place ?;
- * what would be the impact on Regeneration ?.

1.12 A constituted partnership will be established in the summer via the Black Country Consortium. Councillor David Caunt, Leader of Dudley Council is currently the canal champion for this issue at Black Country level and chairs a World Heritage Project Group which consists of officers from the four Black Country Local Authorities as well as the Shadow Steering Group. The appointment of full time staff dedicated to developing the submission and promoting the site as a potential candidate for the Tentative List needs to be considered. Consultants are available to undertake the technical work involved in developing a submission, however from discussions with other sites, at the very least, a full time Project Co-ordinator is required.

1.13 Issues relating to the development of a Management plan for the Black Country Canal network, or the wider Birmingham Canal Navigation will need to be addressed – this is an essential element of the World Heritage Designation. A meeting has been held with the Leader of Birmingham where agreement has been reached that a bid for the BCN would include those canals of the New and Old Main Line that lead up to the Mailbox.

Further details are attached for information.

2. Recommendation

That the report be noted.

Rob Lee
Director of Planning and Transportation

Sarah Middleton
Chief Executive of the Black Country Consortium

Contact Officer
Alan Winser
Planning and Transportation
0121 569 4081

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3. Resource Implications

- 3.1 It is informative to indicate the costs of world heritage bids and implementation from experience elsewhere in the Country.
- 3.2 Hadrian's Wall was inscribed onto the World Heritage List in 1997. A Partnership has been formed which includes a number of organisations as Hadrian's Wall covers an area involving 12 Local Authorities, 2 Regional Development Agencies, 3 National parks and over 1000 private landowners.
- 3.3 Over the period of the site being on the World Heritage List, the Heritage Lottery Fund in itself has contributed £13m to the project. Recently, both Regional Development Agencies, as well as the Local Authorities have contributed to the costs associated with the Management Plan and new projects associated with the Walls further development as a visitor destination.
- 3.4 The Lake District is currently preparing their submission for consideration by the World Heritage Committee. The partnership estimates that the submission will cost between £300,000 and £350,000 – including the employment of permanent full-time staff. Funding has been sourced from the Local Authorities, the National Park and the Regional Development Agency.
- 3.5 The Submission for Bede's World, in the north of England will cost approximately £200,000. A Project Officer has been appointed to bring together partners, the management plan, education development and tourism development plans. Funding has been obtained from the Local Authorities and the Regional Development Agency –One NorthEast.
- 3.6 Ironbridge Gorge has a permanent full-time World Heritage Co-ordinator for oversee the development of the Management Plan and promotion.
- 3.7 Over the last decade therefore, competition has increased and expectations of the Government and UNESCO similarly. If a bid was to be made for the Black Country Canals by the Consortium, dedicated staff would be necessary and funding provided to prepare a management plan for the canals. The implementation of the plan would then need to be funded by partners which would include Sandwell.M.B.C.

4. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 4.1 The aspiration for World Heritage status has been supported specifically within the Regional Economic Strategy, produced by Advantage West Midlands, although the timescales included in the Action Plan are inappropriate at suggesting this would be done within a few years. British Waterways within the West Midlands have supported the aspiration for World Heritage status within the Black Country Canals Tourism and Interpretation Strategy which was published in March 2004. British Waterways do however have some concerns about the impact this type of designation could have on the aspirations for Regeneration and development. Other agencies have provided 'in principle' support including English Heritage.

5. **Implications for the Council's Corporate Priorities**

- 5.1 The mere process of forming a partnership, preparing a management Plan and bidding for World Heritage Status will contribute to Corporate Priorities of *improving the physical environment* and the profile this gives to canals and the Black Country as a whole will impact on the economy and *the provision of high value jobs for local people*. Subsequent implementation would impact on *Local Communities* and *providing a safe Borough – clean and tidy*.

6. **Background Details**

World heritage Status

- 6.1 A World Heritage Site is a site which demonstrates 'outstanding universal value' of either a cultural or natural treasure. It must satisfy the selection criteria adopted by the Committee. UNESCO states that a; "cultural monument could be a masterpiece of creative genius; have exerted great architectural influence; be associated with ideas or beliefs of universal significance; or it may be an outstanding example of a traditional way of life that represents a certain culture" and "natural property may exemplify major stages of the earth's history; represent ongoing ecological and biological processes; contain the natural habitats of endangered animals; or it may be a setting of exceptional beauty".
- 6.2 The process for a site to be inscribed into the World Heritage Site Register is a long process. The DCMS last sought submissions in August 1998. A consultation paper was issued, requesting views on sites which might be included on the UK Tentative List. Over 400 responses to the consultation were received – including a representation for the Wrens Nest and Castle Hill area of Dudley.

(This representation was not successful in this instance because of the lack of clarity from UNESCO of whether a site could be both a 'natural' and 'cultural' site – this is an issue that UNESCO has now addressed and is reflected in its new Constitution)

- 6.3 The 1998 paper prepared by DCMS, reflected UNESCO's concerns about the current under- representation on the WH List of natural sites, and the over-representation of sites focussing on palaces, cathedrals and historic towns in Western Europe. Thus, the paper gave emphasis to the UK's industrial heritage and global influence, and to sites reflecting the unique qualities of our natural environment – all of these qualities were therefore included in the final choice of 25 sites.
- 6.4 On 6 April 1999, the then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Chris Smith, announced the 25 sites to form the new Tentative List of sites which might be nominated for WH status over the next 5-10 years; the inclusion of sites on such a list is a pre-requisite for formal nomination to UNESCO.
- 6.5 Two of these, Blaenavon and St George, Bermuda were given World Heritage Site status by UNESCO in November 2000. Derwent Valley Mills, Saltaire, New Lanark (by Historic Scotland) and the Dorset and East Devon Coast were all inscribed onto the World Heritage List in December 2001, as was the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in 2003. The Liverpool Commercial Centre and Waterfront was approved in July 2004.
- 6.6 Following the presentation of the UK Tentative List to UNESCO, nominations are subject to a rigorous assessment by UNESCO's advisers (IUCN and ICOMOS) over an 18 month period. Decisions on whether to inscribe sites in the WH List are taken by the WH Committee at its annual meeting each July. Implementation of the WH Convention is overseen by UNESCO's WH Committee. It comprises 21 member states, each elected for a six year term. The UK Government was successful in gaining election to the WH Committee in October 2001, for the first time, for a four year term.

Black Country Canals

- 6.7 The Black Country Vision - Looking Forward: The Black Country 2033, states that '*The newly rejuvenated Black Country Canal network is now a UN World Heritage Site*' This aspiration was launched at the Local Government Association Annual Conference in 2003.
- 6.8 In September 2003, canal officers from the four Black Country Local Authorities, the Black Country Consortium and British Waterways met to discuss the idea of World Heritage designation for the Black Country Canal Network.

Since that time, meetings have been arranged with the project group in addition to individual research and attendance at Conferences to gather information and make contacts with other World Heritage sites.

6.9 Councillor David Caunt, Leader of Dudley MBC and 'Canal Champion' for Black Country Consortium and chairs World Heritage project group. During the initial discussions with partners, a number of concerns have been raised and questions have been asked. Some have been answered, some require further investigation and with some, the answers are yet to be discussed. Some of the issues/questions are listed below with some possible answers:-

- **Will World Heritage designation cause problems for the regeneration and development of the canal network?**
The bid could potentially improve the regeneration prospects by making development adjacent to canals more attractive. It could also enhance the ability of Council's to raise the quality of the urban design in redevelopment schemes. It would be a restraint in areas of particular historical value but they will probably be Conservation Areas anyway.
- **How will we do it? How will the bid be funded? Do we have the support – locally, nationally and internationally?**
The issue would need to be discussed with all partners to fully assess the implications. The Consortium would need to address the funding issues in the first instance. The preparation of a management plan would be a pre-requisite and the implementation of that in turn would have funding implications. Marketing to raise the profile of canals locally, nationally and internationally will require more resources but should have significant benefits for the Black Country by improving the image of the area externally and value of the canals locally.
- **Why do we want World Heritage Status? Prestige? Awareness? Heritage Value? Economic benefits? Tourism?**
Just the seeking World Heritage Status should raise awareness of the Heritage value and bring tourism and economic benefits.
- **Are the Black Country Canals really more important than canals anywhere else in the world? Do they have the 'Outstanding universal appeal' required?**
Parts of the canal network are indeed unique (which suggests that those would be the focus of the bid linked as one by the waterway network). Given the other areas achieving world heritage status in the UK as described above, it should be possible to argue "Outstanding Universal appeal"

- **How will a Management Plan work? Who will be responsible for it? Will it really work?**

The Management Plan will set down what needs to be done to manage the asset in a manner consistent with its proposed status and develop the asset in all respects – improving the asset itself and its environs, involving the public, providing access to and services to those seeking to enjoy it, marketing etc. Responsibility must begin with the owners of the asset, British Waterways and those areas of special value adjoining it, the Local Authorities. Presumably the Consortium would facilitate these discussions.

- **What consultation will take place with the wider community? How will the aspiration be promoted? How will it be managed? What happens if we are not included on the Tentative List?**

Consulation would be critical to obtain community support. Marketting would be necessary. Management of this process has not been decided but the Consortium could facilitate the discussions. It is believed that the process would be beneficial even if the Black Country Canals are not included in the Tentative list for reasons given above.

Diagrammatic Process for World Heritage Bid

DCMS issues consultation paper within UK for nomination of sites



DCMS prepares the UK Tentative List



DCMS nominates one site per year from Tentative List for consideration by World Heritage Committee



Once nomination is complete, it is then sent to the three advisory bodies for consideration -

ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), IUCN (World Conservation Union) and ICCROM (International Centre for the study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property)



All 3 bodies prepares a report on the bid for the World Heritage Committee



World Heritage Committee make recommendation based on reports – either supporting or refusing inscription