

Executive

21 April 2022

Report of the Director of Customer and Communities
Portfolio of the Executive Member for Culture, Leisure and Communities

York as a World Heritage Site

Summary

1. This paper presents a report produced by the York World Heritage Steering Group (YWHSG) entitled “Should York be a World Heritage site?” (See Annex).

Recommendations

2. At this stage, the Executive is asked to:
 - Accept the recommendation of the YWHSG report that York should make a bid for World Heritage status;
 - Commit City of York Council, together with YWHSG, to ask the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to consider an application from York for admittance to the UK Tentative List of World Heritage Sites;
 - Work with YWHSG to take the bid project forward to Stage 2, including forming a broad-based public and private partnership to raise the approx. £7.5k required in 2022/23 to fund the required work;
 - Note that, currently, there is no identified council funding stream to cover the cost of any Stage 3 bid and that, if a bid is successful and can proceed to Stage 3, the Council will seek support from partners to progress.

Reason: To seek the international recognition and prestige that World Heritage status confers.

Background

3. The Executive formally set out the ambition for the city to apply for UNESCO World Heritage status as part of approving the Culture Strategy for York, 2019-2025.

Consultation

4. The YWHSG comprises a range of institutions in the city (see annex). Its report recognises that any bid for World Heritage status must deliver greater empowerment and involvement of residents in managing, understanding and enjoying the heritage of the city. It is proposed that further engagement with citizens would take place during Stages 2 and 3.

Options

5. It is open to the Executive to accept the recommendation to progress a bid for World Heritage status or decline to do so.

Analysis

6. YWHSG's report recognises that it will be a difficult task for York to obtain designation by UNESCO as a World Heritage site. At the same time, it sets out the significant benefits that designation brings in terms of:
 - Public awareness – leading an increase in the level of protection and conservation afforded to heritage assets,
 - International assistance - inscription on the World Heritage List may open the way for financial assistance from a variety of sources in heritage conservation projects,
 - International recognition – leading to increased civic pride and a positive impact on tourism and inward investment.

Council Plan

7. Pursuit of world heritage status is consistent with the Council Plan priority of "Safe communities and culture for all".

Implications

8. **Financial** – The Steering Group report states that the cost of a Stage 3 bid is likely to be in the region of £200k to £250k. It must be noted that the council has no budget to cover this and that the cost of the bid cannot form a burden on the city's finances. It would therefore be imperative that a broad-based coalition of partners and citizens come forward to resource the bid if it is to proceed to Stage 3.
9. **Legal** - designation of a World Heritage Site does not bring any additional statutory controls. Protection is provided through the planning system as well as through other designations, including listed buildings and scheduled monuments, that cover specific buildings and

areas, if not the whole, of the site. The boundary of the proposed World Heritage site will be the same as the Central Historic Core Conservation Area, which is already subject to statutory controls. The Local Plan would need to be consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework in respect of heritage assets to ensure that the significance of the World Heritage site and its setting are protected.

10. There are no additional Equalities, Human Resources, Information Technology, Property, Crime and Disorder or Other implications arising from the report.

Risk Management

11. In compliance with the Council’s risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified associated with the proposals contained in this report are those which concern partnership working and project working. There is a clearly identified risk that, however well-constructed York’s bid is, it will not ultimately find favour with UNESCO. This could lead to damage to the Council’s reputation and a failure to meet stakeholders’ expectations. The level of risk is assessed as “Medium” which is acceptable but means that regular active monitoring is required of the project.

Annex: “Should York be a World Heritage site?” Report of the York World Heritage Steering Group.

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Wards Affected: All			
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