

CITY DEVELOPMENT **PLANNING**

DEVELOPMENT QUALITY HANDBOOK

■ **OBJECTIVE**

To assist in preserving the historic fabric of Edinburgh's World Heritage Site and to ensure that changes complement and enhance its special character.

■ **POLICY CONTEXT**

The Manifesto is supplementary to Central Edinburgh Local Plan policies relating to conservation and design.

■ **SCOPE OF GUIDANCE**

The Manifesto applies to the World Heritage Site of Central Edinburgh as defined on the map overleaf.

World Heritage Site Conservation Manifesto



■ MANIFESTO

The environment of central Edinburgh is one of exceptional interest with unrivalled urban and landscape qualities which successfully incorporates all the functions of a thriving capital city. The inscription of the Edinburgh Site on the list of World Heritage Sites was based on the following UNESCO criteria:

- exhibiting an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town planning or landscape design;
- an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble which illustrates significant stages in human history.

The stated aim of inscription as a World Heritage Site is the “better protection and safeguarding of World Heritage Sites ...so the immediate and obvious benefit of international listing is to strengthen the hand of those who are committed to their protection and enjoyment”. The conservation and protection of the World Heritage Site are, therefore, the paramount issues in terms of UNESCO’s criteria.

The conservation of the World Heritage Site is defined as those steps necessary for its protection, conservation and restoration as well as its controlled development and harmonious adaptation to contemporary life.

The significant features and qualities of the World Heritage Site include the historic character of the Site and all those material elements which express this character especially:

- the historic and planned development patterns of the Site;
- the physical appearance and attributes of the interior and exterior of individual buildings. These include not only the main facade of a building, but its construction features, proportions, and interior spaces. The main characteristics to be preserved include its scale, materials, construction features, size, style and ornamentation;
- the relationship between individual buildings and the surrounding streetscape and landscape;
- the various functions that the Site has acquired over time. These functions give it an overall ambience which create or define its special character.

Inscription as a World Heritage Site has no immediate consequences in terms of statutory protection. However, World Heritage status highlights the outstanding international importance of the Site. **The Council will, therefore, regard the World Heritage status of the Site as a material consideration when considering applications for planning permission and listed building consent.**

The World Heritage Site will be actively protected against damage of all kinds, particularly that resulting from unsuitable use, unnecessary additions and insensitive changes such as will impair the authenticity of the Site. The preservation of the historic fabric by beneficial use is a prime objective within the World Heritage Site.

The organic plan form of the medieval Old Town and the clarity of the geometrically planned neo-classical New Town together with the outstanding historic buildings are fundamental characteristics of the World Heritage Site. All proposals affecting the plan form or historic buildings, including their setting, will be considered for their impact on their design integrity.

The Council will ensure that all conservation work and new building intervention carried out within the Site is to an appropriate internationally acknowledged standard. The Venice Charter, which was adopted by ICOMOS in 1965, sets down principles to guide the conservation and restoration of historic buildings on an international basis. The Charter stresses:

- the importance of setting and respect for original fabric,
- precise documentation of intervention
- the importance of contributions from all periods to the building and
- the maintenance of historic buildings for socially useful purposes.

The Charter outlines the basic tenets of what is now accepted to be an appropriate approach to dealing in philosophical terms with historic buildings. The general principles of the Venice Charter will be applied when dealing with historic building issues within the World Heritage Site.

The Council will promote architectural quality and excellence and encourage innovation, whilst enhancing the historic environment and preserving the features which contribute to its character and visual cohesion.

The conservation and design objectives and policies detailed in the Central Edinburgh Local Plan and the Conservation Strategy will be actively promoted within the World Heritage Site. These will continue to recognise the significance of the World Heritage Site.

It is a UNESCO requirement that five yearly reports on the state of conservation of World Heritage Sites should be submitted for their consideration. In order to satisfy this requirement, a series of criteria will be identified which will be used to establish a system which will allow change within the World Heritage Site to be monitored and assessed.



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■ EDINBURGH: WORLD HERITAGE CITY

The historic centre of Edinburgh, including the medieval Old Town and the Georgian New Town, was inscribed on the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO's) List of World Heritage Sites in December, 1995. This represents international recognition that the Site is of outstanding universal value, and ranks Edinburgh in the same world status as the Taj Mahal and the pyramids of Egypt. UNESCO's operational guidelines for the identification of World Heritage Sites recommends that historic urban centres should only be included on the World Heritage List if they are of exceptional interest. The inscription of central Edinburgh as a World Heritage Site is, therefore, an outstanding accolade. There are 13 other World Heritage Sites in the United Kingdom; St Kilda being the only other Scottish Site and Bath the only other urban centre (to date).

The formal UNESCO brief description of the Edinburgh World Heritage Site is as follows: "Edinburgh, capital of Scotland since the 15th century, presents the dual face of an old city dominated by a medieval fortress and a new neo-classical city whose development from the 18th century onwards exerted a far-reaching influence on European urban planning. The harmonious juxtaposition of these two highly contrasting historic areas, each containing many buildings of great significance, is what gives the city its unique character"

The concept of World Heritage Sites is based on UNESCO's 1972 Convention for the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. The Convention noted that the cultural and natural heritage were increasingly threatened by traditional causes of decay, and by changing economic and social conditions. It established the World Heritage Committee which was charged with compiling a World Heritage List of properties and sites which were considered to be of outstanding universal value. The List was intended to "ensure as far as possible, the identification, protection, conservation and presentation of the World's irreplaceable heritage".

The City of Edinburgh Council, Edinburgh New Town Conservation Committee, the Edinburgh Old Town Renewal Trust, Historic Scotland and Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise Limited are signatories to a Statement of Intent to work together to conserve and enhance the World Heritage Site, and to ensure that policies and actions in respect of the Site safeguard its outstanding universal value. In 1999, the Edinburgh World Heritage Trust was established, combining the responsibilities of the Edinburgh New Town Conservation Committee and the Edinburgh Old Town Renewal Trust.

■ REASONED JUSTIFICATION

It is the intention that the World Heritage Site Conservation Manifesto should represent a statement of the Council's commitment to the conservation and protection of the World Heritage Site and the Council's acceptance of its responsibilities as guardian of a World Heritage Site. The Manifesto also provides an opportunity for the Council to reassert its conservation objectives and to consider the issues affecting Edinburgh's historic core in a holistic fashion.

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