

**SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL - THE CABINET
LEADER/CABINET MEMBER DECISION RECORD**

NON-KEY DECISION RECORD

Report title : World Heritage Site

Cabinet Member(s) : Mrs C Lawrence, Cabinet Member for Community, in consultation with Mr D Huxtable, Cabinet Member for Resources

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Date of Member Decision: 10 June 2010

Date of Publication of decision: 10 June 2010

Date decision comes into force: 16 June 2010

1. Cabinet Member Decision

The Cabinet Member for Community agreed to discontinue the work to develop or pursue World Heritage Site status for the area known as the Somerset Levels & Moors.

2. Reason for Decision (s)

The potentially significant costs of progressing to the next stage against a context of reducing public finance, and the resultant change to Somerset County Council corporate priorities.

3. Reason(s) for Urgency (where applicable)

Not applicable.

4. Any relevant Personal Interest that the Cabinet Member may have under the Council's Code of Conduct for members

Member of West Somerset Council.

5. Other background information considered by the Cabinet Member before making this decision.

See Officer report.

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Officer Report

3 June 2010

World Heritage Site

Cabinet Member: Christine Lawrence, Community in consultation with David Huxtable, Resources

Division and Local Member: All

Lead Officer: Kay Allen, Head of Community Regeneration

Author: Kay Allen, Head of Community Regeneration

Contact Details: kxallen@somerset.gov.uk or 01823 358285

Please complete sign off boxes below prior to submission to Community Governance

Report Sign off	Seen by:	Name	Date
	Legal	Catherine Witham	7 th June 2010
	Finance	Kevin Nacey	4 th June 2010
	Human Resources	Richard Crouch	4 th June 2010
	Senior Manager	Kay Allen	4 th June 2010
	Corporate Director	Miriam Maddison	4 th June 2010
	Cabinet Member	Christine Lawrence	7 th June 2010
Summary:	<p>Over the last two to three years Somerset County Council (SCC) has worked with many partners and stakeholders to develop a potential application for World Heritage Site (WHS) status in respect of the area known as the Somerset Levels and Moors.</p> <p>This report summarises the current position and recommends the next steps.</p>		
Recommendations:	<p>It is recommended that the Cabinet Member for Community agrees that no further work should be undertaken by SCC to develop/pursue World Heritage Site status for the area known as the Somerset Levels and Moors.</p>		
Reasons for Recommendations:	<p>There has been a significant delay in the UK Government announcing the timescale for the initial phase and in the meantime the future funding position of Local Government and other public funding agencies has changed significantly.</p> <p>The potentially significant costs of progressing to the next stage against a context of reducing public finance.</p> <p>The fact that SCC corporate priorities have changed.</p>		
Links to Priorities and Impact on Service Plans:	<p>The decision to seek World Heritage Site status was a priority under the 2007 SCC annual plan. It is not currently identified as a priority.</p>		
Financial Implications:	<p>The one off costs of developing the bid to its current stage have already been met. There would be no financial implications arising from the decision to stop further work.</p>		
Equalities Implications:	<p>Summary of key equalities implications from section 4.</p>		
Risk Assessment:	<p>The work to date has involved many partners and stakeholders. There is a risk that there will be a reaction from those who wished this bid to be pursued.</p>		
Scrutiny Recommendation (if any)	<p>N/A</p>		

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1. Background

- 1.1. Since April 2007 the Heritage Group has been progressing work to promote the Somerset Levels and Moors as a potential UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS). Research has concentrated on the potential for the Levels and Moors to be recognised as a 'Cultural Landscape'. This is a new WHS designation which is receiving particular attention at a time when UNESCO is seeking to redress the emphasis on single historic buildings, such as abbeys and castles, among European WHS designations.

The aim of the work undertaken so far has been to:

- test partner and community support;
- raise awareness of the WHS concept and what it has to offer;
- seek information and advice on the WHS bidding process and the implications of WHS status, not least in respect of planning;
- prepare a Statement of Significance and associated documents to support a bid for the inclusion of the Levels and Moors on the UK Tentative List of World Heritage Sites
- plan for submission of a full bid (in January 2013) if acceptance on the Tentative List is achieved.

When work began it was anticipated that the UK Government would announce the opportunity to apply for inclusion on a tentative list of potential sites by the end of 2007. If successful, further work would be needed to develop the bid more fully for the next stage. In the event the opportunity to apply for inclusion on the tentative list has only recently been announced.

2. Options Considered

- 2.1. The only other option is to continue to develop/pursue World Heritage Site status which would have the financial implications described below and not align to the Council's current corporate priorities.

3. Consultations undertaken

- 3.1. Local Councillor and Cabinet Member David Huxtable has been consulted and local Councillors Gloak & Forrest and Opposition Leads Councillors Bakewell, Crabb & Daniell have been informed. All feedback received has been presented to the Cabinet Member for consideration.

4. Implications

4.1. Financial

The work to date has been funded from within existing budgets. If the bid was successfully included on the tentative list, there would be a need for funding to support its further development. At present this funding has not been identified as part of the MTFP process as the timescale is still unclear.

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Discussions have taken place with several recent UK WHS areas and with some prospective ones (Cornish Mining, Jurassic Coast, Blaenavon, Liverpool, and Lake District). Their experience suggests that the information/planning required to reach the point of nomination is likely to cost £95k a year for up to five years, an estimate in line with figures suggested by English Heritage and DCMS.

As SCC is presently the lead partner there would be an expectation that the authority would meet a significant proportion of the costs. The other significant contributor must be SWERDA, which has supported the other recent bids in the South West.

Other partner organisations which could be expected to contribute significant sums would be English Heritage, the National Trust, Taunton Deane Borough Council, and Sedgemoor, Mendip and South Somerset District Councils. There are various other town councils and societies which might be approached for smaller sums of money if it was considered worthwhile. Other organisations have agreed that some staff time should be allocated to assist in the project, including Natural England, the Environment Agency, the RSPB, and Somerset Wildlife Trust. However it must be pointed out that the economic position has changed considerably since this work was started in 2007 and the ability of all public bodies to support such applications financially is now substantially reduced.

4.2. Strategic Priority

The proposal to seek WHS was agreed in 2007 when it formed one of the priorities in the annual plan. The view was that the establishment of this area as a WHS would provide better opportunities to protect and conserve its unique characteristics which include areas of historical and environmental importance as well as providing a significant opportunity to raise the profile of Somerset as a an area to visit, live and work. As such it would provide an opportunity to boost the economy.

Whilst this is all still relevant, it has to be considered against a context of increasing financial pressure and the need for SCC to focus its resources on the delivery of current key priorities as set out in the recently adopted 2010/13 County Plan.

4.3. Risks

The work to date has engaged many different stakeholders, partners and members of the public. It has attracted a lot of interest and whilst those involved understand the reason for the delay in making further progress, a decision to stop any further work including that needed to apply for the tentative list may provoke a substantial reaction. It may be possible to mitigate this through advanced notifications to the groups that have been formed as part of the consultation process.

5. Background papers

5.1. 2007 SCC Annual Plan

Note For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author

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Notes

For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author.

A Cabinet Member **must** have regard to officer advice before exercising delegated powers. All Cabinet Member decisions shall be notified via this template by email to the Group Manager – Community Governance – Julian Gale – (copied to Scott Wooldridge) Please ensure that any local county councillor for any electoral division significantly affected is consulted prior to the exercise of the delegated power and informed of any subsequent decision taken.

Decisions taken by Cabinet Members shall be recorded and notified to all Members of Council via the Council's website within 2 working days of the decision being made. Any Member may ask the Leader (or when absent, the Deputy Leader) of their Political Group to require the decision to be referred to the decision maker for consideration within 3 working days of being published on the Council's website. If there is no referral the decision can be implemented at the expiry of the 3 day notification period. If referred to the decision maker, the decision shall not be implemented until the decision maker has determined the referral. The only exception to this rule shall be 'urgent' decisions requiring immediate implementation – see urgency provision below.

Urgency can only be applied where delay in implementing a decision would be to the detriment of the interests of the Council. The case for urgency must be agreed by the Leader (or Deputy Leader in the absence of the Leader) prior to the decision being implemented.

All decisions and supporting material shall be recorded on the Council's website and be available for public inspection at any time.