

THE OLD AND NEW TOWNS OF EDINBURGH WORLD HERITAGE SITE ACTION PLAN 2024 – 26



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This Action Plan sets out how the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site Management Plan will be delivered and should be read in conjunction with the Management Plan.

This Action Plan is a live document which captures key information known at this stage. It is intended to be dynamic, and actions will need to be flexible. It will be reviewed and updated every two years as part of the Management Plan's monitoring schedule.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring is a responsibility of World Heritage Site inscription. This includes both monitoring the condition of the Site (State of Conservation) and monitoring the implementation of the actions.

State of conservation report

UNESCO monitors the state of conservation of each World Heritage Site through its Periodic Reporting process. The [last Periodic Report](#) was completed in 2013, the most recent Periodic Report was completed in 2023 and awaits publishing by UNESCO's World Heritage Centre. These reports are an important tool to gather information that identifies possible changes to the condition of a Site.

Delivery and oversight

Actions will be delivered by the management partners, with input from wider city stakeholders. The remit and expertise of each partner adds a strength to this process that is greater than the sum of its parts. Monitoring will be carried out on a biennial basis with reports presented to the Steering Group, Oversight Group, Planning (or relevant other Council) Committee and made public.

Governance of the management plan will be further strengthened by setting up an Oversight Group which will meet annually to review progress against the action plan and help overcome barriers to delivery. The Oversight Group will pursue issues through its members' own organisational arrangements to ensure that decisions are properly informed.

The Oversight Group will also be responsible for supporting project objectives and key tasks in response to changing circumstances as delivery of the management plan progresses.

Partnership working

The Management Plan's success is dependent on people giving their time to tell us what they think. In return, it is the management partners' responsibility to clearly demonstrate the importance of the impact of this participation. A lead partner has been assigned to each action to ensure collaboration across the partnership.

Role of the partners

The City of Edinburgh Council

The City of Edinburgh Council is the Planning Authority. It implements the planning system in the city, which is the mechanism for managing World Heritage Sites in the UK. The Council is responsible for providing political leadership and governance for a comprehensive range of services across the city beyond Planning that affects the World Heritage Site.

It is also responsible for the provision of a range of [public services](#) that affect day-to-day life within the World Heritage Site, including strengthening and supporting communities, providing jobs and ensuring its residents are well cared for.

Historic Environment Scotland

Historic Environment Scotland is a non-departmental public body. It is the lead public body established to investigate, care for and promote Scotland's historic environment. Its board is appointed by Scottish Ministers.

Historic Environment Scotland offer technical expertise, support and significant funding to the historic environment via in-house experts and various grants schemes, directly employing the highest number of traditional crafts staff in Scotland and actively fostering apprentice development. HES is also a statutory consultee in the planning process.

Edinburgh World Heritage

Edinburgh World Heritage is the independent, expert charity dedicated to the proactive conservation of the World Heritage Site. It provides grants and advice to unlock a rolling programme of vital conservation work, engage all communities inclusively with their shared heritage, and works to ensure that heritage can play a key part in the solution to the climate emergency.

Edinburgh World Heritage provides independent, expert advice on balanced historic city management to all, enabling a sense of ownership for the care and conservation of the World Heritage Site.

Co-ordination

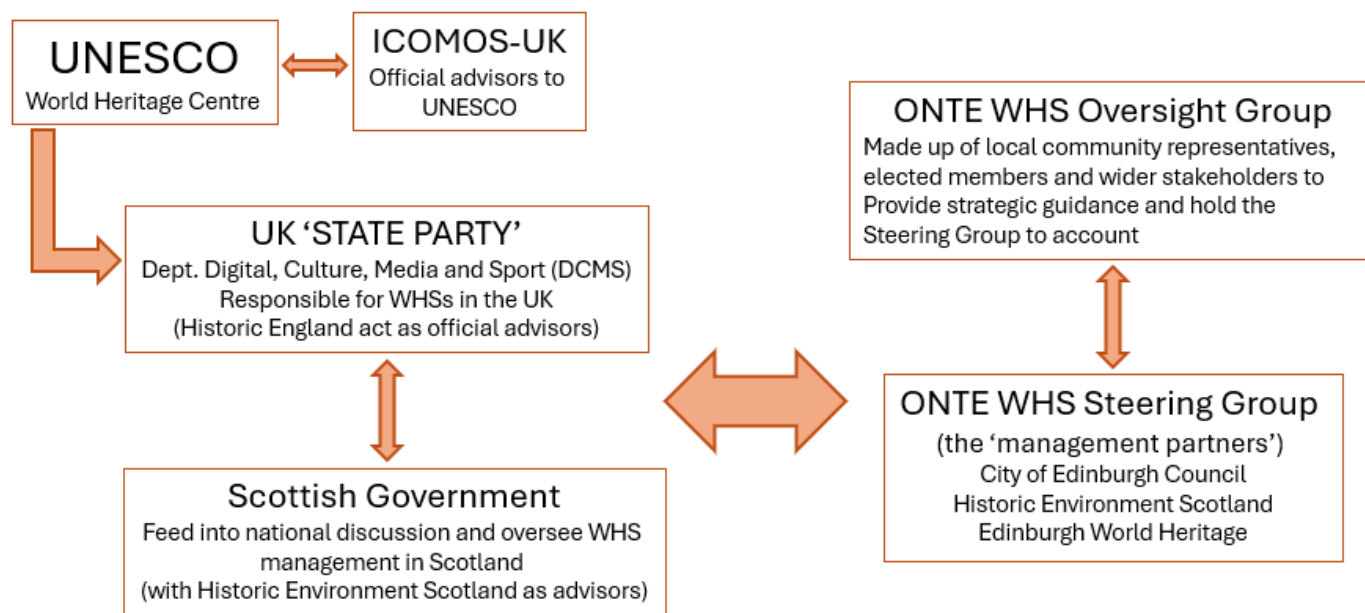
A World Heritage Site Coordinator post was created in 2009 to bring a focus to World Heritage issues across the partnership. The post ensures effective liaison and co-ordination of activities between the partners.

Oversight Group

Influence and accountability will be increased through this 2-year action plan programme and the role of the Oversight Group is important in achieving this. The Oversight Group is chaired by the City of Edinburgh Council Planning Convener and made up of ward councillors, the five community councils that fall within the World Heritage Site boundary, ICOMOS UK (as independent advisors on world heritage), the Chamber of Commerce, Edinburgh Tourism Action

Group, the University of Edinburgh and senior representatives from the management partner organisations. It is important that the membership of the Oversight Group has the flexibility to change to meet its ongoing needs.

Old and New Towns of Edinburgh (ONTE) World Heritage Site (WHS) Governance Structure



Action Plan Themes

During pre-draft engagement, members of the public were asked to rate the 14 themes of the Place Standard. The action plan seeks to address the issues that scored the lowest on the Place Standard “wheel” alongside expert analysis of key issues facing active conservation in the plan period.

Those five themes are:

- Awareness, appreciation and activity around World Heritage Site status
- Climate emergency
- Conservation and maintenance of buildings and public spaces
- Control, guidance, and contribution of new development to city centre
- Sustainable visitor experience

Many ideas were gathered in the consultation to support the conservation, improvement and progression of the World Heritage Site. The themes are cross-cutting. For example, tourism is an important activity in the Old and New Towns; it influences developments within the city centre, and it is an important factor that affects the interpretation and understanding of the World Heritage Site and it has an impact on the operational management of the city. It is therefore critical that the actions in this plan allow room for this interrelationship.

Awareness, appreciation of, and activity around World Heritage Site status



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“By 2035, decision-makers, communities and visitors will be able to understand and express what World Heritage Site status means, the Outstanding Universal Value of the ONTE World Heritage Site, why it matters and what their role in its active conservation is. The Council will have successfully mainstreamed high-quality conservation into its processes, Key Performance Indicators and investment plans. Governance of the plan and its actions will be transparent, with communities actively supporting its delivery. All this will be celebrated, marking Edinburgh as the leading standard in partnership conservation practice. ”

Objective: to co-ordinate the actions to ensure a broad level of understanding of the WHS and to widely transmit its value

Outcome	Action	Lead delivery partner(s)	Resources	Monitoring
The qualities that make the World Heritage Site of Outstanding Universal	1. Developing and promoting education materials to reflect the site as a resource for learning and training for all ages and across all sectors.	HES, CEC and EWH to support	This is a core commitment of the management partnership. Funding will have to be found for individual projects	Uptake number in organisations/institutions Feedback on quality

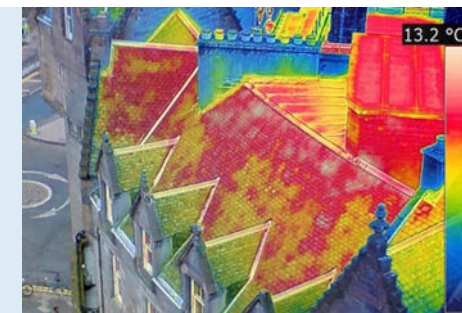
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Value are communicated, understood and informing decision-making by all			within existing budget streams.	Evaluation data from individual projects
	2. Mainstreaming high-quality conservation into Council processes, Key Performance Indicators and investment plans, including the provision of dedicated technical training for decision-making staff and Councillors across departments as well as key partner organisations.	CEC (EWH training support)	Staff time	Number of cases with EWH support Council investment in active conservation work
	3. Formally propose the addition of a new section to the impact analysis of the Transport and Environment Committee reports specifically relating to 'Heritage Impact' and new community heritage Key Performance Indicators for the leasing of CEC estate.	CEC	Staff time	Implementation of changes to key CEC documents
	4. Appropriately high city investment in active conservation and sensitive operational management through the Visitor Levy and other means.	CEC	Staff time	Visitor Levy commitment
	5. Ensure more under-represented communities are meaningfully engaged in shared heritage. Collaboration with the Accessibility Commission and its findings, and the Feminist City Agenda.	EWH	Seek NLF & HES funding	Successful funding applications and evaluation from individual projects

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	Also engaging with newly arrived families, LGBTQ+ communities and under-represented groups outwith the WHS boundary.			
	6. Liaising with WHUK, UNESCO UK and other Scottish/UK World Heritage Sites to share knowledge and expertise on common issues.	CEC (WHS Co-ordinator)	As above	Feedback to WHS Steering Group

Climate emergency



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“By 2035, heritage is conserved and better maintained as a key part of the solution to the climate emergency by all. Energy sourcing is more sustainable and sensitive to the historic environment. Owners are empowered to undertake conservation-led energy efficiency measures and adaptation through clear guidance, and supported with advice and selective grants.”

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Objective: To engage with the work undertaken by management partners in response to the climate emergency whilst safeguarding OUV

Objective: To adapt the WHS to the impacts of climate change and ensure its transition to net-zero whilst safeguarding the OUV and improving the residents' quality of life

Outcome	Action	Lead delivery partner(s)	Resources	Monitoring
Protecting Outstanding Universal Value is a baseline consideration for adaptation, green/blue network, retrofit and Future Streets policies – ensuring harm is prevented, and best practice methods established.	7. Provide heritage-sensitive input into the Council's response to the climate emergency across several areas, including: – Adaptation – Green/Blue Network – Energy Retrofit – Future Streets Framework 8. Addition of a new section to the impact analysis of the Policy & Sustainability Committee reports and Key Performance Indicators specifically relating to 'Heritage Impact'. 9. Design and deliver technical training for decision-making staff to better embed WHS values into projects from the start.	CEC (with Scottish Water supported by EWH)	This is a core commitment of the management partnership. Funding will have to be found for individual projects within existing budget streams.	Feedback to WHS Steering Group Number of projects implemented using new system. Number of projects & key policies with Steering Group support. Collate evaluation from individual projects.
Support conservation-sensitive energy retrofit	10. Advise, develop, seek to fund and advocate for appropriate responses to	EWH, CEC	This is a core commitment of EWH,	Feedback to WHS Steering Group

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and adaptation of historic buildings.	the climate emergency energy retrofit and adaptation in historic buildings via: – Climate emergency grant programme – Developing replicable responses from pilot projects dealing with different building typologies – Provide opportunities for advocacy and training on the climate emergency, such as through the emerging Climate Action Plan and Climate Ready Edinburgh – CEC policy work to shape the adaptation and conservation of historic buildings to meet the needs of Net Zero – Ensuring the historic environment is conserved and enhanced as part of these responses.		including the use of HES funding. Further funding will have to be found for individual projects within existing budget streams and/or visitor levy.	Collate evaluation from individual projects. Multiple overlapping CEC workstreams in this area have existing monitoring in place that we will feed into.
Conservation-sensitive climate emergency retrofit, and adaptation of historic public spaces is supported.	11. Advise, develop and seek to fund and advocate for appropriate responses to the climate emergency in the public realm and green spaces via: – Ensuring the maintenance of drainage system and green spaces (falling branches,	CEC, (EWH support)	This is a core commitment of Management Partners. Funding will have to be found for individual projects within existing budget streams and/or visitor levy.	Feedback to WHS Steering Group. Number of key cases with full Steering Group support.

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	diseases, etc.) across the WHS – as the first step to adaptation – Refining the understanding of flood risks in the Site for the public realm and green spaces – Developing sensitive adaptation interventions for the Site’s public realm and green spaces via pilot projects – Raising awareness and produce guidance for best practice climate change adaptation in the public realm and green spaces – Ensuring the historic environment is conserved and enhanced as part of these responses.			Collate evaluation from individual projects. Multiple overlapping CEC workstreams in this area have existing monitoring in place that we will feed into.
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Conservation and maintenance of buildings and public spaces



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“By 2035, the World Heritage Site will be sustainably funded through the visitor levy (or other public means) to continue and enhance its conservation - responding to the increased conservation and support need of the city resulting from economic challenges and increased rate of deterioration due to climate change. With new funding and partnership support, the Council will deliver celebrated active conservation of the city’s public realm, green spaces and graveyards”

Objective: To ensure ongoing investment in the conservation of the Site

Objective: To work in collaboration with stakeholders to improve the “state of conservation” of the Site

Objective: To ensure that safeguarding of the World Heritage Site is a baseline consideration for all Council plans and strategies within its boundary that include alterations to the historic built environment

Outcome	Action	Lead delivery partner(s)	Resources	Monitoring
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Edinburgh World Heritage's long-term Conservation Funding Programme responds to increased city conservation and support requirements.	12. Continue and expand Edinburgh World Heritage's grants and funding programmes to ensure ongoing investment in and active conservation of the historic building fabric of the World Heritage Site and adjacent conservation areas.	EWH	HES and potential CEC funding to EWH	Feedback loop: collate evaluation from each grant awarded.
	13. Continue and expand the programme of advocacy and engagement around building maintenance, alongside Climate Emergency actions.	EWH	HES funding to EWH	Collate evaluation from each grant awarded.
	14. Refine promotion of building maintenance awareness to public and private stakeholders through: – collaboration and partnership with other organisations promoting traditional skills, materials and buildings maintenance with the Traditional Building Forum's events – developing maintenance guidance	EWH	HES Funding	Feedback loop: collate evaluation from each project undertaken.

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	– working with external partners to provide training and awareness-raising events.			
The Council and Edinburgh World Heritage's essential roles in active city conservation are appropriately resourced.	15. Appropriate and significant funding allocated to ensure the delivery of actions around active conservation projects and sensitive operational management through the Visitor Levy, including to address graffiti and litter within the WHS boundary.	CEC	Visitor Levy	Transparency and amount of Visitor Levy funding attributed to the actions within this plan.
	16. Continued local, national <i>and international</i> fundraising activities to support city conservation to ensure fair impact on public spend.	EWH	EWH	Amount raised from fundraising activities.
OUV is conserved and enhanced during a significant period of change and need in the public realm.	17. Ensure that strategies such as City Centre Transformation, City Mobility Plan, Active Travel Plan and the Future Streets Framework conserve or enhance the authenticity and integrity of the historic environment – implementing high quality, appropriate interventions and reducing clutter/negative cumulative change.	CEC, (EWH advisory support)	CEC staff time and project funding/Visitor Levy (HES <i>advisory funding</i> support for EWH)	Feedback loop: Number of key cases with full Steering Group support Collate evaluation from each grant awarded and project undertaken
		CEC, EWH	Staff time	Buy-in from stakeholders

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	18. Define and implement a protocol for engagement in streetscape and public realm improvements, via: – seconding EWH specialist historic public realm staff to CEC for two days a week – defining and implementing and improved system of partners' role in projects that impact on the public realm through a series of workshops with the relevant stakeholders – support the delivery of heritage statements and impact assessments for public realm projects in the Site. – <i>Exploring the feasibility of funding a dedicated Council historic environment professional to inform and support public realm proposals through the Visitor Levy or other means (people/projects? Capital v revenue projects?).</i> 19. Define and begin a programme of active conservation work to the five historic graveyards within the WHS.	CEC, EWH	Staff time/ Visitor Levy	Condition of graveyards
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Control, guidance and contribution of new development to the city centre



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“By 2035, all new development will conserve or enhance the OUV of the World Heritage Site – following the conservation philosophy of ‘positively managed change’ regardless of contextual modern or traditional style, and always promoting a strong sense of place. As a result of great care being taken over key applications, no negative precedents have been set with respect to climate emergency adaptation or other areas. The Princes Street and Waverley Valley Strategy is in place and delivering a positive mix of uses alongside considered new development to rejuvenate the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of this key area at a crucial point in its long history. More strategic area plans are completed or in train, and value is being added to the delivery of key Council strategies and partnership initiatives. ”

Objective: To improve tools to sustain Outstanding Universal Value

Objective: To sustain effective partnerships that support the management of the WHS

Objective: To ensure that development embraces the context of the WHS and is of the highest quality in terms of architecture, design and materials

Outcome	Action	Lead delivery partner(s)	Resources	Monitoring
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All new CEC policies, plans and strategies safeguard the OUV of the World Heritage Site.	20. Council improvement of heritage mainstreaming in plan development and implementation process: by ensuring early-stage consideration is given to environmental (heritage) impacts, via KPIs and amendment to cross-departmental committee reporting. This includes, and is not limited to the following areas: – Waste and Recycling Strategy – Placemaking and Mobility projects, such as Active Travel – Tourism Strategy – Climate Ready Edinburgh Adaptation Strategy – Edinburgh Street Design Guidance and Factsheets – City Plan 2040.	CEC (EWH support)	Staff time	Stakeholder buy-in Evaluation of influence
Engage and give weight to independent heritage expertise in the determination of proposals affecting the WHS, to ensure that OUV is safeguarded.	21. Influence culture-change across CEC by securing engagement in the Protocol for WHS Management Partners in development, including Planning Department to action on a rolling basis with EWH & HES expert advisory support:	CEC (consulting and decision making) supported by HES & EWH	Staff time	Stakeholder buy-in Evaluation of influence

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	– early engagement in public realm changes (including but not limited to Placemaking and Mobility) – maintain positives around early and formal submission stage of projects/development proposals – engagement in development management (planning applications) – signposting the potential negative impact of small scale, cumulative change on OUV from all development proposals – give weight to local community views on how proposals affect their heritage values, including intangible cultural heritage – ensure heritage is robustly conserved in planning and public realm decision-making to sustain its vital economic, cultural, social and environmental role.			
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World Heritage becomes an important baseline consideration in future plans and strategies in the city centre.	22. Proactively seek to build relationships and opportunities, including funding, to work across departments.	CEC (HES & EWH support)	Staff time	Stakeholder buy-in Evaluation of influence
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Sustainable visitor experience



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“By 2035, Edinburgh’s tangible and intangible cultural heritage has been actively conserved through pioneering implementation of the Visitor Levy – crucially ensuring that Edinburgh remains an attractive place to live, work and do business for years to come. It is a celebrated international example of tourism

and community working hand-in-hand, city liveability for its inhabitants, excellent tourism offer and best practice of outstanding historic city management”.

Objective: To improve understanding of the value of WHS status to tourism within the WHS and the city

Objective: To sustain effective partnerships to advocate for and secure sustainable tourism within the WHS and the city to safeguard OUV

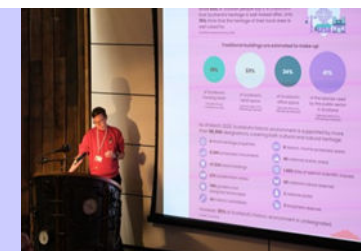
Outcome	Action	Lead delivery partner(s)	Resources	Monitoring
Decision-making and systems in place that enhance the experience of both residents and visitors - mitigating the risk tourism poses to WHS (as identified by UNESCO in their 50th anniversary convention).	23. Edinburgh Tourism Action Group and wider tourism stakeholders, including <i>universities, engaged and empowered to be thought leaders in active conservation and community resilience.</i>	CEC, EWH	Staff time	Stakeholder buy-in Evaluation of influence
	24. Collaboratively develop and seek to secure a 'virtuous cycle' system with a responsible tourism/hospitality operator that secures sectoral investment and support for conservation.	EWH	Staff time	Number of responsible tourism operators engaged
	25. Explore the feasibility of a World Heritage Centre in Edinburgh with shopfront presence that allows for community support alongside visitor	EWH (CEC support)	Staff time	Decision reached

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	engagement towards city conservation.			
The World Heritage Site's conservation is celebrated and invested in appropriately as a fundamental part of Edinburgh's sustainable tourism offer, and local quality of life.	26. The Council to ensure sufficient and considerable annual allocation of Visitor Levy income for the conservation and maintenance of the WHS, with Edinburgh World Heritage to provide historic city management advice to maximise the impact of funding allocating alongside conservation, social and economic outcomes.	CEC (supported by EWH)	Staff time	Stakeholder buy-in Evaluation of influence
	27. Ensure the governance for the allocation of Visitor Levy funding is inclusive to local communities and highly transparent – including but not limited to the allocation of funds between the areas of culture, festivals and heritage and the organisations and outputs on which this is being spent.	CEC (EWH support)	Staff time	Annual allocation of funds to heritage
	28. To advocate for the consideration of the WHS in the operational management of the city and influence decision-making (e.g. the impact	EWH	Staff time	Stakeholder buy-in Evaluation of influence

	street cleanliness and road maintenance has on the perception of the quality and integrity of the WHS, the impact of Short Term Lets policy).			
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Research pipeline



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“By 2035, there is an established programme of research in place to support a deep understanding of the issues that impact the sustainable management of the World Heritage Site and impacts on its communities. As a result of building positive relationships with research partners to this end, the historic city management of the Old and New Towns is considered best practice internationally.”

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Outcome	Action	Lead delivery partner(s)	Resources	Monitoring
There is a clear understanding of the state of conservation of the Site – its trajectory, risks and impacts – to inform conservation action.	29. Establish a Research Development Working Group to develop and sustain a method of tracking the condition of the World Heritage Site, manage the development of the research pipeline and target priorities.	ALL	Funding will have to be sought for individual research projects in collaboration with universities and other city partners.	Progress in development of new monitoring system and Research Working Group