

THE OLD AND NEW TOWNS OF EDINBURGH



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Old and New Towns of
Edinburgh
Inscribed on the World
Heritage List in 1995

World
Heritage
Site

A Short Guide
—
April 2023



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THE OLD AND NEW TOWNS OF EDINBURGH: KEY FACTS

- Inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1995 as a cultural WHS.
- The Site contains nearly 4,500 individual buildings, of which over 75% are listed due to special architectural or historic interest.
- In the New Town the integrity of the street layout is a key defining factor of its character. In the Old Town the 'spine and ribs' pattern of the High Street and its closes and wynds maintains the medieval street and its associated land holding pattern.
- The Old Town was overlaid in the late 18th century and early 19th century with wide streets as a result of the City Improvement Acts and commercial ventures.
- The Old Town contains two 12th century burghs with two early royal palaces (one within the castle), a medieval abbey, and a wealth of early buildings.
- The New Town contains a high concentration of world-class neo-classical buildings, remarkably intact.
- The WHS contains the dramatic river valley of the Water of Leith. The valley contains the original mill settlements of Bell's Mill, the village of Dean and part of Stockbridge.



Upper Bow, Old Town.



Edinburgh skyline.

THE WORLD HERITAGE SITE

The Old and New Towns of Edinburgh WHS is located at the heart of Scotland's capital city, covering some four square miles of the urban area. It includes certain areas where World Heritage status might be used to inspire careful redevelopment and excludes other areas that act as natural buffers (such as Holyrood Park and the Meadows).

The WHS represents a remarkable blend of two urban phenomena: the organic medieval growth and the eighteenth and nineteenth century town planning. The Site has retained its historic urban form and character to a remarkable extent.

There is no formal buffer zone around the Site. The main objective outside the World Heritage boundary is to protect the iconic skyline, and the key views in and out of the Site, as well as its setting. National guidance, alongside conservation areas and listed building designations and a Skyline Study, offer sophisticated layers of protection beyond that of a traditional buffer zone. The Skyline Study defines the dramatic topography of Arthur's Seat, Calton Hill, the Firth of Forth and surrounding hills as the additional attributes critical to the understanding, and therefore the protection, of the WHS.

The WHS boundary for Old and New Towns of Edinburgh; image reproduced from Ordnance Survey mapping with permission of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office © Crown Copyright; Licence no 100023420.



STATEMENT OF OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

Each WHS has a Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV). The SOUV describes the WHS and its importance, lists the Criteria for inscription on the World Heritage List, explains how the WHS satisfies UNESCO's requirements for Authenticity and Integrity, and summarises the management requirements. This provides a clear understanding of the reasons for the Site's inscription on the World Heritage List, and details what needs to be managed in order to sustain the OUV for the long term.



*Outside The People's Story
on the Canongate.*

CRITERIA

To be included on the World Heritage List, Sites must meet at least one out of ten selection criteria, as explained in UNESCO's [Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention](#). The Criteria under which the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh WHS is inscribed on the World Heritage List are:

Criterion (ii): *Exhibit 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.*

The successive planned extensions of the New Town, and the high quality of its architecture, set standards for Scotland and beyond, and exerted a major influence on the development of urban architecture and town planning throughout Europe, in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Criterion (iv): *Be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history.*

The Old and New Towns together form a dramatic reflection of significant changes in European urban planning, from the inward looking, defensive walled medieval city of royal palaces, abbeys and organically developed burgh plots in the Old Town, through the expansive formal Enlightenment planning of the 18th and 19th centuries in the New Town, to the 19th century rediscovery and revival of the Old Town with its adaptation of a distinctive Baronial style of architecture in an urban setting.

MANAGING THE OLD AND NEW TOWNS OF EDINBURGH

KEY MANAGEMENT PARTNERS

The partners in managing the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh WHS are the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC), [Historic Environment Scotland](#) (HES), and Edinburgh World Heritage (EWH). A Steering Group composed of representatives of all the partner organisations coordinates and implements the aims and objectives set out in the WHS Management Plan.

A WHS coordinator: ensures effective coordination between partners; coordinates and drives forward implementation, monitoring and revision of the Management Plan and associated action plans/objectives; promotes the OUV and public benefit of the WHS; increases awareness and understanding among partners, stakeholders and the public; and serves as a central point for advice.



John Knox House, Royal Mile.

*The Jazz Festival
in the Grassmarket
© Chloe Porter.*



THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Management Plan is a framework document for the preservation of the OUV of the WHS. It is developed collaboratively by the Partners, the bodies who have a role in actively managing the WHS and access to it and is informed by extensive consultation.

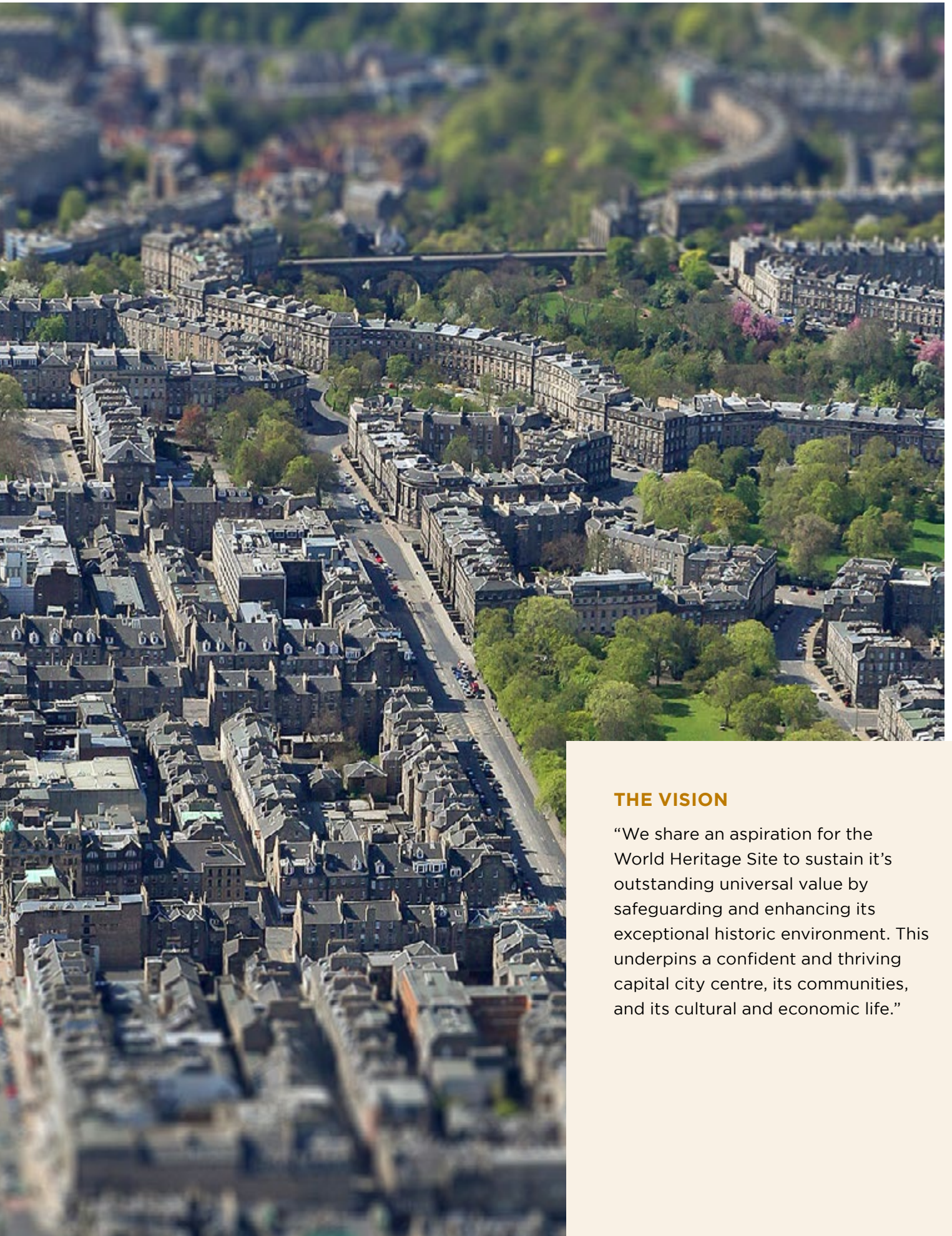
The Plan sets out how the Site will be managed by identifying a series of key issues and devising specific objectives or actions to address these issues. The aims of the Management Plan are also delivered through a range of CEC strategies including transport, public realm, economic development, waste and cleansing, tourism and climate change.

Old Town and Castle.



*View of the New Town
© City of Edinburgh Council.*





THE VISION

“We share an aspiration for the World Heritage Site to sustain its outstanding universal value by safeguarding and enhancing its exceptional historic environment. This underpins a confident and thriving capital city centre, its communities, and its cultural and economic life.”

PLANNING AND THE OLD AND NEW TOWNS OF EDINBURGH

World Heritage designation does not result in additional direct legal protection. Instead, the WHS is protected through the planning system by identifying listed buildings and conservation areas.

Scotland's National Planning Framework 4 requires planning authorities to only support development proposals where the Outstanding Universal Value of a WHS or its setting is protected and preserved.

The Historic Environment Policy for Scotland sets out a series of principles and policies for the recognition, care, and sustainable management of the historic environment.

A series of thematic Managing Change Guidance Notes produced by HES provides best practice advice to help guide changes to the historic environment. One of the guides focuses on [World Heritage](#). It should be used to inform planning policies and help with decisions relating to planning applications affecting the WHS.

Listed buildings are buildings of architectural or historical interest. Around 75% of the buildings within the WHS are listed.

The WHS contains areas, such as Edinburgh Castle, scheduled as a monument of national importance under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. Most works carried out within the boundaries of the monument require Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC): the prior written consent of Scottish Ministers, obtained through HES.

Conservation areas protect the historic character of an area, not only buildings but also features such as trees, parks, paving and street furniture. The whole of the WHS is protected by the Old Town, New Town, Dean Village and West End Conservation Areas and part of three further Conservation Areas.

The Old and New Towns of Edinburgh WHS is protected by a policy in the local development plan for the city that recognises the importance of protecting the OUV of the site. There is also specific guidance on the protection of key views, which is critical to protecting the OUV.



Princes Street from Calton Hill.

*A view of Edinburgh
from Arthur's Seat*



SUMMARY OF RELEVANT LEGISLATION, POLICY AND GUIDANCE:

- Our Place in Time – The Historic Environment Strategy for Scotland (March 2014)
- The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended by the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006
- National Planning Framework 4 (2023)
- Planning Advice Note 2/2011 Planning and Archaeology
- Historic Environment (Amendment) Scotland Act 2011, which amends three pieces of primary legislation
- The Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953;
- The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979; and
- The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997
- Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS) (2019)
- Managing Change in the Historic Environment Guidance Notes, HES



*View from Calton Hill
© City of Edinburgh Council*

FURTHER INFORMATION AND CONTACTS

OLD AND NEW TOWNS
OF EDINBURGH COORDINATOR
– CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

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KEY LINKS

Old and New Towns of
Edinburgh Management Plan
www.ewh.org.uk/managementplan

Edinburgh World Heritage:
www.ewht.org.uk

UNESCO World Heritage Centre
– World Heritage List: Old and
New Towns of Edinburgh:
whc.unesco.org/en/list/728

Old and New Towns of Edinburgh WHS
on the HES website: here you can find links
to the Management Plan and SOUV:
[http://www.historicenvironment.scot/
old-and-new-towns-of-edinburgh](http://www.historicenvironment.scot/old-and-new-towns-of-edinburgh)



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