

Weston-super-Mare Heritage Action Zone Conservation Area

Background to Great Weston Heritage Action Zone

Weston-super-Mare is located on the North Somerset coast, 18 miles south-west of Bristol and separated from Cardiff's coast by 11 miles of the Severn Estuary. A popular tourist destination, one of its most defining features is its stunning south and west facing bay which affords distant views of the Welsh coast beyond a seascape punctuated by islands.

Weston expanded rapidly from its origins as a small village into a popular seaside resort following the arrival of the railway in 1841. The majority of the town's urban form dates from this period. Prior to the 1940s the town was relatively compact, however, it began to expand eastward in the post-war period, and in recent years there has been further significant growth to the east, including the development of large-scale road infrastructure connecting the town with the M5. This has disrupted the urban form, adversely affecting the arrival experience from the east, and encouraged out-of-town retailing on the town's eastern periphery.



Weston-super-Mare Marine Walkway. © North Somerset Council

There are over 100 buildings which are important to the character of Weston town centre. Some, such as the C19th Town Hall and the Art Deco Odeon Cinema are listed, whilst others – particularly some important C20th buildings - could be eligible for local listing. Weston-super-Mare was home to the architect Hans Fowler Price (1835-1912) who successfully mixed styles such as Classical, Gothic, Moorish and Flemish in different buildings. His works invariably used materials characteristic of the area, and many of his buildings remain yet they are under-appreciated.

There are five conservation areas in proximity to the town centre (Ellenborough Crescent, Birnbeck, Boulevard & Montpelier, and two covering Melrose & Grove Park), yet the core of the town centre itself is currently not part of a conservation area.



Weston-super-Mare Odeon. © North Somerset Council

Great Weston Heritage Action Zone - A Driver for Growth

Over three years the Great Weston Heritage Action Zone aims to boost economic growth and keep Weston on the map as a great place to live, work and visit.

Great Weston Heritage Action Zone aims to help unlock the economic potential of historic sites in Weston by encouraging local partners to make use of their resources in a creative and focussed way, to enhance local places and achieve sustainable growth. Weston's beautiful, but often underappreciated, Victorian and early 20th century buildings stand ready to become new business premises and homes.

The regeneration of Weston's historic shopfronts and public places will tempt more shoppers and attract new businesses. Better links between the town centre, railway station and seafront will make sure visitors don't miss all Weston has to offer.

Weston-super-Mare Conservation Areas – The Next Fifty Years

Heritage Action Zone status means a realigning of the relationship between Historic England and the local authority, North Somerset Council. Both are now partners providing a coordinated and planned approach to investment in and development of conservation areas.

As we look at the next 50 years for conservation areas, the Heritage Action Zone model can provide a template for best practice. The Heritage Action Zone affords in-depth understanding of current conservation areas including community engagement with conservation areas and their management. It also acts as a driver for considering how the town could develop, putting heritage and constructive conservation at the heart of town centre regeneration.

Challenges to Delivering Great Weston Heritage Action Zone

The Heritage Action Zone has many strands to it: a characterisation project, the production of an *Informed Conservation* volume, historic area assessments, public engagement, design and style guide development, capital investment in shop front enhancement work and town centre routes contextualisation. Obtaining buy-in from elected members, the public and local businesses is a crucial requirement. As North Somerset Council develops its Local Plan 2036 and associated policies, a core challenge is to ensure conservation areas and heritage investment are embedded as key drivers for Weston-super-Mare.

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