

Developers 'put off Bath'

BATH: Red tape linked to the city's World Heritage status was behind a decision not to develop a national headquarters for the Environment Agency in the city.

Developer Euan Cresswell told a public meeting that the new office, which is being built by his firm Westmark, is based in Bristol because the city offered greater certainty for development.

Mr Cresswell was a key speaker at a forum to discuss Bath's heritage status as part of a series of events celebrating World Heritage Day.

He said: "Whenever we are considering any development in Bath, at the back of our minds is the question of heritage.

"We are developing new national headquarters for the Environment Agency in Bristol.

"I live in Bath and the project director lives in Bath. There is no reason why that scheme could not have been in Bath if we felt confident we could have come up with a building and develop it in the timescale set by the Agency.

"It seems to me some parts of the city deserve protection and should be cherished as parts of the World Heritage site but others don't and perhaps different rules should apply."

■ Heritage day, pages 34 & 35;
■ Comment, page 39

Customers new and old will be celebrating St George's Day in Abbey Ales' city centre pubs The Star Inn, The Assembly and Coeur De Lion.

In The Star it will be an extra special day for the regulars – it is nine years since the pub was saved from closure by Bath's only brewery.

World heritage day

Heritage should not be 'cash cow' – watchdog

The man appointed to keep a watching brief on Bath's world heritage status has called for more of the income from the city's attractions to be invested in public services.

A public meeting organised by discussion group the Better Bath Forum debated Bath's heritage issues at the weekend.

More than 100 people attended the meeting which was chaired by Bath Chronicle editor Sam Holliday and addressed by former Bath City Council chief executive David Beeton, who was recently appointed chairman of the city's World Heritage Steering Group.

Mr Beeton said Bath was one of the most difficult world heritage sites in the UK to manage.

He said: "World heritage status is something to celebrate in Bath, but we know many people think otherwise."

He said there was a lack of money being spent on maintaining the historic fabric of the city and called on Bath and North East Somerset Council to spend the money it makes from its heritage services on the public realm rather than using it to cut council tax bills.

Income from the local authority-run Roman Baths helps shave more than £40 a year off council tax bills in B&NES. But Mr Beeton said: "I think it is quite wrong that heritage should be used as a cash cow."

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He called for support to set up a charity to raise funds for conservation works in Bath and for volunteers to get more involved in conservation work.

He is also keen to extend National Trust ownership of properties in Bath and create an annual heritage festival.

He said: "We have got to encourage visitors to understand what a World Heritage Site is.

"If we show the council that heritage matters they will, in the end, begin to reverse their priorities."

Developer and Bath resident Euan Cresswell runs Bristol-based development firm Westmark and said world heritage status could bring uncertainty for developers.

He said: "Some people can and will make compromises to live and work in Bath. Many others can't or won't.

"Businesses will need to stay competitive to stay in business."

Bath-based antiques dealer Alex Schlesinger said Bath's lack of integrated transport was acting as a deterrent to business in the city.

He said: "Cities that don't thrive, fail because of policies.

"Until these problems are solved in Bath we will have a problem attracting new business."



BOY'S BRIGADE: Dylan Wildey with Mike Filliter of the re-enactment group Ermine Street Guard

PICTURES: Lloyd Ellington

Bath resident and entrepreneur Rob Davies said the city was congested and polluted and in need of cleaning.

He said: "If we get the basics right we can turn this gem which has got very faded into something to be proud of."

Meanwhile Bath and North East Somerset Council has launched a series of five new websites to promote Bath's most popular attractions.

The local authority has teamed up with web development specialists Fusion Workshop for the updated sites focusing on the Roman Baths, the Fashion Museum and the Victoria Art Gallery.

The year-long project has also seen

sites created for the Bath Record Office and corporate hospitality site, Heritage Hospitality.

Each of the sites is available in English, French German, Spanish and Chinese and have been made 'future-proof' in anticipation of new technological developments.

Fusion Workshop managing director Chris Short said: "We wanted to ensure that B&NES Council remain at the cutting edge in offering accessible, secure and unique online visitor experiences whether they choose to make the journey to Bath or prefer to have their cultural experiences online."