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# Abbey Church of Saint-Savin sur Gartempe (France) No 230quater

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## 1 Basic information

### State Party

France

### Name of property

Abbey Church of Saint-Savin sur Gartempe

### Location

Department of Vienne  
Nouvelle-Aquitaine Region  
France

### Inscription

1983

### Brief description

Known as the “Romanesque Sistine Chapel”, the Abbey Church of Saint-Savin contains many beautiful 11th- and 12th-century murals which are still in a remarkable state of preservation.

### Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

13 March 2024

## 2 Issues raised

### Background

The property was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1983 on the basis of criteria (i) and (iii), with an area of 0.16 hectares and without any buffer zone. The boundaries of the property corresponded initially exactly to the outer walls of the Abbey Church and encompassed exclusively its architectural structure.

A buffer zone of 147.77 hectares was officially added around the property through a minor boundary modification request, approved by the World Heritage Committee in 2007 (Decision 31 COM 8B.66). This buffer zone corresponds to the boundaries of the legal protection provided by two regulatory protective measures under the Heritage Code (*Code du Patrimoine*), namely the Outstanding Heritage Site of Saint-Savin (*Site Patrimonial Remarquable – SPR*) which is annexed to the Local Urban Plan (*Plan Local d'Urbanisme – PLU*) for Saint-Savin, and broad protection for the surroundings of historic monuments of Saint-Savin and Saint-Germain. The first one prohibits any modifications of exterior features of the buildings without a prior authorisation from the *Architecte des*

*Bâtiments de France*. The second ensures preservation of the relation between the historical monument and its setting, to enhance the value of the inscribed property. Within this zone, any modifications of buildings that are related to the monument or support the heritage values thereof require a prior authorisation.

In 2015, a second minor boundary modification was approved by the World Heritage Committee (Decision 39 COM 8B.42) with which the boundaries of the property were extended to 1.61 hectares to encompass, besides the church, parts of the ancient abbey's convent structures and its gardens, including the location of the no-longer preserved cloister.

In 2018, the World Heritage Committee adopted a retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value for the Abbey Church of Saint-Savin sur Gartempe (Decision 42.COM 8E).

A minor boundary modification request for the buffer zone was submitted in 2020. It proposed an extension of the existing buffer zone to 4,214 hectares.

This extension is to ensure unobstructed distant views of the Gothic spire of the Abbey Church from different vantage points around the valley of the Gartempe River and to preserve spatial relations between the Abbey and the broader landscape within which it is located. In this way, the proposed buffer zone is to support the Outstanding Universal Value of the property by ensuring maintenance of the visual coherence between the Abbey and its surroundings. The limits of the proposed buffer zone have been established based on an assessment of landscape sensitivity and further informed by the historical analysis of land settlements around the commune of Saint-Savin. The buffer zone was delineated using landscape features and considering the limits of vistas on the Gothic spire.

Legal protection in the proposed extension of the buffer zone is ensured at its northern- and southernmost ends through the broad protection established for the surroundings of the historic monuments of Nalliers and Antigny. In the rest of the area, urban planning regulations of the respective municipalities apply, namely Local Urban Plans (*Plan Local d'Urbanisme – PLU*) for Saint-Savin and Antigny, National Urban Regulation (*Règlement National d'Urbanisme*) for Saint-Germain and Nalliers, and communal map (*carte communale*) for Paizay-le-Sec.

Additionally, the southern part of the proposed buffer zone, on both sides of the Gartempe River, is a presumption zone of archaeological prescription (*zone de présomption de prescription archéologique*), where preventive archaeological works may be required to be conducted before any authorisation for development is granted. The status of the zone does not carry public utility easement.

According to the 2020 minor boundary modification request, the 2019-2024 management plan of the property included actions for the extension of the buffer zone in terms of protection and enhancement of the immediate surroundings of the Abbey and the general landscape. However, the existing protection under the Heritage Code (Outstanding Heritage Site and Scheduled Site) and urban planning tools (Territorial Coherence Scheme/*Schéma de cohérence territoriale* – SCoT, and Local Intercommunal Urban Plan/*Plan Local d'Urbanisme intercommunal* – PLUi) will have to be adapted, and appropriate management tools introduced to manage the extended buffer zone as a whole.

The World Heritage Committee referred back the proposed minor boundary modification of the buffer zone (Decision 44 COM 8B.53), with the following recommendations:

Refers the proposed buffer zone for the **Abbey Church of Saint-Savin sur Gartempe, France**, back to the State Party in order to allow it to:

1. Provide a map of the revised buffer zone boundaries at a more appropriate scale, in accordance with the *Operational Guidelines*,
2. Provide a timetable for taking the enlarged buffer zone into account in the tools for planning and heritage / landscape protection,
3. Clarify the way in which the buffer zone will be managed and how coordination with the management of the property will be organized.

### Modification

Following Decision 44 COM 8B.53, the State Party submitted a number of maps showing the proposed boundaries of the buffer zone and the limits of the existing legal protection.

The State Party also provided a timetable of recently initiated projects aimed at introducing additional protective measures for some of the areas within the proposed enlarged buffer zone. Accordingly, the perimeter of the currently existing Outstanding Heritage Site of Saint-Savin will be extended to the municipalities of Saint-Germain and Antigny. The formal procedure is to start in the second half of 2024, and the process should take around three to five years.

A project of listing the sites of the valley of the Gartempe River is in process since 2022. A section of the landscape along the river south of Saint-Savin is included as part of this development. Its finalisation is scheduled for 2026/2027. This section will partly overlap with the proposed buffer zone between Saint-Savin and Antigny.

In terms of the existing urban planning tools, the SCoT was approved in 2020 for the community of municipalities of Vienne and Gartempe; it includes Saint-Savin, Antigny, Saint-Germain, Nalliers, and Paizay-le-Sec, among others. PLUi for Vienne and Gartempe is expected in the second trimester of 2024.

Moreover, a landscape plan (*Plan Paysage*) for the community of municipalities of Vienne and Gartempe has been approved in 2023. It was prepared in consideration of installation of wind turbines in the area. A broad zone around the property has been identified within which installation of wind turbines or any high buildings is prohibited, to protect the vistas around the Abbey. According to the provided maps, the proposed enlarged buffer zone and the wider setting are fully within this no- turbines zone. Furthermore, in the area immediately around this zone, potential installation of wind turbines would still require Impact Assessment studies and analyses of visibility from important sites located in the surroundings of Saint-Savin.

ICOMOS reiterates its endorsement for the proposed enlarged buffer zone issued in 2020. The buffer zone will contribute to sustaining the property's Outstanding Universal Value.

ICOMOS further considers that the information provided by the State Party in response to the requests made by the World Heritage Committee leaves some questions around the coordination of protection and management of the new buffer zone.

While the State Party informed that the management of the buffer zone will be based on the same protection regulations that apply to the property, it is still not entirely clear for ICOMOS how it will be adapted to the enlarged buffer zone. In particular, the limits of the extended SPR and the Scheduled Sites of the valley of the Gartempe River are not known. As the management plan for the property is not yet ready at this stage (according to the 2023 Periodic Reporting), the organisation of the co-management of the buffer zone remains unclear considering the different jurisdictions within which it falls – what kind of management tools have been or will be introduced through the SCoT to manage the buffer zone as a whole in coordination with the property or how the PLUi that is under preparation will integrate the property and its new buffer zone.

ICOMOS further considers that given the extent of the buffer zone, better maps should be provided that would allow a clear perception of the topographic elements within the extended buffer zone and show clearly limits of the varied protection tools that cover it – i.e. the limits of the areas that enjoy special legal protection, such as the surroundings of the historic monuments of Nalliers and Antigny, the limits of the newly proposed extension to the Outstanding Heritage Site of Saint-Savin, as well as the section of the proposed buffer zone that will be protected through the Scheduled Sites of the valley of the Gartempe River.

While observing these issues, ICOMOS considers that the proposed buffer zone seems adequate as an added layer of protection to the property. Its effectiveness would need to be assessed after the existing protection and management tools are adapted and the management plan completed.

### 3 Recommendations

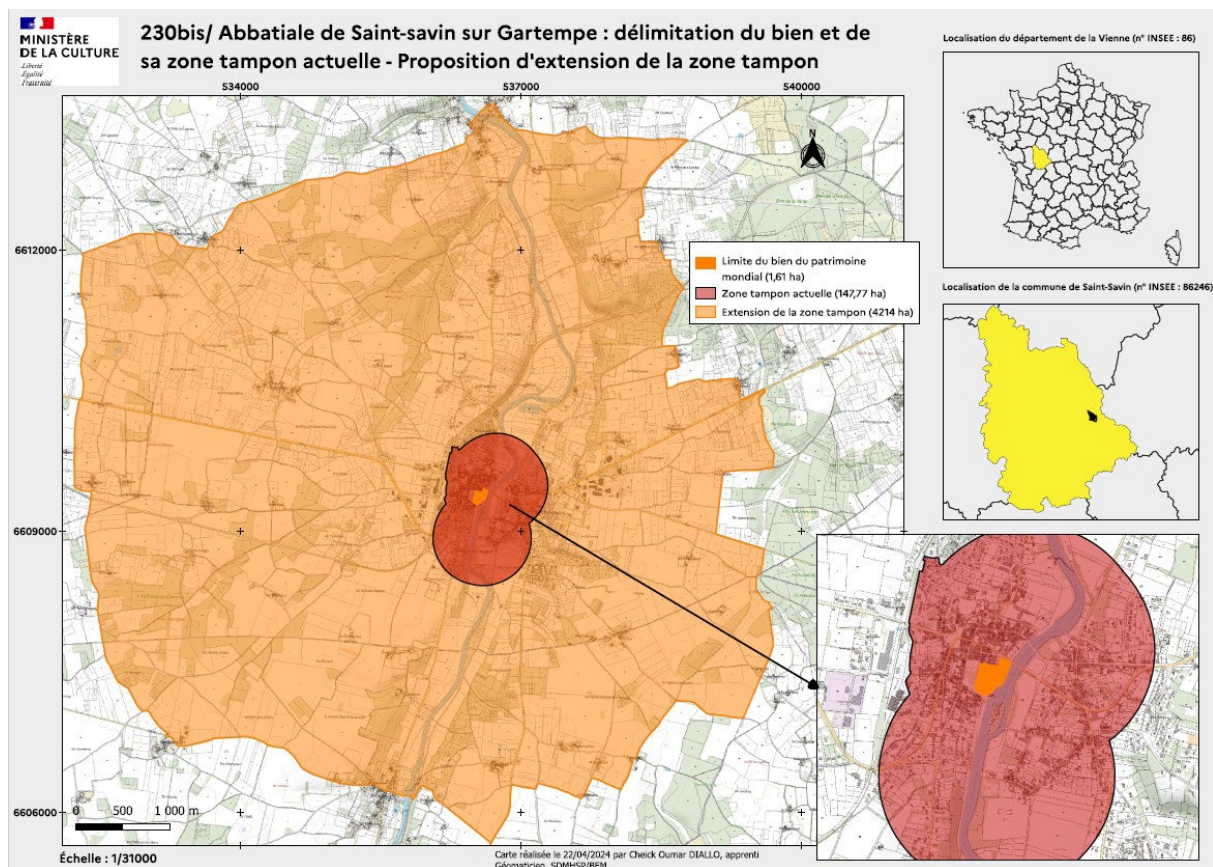
#### Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the proposed buffer zone for Abbey Church of Saint-Savin sur Gartempe, France, be **approved**.

#### Additional recommendations

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party give consideration to the following:

- a) Completing as a matter of urgency the management plan of the property that would consider the enlarged buffer zone, and submitting it to the World Heritage Centre for review by ICOMOS,
- b) Submitting details on how the SCoT and PLUi planning tools integrate the proposed extended buffer zone and provide for its co-management by the different municipalities,
- c) Integrating into the management mechanisms, recommendations of the landscape plan for the community of municipalities of Vienne and Gartempe regarding the creation of a no-wind-turbines zone to protect the vistas around the property,
- d) Providing maps of the revised buffer zone boundaries at a more appropriate scale, in line with the *Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.



Map showing the revised boundaries of the buffer zone (February 2024)