

World Heritage UK

Purpose of Report

For direction.

Is this report confidential? No

Summary

World Heritage UK wishes to re-open a dialogue with the Local Government Association concerning the UK's 33 World Heritage Sites and the seven Sites on the UK's Tentative List for World Heritage nomination over the next decade. Firstly, to develop closer ties and secondly, to gain LGA support to become a [National Amenity Society](#).

This paper will be presented by Paul Simons, Chair of World Heritage UK.

LGA Plan Theme: Supporting local people and places

Recommendation(s)

That the Board:

- **Determines how the LGA should engage with World Heritage UK**
- **That the Board supports World Heritage UK to become a National Amenity Society**

Contact details

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World Heritage UK

Background

1. World Heritage Sites are places from all around the world that are considered so important for the shared understanding and future of our planet that we should look after them forever. (See links below).
2. There are more than 1150 Sites globally; some are natural like the Great Barrier Reef or the Serengeti, and many are constructed like Stonehenge or the Taj Mahal. World Heritage Sites are identified by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), but looked after locally.
3. In the UK, local authorities are inextricably linked to the World Heritage Sites through community and stakeholder engagement, planning, economic development, education, culture, leisure, tourism, social cohesion and well-being.
4. The current range of UK sites and tentative listed properties cover over 50 local authority areas in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. They include major city centres, relic industrial sites and vast natural landscapes.

National Amenity Societies

5. Under the Arrangements for Handling Heritage Applications – notification to Historic England and National Amenity Societies and the Secretary of State (England) Direction 2021, [local planning authorities](#) are obliged to consult the 6 specialist [amenity societies](#) on all applications involving the partial or total demolition of a [listed building](#).
6. In addition consultations affecting a listed park must consult The Gardens Trust; and for theatres, The Theatres Trust.
7. Councils may consult many other voluntary associations about the impact of planning consultations, but only the above *must* be consulted.
8. The focus of all the above is either a specific building or park, while world heritage sites are often about a much larger place, up to and including whole towns. This wider perspective is not adequately represented by any statutory consultees, although other voluntary groups may take that broader approach.

What is World Heritage UK?

9. World Heritage UK is a charitable incorporated organisation established in 2015. It is the only organisation exclusively focused on World Heritage in the UK, and the only one that is led by the Sites themselves, reflecting a bottom-up,

community-driven approach that has proven effective at many Sites, an approach favoured by UNESCO.

10. From the late 1990s, World Heritage Sites in the UK were represented by LAWHF (the Local Authority World Heritage Forum) and driven by local elected representatives supported by their planning, heritage and tourism officers. At that time World Heritage was recognised by the LGA as a special interest group which received an annual report. Complementary to this, informal steering groups and advisory boards were established at each site to engage with landowners, local businesses and voluntary bodies. Some of these groups have now become formalised structures as managing agencies with charitable status.
11. Changes in the nature of organisations bringing forward new nominations, and the creation of site specific NGOs and managing partnerships, at a time of diminishing resources within local government for non-statutory functions, has resulted in a reduction in the influence of local elected representatives.
12. In 2023 there are now twenty-nine WHS in the four home nations, with nine having a direct local authority involvement in their management. Other site managers now include heritage agencies, the Church, Universities, the National Trust and National Parks.
13. An unintended consequence of this has been a reduction in local government involvement and liaison with the UK's World Heritage Sites. However, there is now a need and an opportune moment to redress this imbalance.

Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023

14. The much-publicised Bill for Levelling Up and Regeneration from DLUH&C was granted the Royal Assent on the 26th of October. For the first time in UK legal history, World Heritage is written into primary legislation making the government's commitment to the UN's World Heritage Convention 1972 a statutory duty. Historic England is the heritage agency which advises government on world heritage and international matters through DCMS. The UK FCDO also manages the UK National Commission for UNESCO.

Proposal

15. With the significant milestone of the LURA achieved, WHUK now intend to apply to government to become a statutory consultee on key planning issues concerning World Heritage Sites. This will entail being accepted by government as one of the national amenity societies, of which there are currently seven forming the Joint Committee of the National Amenity Societies, which receive annual funding to fulfil their role as statutory consultees.

16. WHUK is the most appropriate and best placed organisation to fulfil this role for World Heritage; it is independent of government, with its representation of all UK Sites and with grass-root networks with connections to those directly managing the Sites on a day-to-day basis.
17. WHUK wish to present its role and the need for greater direct liaison with the elected representatives of the communities and stakeholders in each World Heritage Site to the Local Government Association's policy board for Culture, Tourism and Sport. We wish to gain the board's support and endorsement for WHUK taking forward an application to government to become a statutory consultee.

Questions to explore

18. The Board will wish to explore the following areas with the presenters:
- 18.1. What role does WHUK see for elected members and officers in its work?
 - 18.2. How will diverse communities be represented in this work?
 - 18.3. What support and offer will WHUK provide to councils?
 - 18.4. Is National Amenity Society status required for this work?

Implications for Wales

19. Welsh World Heritage Sites are covered by WHUK.

Financial Implications

20. There are no financial implications for the LGA. There will be a small increase in consultation work for planning officers, although this should be offset by the value of being able to access expert advice on world heritage site management.

Equalities implications

21. The Board may wish to explore how WHUK will ensure diverse communities are represented and engaged in its work.

Next steps

22. If the Board agrees to support WHUK's application to be a national amenity society, officers will draft a letter of support.

Annex 1:

Supporting information

WHUK published a ground breaking report [*UK World Heritage Site Collection: Asset for the Future*](#) in 2019 aiming to assisting the UK Government and others in planning and supporting the future sustainable management of the UK's World Heritage Sites. Together our Sites are a major resource and a central part of the UK's cultural inheritance and a major asset for the UK.

<https://worldheritageuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/90050100-main-r-f-2019-12-04-lr.pdf>

Helpful links

<https://worldheritageuk.org> the site of World Heritage UK

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/gb> for the official list of UK World Heritage Sites.

<https://www.jcnas.org.uk/> National Amenity Societies

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/about/> What is World Heritage?

UK & NI World Heritage Sites and their local authorities

Cultural Sites (28)

- [Blaenavon Industrial Landscape](#) (2000) Torfaen County Borough.
- [Blenheim Palace](#) (1987) West Oxfordshire District Council.
- [Canterbury Cathedral, St Augustine's Abbey, and St Martin's Church](#) (1988) Canterbury City Council.
- [Castles and Town Walls of King Edward in Gwynedd](#) (1986) Gwynedd County Council, Conwy County Borough, Isle of Anglesey County Council.
- [City of Bath](#) (1987) Bath & North East Somerset Council.
- [Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape](#) (2006) Cornwall County Council, East Devon District Council.
- [Derwent Valley Mills](#) (2001) Derbyshire County Council, Derby City Council.
- [Durham Castle and Cathedral](#) (1986) Durham County Council.

- [Frontiers of the Roman Empire](#) (1987, 2005, 2008) 8 LA's in England & Scotland.
- [Gorham's Cave Complex](#) (2016) Government of Gibraltar.
- [Heart of Neolithic Orkney](#) (1999) Orkney Island Council.
- [Historic Town of St George and Related Fortifications, Bermuda](#) (2000) Corporation of St George (Bermuda).
- [Ironbridge Gorge](#) (1986) Telford & Wrekin Council.
- [Jodrell Bank Observatory](#) (2019) Cheshire East Council.
- [Maritime Greenwich](#) (1997) Greenwich Borough Council.
- [New Lanark](#) (2001) South Lanarkshire Council.
- [Old and New Towns of Edinburgh](#) (1995) Edinburgh City Council.
- [Palace of Westminster and Westminster Abbey including Saint Margaret's Church](#) (1987) Westminster City Council.
- [Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal](#) (2009) Wrexham Borough Council.
- [Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew](#) (2003) London Borough of Richmond on Thames.
- [Saltaire](#) (2001) City of Bradford.
- [Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites](#) (1986) Wiltshire Council.
- [Studley Royal Park including the Ruins of Fountains Abbey](#) (1986) North Yorkshire Council.
- [The English Lake District](#) (2017) Cumbria Council, Westmorland & Furness Council.
- [The Forth Bridge](#) (2015) Fife Council & Edinburgh City Council.
- [The Great Spa Towns of Europe](#) (2021) Bath & North East Somerset.
- [The Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales](#) (2021) Gwynedd County Council.
- [Tower of London](#) (1988) City of London.

Natural (4)

- [Dorset and East Devon Coast](#) (2001) Dorset Council, East Devon District Council.
- [Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast](#) (1986) County Antrim.

- [Gough and Inaccessible Islands](#) (1995, 2004) British Overseas Territory.
- [Henderson Island](#) (1988) British Overseas Territory.

Mixed (1)

- [St Kilda](#) (1986, 2004, 2005) Outer Hebrides.

UK Tentative List (2023)

1. [Flow Country 2012 Caithness & Sutherland.](#)
2. [Moravian Church Settlements 2022 County Antrim.](#)
3. [City of York: historic urban core 2023 City of York Council.](#)
4. [Birkenhead Park, the pioneering People's Park 2023 Wirral Council.](#)
5. [East Atlantic Flyway: England East Coast Wetlands 2023 TBC the Humber, the Wash, Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and the Thames.](#)
6. [Little Cayman Marine Parks and Protected Areas 2023 British Overseas Territory.](#)
7. [Mousa, Old Scatness and Jarlshof: the Zenith of Iron Age Shetland 2023 Shetland Council.](#)