

The Protection of World Heritage Sites



Definition

World Heritage Sites are places of 'outstanding universal value' to the whole of humanity, which are of cultural and / or natural significance internationally. The identification, protection, conservation and presentation of World Heritage Sites is provided for by the 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage ([the World Heritage Convention](#)). The United Kingdom ratified the Convention in 1984, and in 1986 the first of this country's World Heritage Sites were 'inscribed' on the World Heritage List. Today there are twenty-five World Heritage Sites in the UK (excluding dependents), which are (in order of inscription):

- [Durham Cathedral and Castle](#)
- [Castle and Town Walls of King Edward in Gwynedd](#)
- [Studley Royal Park including the ruins of Fountains Abbey](#)
- [St Kilda](#)
- [Giant's Causeway and Causeway coast](#)
- [Ironbridge Gorge](#)
- [Stonehenge, Avebury and associated sites](#)
- [Blenheim Palace and Park](#)
- [Palace of Westminster, St Margaret's Church and Westminster Abbey](#)
- [City of Bath](#)
- [Frontiers of the Roman Empire \(including Hadrian's Wall and Antonine Wall\)](#)
- [The Tower of London](#)
- [Canterbury Cathedral with St Augustine's Abbey and St Martin's Church\)](#)
- [Edinburgh Old and New Towns](#)
- [Maritime Greenwich](#)
- [Heart of Neolithic Orkney](#)
- [Blaenavon Industrial Landscape](#)
- [Dorset and East Devon Coast](#)
- [Derwent Valley Mills](#)
- [New Lanark](#)
- [Saltaire](#)
- [Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew](#)
- [Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City](#)
- [Cornwall and East Devon Mining Landscape](#)
- [Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal](#)

[English Heritage](#) has a webpage devoted to World Heritage Sites, as do [Historic Scotland](#) and [Cadw](#) in Wales.

Inscription

The Convention is administered by a [World Heritage Committee](#) of 21 state party members, who are elected for a four year term. It is this intergovernmental Committee which is responsible for inscribing nominations of state parties on the World Heritage List, at their annual meeting following a period of at least eighteen months of evaluation. To be inscribed on the List sites have to meet one or more of ten criteria established to assess outstanding universal value. The latest UK World Heritage Site, Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal in Wales, was inscribed on the List in June 2009.

The UK Government (Department of Culture Media and Sport) maintains a Tentative List of nominated sites. From this List [Darwin's Landscape Laboratory](#) was submitted in 2009 for consideration by the World Heritage Committee in June 2010. Subsequently [the Twin Monastery of Wearmouth & Jarrow](#) will be submitted in January 2010 for consideration in 2011.

Policy and Guidance

In July 2009 the Government issued a [Circular on the Protection of World Heritage Sites](#), which provided updated policy guidance (replacing and adding to that previously set out in PPG15 and PPG16) on the level of protection and management required for World Heritage Sites. This guidance only applies to England. English Heritage has developed further [Guidance on World Heritage Sites](#) to supplement the Circular.

The Circular sets out that the outstanding universal value of a World Heritage Site is a key material consideration to be taken into account by the relevant authorities in determining planning and related applications and by the Secretary of State in determining cases on appeal or following call-in.

With regard to national, regional and local policy frameworks the main objective should be the protection of each World Heritage Site through conservation and preservation of its outstanding universal value. Policies should apply both to the site itself and to its setting, which may include important views and / or a defined 'buffer zone'. Policies should seek to strike a balance between the needs of conservation, biodiversity, access, local community interests and the sustainable economic use of a Site.

In Scotland the [The Historic Environment \(amendment\) Scotland Bill](#) is coming close to the end of its passage through the Scottish Government. This is a single piece of legislation, with a limited scope, to amend three pieces of current primary legislation: The Historic Buildings and Monuments Act of 1953, the Ancient Monuments and Archaeology Areas Act of 1979 and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas)(Scotland) Act of 1997 all while protecting the core of the current system.

In Wales, in the absence of the Heritage Bill for England & Wales still waiting for Parliamentary time, the Welsh Heritage Minister issued in 2009 [The Welsh Historic Environment Strategic Statement](#) with an accompanying [Action Plan](#). [Welsh Office Circular 1/98](#) continues to provide planning and the historic environment directions.

Management and Control

Each World Heritage Site should have an agreed Management Plan in place, which specifies how the outstanding universal value, authenticity and integrity of the Site are to be maintained. The policies set out in management plans are key material considerations for planning authorities in making plans and planning decisions.

Under the terms of the [Town and Country Planning \(Consultation\) \(England\) Direction 2009](#), planning authorities are required to consult the Secretary of State before approving any planning application to which English Heritage maintains an objection and which would have an adverse impact on the outstanding universal value or its setting. The Secretary of State then has the discretion to call-in the application for his own determination.

On 1 October 2008 World Heritage Sites were added to the types of land described as Article 1(5) land in the [Town and Country Planning \(General Permitted Development\) Order 1995](#). Similar to controls within conservation areas, such designation restricts permitted development rights for some types of minor development. Local authorities can further restrict these and other permitted development rights using directions under Article 4 and Article 7 of the 1995 Order. This control does not extend to include the buffer zone or setting of a Site.

World Heritage Sites are defined as 'sensitive areas' for the purposes of environmental impact assessment ([EIA Regulations in England](#); [EIA Regulations in Scotland](#)). Therefore, an EIA must be carried out for any development proposal in, or partly in, a World Heritage Site if they are considered by planning authorities to have a significant affect on the environment. Also design and access statements are required for development proposals affecting World Heritage Sites (current requirements will differ across the UK).