



Press Release – For immediate release

The National Trust and UNESCO sites: A Partnership for Sustainable Development

Date: September 15, 2025

A [new report](#) from the National Trust, the UK National Commission for UNESCO (UKNC), and Natural England shows how the Trust - as one of the UK's largest conservation charities - can maximise its impact, and deliver its wider mission, through collaboration with UNESCO sites.

The report examines the Trust's role in supporting sustainable development by working with UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, Global Geoparks and World Heritage Sites across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Specifically, the report:

- Highlights how the National Trust Strategy aligns to the UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Provides a comprehensive overview of the level of Trust ownership in UNESCO sites, and its input into UNESCO site governance models
- Uses case studies from a spectrum of sites and programmes across the UK and overseas to identify the value, challenges, and opportunities from UNESCO status.

The findings of this report provide valuable insights for site managers, local authorities, and broader partners. They demonstrate that being part of a UNESCO site is not just about protection or prestige; it offers a chance to unite around issues like climate change, biodiversity, heritage, identity, and inclusion.

The National Trust's role as an active partner and collaborator in driving change is crucial for the success of these vital landscapes and communities.

The report was authored by Sarah France, World Heritage Site Co-ordinator for Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal, following a sabbatical with UKNC and Natural England, which provided new insights into the Trust's evolving role in managing UNESCO World Heritage Sites and its wider commitment to sustainable development.

Speaking of the report launch:

Sarah France, World Heritage Co-ordinator for Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal, National Trust, stated:

"This sabbatical has been an incredible journey of discovery and collaboration. It has shown us the immense potential of UNESCO sites to drive positive change and foster a deeper connection between people, nature, and heritage."

Matt Rabagliati, Head of Policy, Research and Communications for UK National Commission for UNESCO, added:

"This insightful and timely report demonstrates how collaboration across institutions and designations can generate new insights and, in turn, enhance our collective stewardship of these sites. We hope this encourages others to consider their connection to the UK's UNESCO sites."

The Report is available to download at: <https://unesco.org.uk/resources/the-national-trust-and-unesco-sites-a-partnership-for-sustainable-development-2025>

Ends.

About the UK National Commission for UNESCO

The UK National Commission for UNESCO (UKNC) is a constitutional part of the UK's membership of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation ([UNESCO](https://unesco.org)). An independent body, UKNC is core-funded by the UK Government primarily to bring the benefits of UNESCO programmes and international agreements to the UK government, academic community and broader civil society. It also ensures that these elements fully contribute to and shape UNESCO's global aims and activities.

www.unesco.org.uk

UNESCO Biosphere Reserves

UNESCO Biosphere Reserves are 'learning places for sustainable development'. They are sites for testing interdisciplinary approaches to understanding and managing changes and interactions between social and ecological systems. Each site promotes solutions reconciling the conservation of biodiversity with its sustainable use. <https://en.unesco.org/biosphere/about>

UNESCO Global Geoparks

UNESCO Global Geoparks are single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education, and sustainable development. <https://en.unesco.org/global-geoparks>

UNESCO World Heritage Sites

UNESCO World Heritage Sites are designated by UNESCO for having cultural, historical, scientific, or other form of significance. The sites are judged to contain cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. <https://whc.unesco.org>

About the National Trust

The National Trust is an independent conservation charity founded in 1895 by three people: Octavia Hill, Sir Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley, who saw the importance of the nation's heritage and open spaces and wanted to preserve them for everyone to enjoy. Today, across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, we continue to look after places so people and nature can thrive.

We care for more than 250,000 hectares of countryside, 890 miles of coastline, 1 million collection items and 500 historic properties, gardens and nature reserves. In 2023/24 we received 25 million visitors to our pay for entry sites. The National Trust is for everyone - we were founded for the benefit of the whole nation, and our 5.4 million members, funders and donors, and tens of thousands of volunteers support our work to care for nature, beauty, history for everyone, for ever.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/