

National Trust and UNESCO sites

A review of how we can play our part in delivering for heritage, nature and people in UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Biosphere Reserves and Global Geoparks

Sabbatical Report by Sarah France

Foreword

This report signifies the culmination of a timely sabbatical undertaken by Sarah France from the National Trust, hosted jointly by the UK National Commission for UNESCO (UKNC) and Natural England. It offers not only a snapshot of one organisation's relationship with UNESCO designations but also a broader reflection on how national institutions can adopt a more connected, responsive, and proactive role in tackling the urgent and interconnected challenges of our time.

The sabbatical originated from the remarkable work carried out at the Skell Valley Project, based at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal—a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Through this project, Sarah and her team developed an inclusive, place-based model for broad-based partnership working to address the challenges not only facing the Abbey, but also communities up and downstream. This work served as a key inspiration for the UKNC's 2022 Sites for Sustainable Development report, helping to shape our understanding of how UNESCO-designated places can act as catalysts for collaboration and systemic change.

Building on this foundation, the sabbatical aimed to explore the National Trust's changing role across UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The Trust is among the UK's largest landowners and guardians of natural and cultural heritage. At some sites, it plays a central part in management; at others, it has a smaller presence. Through extensive engagement with National Trust teams across England and Wales, this report offers a clear analysis of how the organisation interacts with UNESCO designations, highlighting where it is making an impact, where opportunities still exist, and how partnerships could be strengthened.

UNESCO sites offer a unique opportunity encompassing natural and cultural heritage, connected in a common goal of a more sustainable and inclusive future. Uniquely for any organisation, the Trust's portfolio reflects this diversity including World Heritage Sites both natural and cultural, Biosphere Reserves and Global Geoparks. As the Trust launches a new Strategy 'People and Nature Thriving' more than ever the importance of looking beyond boundaries and connecting locally, nationally, and globally is critical to success. Perhaps most of all the natural World Heritage Sites in the Trust's guardianship – the geological Jurassic Coast and Giant's Causeway - demonstrate a heritage and story that transcends boundary and connects places and people from local to global in a story of our whole Earth its past, its present and its possible future.

The findings offer valuable insights not only to the Trust but also to site managers, local authorities, and broader partners. They highlight that being part of a UNESCO site is more than about protection or prestige; it offers a chance to unite around issues like climate change, biodiversity, heritage, identity, and inclusion. These results show how institutions such as the National Trust can support these vital landscapes and communities, not just as owners or managers, but as active partners and collaborators in driving change.

Continued

The insights generated here will feed directly into the UKNC's ongoing efforts to build a resilient network of UK UNESCO sites. This includes our Local to Global programme, which aims to develop a sustainable and well-resourced network of UNESCO sites across the UK, and our Climate Change and UNESCO Heritage project, which seeks to enhance the capacity of designated sites to respond to climate impacts.

We hope this report encourages others to consider their connection to the UK's 60 UNESCO designations. We thank Sarah for her leadership, the National Trust for enabling the sabbatical, and all the staff and stakeholders who contributed to this meaningful project. It demonstrates how collaboration across institutions and designations can generate new insights and, in turn, enhance our collective stewardship of these sites.

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



Jonathan Larwood, Principal Officer – Geodiversity, Natural England



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Introduction



English Lake District World Heritage Site, Wasdale, Cumbria

About this report

In 2024 I undertook a sabbatical in partnership with the UK National Commission for UNESCO (UKNC) and Natural England to improve the understanding and awareness of the National Trust's role at UNESCO sites.

The National Trust has a significant land and property ownership in nine of the 24 World Heritage Sites (WHS) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This is a diverse collection of sites and includes the two natural sites of the Giant's Causeway and Jurassic Coast, the historic parkland and water garden at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal and the archaeological monuments and landscapes of Stonehenge and Avebury and Hadrian's Wall. The collection also includes the mines and beam engines of the Cornish Mining WHS, Penrhyn Castle in the Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales and finally, the English Lake District which extends across mountains and lakes and includes the beginnings of the Conservation Movement.

Probably less well-known are the National Trust's land and properties in UNESCO Biosphere Reserves and Global Geoparks. The National Trust has substantial land ownership in three of the four Biosphere Reserves. These are all in England and include North Devon, the Isle of Wight and the Brighton and Lewes Down Biosphere Reserves. All three cover extensive areas of both land and sea with North Devon extending to include Lundy Island. Biosphere Reserves are designated not only to protect nature but also to explore and test ways that communities and the environment can exist in harmony.

Global Geoparks are the third of the landscape-scale UNESCO sites. These sites of international geological significance are managed by community-focused partnerships that celebrate heritage and support sustainable development, primarily through tourism based on landscape, geology and cultural heritage.

The National Trust is unique in having ownership spread across all three categories of UNESCO landscape-scale sites. This puts it in a good position to explore the integrated management of natural and cultural heritage, to promote sustainable development and work to tackle global challenges such as climate change and the decline in nature.

This report explores the National Trust's ownership and management of these internationally recognised sites. Its aim is to understand the relationship with UNESCO sites better and to challenge the organisation to lead the way in achieving great things for people, nature and heritage in these special places.

Sarah France, World Heritage Coordinator for Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal, National Trust



Research objectives

- **Address a gap in the National Trust's understanding of its landownership in UNESCO sites.** There is currently no directory or mapping which shows National Trust ownership across all UNESCO sites.
- **Collect and analyse information on how the National Trust contributes to the management of World Heritage Sites and other UNESCO sites.** The National Trust's input to the care of UNESCO sites is not well understood or recorded. By providing a comprehensive picture of how it is inputting to the management of sites through steering groups, partnership boards and management plans we can start to identify where the gaps are and how it can optimise its involvement and deliver greater public benefit.
- **Explore the value that the UNESCO designation brings to the National Trust and what the challenges are.** There are certainly extra costs and challenges around managing a UNESCO site, but the designation can also be of great value to the National Trust and the communities living, working and visiting its properties. The report will celebrate successes where the National Trust is delivering sustainable development and working proactively with partners to solve complex challenges.
- **Develop a set of recommendations for the National Trust and the UKNC on how they can work more closely together to deliver for people, nature and heritage in UNESCO sites.** This could have key learnings for other stakeholders in UNESCO sites, as well as the global network of National Trusts.




The National Trust and its role in UNESCO sites

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is the United Nations agency with global responsibility for protecting cultural heritage internationally. UNESCO has a UK National Commission based in London who are keen to work with key stakeholders in UNESCO sites, such as the National Trust, to explore how we can work more closely together to deliver the wider mission of UNESCO and explore the idea of UNESCO sites as exemplars of sustainable development. This idea is set out in the recently published 'Sites for Sustainable Development Report' and recently updated in the UKNC's forthcoming 'UNESCO Climate Action and Sustainability Framework Research Agenda'.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by all member states in 2015 and provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet. It sets out 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are an urgent call for action by all countries. The SDGs are a core priority for UNESCO and include climate action, life on land and water, health and wellbeing and gender equality.

The National Trust's purpose to protect our places 'for everyone, for ever' is aligned with this UNESCO vision. The National Trust was founded in 1895 to promote the permanent care of places of historic interest and natural beauty for the benefit of the nation. The core priorities for the National Trust up to 2035 are set out in our new strategy 'People and Nature Thriving'. At its core are three ambitious 2050 goals: to restore nature, to end unequal access to nature, beauty and history, and to inspire millions more people to care and take action. The work to deliver these objectives at all National Trust properties can make a valuable contribution to the global ambitions of UNESCO and delivery of the United Nations SDGs.

The following page sets out how the delivery of the National Trust's new strategy can play a role in achieving the United Nation SDGs.

National Trust Strategy – what we aim for by 2050	Contribution to delivery of UN SDGs
<p>Restore nature</p> <p>Restored natural processes, functioning ecosystems and expanded habitats have enabled nature to recover and flourish and have supported adaptation to a changed climate and environment.</p> <p>Society is resilient and sustained through a nature and climate-positive economy; we played our part in meeting UK carbon net zero.</p>	
<p>End unequal access to nature, beauty and history</p> <p>People enjoy universal access to high quality natural and historic places and feel the positive benefits in their everyday lives.</p> <p>This access creates a greater sense of belonging and connection with heritage (past, present and future) and greater appreciation of the heritage of others.</p>	
<p>Inspire millions more people to care and take action</p> <p>At least half the population care about nature, beauty and history.</p> <p>People have more nature, beauty and history in their lives; they understand, enjoy, use, and stand up for it.</p> <p>A nation more invested in nature and culture, for themselves and future generations.</p>	

1. National Trust ownership in UNESCO sites



Isle of Wight Biosphere, Newtown National Nature Reserve

What are the UNESCO landscape sites?

World Heritage Sites represent the diversity of our planet and the people who have lived on it. They show the development of human history over thousands of years and celebrate the best of who we are. They are ours to share, to cherish and to respect. Their disappearance would be an irreparable loss to humanity.

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. They include terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystems. Each site promotes solutions reconciling the conservation of biodiversity with its sustainable use.

Global Geoparks are single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with the holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development. Using its geological heritage, in connection with all other aspects of the area's natural and cultural heritage, to enhance awareness and understanding of key issues facing society such as climate change, sustainable use of resources and reducing natural hazard related risks.

Map: adapted from the Local to Global Map on the UKNC for UNESCO website and funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund and Britain is Great campaign. For more information, visit UNESCO's [interactive map](#).



Landownership in World Heritage Sites

There are currently 33 World Heritage Sites in the UK and 24 of these are in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The National Trust has significant land ownership in nine of the 24. It owns just over 500 square kilometres of land, making it one of the largest landowners of World Heritage Sites in the UK.

The World Heritage Convention 1972 was the first international treaty to bring together nature and culture and recognise the way people interact with nature. As landowners in a World Heritage Site the National Trust has responsibility under the World Heritage Convention and the accompanying World Heritage Operational Guidelines to preserve the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the WHS.

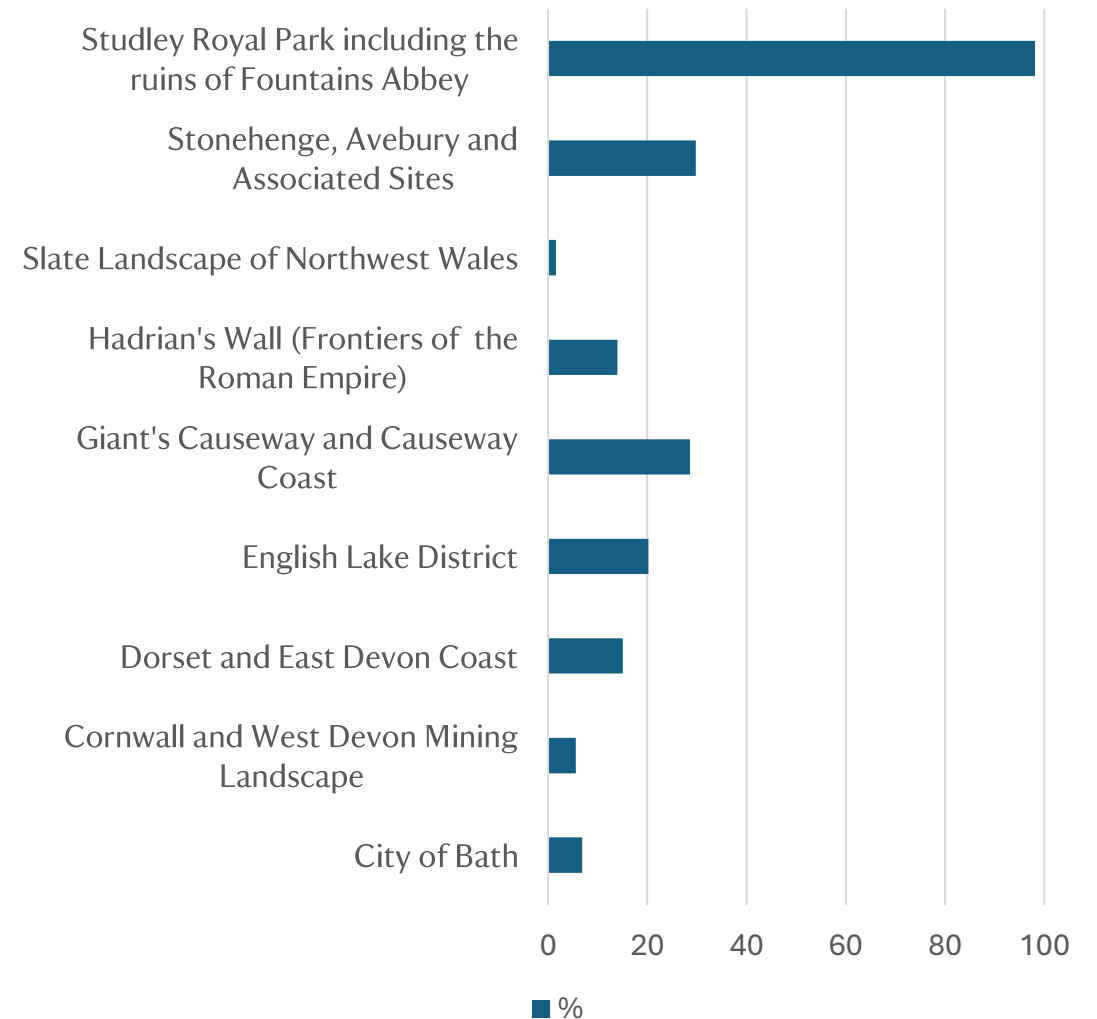
Most of the World Heritage Sites where the National Trust has ownership are cultural. The two natural sites are inscribed for their geological significance and include the Giant's Causeway and the Dorset and East Devon Coast.

Three of the seven cultural sites are categorised as cultural landscapes which are the combined works of nature and humans. The English Lake District, Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape and the Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales are in this sub-category.

As well as the land in National Trust ownership, it also has restrictive covenants over large areas of land that it doesn't own. In 1937 the National Trust was granted special power to hold covenants over land by parliament. Covenants are private legal agreements between the National Trust and landowners, made to protect the natural and historic features of land or buildings. There are restrictive covenants over land and buildings in the English Lake District for example.

Finally, the National Trust often owns property in the World Heritage Site buffer zones, such as at Chirk Castle which lies in the of Pontcysyllte Aqueduct buffer zone.

Area of the WHS in National Trust ownership (%)

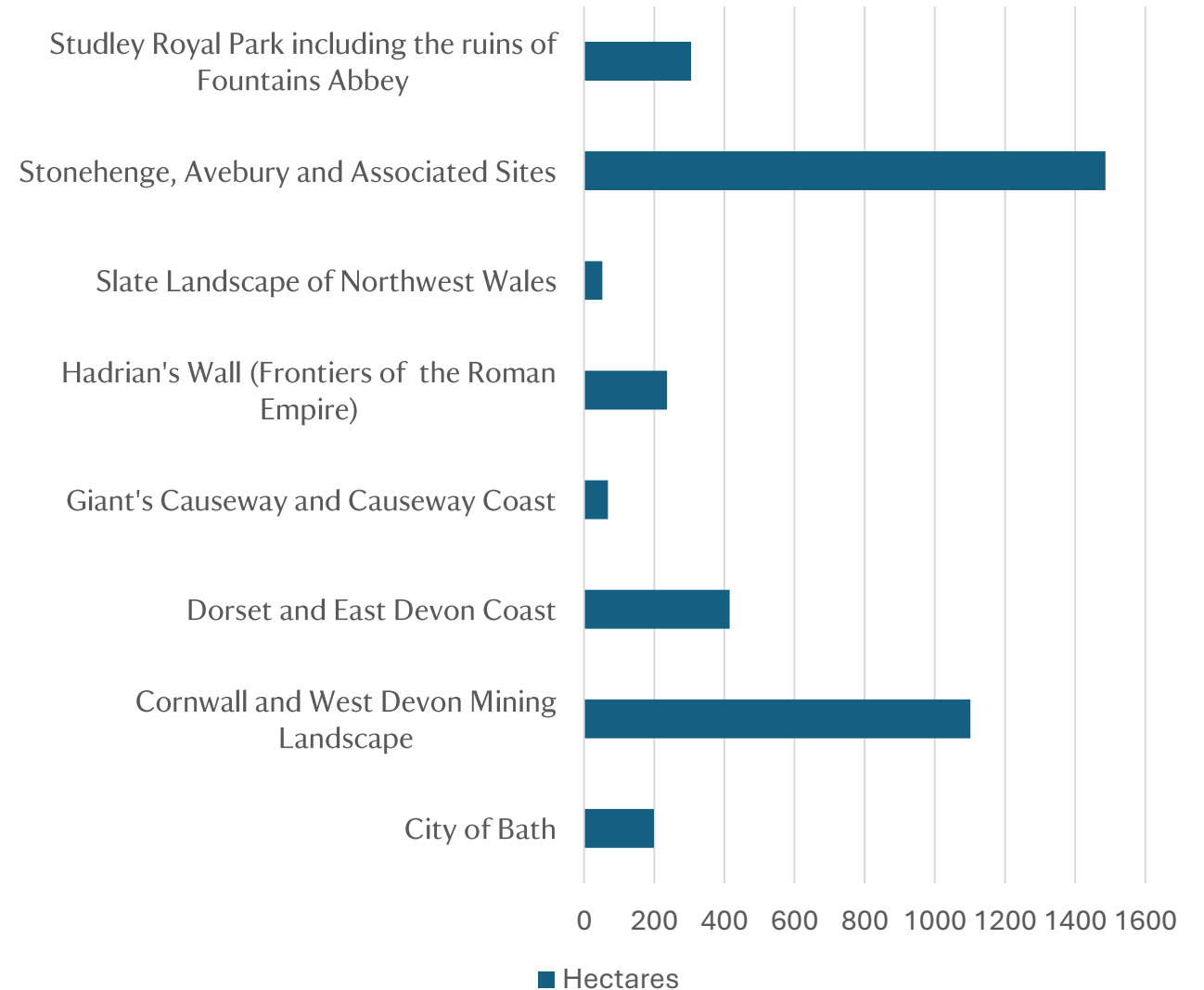


Key facts about the National Trust in the English Lake District

The National Trust ownership is so large in the English Lake District WHS that it merits its own focus so is not included in the table.

- The National Trust owns 46,259 hectares of land in the English Lake District World Heritage Site.
- When Beatrix Potter died in 1943, she left 14 farms and 4000 acres of land to the National Trust, together with her flocks of Herdwick sheep.
- The National Trust now owns 91 hill farms, most of which are tenanted.
- 24 lakes and tarns in the WHS are looked after by the National Trust including Wast Water, Buttermere and Crummock Water.
- The iconic mountains of Scafell Pike and Great Gable are cared for by the National Trust and most of the central fells.
- The formation of the National Trust is reflected in the World Heritage inscription. The very idea of the National Trust – and the conservation movement as a whole – came about because some influential Victorians, with the Lake District in mind, saw how important it was for the life of the nation to have places of calm and beauty that were protected.

Area of the WHS in National Trust ownership (hectares)



In all the World Heritage Sites where the National Trust owns properties, our places make a direct contribution to the Outstanding Universal Value of those sites.

Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast

The causeway is made up of around 40,000 massive black basalt columns extending out to sea. Geological studies show this landscape was caused by volcanic activity during the Tertiary, some 50 to 60 million years ago. The National Trust owns almost a third of the World Heritage Site and is the biggest landowner. This includes the causeway which is the main honeypot for visitors and the visitor centre and car park. The Trust also owns 15 miles of footpath along the coast. The remainder of the World Heritage Site is mostly marine.

Around 420,000 visitors a year come to the Giant's Causeway, making it one of the most visited properties in the National Trust.

'The collection of properties in World Heritage Sites is diverse – including ancient monuments and landscapes, industrial heritage, Georgian buildings and gardens and even the birthplace of the National Trust itself...'

Sarah France, World Heritage Coordinator for Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal



View across part of the Giant's Causeway, County Antrim

Dorset and East Devon Coast

The Dorset and East Devon Coast or the 'Jurassic Coast' as it's also known, is a hugely diverse and beautiful landscape underpinned by incredible geology. The rocks, fossils and landforms span the entire Mesozoic era and provide a remarkable insight into 185 million years of environmental change and evolution. The National Trust owns diverse landscapes and iconic landforms along the 95 miles of coastline covered by the World Heritage Site. To the east are the vast areas of sandy beach and heathland at Studland Bay and the old quarry site of Dancing Ledge at Spyway and Ringstead Beach. To the west are the towering sandstone cliffs and shingle of Hive Beach, part of Chesil Beach, the largest shingle ridge in the world.



Old Harry Rocks at Studland Bay, Dorset



Hadrian's Wall and Housesteads Fort

Hadrian's Wall (part of the Frontiers of the Roman Empire)

Hadrian's Wall is part of the Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site, a serial site which also encompasses the Antonine Wall in Scotland and the German Limes. As owner of Housesteads Fort and the surrounding landscape the National Trust is probably one of the largest single owners along the 188 kilometres long Hadrian's Wall. Housesteads Fort is part of the central section of the wall and the extensive remains of the fort are in an exceptionally good state of preservation. The wider landscape owned by the National Trust provides the setting to the fort and the wall itself and extends into the World Heritage Site buffer zone.

Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites

Stonehenge and Avebury are some of the most famous prehistoric monuments in the world, dating back over 5000 years. Stonehenge is the most sophisticated prehistoric stone circle in the world, while Avebury is the largest. These stone circles sit within extensive ceremonial landscapes.

As the single largest landowner, the Trust's property is spread across both areas of the World Heritage Site. Around 850 hectares of the downland at Stonehenge surrounding the standing stones is managed by the Trust for archaeology and nature. Visitors can discover the other prehistoric monuments including the Avenue and King Barrow Ridge with its Bronze Age burial mounds.

At Avebury, the National Trust cares for the vast and ancient stone circle and many of the other major monuments such as West Kennet Avenue and Windmill Hill causewayed enclosure. Although not part of the OUV the National Trust also owns Avebury Manor.



The Avenue at Avebury, Wiltshire



Towanroath Shaft engine house on the cliffs near St Agnes, Cornwall

Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape

The landscape of Cornwall and West Devon was transformed in the 18th and early 19th centuries as a result of the rapid growth of copper and tin mining. Substantial remains of the industry still survive in the landscape. The National Trust is the single largest landowner, owning just under 6% of the WHS, an area of 1100 ha. The WHS covers ten mining districts, and the National Trust owns land in five of them – St Just Mining District, Tregonning and Gwinear Mining District, Wendron Mining District, Camborne and Redruth with Wheal Peevor and Portreath, and St Agnes Mining District. A variety of features are in the care of the National Trust including the East Pool Mine and Levant Mine and Beam Engines and the houses and gardens of the mine owners such as Godolphin House and Cotehele with its Victorian quay. The Cornish coastline looked after by the National Trust provides the setting to the mining landscape and includes sections of the South West Coast Path which means visitors can easily access this dramatic coastline.



Penrhyn Castle, Gwynedd

The Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales

The Slate Landscape is one of the newest World Heritage Sites in the UK, inscribed on the list in 2021. One of two industrial WHSs where the Trust has property, it illustrates the transformation that slate quarrying and mining brought to the mountains and valleys of the Snowdon massif from the 1780s to the early 20th century. Although the National Trust's ownership is small – there are six components to the World Heritage Site and the Trust owns 52 hectares in one of them – what it does own is an integral part of the story of slate quarrying and is well located for telling that story. Penrhyn Castle was once the home of the Pennant family, at one time owners of Penrhyn Quarry, the largest slate quarry in the world. The castle is a vast Neo-Norman mansion, built by the Pennant family in the early 19th century and designed to make an impact on the surrounding landscape and communities who lived there. The property attracts 118,000 visitors a year.

‘Being part of the Slate Landscape World Heritage Site has allowed the Castle to partner with other organisations and be part of the wider narrative of North Wales and the world. It has opened new avenues for telling the vitally important industrial story linked with the Castle and its family.’

Ceri Williams, General Manager at Penrhyn Castle

City of Bath

The City of Bath is exceptional for having two UNESCO designations. In 1987 it was inscribed for its hot springs, Roman archaeology, Georgian buildings and natural landscape setting. In 2021 it was also designated as one of the Great Spa Towns of Europe. The National Trust owns 6% of the WHS, an area of 199 hectares. This includes the Bath Assembly Rooms which were the hub of fashionable Georgian life in 18th century Bath and the designed landscape of Prior Park with its beautiful Palladian bridge. The Trust also owns much of the Bath skyline which forms part of the green setting to the city.



The Palladian Bridge at Prior Park Landscape Garden, Somerset



The Wrestlers statue in Studley Royal Water Garden, North Yorkshire

Studley Royal Park including the ruins of Fountains Abbey

This was one of the first sites to be inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1986. It owes its originality and striking beauty to the fact that a humanised landscape was created around the largest medieval ruins in the United Kingdom. The use of these features and the planning of the water gardens is considered a masterpiece of human creative genius. The WHS is almost wholly owned by the National Trust with the abbey ruins being jointly managed with English Heritage. The site is one of the most popular in the National Trust, attracting around 600,000 visitors a year.

English Lake District

The largest World Heritage Site in the UK is the English Lake District – a landscape of exceptional beauty, shaped by persistent and distinctive agro-pastoralism and local industry which gives it a special character. The National Trust owns around 20% of the WHS which is an area of 46,206 hectares. It is responsible for caring for many of the attributes which give the WHS its OUV. These include many of the spectacular landscapes shaped by farming and industry, the farmsteads and farmhouses and the hefted sheep that graze on the fells and common land.

The WHS inscription also includes the landscapes and places which inspired the Picturesque, Romantic and early tourism movements, including villas and designed landscapes such as Wray Castle and Aira Force. The landscapes and places that inspired the global Landscape Conservation Movement are also part of the inscription. Quite uniquely, the establishment of the National Trust and its continuing role as a landowning Conservation Movement is recognised as an attribute of the site's OUV.

These landscapes and historic features are spread across four of the National Trust's property portfolios in the Lakes.



Wray Castle with a view across Lake Windermere, Cumbria

Landownership in Biosphere Reserves

There are four Biosphere Reserves in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and the National Trust has significant ownership in three of them. These are the North Devon Biosphere Reserve, the Brighton and Lewes Down Biosphere Reserve and the Isle of Wight Biosphere Reserve. Only a small area of land is owned by the Trust in Biosffer Dyfi and this is in the transitional zone so is not covered in this report.

The National Trust ownership in Biosphere Reserves is spread between the three zones of Biosphere Reserves. UNESCO defines the three zones as:

Core – this area is strictly protected and contributes to the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variations.

Buffer – this surrounds the core area and is used for activities which are compatible with sound ecological practices that can reinforce scientific research, monitoring, training and education.

Transitional – this is where communities foster socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable economic and human activities.

The zone where National Trust landownership sits influences its role in delivering biosphere objectives.

Area of the Biosphere Reserve in National Trust ownership (hectares)



England's Biospheres are part of a global network of 759 Biosphere Reserves spread across 136 countries. They are the world's only globally recognised designation for demonstrating excellence in sustainable development.

North Devon

The North Devon Biosphere Reserve extends from the heights of Exmoor and Dartmoor to the marine environment of the North Devon coast. The Biosphere Reserve covers a vast area of 380,140 ha which includes a large marine area encompassing the island of Lundy which is owned by the National Trust. Overall, the Trust owns around 1.2% of the Biosphere Reserve with most of our ownership sitting in the transition zone. The large inland Regency house and estate of Arlington lies in the transition zone along with extensive areas of coast including West Exmoor, Brownsham, Morte and Portledge which are all spread along the North Devon coast.



Guillemots on rock stacks at Lundy Island, Devon

Isle of Wight

In contrast to North Devon, in the Isle of Wight Biosphere Reserve most of the National Trust's ownership is in the very significant core and buffer zones. Although the Trust only owns 2.3% of the Biosphere Reserve, the areas of land are substantial with 965 hectares in the core and 1115 hectares in the buffer. The Biosphere Reserve covers the whole of the Isle of Wight and the surrounding marine area. The National Trust owns 17 miles of coastline including the Needles Headland and more than 2000 hectares of countryside. Newton is the only National Nature Reserve on the island and is managed by the National Trust and valued for its rich hay meadows and ancient woodlands.



The Needles, Isle of Wight



Chalk downland wildflowers at Devil's Dyke, South Downs

Brighton and Lewes Down

Also known as the 'Living Coast', the Biosphere Reserve is situated on the chalk hills and coast of the South Downs and includes the city of Brighton and Hove and neighbouring towns. The Biosphere includes rural, marine and urban environments and a large part of the South Downs. The National Trust owns 460 hectares of rare chalk grassland habitat at Saddlescombe and Devil's Dyke in the northern area of the Biosphere.

Landownership in Global Geoparks

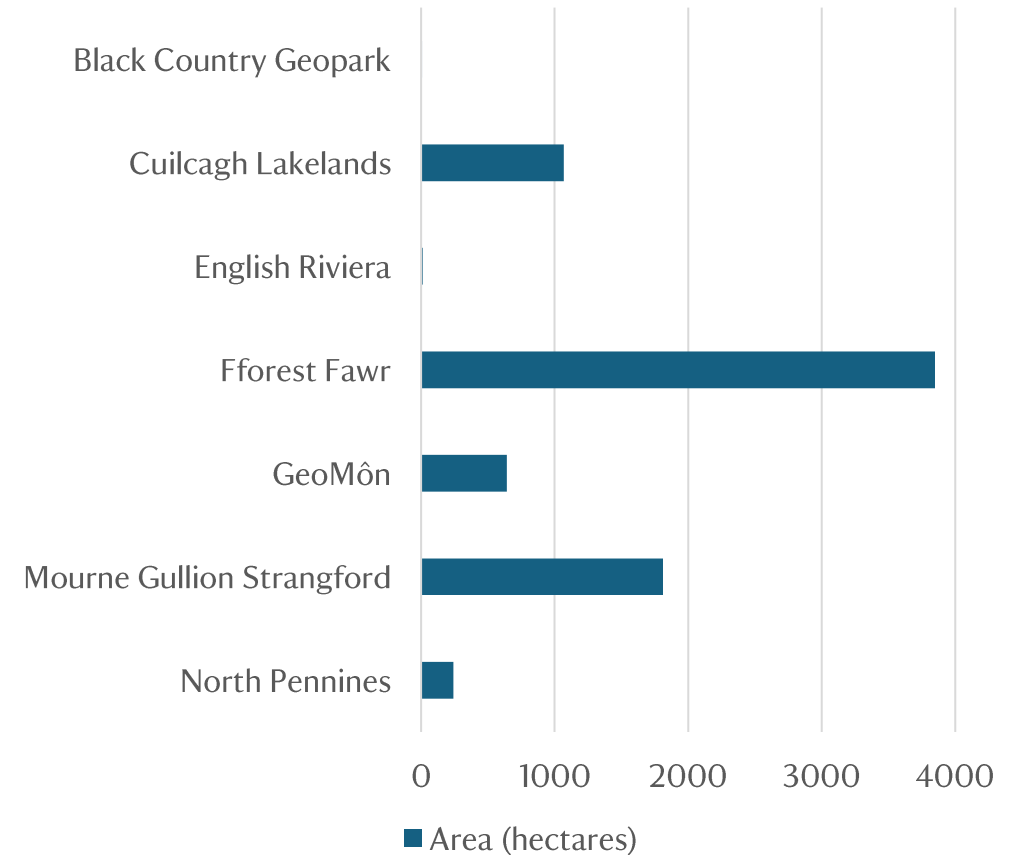
All ten of the UK's Global Geoparks have internationally significant geology, but what makes them special is that they are community-led partnerships that promote an appreciation of natural and cultural heritage while supporting the area's sustainable economic development - primarily through geological and eco-tourism.

The National Trust has ownership in seven of the ten Global Geoparks. In Fforest Fawr where it has the largest ownership, the 3847 hectares is around 5% of the total area of the Global Geopark. In GeoMôn the National Trust also has a substantial area of ownership although this is only 0.9% of the total area of the Geopark which covers the entire island of Anglesey.

For all the three sites in England the National Trust ownership is under 1%. Despite this low percentage in terms of ownership, the National Trust sites are often of geological significance or provide important visitor infrastructure and have the potential to play a role in the delivery of the Global Geopark objectives.

In Northern Ireland, large areas of both the Cuilcagh Lakelands and Mourne Gullion Strangford are cared for by the National Trust.

Area of the Global Geopark in National Trust ownership (hectares)



The Global Geoparks where the National Trust has ownership are spread across Northern Ireland, England and Wales. They include land in the only Transnational Geopark of Cuilcagh Lakelands which straddles Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

North Pennines

The North Pennines Global Geopark is one of the largest in the UK and shares a boundary with the North Pennines National Landscape. The National Trust owns 200 hectares at Allen Banks and Staward Gorge, on the northern edge of the Geopark. The deep gorge was formed by the River Allen and is the largest area of ancient semi-natural woodland in Northumberland. The site has a fascinating geological story to tell, marked by tropical seas and deltas, molten rock, glaciers and river processes. Remnants of Allen Banks and Staward Gorge's industrial past still survive in the landscape today. The gorge and surrounding woodlands are popular with walkers.



Visitors crossing a bridge at Allen Banks and Staward Gorge, Northumberland

Black Country

The geology in the Black Country is rich in industrial minerals. These minerals provided the ingredients to make iron and paved the way for an intense and very early part of the Industrial Revolution. Wightwick Manor is the only property in the Geopark owned by the National Trust. Built in the late 19th century for the Mander family, it was designed in the 'Old English Style'. The Mander family had made their wealth in paint manufacturing and by 1882, their paint and ink products were transported all over the world. Later generations of the family were keen collectors of art and other objects, and there is a display of erratic boulders in the gardens.



Wightwick Manor and Gardens, West Midlands



Porth Darfarch, Anglesey

GeoMôn

Covering the entire island of Anglesey in Wales the Geopark is of exceptional geological significance. It has some of the oldest fossils in England and Wales and more than 100 rock types from almost every Geological Period. This great variety of rocks has created landforms and seascapes with a spectacular coastline. The National Trust properties are all on the coast and include designated Regionally Important Geodiversity Sites (RIGS) such as the igneous dykes at Porth Dafarch. The cluster of National Trust properties on the north-west coast of Anglesey are all RIGS and include Cemaes Bay, Carreglwyd and Mynachdy and to the east is Fedw Fawr.

Fforest Fawr, Wales

The Geopark is situated in the western half of the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park in mid-Wales. The geological history spans 470 million years, with the soils derived from the underlying marine and terrestrial strata creating a rich flora and fauna. The limestone geology results in some of the UK's longest cave systems and extensive doline fields. The landscape was sculpted by glaciers during the last Ice Age to create the dramatic landforms seen today. The National Trust owns over 3000 hectares of the central area of the Brecon Beacons, including the highest peak of Pen Y Fan. The spectacular landscape of these mountains is the result of layer upon layer of Old Red Sandstone dating from around 370 million years ago. The mountains are popular with hill walkers and the National Trust car parks are well-used by visitors. The National Park Visitor Centre provides interpretation about the geological history of the landscape.



View of Cribyn from the summit of Pen Y Fan in the Brecon Beacons

Cuilcagh Lakelands, Northern Ireland and Ireland

The National Trust owns just over 1000 hectares of land in the Geopark which is the first transnational Geopark in the world. Most of this land is on the Crom estate which lies on the shores of Upper Lough Erne. Castle ruins, islands and parklands rich in wildlife make this a beautiful place to visit. The historic houses and estates of Castle Coole and Florence Court are also within the Geopark.



The Old Castle ruins at Crom, County Fermanagh



River flowing over granite boulders at Bloody Bridge, County Down

Mourne Gullion Strangford, Northern Ireland

Situated in the south-east of Northern Ireland, the Geopark includes three discrete upland areas. The National Trust acquired 553 hectares of the Mourne Mountains, including the highest peak of Slieve Donard, in 1991. The dramatic granite peaks are surrounded by sweeping lowlands. To the north of the Mournes is the national nature reserve of Murlough, a fragile 6000 year old dune system.

Strangford Lough, also owned by the National Trust, is the largest sea inlet in the UK and Ireland and internationally important for its wildlife. It is one of only three designated marine nature reserves in the UK. The Geopark is also celebrated for its rich archaeology and heritage. Many of the important prehistoric sites are looked after by the National Trust. The later 18th century mansion of Castle Ward on the banks of Strangford Lough is a popular attraction for visitors.



2. National Trust input to management of UNESCO sites

Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark, Slieve Donard, County Down, Northern Ireland

Current Governance models in UNESCO sites

Governance is how the National Trust input to decisions made about how UNESCO sites are managed. There is no single model for the governance of UNESCO sites, and this can make it difficult for National Trust property and regional teams to engage in their management.

The National Trust's input to management of UNESCO sites is not well understood holistically or recorded. By providing a comprehensive picture of how the organisation is currently inputting to management of sites through steering groups, partnership boards and management plans and strategies it should be possible to identify where the gaps currently are and address them.

World Heritage Governance

The National Trust is inputting to management across all nine World Heritage Sites through membership of partnership boards and steering groups. In properties where resources are already stretched it can be hard to find the time to attend the mix of partnership boards, steering committees and delivery groups. Participation at these meetings is felt to be important as these groups often make decisions affecting how the National Trust manages its land and delivers its strategy.

There is also a recognition across the wider World Heritage community that the mix of governance models and a lack of clarity on how decisions are made at some sites is a challenge. In 2024, in response to the UNESCO periodic reporting process, Historic England started a review of current governance models across the UK's World Heritage Sites.

See page 63 - The complexity of governance models in UNESCO sites



Aira Beck at Ullswater, Cumbria

The lead body managing the World Heritage Site varies across the nine sites:

National Trust It is only at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal WHS that the National Trust takes the lead role in management of the site. The Trust owns 98% of the WHS so has a clear mandate to make decisions on how the site is managed. The National Trust employs a World Heritage Coordinator who prepares the WHS management plan with the support of a steering group, which includes Historic England, English Heritage, North Yorkshire Council and ICOMOS (UK). There is a wider stakeholder group who work with the National Trust to develop and deliver the management plan.

Local Authority/National Park Authority In most sites where the National Trust owns land, management is led by the Local Authority or National Park Authority. These include the City of Bath WHS, Cornwall and West Devon Mining WHS, the Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales WHS and the English Lake District WHS. These WHSs all cover large areas with multiple landowners and stakeholders. It is therefore practical for the local authority to take the lead in their management. The partnership boards and steering groups usually have terms of reference, elected chairs and more formal voting mechanisms.

Independent Trusts In the last decade, small independent trusts have been set up to coordinate management in WHSs. This governance model can be seen at Hadrian's Wall and the Giant's Causeway. Until recently the Jurassic Coast Trust coordinated management of the Dorset and East Devon Coast WHS, but this small Trust has now stopped operating as it wasn't financially viable.

Mix of Local Authority and Public Body At Stonehenge and Avebury WHS, Wiltshire Council hosts the WHS Coordination Unit with Historic England, the National Trust and English Heritage also contributing towards its costs. Until 2014 the two components of the site were managed separately, with each having their own steering committee and management plan. There is now a single management plan covering the whole WHS, but the governance model is complex with an overarching partnership board, two steering committees and a research committee. This model represents a transition from the pre-2014 arrangements and is currently the subject of a review.

Governance of Biosphere Reserves

All the Biosphere Reserves in England and Wales are hosted by a local authority. This contrasts with World Heritage Sites where there is a mixture of organisations responsible for management of sites. This could be because unlike World Heritage Sites, which can be single-site focussed, they all cover large areas of both land and sea.

The **North Devon Biosphere Reserve** team is hosted and funded by Devon County Council with financial contributions from the constituent district councils. The team of ten is led by a Biosphere Reserve Manager. The North Devon Biosphere Reserve Partnership is the body responsible for coordinating, on behalf of the constituent local authorities and stakeholders, the management of the Biosphere Reserve. There is a partnership agreement which sets out how the partnership operates, and the chair is independently appointed.

The **Isle of Wight Biosphere Reserve** and **Brighton and Lewes Down Biosphere Reserve** have similar management models. Both are managed by a site manager sitting within the local council. The Isle of Wight Biosphere Reserve has a Strategic Environment Manager who has the biosphere within their remit while Brighton and Hove Council employ a programme manager dedicated to overseeing management of the Biosphere Reserve. This post is part-funded by a network of charities and organisations that form the partnership board so there is buy-in locally to the management of the UNESCO site. The board has representatives from a range of local and national organisations. The Isle of Wight Biosphere Reserve has a steering group with seven members appointed through a public recruitment process and the rest are local authority appointees, officers and local politicians.



The garden at Arlington Court, Devon

Governance of UNESCO Global Geoparks

Global Geoparks are co-ordinated locally through the establishment of a management body with legal recognition. This management body is responsible for the creation and oversight of a comprehensive management plan that involves local communities and authorities to ensure on-going protection, education, and sustainable development of geological heritage. These local efforts are part of the International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme (IGGP), overseen by the UNESCO Global Geoparks Council, which is responsible for the evaluation and revalidation of Geoparks. Revalidation is undertaken every four years.

As a consequence, governance will vary according to local circumstances. The **Black Country Global Geopark** is managed by a community-led partnership of the four Local Authorities: Dudley, Sandwell, Wolverhampton, and Walsall. The **Mourne Gullion Strangford Global Geopark** is also led by the local authority with oversight by the Geopark Management Group which includes community stakeholders, academic partners and representatives from statutory bodies. **Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark** is managed by governing bodies from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland working in cross-border co-operation.

Fforest Fawr Global Geopark, which sits within the Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) National Park, is governed by a partnership of public, private, and charitable sector organisations, with the National Park acting as the lead partner. Similarly, the **North Pennines Global Geopark** is governed by the North Pennines National Landscape Partnership, specifically the National Landscape team which is hosted by Durham County Council.

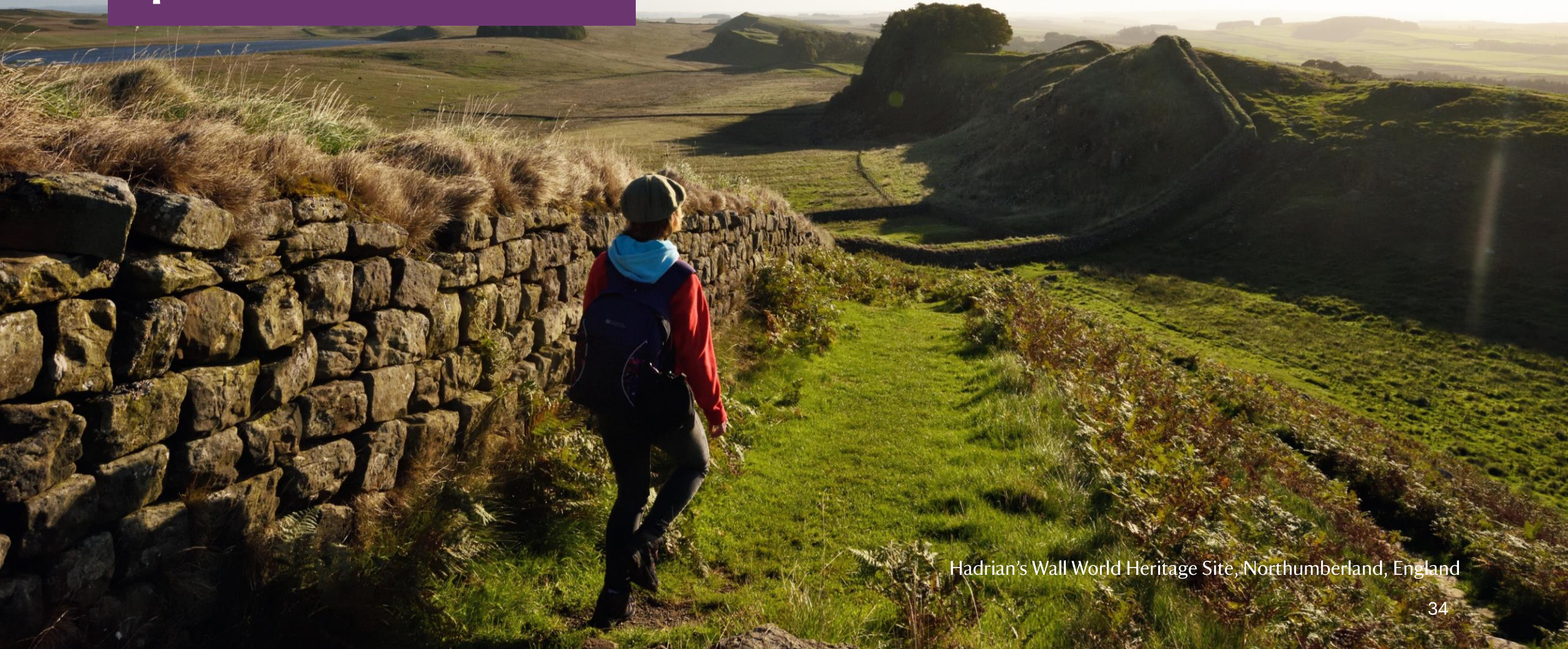
In contrast **GeoMôn Global Geopark** is volunteer led and overseen by a charitable Trust that brings together local people, geologists, businesses, university staff and community leaders.

There is no National Trust network for Global Geoparks or Biosphere Reserves so further research and discussion with staff on the ground is needed to establish what contribution the organisation is making to the management of these UNESCO sites.



National Trust Rangers and volunteers repairing the mountain footpath at Pen Y Fan

3. The value of being part of a UNESCO site



Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site, Northumberland, England

The value of the UNESCO designation to the National Trust

There is much debate nationally about the value of the UNESCO sites to the UK as a whole and to local communities. The question about the value or benefits of the World Heritage inscription to the National Trust properties which lie within them is a common question asked by our staff and volunteers, visitors and local communities. In 2007, the average World Heritage Site nomination process was estimated to cost around £500,000 according to the PricewaterhouseCoopers' LLP Report on the Costs and Benefits of World Heritage Site Status. To justify that level of investment, it's critical that world heritage inscription brings benefits to the local area and the communities who live there.

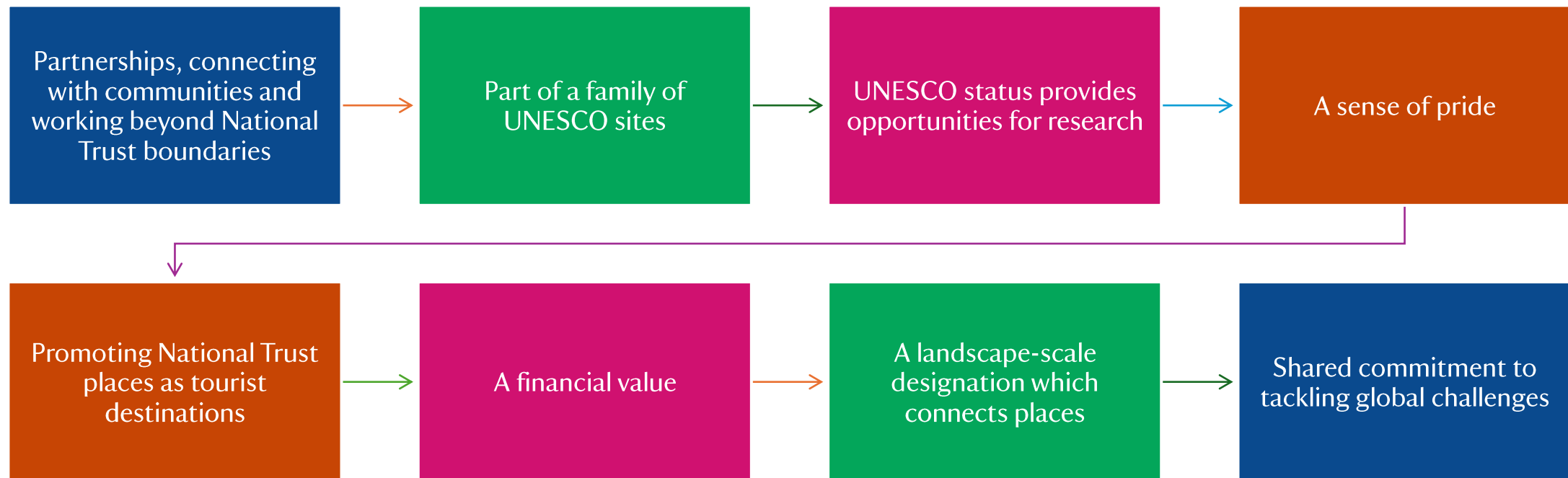
In all the World Heritage Sites where the National Trust own land or property the UNESCO site was inscribed after it acquired the land. The organisation's participation in the nomination process has increased since the inscription of Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal, Stonehenge and Avebury and the Giant's Causeway and Coast in 1986. Anecdotally, our participation was minimal at that time and the nomination reports were brief. This contrasts with the National Trust's active role in the partnership driving forward the English Lake District nomination in 2017.

The National Trust has a network for World Heritage Sites which includes the General Managers of properties in WHSs, archaeologists and planning advisers. Working together, the network developed a set of values that they felt the World Heritage inscription brought to the properties they manage. Discussions were also held with General Managers in the North Devon Biosphere Reserve and Brighton and Lewes Down Biosphere Reserve.



The garden at Arlington Court, Devon

Values of being part of a UNESCO site identified by the National Trust teams



Partnerships, connecting with communities and working beyond National Trust boundaries

UNESCO sites can provide a powerful mechanism for the National Trust to engage in wider partnership working. All UNESCO sites have some form of partnership board or steering group which is often hosted, funded and facilitated by a local authority or independent trust. When these work well, they provide a way for the organisation to work beyond the boundaries of its properties and deliver ambitious landscape-scale projects for nature recovery and climate change adaptation.

Management plans and nature recovery strategies are produced for all UNESCO sites. Developed with partners and local communities these can be a way to embed the National Trust's work within the wider community. They provide a structure within which organisations can work effectively to deliver projects. They can also be used as a tool for finding an agreed way forward for different and sometimes conflicting interests such as nature conservation and tourism.

Opportunities and connections offered by these partnerships also help the National Trust to engage with new audiences which is key goal of its new strategy 'People and Nature Thriving'. The strategy seeks to end unequal access to nature, beauty and history. One priority focusses on urban places and addressing unequal access to the outdoors. Through working in partnerships with others the Trust aims to increase access to parks and green spaces in and around urban areas. Another part of the strategy is the delivery of 20 new green corridors across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Work is currently underway to develop green corridors in the City of Bath World Heritage Site and the Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site.

Case Study – Working collaboratively to develop and deliver the Lake District Partnership Plan

The English Lake District was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 2017. The National Trust looks after 20% of the WHS which includes the countryside, buildings and designed landscapes. The site is inscribed under the 'cultural landscape' category and includes the start of the global Conservation Movement and the birthplace of the National Trust in the Lake District.

The National Trust has been part of the Lake District National Park Partnership for many years. This partnership covers both the National Park and the World Heritage Site as the boundaries are contiguous. The Lake District Partnership Plan is an exemplar of how different stakeholders and organisations can be brought together to agree a management plan which sets out a vision and policies for every aspect of site management. The plan can be used to help inform strategic decisions within the National Trust as it provides a vision and actions across all its land ownership in the Lakes.

“The Lake District Partnership Plan is the best single piece of conservation management planning I have ever seen.”

Jamie Lund, National Trust Regional Archaeologist covering the Lake District



Case Study – Delivering the Skell Valley Project in the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal World Heritage Site

Flooding and siltation caused by the River Skell are the biggest threats to the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal World Heritage Site. The river's natural course was altered in the 12th century to build the abbey and power the corn mill and again in the 18th century to create the cascades, ornamental ponds and lakes that sit at the heart of the Studley Royal water garden. The WHS has experienced more frequent and severe flooding in recent years because of climate change.

In 2015, the National Trust World Heritage Coordinator, as part of preparation of the World Heritage Management Plan, brought together Historic England, the Environment Agency, Nidderdale National Landscape and the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust to look at management solutions to address these threats. The Skell Valley Project was born out of these discussions. Working with communities and other partners highlighted the need for the project to address wider challenges not just around climate change but also the decline in nature, threats to heritage and the barriers people face in accessing nature and the outdoors.

In 2021, working alongside Nidderdale National Landscape the National Trust made a successful bid to The National Lottery Heritage Fund for a grant of £1.4M towards the £2.5M project costs. The project was also supported by the European Regional Development Fund, Wolfson Foundation, Royal Oak Foundation and other donors.

The project team worked with fifteen farmers upstream to plant woodlands and hedges, create wetlands and construct woody debris dams. All of these measures slow the flow of the river during periods of heavy rainfall, improve water quality and create habitats for wildlife. Communities, including local schools, helped to monitor the wildlife in the river, record ancient and veteran trees and research the history of the landscape and its management. New footpaths and trails encourage people to explore, enjoy and learn about the heritage of the valley while at the same time improving wellbeing. Delivery of the project finished in May 2025 and looking at the legacy is now a priority.

“Fountains itself is truly unique, its significance unquestioned. Studley Royal is one of the finest water gardens in the world and Fountains Abbey one of the most spectacular ruins in the country. What is also unique is the deep relationship between the heritage and the river. The garden would not exist without the Skell, but the Skell can at times threaten its very existence.”

Sarah France, World Heritage Coordinator for Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal, National Trust



Flood events at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal are increasing in frequency as a result of climate change. The River Skell which flows through the World Heritage Site becomes inundated during heavy rainfall, leaving a path of silt and debris in its wake.

Partnerships, connecting with communities and working beyond National Trust boundaries

Case Study – Connecting urban communities with nature through green corridors in the City of Bath WHS and Durham Castle and Cathedral WHS

Looking after urban places continues to be a core part of the National Trust's Strategy. The aim is to benefit people who live in the UK's towns and cities by helping to provide more access to green spaces. Only 2% of National Trust properties are located within urban areas so this can only be achieved by working in partnership with others. A key part of the strategy is the delivery of 20 new green corridors across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The overall aim of the work is to address unequal access to nature, beauty and history focussed in and around towns and cities. The green corridors will also benefit wildlife, allowing movement from one habitat to another.

Crook Hall Gardens is one of the National Trust's most recent property acquisitions and lies just on the edge of Durham city centre. Although Crook Hall is outside the Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site, it has lovely views across the river to the castle and cathedral. The team at Crook Hall is working with the local council, communities and the Durham World Heritage Site Coordinator to develop the Durham City Green Corridor.

In Bath, the National Trust has worked with local partners and communities, including the World Heritage team at Bath City Council, to create a green corridor linking Bath's historic city to the surrounding countryside. A three-mile route through Bathampton Meadows revives the Georgian trend of walking and enjoying countryside views, something that was prescribed by doctors in the 18th century. The Bath corridor will provide foraging habitats for Greater Horseshoe Bats, wetland habitats for wading birds and an increased number of wildflowers for pollinators.



View to Durham Cathedral from Crook Hall Gardens

Partnerships, connecting with communities and working beyond National Trust boundaries

Case Study – Delivering the Changing Chalk project in the Brighton and Lewes Down Biosphere Reserve

The ancient chalk grasslands of the South Downs are an internationally rare habitat supporting a rich diversity of plants and wildlife. Chalk grassland, rich in orchids once covered large swathes of the South Downs. Over the years this habitat has disappeared, initially because of over intensive farming after the Second World War and then shrub encroachment due to under-grazing. The grassland now covers only 4% of the South Downs.

The National Trust is leading the Changing Chalk project to protect these habitats for the future, enabling more people to enjoy them and be involved in their care. The project is nearing completion and is being delivered in partnership with the team from the Biosphere Reserve and 11 other organisations.

On the National Trust's land at Devil's Dyke, the delicate balance between scrub and the ancient chalk grassland is being restored. Several partners are working with local farmers to support grazing regimes that maintain this balance. The partnership with the Biosphere Reserve team has also been invaluable in connecting people with nature in the urban area of the Biosphere Reserve. The 'Greening the City' part of the Changing Chalk project brings the wildflowers of the Downs into the heart of Brighton and Hove. Locally-sourced and sown wildflowers are providing vital habitat stepping stones for local native pollinators and invertebrates.

The project has helped young people feel a stronger connection to the chalk grasslands while learning new skills for work and life through the 'Find your Future' programme. On the eight-week programme, young people not currently in education, employment or training learnt about the history and nature of the Downs and developed new countryside skills such as scrub bashing, path clearance, repairing and replacing fence posts to secure fields for grazing cows and installing new stiles to improve public access.

The project is funded by a £2.23M National Lottery Heritage Fund grant, the People's Postcode Lottery and the Linbury Trust.



Changing Chalk initiative within the Brighton and Lewes Down Biosphere Reserve

Partnerships, connecting with communities and working beyond National Trust boundaries

Case Study - Wightwick Manor and the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark

Every National Trust property is part of a larger landscape and wider story. Making connections between sites and between stages of history that have shaped a place (geological, biological and human) enriches the story at these sites. In the West Midlands, a number of deeper connections are being made.

At Wightwick Manor a family of Victorian industrialists (the Mander Family) acquired the estate in 1887. They established a grand family home and landscaped gardens. This property is sited on the northern slope of the Wightwick Wedge and Smestow Valley Geosite within the Black Country Global Geopark. Whilst landscaping they unearthed numerous curious large boulders of granite and other volcanic rocks that are not naturally found in the area – glacial erratics originating from southern Scotland and the English Lake District WHS. Members of the Mander family took an interest in these glacial boulders arranging many of them in the walls and as a landscape feature in the orchard.

The Black Country Geopark team has been working with the Wightwick Manor National Trust team to restore and interpret the Mander erratic boulder collection. The boulders project is creating a useful dialogue between the site staff, the local community (in particular the Black Country Geological Society) initiating considerable research into this under interpreted aspect of the estate's rich history. It's also sharing geodiversity knowledge and geoconservation skills with the National Trust's site staff.

More widely, connecting through a shared geology of underlying red Triassic desert sandstones, the Geopark team is working with National Trust properties outside the geopark including Kinver Rock Houses and Dudmaston Estate.

Interpretation materials are being developed and walking and cycling routes planned that connect these properties through an ice age storyline based around the glacial boulders and a scorching deserts storyline connected to the underlying sandstone landscape. The latter is part of the National Trust Sandscapes project, a nature recovery initiative that is reconnecting sandy habitats and the landscape of Shropshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire.



Erratic display at Wightwick Manor

Case Study - Wightwick Manor and the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark

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A landscape scale designation that connects places

World Heritage Sites, Biosphere Reserves and Global Geoparks all recognise the significance of places at a landscape-scale, as well as at a site level. Many of the UNESCO sites bring together a collection of protected sites. In Biosphere Reserves, such as North Devon, this can include an array of nationally and locally designated sites that protect nature including Marine Conservation Zones, Local Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The Nature Recovery Plan 2021-2025 for the North Devon Biosphere Reserve recognises how well placed the UNESCO site is to deliver nature recovery across the core, buffer and transition zones of the site, ensuring a holistic ecosystem-based approach to reversing the decline in nature.

The Frontiers of the Roman Empire (Hadrian's Wall) and Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Sites both include many scheduled monuments and archaeological sites within their boundaries. The World Heritage Site designation provides a model for managing these sites at a landscape-scale, recognising how the individual sites function together within the landscape.

Inscribed in 2021, the Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales brings together six geographically separate landscapes associated with slate quarrying into a single World Heritage Site covering all elements of the slate industry. These include Penrhyn Castle, now owned by the National Trust which was built by the wealthy Pennant family in the 19th century. The Pennant family owned the Penrhyn Quarry which was at one time the largest quarry in the world. The WHS also includes the quarry workers villages, the transport links that carved their way through the mountains to connect the quarries to the purpose-built ports on the coast. The WHS Interpretation Strategy aims to set out the whole story of the slate heritage, connecting communities and places.

Case Study – Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site

“Stonehenge is one of the UK’s most contested landscapes. The National Trust has owned and cared for the sites and monuments surrounding the Stones for almost a century. During that time, we have faced many challenges. Foremost amongst them in recent decades has been the presence of the A303 scything its way through the landscape.

When the most recent proposals to dual the existing road came forward in 2013 the framework provided by agreed approaches to WHS management enabled us to find common ground with partners. It served as a platform to influence the scheme’s promoters to deliver a design that benefited people and protected the landscape. None of this would have been possible without a shared understanding of the special qualities, or attributes, that make up the Outstanding Universal Value of the WHS.

Without the WHS status the approach to protecting the Stonehenge Landscape in delivering this nationally significant infrastructure project would have been atomised into impacts on individual sites and monuments. Although the government eventually chose to withdraw funding for the scheme, it serves as an object lesson in how WHS designation can enable a holistic approach to the care and management of our landscapes.”

Nick Snashall, National Trust Archaeologist covering Stonehenge and Avebury WHS



A sense of pride

The UNESCO designation gives a global stamp of acknowledgement of the importance of the heritage in the National Trust's care and can be a great source of pride for staff and volunteers at properties. At Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal, the staff and volunteers are champions for the WHS and play a vital role in conserving the site, welcoming visitors and talking about the World Heritage Site status and values. The activities and work going on at site include:

- Organising regular inductions for all our new staff and volunteers to raise awareness of the World Heritage Site status so that everyone is confident in talking about it to visitors.
- Working with local refugee groups to promote the free entry policy that the National Trust has for refugees from Ukraine, Syria and other countries and undertaking partnership work to facilitate work placements and explore future workshops and exhibitions in the WHS.
- Branding all our vehicles and staff and volunteer uniforms to read 'Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal – a World Heritage Site' and mentioning the UNESCO World Heritage Site status on all our welcome signage across the property and any press releases.
- Explaining our World Heritage Site status to visitors through interpretation panels in the visitor centre courtyard that encourage visitors to explore the site, daily guided tours led by volunteers and a day of World Heritage activities on the annual World Heritage Day.
- Ensuring a high quality of signage and other visitor infrastructure to ensure the WHS is presented to a high standard for visitors.

The National Trust team has also worked with visitors and the local community living around the WHS and in the nearby City of Ripon to build on the sense of pride that already exists in having a WHS on their doorstep. One small example is the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal parkrun which attracts around 400 runners a week, recently voted top parkrun in the country in the 'Ultimate Guide to Parkrun'.



Runners setting off on their weekly Parkrun past Fountains Abbey

“The scenery is spectacular at this World Heritage Site, set in a secluded valley and deer park... Many say it is the most beautiful parkrun they have ever done.”

Lucy Waterlow in the 'Ultimate Guide to Parkrun'

Part of a family of UNESCO sites

The UK National Commission for UNESCO works to strengthen the network and build the capacity of UNESCO-designated sites across the UK. It works in coordination with organisations such as World Heritage UK, the UK Global Geoparks Committee, and the UK Man and the Biosphere Committee, which support their respective networks. Together, these bodies play complementary roles in enhancing the capacity, visibility, and impact of the UK's UNESCO sites.

The UK National Commission (UKNC) for UNESCO was founded in 1946 by the UK Government and established under UNESCO's Constitution. The organisation supports the UK's contribution to UNESCO and brings the benefits of UNESCO to the UK. It is the central hub for all UNESCO-related matters within the UK. It has all UNESCO sites within its remit including World Heritage Sites, Biosphere Reserves, Global Geoparks and Creative Cities.

World Heritage UK (WHUK) is the only organisation exclusively focused on World Heritage in the UK and is led by the World Heritage Sites themselves. It was founded in 2015 as a development of the Local Authority World Heritage Forum. It is an independent organisation largely run by volunteers and represents the 35 UK WHSs, the majority of which are members.

For over ten years both Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal WHS and Giant's Causeway and Coast WHS have been active members of WHUK. The General Managers have sat as trustees of the organisation and the World Heritage Coordinator at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal attends the meetings, workshops and conferences. The WHUK network is member based and an excellent way to work with all the site managers across the UK to get support and share learning on the management of WHSs. WHUK is totally dependent on membership fees and currently the National Trust contributes through the three sites that are part of the network. The National Trust team in the English Lake District WHS have just joined.

The conferences and workshops in recent years have had themes varying from industrial heritage to climate change and the regular online coordinator meetings provide opportunities to share experiences around issues like planning and the six yearly cycle of UNESCO periodic reporting. WHUK also includes specialist groups such as the WHUK climate emergency network which has been invaluable in sharing knowledge and approaches to tackling climate change and raising the profile of this crisis within the wider world heritage community.

In the last five years the UKNC has been taking a greater role in supporting the wider family of UNESCO sites across the UK. They support all 58 UNESCO sites in the UK, including the World Heritage Sites, Biosphere Reserves and Global Geoparks, but also the Creative Cities. They are currently leading the Local to Global strategic investment programme (see page 46) and the Climate Change and UNESCO Heritage project (see page 53).

Case study – Local to Global strategic investment programme, UK National Commission for UNESCO

Local to Global is an ongoing programme of work that aims to build a more resilient and adaptive network of UNESCO Sites in the UK. It is the result of a long-term relationship with The National Lottery Heritage Fund, beginning in 2020. Support from National Lottery players has significantly enhanced UKNC's financial and human capacity to facilitate reflexive and meaningful engagement across the UK's network of UNESCO Sites.

With a network that covers 14% of the UK's landmass, the programme investigates how UNESCO Sites localise global challenges and works with them to globalise local solutions. Successful outputs include:

Promotion and inclusion – to redress low levels of awareness of UNESCO sites in the UK, Visit Britain and GREAT Challenge Fund collaborated with us on the "Discover the UK's UNESCO Sites" summer 2023 campaign. For the first time, all land-based UNESCO designations in the UK were brought together in a beautifully illustrated interactive map – showcasing the worldclass nature, culture and heritage often found on our doorsteps. The campaign was translated into seven languages and reached millions worldwide, thanks in huge part to a coordinated marketing effort from the network that drove organic online audience engagement. Click [here](#) for more details.

Horizon scanning and future techniques – the introduction of annual in-person workshops for UNESCO sites at six locations across the UK has been a gamechanger. They have facilitated deliberative democratic processes that identify opportunities for the UKNC to adapt the way we work through collaboration and asset based thinking. The model has since been introduced to other UNESCO networks worldwide such as Estonia. Click [here](#) for more details.

Part of a family of UNESCO sites

“Importantly, Local to Global doesn't stand still. The programme shares similar values of the National Trust's strategy: continually renewing our ways of working to increase access to the UK's worldclass nature, culture and heritage and inspiring more people to care and take action. The programme will iteratively evolve as we work in partnership with the National Lottery Heritage Fund to strengthen and deepen our understanding of the UK's UNESCO Network.”

Liam Smyth, Programme Lead – 'Local to Global'



Partnerships, connecting with communities and working beyond our boundaries

Case study – Local to Global strategic investment programme, UK National Commission for UNESCO continued:

Digital learning resources – a new website was developed for the UKNC in 2025, containing a resource centre which houses newly created digital resources such as factsheets for each UNESCO Site, and toolkits that promote best practice in audience development, fundraising, and digital engagement. Click [here](#) for more details.

Community grants – the UKNC are now administering a series of seed awards that support a community of practice amongst UNESCO Sites in the UK. In 2026 the grants will prototype new ideas that foster devolved decision making and empower the network to find collaborative solutions to shared challenges.

New research – in partnership with Creative PEC, the UKNC will be co-commissioning a new piece of research that assesses the value generated by multi-stakeholder partnerships. This will hold important implications for how we continue to cultivate networks and collaborative innovation at local, national and international levels.



Visitors walking on basalt columns at the Giant's Causeway

Promoting National Trust places as tourist destinations

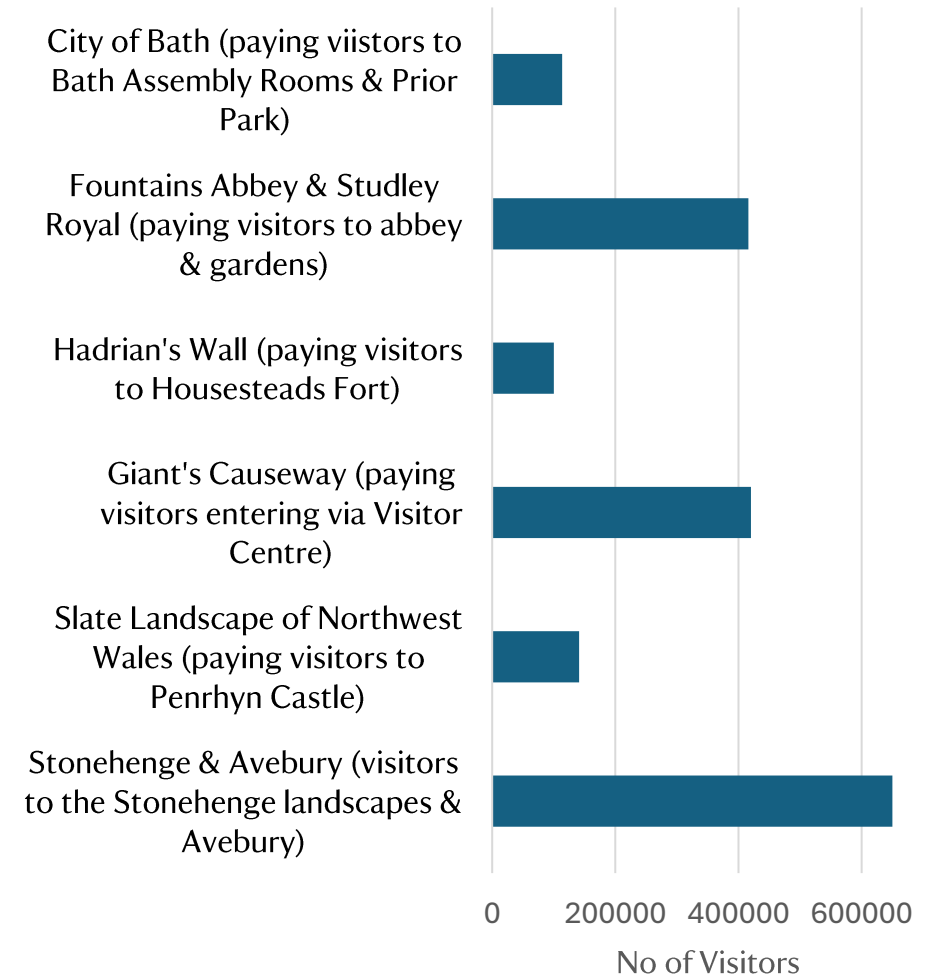
All the places owned by the National Trust in World Heritage Sites, Biosphere Reserves and Global Geoparks are popular visitor attractions. The properties in World Heritage Sites are some of the most visited places in the National Trust, attracting both domestic and international visitors. The income generated from visits is vital for funding conservation work and visitor infrastructure across the National Trust.

Recognition by the global community of the World Heritage Site status has a high value for sites like the Giant's Causeway and Coast, which attracts an international audience and has a global reputation. Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal also attracts more international visitors than other National Trust properties locally and the properties in the English Lake District such as Hill Top - Beatrix Potter's holiday home - attract tourists from all over the world. The National Trust doesn't have the data collection processes in place at all its sites to be able to monitor the number of international visitors, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the World Heritage Sites in particular, attract more visitors from abroad than other National Trust properties.

However, this doesn't always translate into additional income for National Trust properties in World Heritage Sites. In places like the Dorset and East Devon coast where the National Trust principally own beaches and coast the main means of income generation is the car parks. At Stonehenge where the National Trust looks after the landscape and archaeological sites surrounding the Stones, and Avebury where a village lies in the middle of the Stone Circles, these sites are free for visitors to access. In these areas securing financial resources to look after these sites remains challenging.

The National Trust was hit hard financially by the Covid pandemic and visitor numbers are still down on those before the pandemic. This particularly affected sites like Giant's Causeway and Coast which relied on international tourism. The table gives a broad picture of visitor numbers to National Trust properties in World Heritage Sites.

Visitor Numbers to National Trust properties in WHSs
2024



A financial value

One of the key findings of 'The National Value of UNESCO designations to the United Kingdom Report' was the financial value that UNESCO sites bring to the UK – a minimum of £151M of financial benefit a year. This financial value can be connected to the role the UNESCO brand can play in promoting both international and domestic tourism but also the power of the stamp of international significance in supporting fundraising in UNESCO sites. The Trust is leading two large National Lottery Heritage Fund projects – the Skell Valley Project in the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal World Heritage Site and Changing Chalk in the Brighton and Lewes Down Biosphere Reserve. At Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal the World Heritage status helped demonstrate to the National Lottery that the grant would protect a site of the highest heritage significance.

These are just some of the grants received over the last five years at National Trust properties within UNESCO sites:

Skell Valley Project in the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal WHS – A National Lottery Heritage Fund grant of £1.4M to protect the World Heritage Site from flooding and engage communities in heritage and nature along the valley. Case study is on page 38.

Changing Chalk project in the Brighton and Lewes Down Biosphere Reserve – A National Lottery Heritage Fund grant of £2.23M to restore the rare chalk grassland and connect urban communities to the nature, beauty and history of the surrounding landscape. Case study is on page 41.

Fix the Fells project in the English Lake District WHS – The Fix the Fells appeal by the National Trust raises money from donations to improve footpaths across the Lake District fells. The fundraising message on the National Trust website uses the UNESCO World Heritage Site status to emphasise what a precious landscape the Lakes is.

North Devon Riverlands Project in North Devon Biosphere Reserve - £554,000 of funding was secured from the Government's Species Survival Fund to enhance the quality of freshwater habitats in the area. The project has improved carbon sequestration and water quality and increased biodiversity of the wide range of species that rely on wetland habitats to survive.



Pond created as part of North Devon Riverlands Project

Shared commitment to tackling global challenges

Conservation is at the heart of the National Trust's cause 'for everyone, forever' and tackling climate change is one of its top priorities. Climate change is also one of the greatest threats to UNESCO sites. There is work going on across the UK and internationally to formulate guidance, models and good practice on how to protect sites and properties for future generations and how UNESCO sites can be exemplars that others can learn from.

The National Trust in the UK can share good practice and learn from heritage sites across the world through the International National Trusts Organisation (INTO). This is a separate organisation but embedded within the National Trust structure. Its purpose is to bring the global National Trust family together to share knowledge and tools for the protection of cultural and natural heritage. INTO has a 'Places' programme which allows sites across the world to enjoy access to other heritage sites which are part of the network and runs exchange programmes between sites.

This work that INTO is delivering can contribute to UNESCO's global priorities which are Africa and Gender Equality. The UNESCO Operational Strategy for Priority Africa 2022-2029 has five flagship programmes. Programme Five is focussed on using science and innovation to tackle challenges like climate change and water resource management in Africa. One of the main objectives is to prevent risks and enhance resilience and adaptive capacity to climate change and disasters. The National Trust and INTO are delivering this objective through the 'Withstanding Change: Heritage amongst climate uncertainty' project. This connects places in Africa with National Trust properties in the UK to share learning about climate change adaptation.

Through INTO and the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU), the Rwenzori Mountains National Park WHS in Uganda and the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal WHS in England were able to share knowledge, skills and practical tools on protecting cultural heritage against climate change.



CCFU and Skell Valley Project visit to Uganda's Rwenzori Mountains in December 2022

Case Study - Withstanding Change: Heritage amongst climate uncertainty

The Withstanding Change project connects sites in the Middle East and Africa and the UK to share learning on the effects of climate change on built heritage. The project is supported by INTO and funded by the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund. Each of the sites involved is paired with a National Trust property so they can share knowledge. Exhibitions and interpretation have been developed at each place to engage local communities in the project.

Penrhyn Castle, a component of the Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales World Heritage Site and owned by the National Trust, has been paired with the Stone Town of Zanzibar which was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 2000. Penrhyn Castle is within striking distance of both the mountains of Eryri and the Menai Strait. This location means the property is susceptible – as are all coastal areas – to the impacts of climate change. Increased rainfall and the frequency and severity of storms are both damaging the built fabric of the castle.

Penrhyn Castle has been twinned with the Stone Town of Zanzibar, an outstanding example of a Swahili trading town. Arab, Indian and European influences are visible in the 18th and 19th century buildings, including the Old Customs House. The Stone Town is at significant risk from sea level rise as well as more frequent tropical cyclones, flooding and coastal erosion. The Old Customs House sits on the seafront and is constantly exposed to increasing humidity and sea salt spray which deteriorates its lime render and corrodes metallic building elements like the corrugated iron roof. Increased out-of-season rainfall is preventing the walls from drying out and leading to growth of algae, as well as deterioration of timber elements in the building.

Shared commitment to tackling global challenges

Zanzibar Stone Town Heritage Society has worked closely with their local communities to upskill people with traditional heritage skills. This approach to engagement and learning is of particular interest to the National Trust team at Penrhyn Castle.

“The twinning arrangement between Zanzibar Stone Town Heritage Society and the National Trust’s sites from North Wales will strengthen the climate adaptations of these sites in Zanzibar and United Kingdom. We’re learning together through networking, data and information sharing, experience sharing, working with diverse communities, and jointly developing new approaches on climate change adaptation and resilience measures using traditional and advanced methodologies.”

Hoshil Dhanji and Makame Juma of Zanzibar Stone Town Heritage Society



Old Customs House, Zanzibar



Penrhyn Castle, Gwynedd

Case study – Climate Change and UNESCO Heritage (CCUH) project, UK National Commission for UNESCO

Between February 2024 and July 2025, the UKNC delivered the Climate Change and UNESCO Heritage (CCUH) project, in partnership with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and funded by HM Treasury's Shared Outcomes Fund.

CCUH worked with three UNESCO designations across the UK to use natural and cultural heritage as a way to bring people together to co-design and test approaches to addressing interconnected challenges, such as climate change. The three pilot sites, all including National Trust owned assets (North Devon Biosphere Reserve; Fforest Fawr Global Geopark; Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site) worked with local partners, communities, and national expert consultants to test and produce a suite of accessible, reusable tools and resources in three areas of work:

Data tools and resources

Building tools to identify, share and understand data and knowledge more effectively, including the identification of common threats and opportunities presented by a changing climate. Proof of concept tools have been co-developed and tested within real-world environments and at landscape scale, with open source code supported by project learning to be made available to support wider adoption and use. This includes a proof of concept interactive Threats and Opportunities Dashboard, which builds on the UKNC's Sites for Sustainable Development Report (2022) methodology to interrogate participating designation responses across 13 categories, providing clear information on threats, opportunities and climate change hazards at a

Shared commitment to tackling global challenges

national level and/or by designation type, as well as showing areas of inter-designation commonalities to support collaborative action.

Creative approaches to stakeholder identification and engagement

Using creative practice and storytelling to identify community perspectives at a local level and supporting meaningful engagement through the development of a reusable, modifiable engagement toolkit for others to access.

Participatory engagement and decision making

Working with UCL's Climate Action Unit to develop and trial ways to bring together diverse multi-agency / multi-sector stakeholders and communities to discuss and respond to climate change impacts on local heritage. Critically, this work begins to explore questions about adaptation and change, and people's responses to it. This represents a key synergy between CCUH's approach and the National Trust relating to adaptation pathway planning, and other participatory decision-making models, designed and trialled by UCL. CCUH approaches build on, and complement, the methods used at the National Trust, whilst also deepening understanding of their applicability for cross-partnership working for sites with multiple owners.

By testing and iterating approaches in different designations, CCUH thinking has been informed by the distinct characteristics of each site, including

Shared commitment to tackling global challenges

governance and compliance models, local communities and values, and organisational composition. From the outset, CCUH learning has been intended for wider use across the UK UNESCO network and beyond; as such, all resources and materials have been designed to respond to different local contexts, whilst providing enough consistency to support broader collaboration; working together is seen as an essential part of addressing systemic challenges facing heritage sites.

These reusable resources have been complemented by national cross-sector work to develop a UNESCO Climate Action and Sustainability Framework and supporting Research Agenda. Developed over the course of the project and guided by a Research & Innovation Group comprising expertise from academia, heritage sector bodies, professionals, and practitioners, including the National Trust, a cross-cutting research strategy has been created. This updates the evidence base relating to Sites for Sustainable Development and is centred around the role of UNESCO sites as 'laboratories' for advancing nexus-approaches to climate action and sustainable development.

CCUH resources will be available in autumn 2025.

“Overall, CCUH has focused on testing, developing and validating the tools needed to support participatory approaches to interconnected challenges, understanding that place-based, local responses will be required but that these are often situated within broader ecosystems. “

Dave Chapman and Aisling Parrish, Project Lead and Project Administrator, Climate Change and UNESCO Heritage Project





CCUH project community site visit to Braunton Burrows, North Devon Biosphere Reserve.

4. The challenges of being part of a UNESCO site



Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre, County Antrim, Northern Ireland

Challenges

This chapter looks at some of the challenges the National Trust faces when managing its land and property that lies within a UNESCO site. These principally focus on the additional complexity of managing land and property and delivering the National Trust Strategy goals in internationally designated sites. These challenges were identified with input from colleagues across the National Trust including the General Managers at properties, archaeologists and planning advisers.

The three key challenges this report focusses on are:

- Managing change in UNESCO sites, particularly in World Heritage Sites which have their own distinct challenges because of the framing of the World Heritage Convention and associated guidance.
- The complexity of the governance models that influence how UNESCO sites are managed.
- The resources needed at a local, regional and national level to manage National Trust land and property in UNESCO sites.



East Pool Mine at Pool, near Redruth, Cornwall

Managing change in World Heritage Sites and the planning system

Planning proves a challenge, but also a great opportunity, for the management of National Trust land and properties in World Heritage Sites. The status brings additional planning controls and extra complexity due to the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (more commonly known as the World Heritage Convention), the World Heritage Operational Guidelines and associated guidance. The planning system is the main mechanism in the UK for protecting the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of World Heritage Sites, their buffer zone and setting from development.

Biosphere Reserves are designated under the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB) programme and supported by the MAB Technical Guidelines. The MAB programme focusses on the Biosphere Reserves as places for connecting people and nature and promoting sustainable ways of living. Global Geoparks are designated through a community-led approach and the designation is reviewed every four years. The Operational Guidelines for UNESCO Global Geoparks set out guidelines for protection and management of the geological significance of the sites. Both these UNESCO designations are protected through national and local designations such as National Parks, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Local Wildlife Sites and planning policies set out in the local plan covering the site.

In the National Trust's response to planning applications at these sites it is more likely to refer to the property's location within a National Park or other designated area rather than making explicit reference to a Biosphere Reserve or Global Geopark.



View of the Needles from the Needles Old Battery, Isle of Wight

Planning in a World Heritage Site

While not part of the legislative framework, the UK government is a signatory to the **World Heritage Convention** and this brings extra requirements in terms of managing change in World Heritage Sites. Under the World Heritage Convention, all sites must ‘preserve the Outstanding Universal Value’ of the WHS at the point of inscription.

Paragraph 172 of the World Heritage Operational Guidelines puts a duty on the State Party, in the UK this is the Department for Cultural, Media and Sport (DCMS), to inform the World Heritage Committee of their intention to undertake development which may impact on the OUV of a WHS before a planning decision is taken. The UNESCO World Heritage Committee can then ask their advisers, either ICOMOS or IUCN, to undertake a technical review which looks at the impact of the proposed development on the OUV of the WHS. This is then referred back to the State Party to inform the planning decision on the proposed development.

The **Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill 2022** gives statutory protection to WHSs and their settings. This now includes provisions in law to give special regard to the desirability of preserving or enhancing WHSs and for the first time gives them the same status as listed buildings and conservation areas.

In England, WHSs are provided with the highest level of protection by the **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**. The NPPF sets out detailed policies for the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment through both plan-making and making decisions on planning applications. The NPPF and accompanying Planning Practice Guidance support policies which encourage sustainable use of WHSs, including enhancement where appropriate. Development that would result in substantial harm to WHSs or their setting, should be wholly exceptional and only be permitted where substantial public benefit outweighs the harm to the site.

Government advises that all planning applications for development in a WHS, its buffer zone or setting, should be accompanied by a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) following the method set out in the **Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context**. The HIA sets out an assessment of the impact of proposals on the OUV of the WHS. The National Trust takes the approach that all applications in a WHS or its buffer zone will be accompanied by a proportionate HIA.

The National Trust engages with the planning system on many levels. It **submits planning applications for its own development and projects**, such as new visitor infrastructure, landscape and climate change adaptation works and changing our buildings to new uses. Recent examples include:

- Flood resilience works at Goldrill Beck, English Lake District WHS
- New visitor infrastructure and conservation works at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal WHS
- New visitor centre at Giant's Causeway and Coast WHS
- Renewables infrastructure such as the solar panels on the visitor centre at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal WHS

There is no doubt that for the National Trust as a landowner and developer, the planning process in a World Heritage Site is more resource intensive. The referral process to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Paris for a technical review can also extend the time taken to determine planning applications as there is no set guidance provided by UNESCO on the timeframes for advice.



Architect's digital representation of the Studley Revealed Project at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal



View of Goldrill Beck, English Lake District

Case Study – Goldrill Beck in the English Lake District WHS

The English Lake District WHS is inscribed as a cultural landscape and many of the river courses have been changed as part of farming. Goldrill Beck has been modified into a straightened channel over many centuries, and this has affected the river's natural processes and separated it from its natural floodplain. The river runs parallel to the A592, the only road in the valley and the straightened channel means this road is vulnerable to damage from flooding and potentially even loss. It was decided the best solution was to 're-meander' the river through the floodplain. The works to restore ditches, create ponds and remove artificial watercourses needed planning permission.

The National Trust archaeologist working with a small team of heritage professionals from Historic England, ICOMOS, Lake District National Park Authority, Forestry Commission and the Environment Agency produced a detailed Heritage Impact Assessment to support the undertaking of what was the first landscape-scale intervention into the cultural landscape following inscription. This established a best practice approach for other partners to use in preparing Heritage Impact Assessments for landscape-scale works making use of the Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context. It also provided an opportunity to work together with partners to agree an approach which delivers for nature and climate in a World Heritage Site inscribed for its cultural landscape.

The National Trust comments on planning applications submitted by others, for example where there would be an impact on its property or land. It is not a statutory consultee in the planning process so there is no requirement on planning authorities to notify the National Trust about applications with a potential impact on the WHS. This makes monitoring planning applications a challenge. The organisation currently relies on search system to pick up on applications within a defined area or radius of its land. The World Heritage Site designation can strengthen the case when the National Trust objects to development which may negatively affect its land and properties.

As a stakeholder, the National Trust engage in major infrastructure applications such as wind farms, new rail links or electricity connections which are strategically important. A recent example of this was the National Trust's engagement with the Stonehenge A303 Development Consent Order.

It also **comments on emerging Local and Neighbourhood Plans**. At Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal World Heritage Site the National Trust led on preparation of the buffer zone proposals for the WHS and worked with Historic England and the local council on policies to protect the WHS, its buffer zone and wider setting in the Local Plan and Ripon City Plan. Commenting on local plans takes a lot of time and specialist resource for the National Trust but is a critical part of its conservation role. It can involve writing detailed submissions on allocated sites and policies to appearing at local plan inquiries.

World Heritage Management Plans and Supplementary Planning Documents for WHSs also have weight in planning decisions

and it's important to input to those documents. At Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal where the National Trust own most of the WHS, it leads on preparation of the management plan. However, at the other eight WHSs where it has ownership, input is through governance structures such as partnership boards and steering groups.

Finally, at a national level **it responds to Government consultations to influence emerging national policy and legislation protecting heritage, the environment and supporting the delivery of sustainable development**. The Trust is well set up to be able to input to national policy, with knowledge and experience of planning, heritage and sustainable development across the country.

In many ways, management of land and properties in World Heritage Sites is guided by the principle of 'preservation of OUV' set out in the World Heritage Convention. This concept of 'preservation' doesn't always sit comfortably with the National Trust's approach to conservation which is an active process of carefully and thoughtfully managing change. These differences in policy approach are also reflected in the UK planning system which gives the highest protection to World Heritage Sites, while also recognising the public benefits which development can bring.

There are huge challenges around climate change and the decline in nature which need urgent action on the ground. In the UK, the cost-of-living crisis has hit hard, making the financial sustainability of the National Trust's places ever more important. The solutions to these challenges, such as flood mitigation measures and visitor infrastructure, must often be delivered on properties and land which may be located within a UNESCO site.

The complexity of governance models in UNESCO sites

The mix of governance models across sites where the National Trust has a role to play in management can be challenging. In places like Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal where it owns almost the whole WHS the organisation has a high degree of influence on the management of the WHS. The National Trust chairs the World Heritage Site steering group, employs the World Heritage Coordinator and leads on preparation of the management plan. This site-led model is common in other World Heritage Sites under single ownership such as the Tower of London, Blenheim Palace and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

For larger sites such as the English Lake District and City of Bath where there are multiple partners the governance models can have many tiers. In the Lake District for example, the National Trust is represented on the Lake District Partnership Board by the Regional Director for the North, the World Heritage Site Steering Group by the Assistant Director of Operations for the Lakes and on the Technical Advisory Group by the National Trust's archaeological and curatorial consultants.

Stonehenge and Avebury WHS is another example where the governance models are complex. The site originally was managed as two separate sites, each with their own steering committee and management plan. A decision was made in 2012 to produce a single management plan for both sites. A new Stonehenge and Avebury WHS Partnership Panel was set up to oversee the World Heritage Coordination Unit and manage delivery of the plan. However, both the area steering committees and the Avebury and Stonehenge Archaeological and Historical Research Group were retained as part of the new governance structure. A National Trust representative attends each

meeting to ensure they have a say in the decision-making process. This puts pressure on the small property team. These are just two examples where it's resource intensive for the National Trust to participate in the board and committees which have been set up to manage World Heritage Site.

The challenges around governance were also flagged up in the 'UK World Heritage Asset for the Future Technical Report' prepared by World Heritage UK (WHUK) in 2019. Recently the WHUK meeting of World Heritage Site Chairs flagged up governance as one of the greatest challenges facing sites. This was further reinforced in the 2023 cycle of periodic reporting. Historic England commissioned CBA consultants to carry out a review of governance across all WHSs in the UK.

The key aims of the review are:

- To record current governance and financial models in England.
- Identify successful governance and financial models currently in operation in WHSs in England and to look at alternative models used in other similar sectors.
- Identify mechanisms to measure the success and sustainability of models.

It is important that the National Trust is part of this review process as this is an issue across all nine of the WHSs where it has an interest. The review process needs to engage fully with the wide range of partners and stakeholders involved in managing sites.

Resources

Both staff and financial resources are unevenly spread across land and property in UNESCO sites. There is no holistic overview of the role of the National Trust in UNESCO sites. It is left to the property or region to resource management of these sites.

There is a big variation in income generated by properties in World Heritage Sites. Some World Heritage Sites, such as Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal, charge for admission and have a shop, restaurants and holiday cottages, which generate income for the management of the site. Others, such as Stonehenge Landscape and Avebury and the Dorset and East Devon WHS, have less potential to generate income but have a large cost in terms of care and management of the landscape. This means the resources, both in staff teams and financially, available to input to world heritage management can vary across sites.

The additional resources involved in the management of UNESCO sites are:

- Property or consultancy staff to attend partnership boards, steering committees and delivery groups.
- Staff to input to management plans and other projects.
- Additional complexity of applying for planning consent for visitor infrastructure, farm buildings, renewables and climate change and nature recovery works on National Trust properties.

The staff currently engaged in UNESCO sites on a regular basis are in the property teams and the regional planning and archaeological consultants.

There is a wider issue across all UNESCO sites around resources. Many of the teams that manage these sites are part of local authorities which are seeing an increasing pressure to cut their budgets and focus their resources on delivery of essential services. Small trusts set up to manage World Heritage Sites are also struggling to remain financially secure.



Dr Nick Snashall walking West Amesbury Down, Stonehenge Landscape

5. Recommendations



View across the old quarry towards Devil's Dyke at Newtimber Hill, Brighton and Lewes Down Biosphere Reserve, West Sussex, England

Recommendation 1

Improve and enhance the information about National Trust land ownership in UNESCO sites and how its land or property contributes to the values of the UNESCO site.

- Upload all UNESCO site boundaries to the National Trust GIS Browser.
- Complete a National Trust and UNESCO Sites Directory. This directory could include a summary of the OUV of each World Heritage Site or the values of the Global Geopark or Biosphere Reserve, an outline of the governance structure, contacts and links to key documents such as management plans and nature recovery strategies. It should also include a map showing the UNESCO site boundary and National Trust land and properties
- In National Trust Property Business Plans, set out clearly how land or property contributes to the Outstanding Universal Value of the WHS or the values of the Biosphere Reserve or Global Geopark.
- Raise awareness among National Trust property and regional consultancy teams about UNESCO sites. This could be done through creation of an e-learning resource.
- Carry out further work in the English Lake District to look at National Trust ownership and management across the four property portfolios.

Recommendation 2

Review and strengthen National Trust input to management of UNESCO sites and work through others to make the governance models more effective.

- Build on the review of current governance models in World Heritage Sites led by the National Trust Placemaking and Heritage Director, to identify common issues and solutions.
- Record how National Trust membership of partnership boards and steering groups is decided and resourced.
- Build capacity within property and consultancy teams to ensure those representing the National Trust on partnership boards and steering groups have a good understanding of UNESCO issues.
- Input to the current review of governance models in England led by Historic England.
- Encourage the UKNC and WHUK to develop good practice governance models that can be promoted at UNESCO sites.

Recommendation 3

Optimise the National Trust's role in partnerships. Work with others to deliver the new National Trust strategy and to support delivery of wider UNESCO goals.

- Work with World Heritage Coordinators and Site Managers from organisations outside the National Trust to develop opportunities for joint working on projects.
- Ensure National Trust projects and strategies, such as our nature recovery and climate action programmes, are included in World Heritage management plans and Biosphere Reserve nature recovery strategies
- Actively participate in partnerships set up to manage UNESCO sites and support delivery of management plans and strategies
- Continue to work with INTO to share best practice between the international network of National Trusts and bring forward partnership projects connecting UNESCO sites.

Recommendation 4

Ensure all National Trust properties have the resources to benefit from the networks set up to support UNESCO sites in the UK.

- Review scope and membership of the World Heritage General Managers Network to include Global Geoparks and Biosphere Reserves.
- Encourage each National Trust property portfolio to join WHUK.
- Provide opportunities for National Trust teams across all UNESCO sites to engage with the UKNC projects such as the 'Local to Global' project and the Climate Change and UNESCO Heritage project.

Recommendation 5

Explore how the UNESCO designation is used to promote tourism at National Trust properties

- Carry out research, including analysis of National Trust visitor survey data, in UNESCO sites to understand the role the UNESCO designation plays in attracting visitors.
- Improve information on international visitors to National Trust properties in UNESCO sites.
- Work together as a National Trust group of World Heritage Sites to promote properties as places to visit to domestic tourists and international visitors.
- Hold a workshop with UKNC to explore how the UNESCO brand can be used alongside the National Trust brand at properties in UNESCO sites.
- Understand how UNESCO are marketing sites and work more closely with them.

Recommendation 6

Clearly set out the position of the National Trust in the care and management of UNESCO sites

- As part of the development of the National Trust Strategy clearly define the National Trust position on the care and management of UNESCO sites.
- Include the management of World Heritage Sites in the review of the National Trust Heritage Assets Managing Change Instruction.
- Develop research on the connections between the National Trust purpose and strategy and the wider mission of UNESCO and the UN Sustainable Development Goals

Recommendation 7

Develop guidance and share knowledge more widely within the National Trust about planning and World Heritage Sites

- Upskill consultancy and property teams in World Heritage Sites on the planning system and issues specific to World Heritage Sites.
- Produce a guidance note and links to other advice and contacts for the planning process in World Heritage Sites
- Share knowledge and develop specialisms within the National Trust on topics such as Heritage Impact Assessments
- Better connect the National Trust into existing World Heritage Site networks such as the WHUK Coordinator meetings, the UKNC local to global workshops and ICOMOS training sessions on World Heritage guidance.
- Develop and share good practice on policies for World Heritage Sites, buffer zones and setting and supporting documents such as settings studies.
- Review the resources in place to input to all stages of the planning process including the development of World Heritage management plans.

Recommendation 8

Review the staff and financial resources available within the National Trust for the management of UNESCO sites to ensure they are well-resourced

- Carry out a review of staff and financial resources for UNESCO sites, recognising the extra complexity it brings.
- Review the National Trust financial model to ensure it reflects the resources needed to input to management of a World Heritage Site.
- Provide a resource to take forward recommendations in this report.

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