

**DRAFT PRESS RELEASE: EMBARGOED until 00:01 6 October 2022**

## **Local and innovative solutions to global challenges: new report shows UNESCO-designated sites are at the forefront of sustainable development**

As world leaders prepare for major climate and biodiversity summits, a new report reveals why governments should invest in their UNESCO designated sites to help meet global commitments.

**London, UK, 6 October 2022** - Faced with a growing energy crisis, record greenhouse gas concentrations, and increasing extreme weather events, COP27 to be held in Egypt in November seeks renewed cooperation between countries to deliver on the Paris Agreement. Meanwhile, world leaders will meet in Montreal, Canada, in December during COP15 to agree on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

A new study published today by the UK and Canadian Commissions for UNESCO has found that UNESCO designated sites face a range of global challenges, but it also shows that, with additional support, they can be at the forefront of generating and sharing innovative local approaches to tackling these challenges. For the first time, it provides a framework that groups Biosphere Reserves, Global Geoparks and World Heritage Sites as UNESCO sites for sustainable development - for how they connect global goals to local actions, and have the tools to effect real, long-lasting progress towards Agenda 2030.

UNESCO sites are a global network that span the globe, cover 10 million km<sup>2</sup> (the geographical size of the USA), and are home to hundreds of millions of people. The study shows that these sites in the UK and Canada face significant threats ranging from over-tourism, flooding, storms, and invasive species to pressures from housing and commercial development. Despite this, the report shows the UNESCO sites are uniquely placed to address them by bringing people, communities, businesses, and organizations together to mobilize solutions locally, regionally, and internationally.

### **Quotes**

“At a time when we all urgently need solutions to build more resilient societies and innovative solutions to global challenges, UNESCO sites offer a wealth of concrete actions to reinvent our relationship with nature, develop decent jobs and foster social cohesion. This report by the Canadian and UK Commissions for UNESCO shows how UNESCO sites can be at the forefront of sustainability, and I believe all countries can take inspiration from this research.”

- Audrey Azoulay, Director-General, UNESCO

“UNESCO is most famous for its World Heritage Sites, Global Geoparks and Biosphere Reserves. These are exceptionally special places, but places that are also as vulnerable as anywhere else to the threats of climate change and overdevelopment. However, as this report shows, these sites also have all the ingredients communities and stakeholders need to plan together for a sustainable future. Hundreds of millions of people live on the 10 million square kilometers of this extraordinary global network: we must continue to respect these sites and invest in them so that they can show us the way.”

- Laura Davies, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of the UK to UNESCO

“This project is an example of how National Commissions are uniquely placed to be the principal agents for change to accelerate UNESCO’s response to global challenges. National Commissions link the work of UNESCO to local communities through UNESCO designated sites. The Canadian government recognizes the important role that UNESCO designated sites play in advancing international agreements at local levels. For example, Environment and Climate Change Canada recently announced over 11 million dollars of funding for conservation efforts in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples in Canada’s 19 biosphere reserves.”

- Natasha Cayer, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Canada to UNESCO

### Quick facts

- UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It seeks to build peace through international cooperation in education, sciences and culture.
- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit on 25 September 2015.
- The three types of UNESCO designated sites -- Biosphere Reserves, Global Geoparks and World Heritage Sites – together give a complete picture of celebrating our heritage while at the same time conserving the world’s cultural, biological and geological diversity, and promoting sustainable development.
- Canada has 44 UNESCO designated sites, the UK has 48.
- The report is the product of a 2-year collaborative project between the UK and Canadian Commissions for UNESCO that involved original research performed in the UK and Canada.

### Related products

Background information

### Associated Links:

[Report: Sites for Sustainable Development: Realizing the potential of UNESCO designated sites to advance Agenda 2030](#)

[Executive Summary of report](#)

[Supplementary Information](#)

Fforest Fawr UNESCO Global Geopark:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gz5mt9YUau4&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gz5mt9YUau4&feature=emb_title)

[What are biosphere reserves?](#)

[UNESCO Global Geoparks](#)

[About World Heritage](#)

[Stories from biospheres across Canada](#)

**Contacts**

Matthew Rabagliati, Head of Policy Communications and Research, UK National Commission for UNESCO, [mrabagliati@unesco.org.uk](mailto:mrabagliati@unesco.org.uk)

Vanessa Poulin-Gladu, Manager, Public Affairs, Canadian Commission for UNESCO, [Vanessa.Poulin-Gladu@ccunesco.ca](mailto:Vanessa.Poulin-Gladu@ccunesco.ca)

## Sites for Sustainable Development: Realizing the potential of UNESCO designated sites to advance Agenda 2030

### Background Information

#### **UNESCO**

UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It seeks to build peace through international cooperation in education, sciences and culture. UNESCO's programmes contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals defined in the 2030 Agenda, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015.

#### **Agenda 2030**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit on 25 September 2015. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.

#### **UNESCO Designated Sites**

UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, Global Geoparks and World Heritage Sites together give a complete picture of celebrating our heritage while at the same time conserving the world's cultural, biological and geological diversity, and promoting sustainable development. They span 10 million km<sup>2</sup> of the world's land area and comprise partnerships between millions of communities, organisations, charities, and businesses.

**Biosphere Reserves** are sites recognized by UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme as models of a sustainable future that protect and celebrate cultural and biological diversity, and that empower people to engage with one another and with nature in healthier ways. Biosphere Reserves in Canada and the UK actively work to conserve biodiversity and implement the UN Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. There are 7 biosphere reserves in the UK and 19 in Canada.

**UNESCO Global Geoparks** are areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed using a holistic approach that favours protection, education and sustainable development. UNESCO Global Geoparks explore, develop and celebrate the links between geological heritage and all other aspects of the area's natural, cultural and intangible heritages. They aim to reconnect human society at all levels to the planet we all call home. There are 8 UNESCO global geoparks in the UK and 5 in Canada.

**World Heritage Sites** are landmarks or areas that benefit from international legal protection through the 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (commonly referred to as the World Heritage Convention). To be considered

for designation, sites must have special cultural or natural significance that is of Outstanding Universal Value. There are 33 World Heritage Sites in the UK and 20 in Canada.

### **Canadian Commission for UNESCO**

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO (CCUNESCO) serves as a bridge between Canadians and the vital work of UNESCO—the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Through its networks and partners, the Commission promotes UNESCO’s values, priorities and programs in Canada and brings the voices of Canadian experts to the international stage. CCUNESCO operates under the authority of the Canada Council for the Arts. For more information see: <https://en.ccunesco.ca/>

### **UK National Commission for UNESCO**

The UK National Commission for UNESCO (UKNC) supports the UK’s contribution to UNESCO and brings the benefits of UNESCO to the UK. We are the central hub for all UNESCO-related matters within the UK. We are an independent not-for profit organisation, supported by grant funding from the UK government. Our core functions are: To provide expert, individual policy advice to the UK and devolved governments on UNESCO related issues, to support the UK government’s agenda to help UNESCO achieve its core goals, to advise and assist individuals and institutions in the UK and its’ Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, with accessing UNESCO accreditation and prizes. We also support and enhance the value of the UK’s 165+ UNESCO sites and projects. For more information see: [www.unesco.org.uk](http://www.unesco.org.uk)

### **Example: Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal World Heritage Site**

Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal Estate UNESCO World Heritage Site is at the heart of a community green recovery programme which will pioneer innovative approaches to flood management and climate change. After five years of planning, involving extensive consultation and in-depth surveys, the Skell Valley Landscape Conservation Action Plan, will receive £2.5 million of funding from donors, including the UK National Lottery Heritage Fund and European Regional Development Fund. The funding will also address other sustainable development challenges, including barriers to access to heritage and the outdoors, loneliness and isolation, health and well-being, a lack of diversity among the people who volunteer, and the small pool of volunteers.

*“As well as finding ways to combat flooding and protect our remarkable heritage, we really want to ensure that the action plan ensures Fountains Abbey and the wider Skell Valley remain open and accessible to all.”*

Sarah France, World Heritage Coordinator, Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal UNESCO World Heritage Site

### **Example: Clayoquot Biosphere Trust**

Every two years the Clayoquot Biosphere Trust in Canada publishes the Vital Signs report on the state of many different indicators of the health of the area’s communities and ecosystems. Key findings of the report are shared with local First Nations, municipal governments, and organizations with an aim to inspire dialogue and action in priority areas.

<https://clayoquotbiosphere.org/research/vital-signs>

***Example: Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark***

The Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark is made up of a range of cultural and natural heritage protected areas and assets. Each Site of Special Scientific Interest or Local Nature Reserve has an individual management plan and local reporting process, and often sits in isolation, thought of in terms of a single specialism. The geopark helps bring these sites (and their stakeholders) together to manage the area holistically, create a shared narrative and identify and manage common challenges.