

Press release

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Three UNESCO sites in the UK announced as pilot locations in groundbreaking new Climate Change project.

- A major new pilot is looking to understand the growing and multiple impacts of climate change on cultural and natural heritage across the UK. Three UK UNESCO sites are set to receive funding and expert support to engage in the pilot over a 12-month period.
- Teams at North Devon Biosphere Reserve, Fforest Fawr Global Geopark Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site, will test how new ways of collaborative working and improved sharing of data can help to better understand and address the impacts of climate change on the UK's cultural and natural heritage.
- The £1.8 million pilot is being funded by HM Treasury and led by the UK National Commission for UNESCO and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

The UK National Commission for UNESCO and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has announced today (15 August 2024) that three UNESCO sites in the UK are set to receive funding and support to take part in the groundbreaking pilot project, *Climate Change & UNESCO Heritage*.

From extreme weather fluctuations, to the devastating effects of pests and non-native species, climate change is creating and accelerating the interconnected challenges affecting the UK's cultural and natural heritage. Much of the data and expertise needed to help tackle these issues already exists, yet siloed working practices at every level can often hinder public and private sector organisations from sharing data effectively, or from working collaboratively on common challenges.

Funded by the HM Treasury Shared Outcomes Fund, the £1.8 million *Climate Change & UNESCO Heritage* project aims to explore, develop and test ways to

overcome these barriers. With cultural and natural heritage being foundational to localising global challenges like climate change, the pilot will also capitalise on the huge potential UNESCO designated sites offer as testing grounds for developing new ways of working.

The project builds on research by the UK and Canadian National Commissions for UNESCO which found that UNESCO sites are not only ideal test beds for developing participatory approaches to global challenges, but are also well-placed to support genuine, on-the-ground collaborative action that can help to achieve outcomes aligned with the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda.

Work is already underway to bring together government departments and public agencies to explore these challenges at a national level. North Devon Biosphere Reserve, Fforest Fawr Global Geopark, and Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site, have been selected as the three UNESCO sites that will join the project as local case study locations for a 12-month period ending July 2025.

Each site will work with local communities and stakeholders to co-design, develop and test locally-derived models of partnership working. They will also create new shareable and reusable data tools and templates that will help identify and analyse climate-related information more effectively. Project managers will be employed at each UNESCO site to act as the focal point for the project, bringing together community stakeholders.

The learning will lay the groundwork for an improved understanding of the threat climate change poses to the UK's natural and historic environment, and support UNESCO sites and their local communities to make informed decisions on how to best navigate these challenges in the future. Results of the pilot will be available in summer 2025.

Two specialist agencies have been appointed to support the creation of new approaches and tools at the national and pilot site-level. NIAXO Ltd will lead on data science, analysis and interpretation. Lateral North, based in Glasgow, will lead on stakeholder mapping and user research.

Speaking of the project, Heritage Minister Sir Chris Bryant MP, said:

'I am delighted to see some of our iconic UNESCO sites playing a central role in making sure we are able to protect our heritage assets against the threat of climate change.'

'I look forward to seeing this project progress and uncover how we can make the best use of our data and expertise, so that we can continue to care for these important places and the communities they serve for generations to come.'

James Bridge, Chief Executive and Secretary-General of the UK National Commission for UNESCO said:

'Across the world, places of cultural and natural heritage - and the communities that live in these places - are facing significant challenges due to the changing climate. If we are to solve these challenges, we must all work together, across multiple sectors, and in new and innovative ways.'

The UK's UNESCO designations have a long record of site-to-site collaboration and as multi-stakeholder partnerships they provide the perfect testing ground for this kind of exploratory approach. Whilst the pilot will test approaches tailored to three specific sites in the UK, it is hoped that the results will be relevant, adaptable, and useful to people and places more broadly, both in the UK and internationally.'

Andy Bell, CEO of North Devon Biosphere Foundation, said:

'Climate change presents a risk to both natural heritage and human health and since the purpose of Biosphere Reserves is to show how people and planet can thrive happily together, our work in this project will be to support decision making by local and national government agencies to ensure biodiversity can continue to provide health services under a changing climate. The North Devon Biosphere team is delighted to be working with the UK National Commission for UNESCO and DCMS to demonstrate the synergies in this melting pot of climate, natural and cultural heritage and health.'

Catherine Mealing-Jones, Chief Executive Officer of Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority, said:

'Fforest Fawr UNESCO Global Geopark is a magnificent landscape created over millions of years, transformed during the ice age and shaped by people ever since. Now the precious natural environment and cultural legacy is under threat from climate breakdown. Bannau Brycheiniog National Park is delighted to be working with the UK National Commission for UNESCO to explore how the Geopark can adapt and become resilient.'

Jane Gibson, Chair of the Hadrian's Wall Partnership Board, said:

'We are delighted that Hadrian's Wall can be a pilot in this very important project. The Wall and the many partner organisations that manage this World Heritage Site will all be affected by climate change. We are proud that our data and partnership can contribute to future sustainability of our heritage and look forward to working with Newcastle University, who'll lead on the pilot, and with wider project partners.'

Tim Carter, Director at NIAXO, said:

'NIAXO is delighted to be part of this timely project. Data sharing and collaboration will be critical in enabling us to work towards protecting the UK's cultural heritage from the effects of climate change for future generations.'

Graham Hogg, Director at Lateral North, said:

'Lateral North is excited to be working alongside DCMS and the UK National Commission for UNESCO to map the stakeholders, data and stories of how the climate emergency is affecting our landscapes, environment, heritage and culture. We believe this pilot project is of great significance in bringing people, communities and organisations together to work collaboratively. We are excited that this project is foregrounding the voice of nature and the creative community, connecting with grassroots organisations, and highlighting how this approach could be used by others moving forward at a national and international level, all of which are keen drivers as part of the work we do.'

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About the UK National Commission for UNESCO

The UK National Commission for UNESCO (UKNC) is a constitutional part of the UK's membership of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

An independent body, UKNC is core-funded by the UK Government primarily to bring the benefits of UNESCO programmes and international agreements to the UK government, academic community and broader civil society. It also ensures that these elements fully contribute to and shape UNESCO's global aims and activities.

UNESCO harnesses the power of education, science, culture, and communication & information to advance global peace, sustainable development, intercultural dialogue, and poverty eradication.

UNESCO Biosphere Reserves

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

UNESCO Global Geoparks

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

UNESCO World Heritage Sites

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

About North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve

The North Devon UNESCO Biosphere is an important meeting place of rich natural and cultural heritage in a stunning world-class environment from dunes, grassland and moors, towns and villages to 12m beyond Lundy Island into the Bristol Channel. From seals and red deer, to the diversity of our rolling countryside, coastal regions and marine habitats, our UNESCO biosphere reserve celebrates life by recognising the connections between people and nature.

About North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Foundation

The North Devon Biosphere Foundation is dedicated to furthering the aims of the UNESCO North Devon Biosphere Reserve Partnership. It is committed to the strategy and action plan of the partnership and works closely with all partners in the Biosphere. <https://www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk/>

About Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) National Park Authority

In 2022 the Welsh name of the National Park was reclaimed, and a new vision and management plan was launched. Through our stewardship of the 520 square miles of special and unique living landscapes which make up the National Park, we are working to act as an exemplar to inspire and enable others in the shared task of safeguarding our home – planet Earth. [Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority \(beacons-npa.gov.uk\)](http://beacons-npa.gov.uk)

About Fforest Fawr UNESCO Global Geopark

A UNESCO Global Geopark is an area with a geological heritage of international significance which local communities have chosen to celebrate and which has then been endorsed by UNESCO. Fforest Fawr UNESCO Global Geopark is managed by a partnership between Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority, the British Geological Survey and Cardiff University together with a host of other organisations with local, regional or national interests. From the valley floor to the mountain top and everything in between, the biggest attraction of the Geopark is the landscape itself - a cracked and crumpled layer-cake of rocks, over 470 million years in the making, sculpted by ice then transformed by people.

About Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site

A World Heritage Site since 1987, Hadrian's Wall is an astounding feat of engineering. It's the best known and the best-preserved frontier of the Roman Empire. When Hadrian's men set out to construct it, they were faced with a relentlessly challenging and variable landscape to conquer. Not the fierce torrents of fast rivers, the hard rock of the Whin Sill, nor mile upon mile of rolling hills would defeat them. The Wall is Britain's most impressive and most important Roman monument. Together with the Antonine Wall and the Upper German Raetian Limes, it forms part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site 'Frontiers of the Roman Empire

About Lateral North

Lateral North has an extensive background of working throughout the UK and internationally with cultural and heritage organisations to redesign their ideas, spaces and places. Throughout all of their work collaboration, co-design and co-production has been a key driving force for change inspired by design. As such, their portfolio of work ranges from collaborating alongside artists, architects, institutions, fabricators, community groups and a host of other individuals and organisations to realise both permanent and temporary installations, experiences, exhibitions and other design-led outputs to creatively tell their stories.

www.lateralnorth.com.

About NIAXO

NIAXO is an innovation fuelled technology company, enabling organisations to gain bespoke insights from their data by managing their information as an asset and as a medium for positive change. <https://www.niixo.co/>