



World Heritage UK

World Heritage in the UK and Brexit

Briefing paper, 28th July 2016

This document sets out a summary of the views of the Membership of World Heritage UK of the challenges posed, and opportunities raised, for the UK's World Heritage Sites (WHSs) by the proposed exit of the UK from the European Union. The views were canvassed in response to a request from the Secretary of State for DCMS in advance of a round table meeting with the Heritage Sector, including WH:UK on August 3rd 2016.

Summary

Our membership identified significantly more challenges than opportunities. These can be grouped around issues that relate to funding, environmental protection, partnership working, freedom of movement and some WHS specific issues. The overall view is that although no details of the Brexit have yet been negotiated, there is a feeling that it will result in many more challenges for World Heritage Site management in the UK than opportunities.

The Sites further wish to emphasise the high economic, social and cultural value of the designation, as recently demonstrated by a UNESCO National Commission report and many other similar studies, particularly for community-led regeneration and civic pride. On a broader scale, economic impact of heritage and culture in attracting people to this country is huge, but needs investment to maintain and grow the quality and scope of the offer.

In a time when the Culture White Paper sets out an aspiration for the UK to "*set a global standard in the stewardship of World Heritage Sites*" - an aspiration that is largely dependent on the Sites themselves - our membership is concerned that the Brexit decision may well diminish our ability to do that. Having said that, there are opportunities and we are eager to develop them.

Challenges

Our main points start overleaf, but in addition, our membership have expressed broad concerns over:

- the uncertainty of the Brexit process and the related instability;
- the changing perception of the UK from overseas;
- breakdown in social and cultural cohesion, particularly with respect to the Union and;
- the very real threats to the economy and inward investment.

It also acknowledges a wider concern around tourism, but recognises that it may be too soon to say what the impacts might be. Our comments in respect of the above are restricted to where they have a direct relevant to World Heritage Sites.

1. Funding

a. Structural funds; ERDF and similar fund

- i. Some of the UK's WHS have benefitted significantly from regional development funding (e.g. Cornish Mining WHS, Blaenavon WHS, and Durham WHS). The loss of this funding opportunity for some of the most deprived parts of the country is a cause for concern. For example, ERDF funding is an important match-funder for large heritage projects such as Cromford Mills (Derwent Valley Mills WHS) which secured a significant ERDF grant that enabled the new Gateway centre and Creative workspaces to be delivered. Likewise the new Giant's Causeway visitor centre, so important for the economy of NI was part funded with EU structural funds. The RDPE invested £2.4mill into the Cornish Mining WHS resulting in widespread economic benefits across the whole of Cornwall and West Devon. We could give more examples.
- ii. The management of many of the UK's WHS have benefitted from smaller scale funds delivered within the UK through the Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) or such as via Local Action Groups (LAGs). The lack of these funds may well have significant impact on small scale SMEs and tourism businesses upon which many of our Sites rely for high quality visitor services; particularly as for small businesses, it is often their only route to access public sector funding.
- iii. Funding packages for heritage projects, whether capital or revenue-related always rely on a mix of sources, and it is feared that with local authorities less able to prioritise heritage work, and LEPs showing a focus on mainstream infrastructure, lack of any EU structural funds will see projects unable to match fund their funding packages.

b. Project and collaborative funding

- i. Our membership have raised concerns about the funding available from sources such as LIFE, Interreg and a whole range of environmental and cultural funding. Not only are these project streams a source of valuable income, but they nurture a sense of collaboration very much in keeping with the ethos of the World Heritage Convention, and instil good practice and rigor in project design. At a time when Government has been cutting its expenditure and urging NGOs and other bodies to seek funds elsewhere this is going to cause significant problem
- ii. We have concerns about whether projects already underway will be honoured in full, or whether projects in the pipeline are worth pursuing further.

c. Research funding

- i. The position in relation to research funding through Horizon 2020 and other EU sources needs to be clarified as this impacts on the research agendas of our Sites. As you will be aware, ongoing research into the Outstanding Universal Values of our WHS is part of the State Party commitment to UNESCO, and EU funding has been a significant source of funding through our University Partners. For example, Derwent Valley Mills WHS are a part of the EUR 800,000 EU funded PROTHEGO project on Geo-hazards in WHS Sites which will end in two years-time but sees no opportunity for future collaborations.

d. Agri-environment schemes

- i. The loss of Agri-environment funding will be a significant blow to a number of existing or candidate WHS in the UK, some of whom rely on support of this type to maintain OUV and other values within their boundaries. Stonehenge and Avebury is one good example, but of perhaps most significance is the case of the candidate English Lake District World Heritage site whose nomination bid is based in large part on the contribution of traditional hill farming to its world class cultural landscape. Lake District hill farming has been dependant on agri-environment subsidies and will now need to demonstrate to UNESCO a viable, authentic and continuing hill farming culture. A further example is that agri-environment schemes have contributed towards restoration of several engine houses and other mining artefacts in the Cornish Mining WHS.

2. Environmental protection

a. Designations

- i. Much of the EU environmental legislation adopted by the UK Government (particularly Natura 2000 sites – Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas) has been widely accepted as very positive in protecting Sites with, or within landscapes, including those of cultural and natural importance. There is uncertainty and concern amongst the World Heritage community – particularly, but not exclusively for natural sites, such as the Giants Causeway and the Jurassic Coast – about the future of EU transposed legislation, and we are aware that any lessening of the current robust European measures would lead to questions from UNESCO and the advisory bodies (notably IUCN) about the UK's ability to fully protect our Site.

b. Directives

- i. In very broad terms, the maintenance of the high environmental standards, as set out in EU Directives¹ is seen by World Heritage Site managers as non-negotiable. This is needed to ensure appropriate developments within WHSs through the Impact Assessment requirements of planning legislation. There are also benefits for the wider health and wellbeing of communities and for supporting visitors to our Sites (e.g. beach quality on the Jurassic Coast), the fabric of historic buildings (e.g. air pollution impact at the Cathedrals) and the maintenance of key elements of Outstanding Universal Value (e.g. water quality at Bath).

3. Partnership working

a. Collaboration projects

- i. Our membership has expressed concern at the likely loss of partnership working opportunities with counterparts across Europe. A number of successful EU funded projects have been developed in association with World Heritage Sites. A good example is found at Blaenavon WHS and involves the European Route of Industrial Heritage (ERIH). The project has been the trailblazer for continued regional, national and international collaboration between industrial heritage attractions in South Wales and others in Europe.
- ii. We also feel that the UK is likely to be omitted from European collaboration projects that address common problems and promote exchange of best practice.

¹ including Habitats, Birds, Invasive Alien Species, Water Framework, Marine Strategy Framework, SEA, Environmental Impact, Air Quality, Floods, Landfill Directives

b. Skills and knowledge transfer

- i. We believe that future collaborations and the exchange of staff and artists working on WHSs will be put at risk. This has already been highlighted by the Museums Association and the Arts Council, and can be such an important issue for Sites at which specialist expertise is needed and not widely available.
- ii. By way of example a colleague at Saltaire WHS is involved with several university based post-doctoral networks to develop heritage research and skills. They consider that these may be at risk as they have partners and funding via the EU. They provide research which could never hope currently to be commissioned in any other way – so add to the intellectual capital of the WH Site.

4. Freedom of movement

- i. Many of the UK's Sites are large visitor attractions and depend for their ongoing conservation and management on a consistent and year-round visitor offer and demand. Some of our members have raised their concerns as to whether less freedom of movement will impact on visitor numbers, and the ability to attract new, and retain the existing skilled workforce until our own is built up more; particularly in respect of certain sectors, such as stone masons.
- ii. A specific issue has been raised by Giant's Causeway WHS in Northern Ireland in respect of the number of visitors who come to the Site directly from the Republic of Ireland, often on day trips from Dublin, and whether new controls or delays on the border could impact on this activity.

5. World Heritage Site specific issues

The following issues have been raised that are very specific to the management of World Heritage Sites:

- i. **Multilateral Aid Review:** The Membership has some concern that given the Government's decision to hold the referendum, the Brexit result, and that a significant part of the governing party wishes continues to look inwardly, the Multilateral Aid Review may recommend a change in the UK's relationship with UNESCO. Should this be in any way a cause for concern, we, along with UNESCO UKNC and others would welcome the opportunity to demonstrate the huge added value that the WH designation and other activities of UNESCO deliver for the country, which have been the subject of recent reports by the UKNC and others.
- ii. **Trade in cultural objects:** We have a concern that the trade of cultural objects will be impacted, particularly illicit trade, which is governed by UK law, but guided by EU directives.
- iii. **Trans-national Site Management:** Members have identified a potential negative impact on managing our trans-national Sites –Frontiers of the Roman Empire (inscribed) and Great Spas of Europe (tentative list). Brexit will not help the management of sites as single entities as differences such as increased disparity in legislation and other operational arrangements will be unwelcome additions to what are already complex management arrangements.

Opportunities

6. The World Heritage UK Membership sees the following as potential opportunities of Brexit

- i. A weaker sterling could lead to more overseas visitors, but this is only an opportunity for the Sites that have the capacity to manage this.
- ii. Establish collaboration / partnerships beyond Europe - an opportunity to forge new relationships alongside the emerging foreign policy.
- iii. Use our World Heritage to help shape and create a revised shared national cultural narrative for UK, and transmit this within the UK and to the world.
- iv. Potential “Staycation” uplift, with better links and support between WH and national or local tourism agencies, and LEPs.
- v. Re-establish the VAT exemption on works to Listed Buildings.
- vi. Improve environmental legislation – the EU Directives have been powerful tools for environmental and heritage protection, but have not been perfect. We could address their weaknesses and loopholes by improving them rather than abandoning them.
- vii. Government funding redistribution: Assuming that there is some real saving to be made from leaving the EU, some of that could be directed to the heritage sector. There are of course many competing demands for such savings, so a strong case will need to be made. A strong heritage sector combined with a weak pound might provide a very useful boost to the economy and a source of income from outside the UK, justifying significant investment.
- viii. Find new ways of working, looking for opportunities to consider developing international partnership’s with countries outside of the EU area.
- ix. The EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been widely criticised for subsidising environmentally damaging agricultural activities. With Brexit, an opportunity exists to restructure the way farming subsidies are granted. A better cross-cutting subsidy structure could support farming communities more holistically. This could be of potential benefit to landscape scale WHSs and their setting.

World Heritage UK is a charity formed in 2015 to represent the view of World Heritage Sites in the UK. Its vision is for a more coherent WHS Policy in the UK, achieved through networking, advocacy and promotion. Our voting members are the bodies responsible for managing the Sites on a day to day basis.

World Heritage UK

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Additional examples, added 4/8/16

From Stonehenge and Avebury

Also over a million pounds invested by European partners in the Stonehenge Hidden Landscape research project which has discovered a number of new monuments. This was very widely reported in the national and international media. This project encouraged the sharing of advanced technology between European universities and academic institutes most notably the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute based in Austria. It brought in substantial European investment and expertise to the enrich research in the UK. A high profile dig is currently underway as we speak at Durrington Walls as a direct result of this research which could dramatically alter our understanding of the Stonehenge part of the World Heritage Site.

Environmental stewardship schemes at Stonehenge and Avebury they are absolutely fundamental to the protection of the monuments and sensitive buried archaeology from the effects of ploughing across the World Heritage Site landscape. Around 40% of the Stonehenge and Avebury landscapes are in environmental stewardship schemes which help to protect sensitive archaeology and enhance the setting of around 800 historic features within the World Heritage Site. These schemes represent a financial commitment by Defra of approximately £2 million over their lifetime. It is vital that this investment continues in order to maintain this protection and support a sustainable rural economy through this period of uncertainty. Enormous benefits are also reaped for biodiversity through the above schemes.

From St Kilda

St Kilda and the Giant's Causeway are natural WHS and there is the potential for a greater impact as some of the natural designations (I'm not sure about Giant's Causeway) are based on the European Habitats Directive , e.g. the Special Protection Area. The St Kilda SPA mirrors the boundary of the WHS, and includes the seabed, water column and surface . Obviously in the future this would no longer apply so the Scottish Government (or UK?) would need to ensure a similar (or enhanced) level of protection through new legislation. However the St Kilda SPA overlaps with the SSSI , so there is protection afforded to part of the WHS , but crucially not the sea. So it is not clear how this level of protection would be afforded in future. Indeed the current consultation on marine SPAs , which was expected to include St Kilda, does not. It is not clear why it has been omitted , however it may be that part of it would lie outwith 12 nautical mile limit (this is a suggestion!)

Over the past decade we have probably seen hundreds of thousands of pounds in European funding for research allocated on St Kilda, this includes the Soay Sheep Project as well as research into the endemic St Kilda mouse and Great skuas and Leach's storm petrels . The impact on the scientific community is well documented. Any change in freedom of movement will have an impact too , every year probably between 10-20 % of our volunteers or researchers are non UK citizens .