

World Heritage UK's Year – April 2025 to March 2026



Advocacy

World Heritage UK (WHUK) works internationally, nationally and locally to build awareness, understanding and valuing of World Heritage (WH), World Heritage Sites (WHSs) and Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), with key stakeholders, communities, and audiences:

- WHUK's President Chris Blandford has continued to work with and support the **European Network of World Heritage Associations (ENWHA)**. WHUK is a core member of the Association and has been advising on an organisational framework as the group of 15 countries become more formally associated and influential. ENWHA held its annual meeting in Slovenia in October 2025 and Chris gave a paper on an overview of World Heritage (WH) governance and administration across Europe. The next annual meeting will be held in Iceland in October 2026
- **World Heritage of Flanders**, Belgium is investigating a refinement of its management and governance of WH. WHUK's President was invited to give a presentation and share with them the challenges that the WHUK model has faced, and the successes it has achieved in its first 10 years
- Members of WHUK helped organise and participated in a successful series of workshops at the first **European WHS Managers' Forum** in the Alhambra, Spain in April 2025. Sponsored by the Spanish Heritage Ministry and ENWHA, it aimed at WH awareness raising and sharing. It attracted 120 delegates from 20 different countries. The next Forum will be held in the Loire Valley, France in 2027

- WHUK's Chair and President took part in the **47th World Heritage Committee Meeting** in Paris in July 2025. This included attending the launch of the Ireland National World Heritage Strategy by the Deputy Director of the World Heritage Centre and the Irish Minister for Heritage. WHUK's President contributed to a follow up event in Dublin in November 2025 hosted by ICOMOS Ireland and ICOMOS President, Teresa Patricio
- On behalf of its members, WHUK continues to collaborate with and support the UK organisations and agencies that are all part of the UK WH family including DCMS, Historic England, Natural England, Historic Environment Scotland, Cadw, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, ICOMOS-UK, IUCN, ICCROM, and the UK National Commission to UNESCO
- WHUK is a member of DCMS' **World Heritage Advisory Group (WHAG)**, helping to advise and steer the State Party in all aspects of delivery of the WH Convention. WHAG comprises of WH leaders and decision makers from both Government and non-departmental public bodies
- During 2025 WHUK's President delivered a number of university lectures to inspire students to be the next generation of the WH family. He also gave a paper on the contribution of WH to the Westminster Media Forum Policy Conference themed on Next Steps for UK Heritage Tourism Policy
- WHUK is represented on a range of NGO advocacy groups including The Heritage Alliance's Spatial Planning Advisory and International Advisory Groups. Working with a wide range of heritage leaders it also supports the Historic Environment Forum in fostering research, conservation and presentation, and political engagement
- As a **Council Member of the National Trust** WHUK's President continues to encourage greater NT and WHUK collaboration particularly following the acquisition of the Ironbridge Gorge WHS by the National Trust
- In March WHUK provided comments to the **Ministry of Housing Community and Local Government (MHCLG) Consultation** on the revision of the 2025 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Comments included encouraging MHCLG to address the lack of consistency and problems arising from the difference between the wording of the UNESCO Operational Guidelines and the WH sections of the proposed NPPF. WHUK emphasised the primacy of Outstanding Universal Value, the disparity between the UK planning system approach and UNESCO in relation to "balance", and the need for distinct and stronger strategic and local policies for WH protection
- WHUK were invited to support the new **All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on World Heritage**. It was initiated in October and is chaired by Jonathan Davis MP for Mid Derbyshire which includes the Derwent Valley Mills WHS. Chris Blandford, WHUK President, is providing joint leadership and knowledge sharing for the APPG. Between November 2025 and June 2026, a programme of topic discussions with guest speakers (including some WHUK Trustees and Members) is raising awareness of WH for MPs and Peers. Topics include WH in relation to planning reform, tourism, education, soft power, environmental change, and the future of WH in the UK. A parliamentary debate in November led by the APPG focused on 80th Anniversary of UNESCO creation was well attended. A second debate is planned for Spring/Summer 2026

Sector Development

WHUK works on behalf of the UK's 35 WHSs and 5 Tentative List Sites. We deliver a key hub role, linking the frontline with Government and heritage Non-Departmental Public Bodies. We provide knowledge, training and networking opportunities for WH professionals to share and learn from each other. This year we delivered:

- **“World Heritage & Climate Action”** was the theme for the **2025 workshop**, held over 2 days at the Local Government Association head office in London. 60 in-person and 20 digital delegates enjoyed talks from the likes of ICOMOS, the National Trust, English Heritage, Historic England, Westminster City Council, Natural England, Historic Environment Scotland, NLHF and more, on topics exploring how these organisations were addressing the impacts of climate change strategically and in practice. Included in the programme was a site visit to Westminster Abbey WHS. Delegate feedback was overwhelmingly positive. The workshop was generously supported by Historic England.

In addition to the workshop and to kick off **WHUK's 10th anniversary** celebrations, a drinks reception was held in Portcullis House adjacent to the Houses of Parliament. MPs and Peers with WHSs within their constituencies and key stakeholders from across the heritage sector were invited, with over 100 attendees (including 20 MPs and the Minister for Heritage) attending.

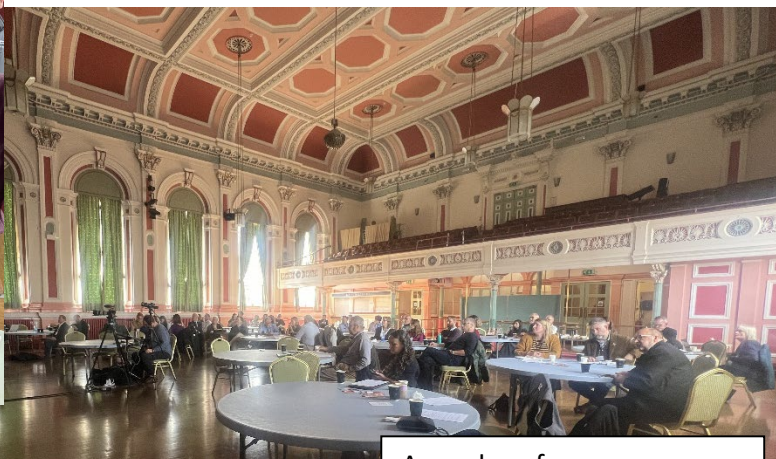


L-R: WHUK Chair Paul Simons, Minister for Heritage Baroness Twycross, and WHUK President Chris Blandford

- **“Engagement with World Heritage”** was the theme of the **2025 annual conference**, held over 2 days in Saltaire WHS. 75 in-person and 20+ digital delegates heard talks on topics ranging from engaging politicians, communities, new audiences, and schools, heritage engagement via art installation and technology, and more, from a variety of speakers including a number of WHSs, the NLHF, the City of Culture team, University of Bradford, the National Trust etc. The programme included site visits across Saltaire WHS. Again feedback was predominately very positive. The 25/26 conference was kindly sponsored by North Yorkshire Council and the National Trust



2025's annual conference at Saltaire, with Trustees past and present celebrating our 10th anniversary with cake!



Annual conference venue – Victoria Hall in Saltaire WHS

- During this year WHUK continued its webinar initiative. During the spring/summer period, we completed our series on **Climate Action** ending with the English Lake District. The series welcomed over 40 signups and generated £550 in income
- The summer series took a new direction as for the first time WHUK hosted talks that introduced the **ENWHA** and heard from WHSs in France (Loire Valley), Germany (Hanseatic Ports), Norway (Western Fjords) and Italy (Florence), as well as a general introduction the ENWHA. 70 signed up and the series brought in £1020
- The final series of 2025 showcased WHSs/Tentative Sites that are or have been significant **observatories**. The series heard from WHSs Stonehenge & Avebury, Jodrell Bank, and Maritime Greenwich and prospective Irish transnational the Royal Observatories of Ireland. The series had 40 signups and an income of £450



- 2026 started with a webinar series revisiting **Industrial Heritage**. Back in 2024, six WHSs were covered in the first IH webinar series. This second series would include those IH Sites that missed out two years ago, and will end with the launch of the upcoming IH Trail. Up to the end of 25/26, this series had 87 attendees signed up and an income of £1035

- WHUK hosted four **WHS Coordinators' Forums** (May, September, November and February) in 25/26, providing Site coordinators and managers the opportunity to hear the latest from Government, NDPBs, and their peers, as well as focused talks on projects at ENWHA, Realising the Benefits 2 etc; average attendance was 30+
- WHUK hosted one **WHS Chairs** meeting in November, with updates from NDPBs, individual WHSs, the NLHF, and the WH APPG
- WHUK has continued to support **Special Interest Groups**, including Industrial Heritage, Climate Emergency (now with its own dedicated webpages on the WHUK website), and the north England WHS cluster
- WHUK's **membership** faced some challenges during 25/26, as there were some cancellations or downgrading:
 - Voting Members = 31, marginally down on the previous year
 - Associate Members = 8, down on 24/25
 - Individual Members = 62, up on 24/25
 - Academic Member = 1

Engagement & Communications

WHUK's engagement and communications is primarily aimed at the UK's WH sector:

- **Realising the Benefits of WH to Local Communities 2** (RtB2) reached its second phase. Following the pilot project delivered the previous year, WHUK with support from Historic England, Historic Environment Scotland and Cadw, has developed RtB2, to better understand and support greater engagement with WH and WHSs by their local communities, through a 2½ year p/t role hosted at WHUK. This project was agreed this year and commenced during the summer, starting with desk research before moving into a number of 1-2-1 interviews with Sites themselves
- **Website** – additional resources were added to the site during the year, primarily 74 articles for the News section across a variety of topics including events, reports, job opportunities and WH/WHs news
- **Database** – WHUK's database of regular contacts stands at 764 (WH stakeholders and commercial, up 9% YOY)
- **E-Communications** – 14 e-newsletters were sent out to our database during the course of the year, reaching ~21k in total, with an average open rate of 24.4% (cf. last year's figure 25%) and average click through of 4.8% (cf. industry norm of 3-5% and 6% last year)
- **Social Media** – X followers are currently 3303 (same as last year), Facebook has ~2700 followers (cf. ~2400 YOY) and LinkedIn has 866 followers (cf. 660 in 24/25); WHUK has a new social media volunteer Clare whose regular postings are seeing increased engagement over all channels
- WHUK has given **presentations** on WH to Durham, Bangor and King's College London universities

Governance & Management

- 2025-26 saw changes within the **Board of Trustees**; Teresa Anderson, Graham Thompson and Tony Crouch all retired. Tony will continue to support WHUK and has been elected as WHUK's new Vice President. New Trustees elected include Graham Neville, NatureScot's Director of Operations, Armagh Observatory's Prof. Michael Burton, and business consultant Tim Stanley
- The 2025 online **AGM** saw finances of the previous year agreed and new membership rates for 2026-27 also agreed; 2025-26 saw WHUK make a small profit of just over £550 following from a successful year of events, membership retention and project contribution
- The new role of **WHS WHUK Board Rep** established. A voluntary role held by a WHS Coordinator, who will be able to provide a WHS voice at Board meetings. For 2025 the WHS Rep is Durham's Anne Allen

World Heritage UK
April 2026

