

The Scottish Parliament

The Information Centre

Research Note

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WORLD HERITAGE SITES IN SCOTLAND

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) designate World Heritage Sites. The designation is awarded for sites of outstanding universal value, and is designed to give a sense of collective global responsibility. Sites can have cultural, natural or mixed status. Scotland has three sites: St. Kilda, the Heart of Neolithic Orkney and Edinburgh Old and New Towns. A further site - New Lanark - is under UNESCO consideration.

Background

The *Convention concerning the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage* ([World Heritage Convention](#)) was adopted [UNESCO](#) in 1972 and ratified by the UK in 1984.

Under the Convention, the [World Heritage Committee](#) designates World Heritage Sites. These can be one of three types - natural, cultural or mixed. There are no tiers of World Heritage designation. Criteria for the different types of site are available on the [World Heritage website](#).

There are three World Heritage Sites in Scotland - St. Kilda (designated 1986) is a natural site, the Old and New Towns in Edinburgh (designated 1995) and the

Heart of Neolithic Orkney (designated 1999) are cultural sites¹. In the UK as a whole, there are twenty World Heritage Sites².

Process of designation

The [concordat](#) between the Department for Culture, Media and Sport ([DCMS](#)) and the Scottish Executive states that:

12. **World Heritage Sites:** In accordance with the agreed roles of UK and Scottish Ministers in respect of international responsibilities, set out in the International concordat, the Secretary of State (for DCMS) will be responsible for the UK Government's overall policy on World Heritage Sites and exercise a co-ordinating role in its relationship with UNESCO on this issue. Within this overall policy Scottish Ministers will, however, continue to be responsible for identifying and nominating individual Sites within Scotland, and for dealing with issues which may arise about the proper management of those sites. DCMS will chair regular meetings to discuss World Heritage issues of mutual concern.

Historic Scotland has responsibility for identifying cultural sites for the Scottish Ministers, whilst Scottish Natural Heritage identifies natural sites. Scottish Ministers then propose Scottish sites to DCMS to include on a 'tentative list'. This list contains sites the UK intends to take forward with a view to being established as World Heritage Sites. It is accepted that not all those proposed shall be endorsed. A further, more definite list is lodged with UNESCO - any sites on this list must be accompanied by a Management Plan (although this was not the case when St. Kilda and Edinburgh were originally designated). It is the responsibility of the State Party (i.e. the Member State signed up to the World Heritage Convention) to draw up this Management Plan, although such a task can be devolved to an organisation deemed more appropriate. The World Heritage Committee has the final say on sites to be given World Heritage Site status.

The most recent tentative list was produced by DCMS in July 1999 - it contained 25 UK sites, 4 of which were in Scotland - Forth Rail Bridge; The Cairngorm Mountains; the Flow Country; and New Lanark. The subsequent nominations list was for 4 UK sites, including New Lanark.

Protection and financial support

The World Heritage Convention is designed to identify sites of global significance and encourage international co-operation to protect these sites. Financial assistance and expert support is available to states that have ratified the Convention. Whilst there is no additional statutory protection under World Heritage Site status, the prestige of being on the World Heritage List is deemed such that a high level of protection will exist on the site.

Scottish Executive National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) 18, [Planning and the Historic Environment](#) states that³:

¹ Some further information available at: <http://www.kilda.org.uk/frame2.htm>, <http://www.edinburgholdtown.org.uk/> and <http://www.orkneyjar.com/history/worldheritagesite.htm>

² See <http://www.unesco.org/whc/nwhc/pages/sites/main.htm> for the full world-wide list
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"Responsibility for the nomination and subsequent protection and management of (World Heritage) sites lies with national governments. No additional statutory controls result from designation but a combination of a clear policy framework and comprehensive management plan should be established to assist in maintaining and enhancing the quality of these areas."

Historic Scotland indicate that⁴:

"World Heritage Site status brings with it no extra controls over the area affected nor any additional resources. The designation is rather more of an accolade."

There is though, financial support available from the World Heritage Fund. Assistance is available through this fund for preparatory work on tentative lists (including for emergency designation), as well as for site related training and educational projects. Recent financial aid has been targeted towards less developed countries. The money from this fund comes mostly from dues paid to UNESCO by State Parties. Deadlines for requests for financial assistance are every 6 months.

Historic Scotland indicate that there has been no real issue regarding funding for World Heritage Sites in Scotland, although it seems more of an issue elsewhere in the UK⁵. Responsibility for drawing up Management Plans, carrying out monitoring etc is devolved at each Scottish site.

Scottish sites

- **St. Kilda** - was bequeathed to the National Trust for Scotland in 1957. Today the National Trust for Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Defence Evaluation Research Agency have a presence on, and the responsibility for, the archipelago's management. St. Kilda is covered by many [national and international designations](#), including as a Biosphere Reserve (another UNESCO designation) and as a National Scenic Area. The National Trust [St. Kilda website](#) gives further information as to how the area is managed. St. Kilda is a natural site, but it seems likely it will be awarded mixed site status with regard to its cultural importance. A cultural Management Plan is currently being drawn up.
- **Heart of Neolithic Orkney** - this is the most recently designated site⁶, the Management Plan for which was published in early 2000⁷. Because most of the sites included in the designated area are in the care of Historic Scotland, this body had lead responsibility for drawing up the Management Plan. Part of

³ Section 15

⁴ Historic Scotland website - [Q&A section](#)

⁵ Personal correspondence, Historic Scotland

⁶ See map of area at <http://www.orkneyjar.com/history/standingstones/stenesscentre.htm>. Nearby Skara Brae is also included.

⁷ Available in SPICe in CD format, or from Historic Scotland.

this remit is to pull together the interests of other relevant organisations. A statement of intent was signed in [March 2000](#).

- **Edinburgh Old and New Towns** - the [Edinburgh World Heritage Trust](#) (EWHT) was created in 1999, amalgamating the Old Town Renewal Trust and the New Town Conservation Committee. This was on top of a statement of intent signed by the City of Edinburgh Council, Edinburgh New Town Conservation Committee, the Edinburgh Old Town Renewal Trust, Historic Scotland and (then) Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise Limited to work together to conserve and enhance the World Heritage Site. Edinburgh was designated under a previous UNESCO nomination process that did not require a Management Plan to be submitted with the nomination. As such the Edinburgh Management Plan is at a preliminary stage - responsibility for its production has been devolved to EWHT from the Scottish Executive.

EWHT is funded by Historic Scotland and the City of Edinburgh Council and aims to⁸:

"preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Site's special architectural or historic interest. The Trust seeks to co-ordinate activities necessary for the protection of the heritage value of the Site through its controlled development and its harmonious adaptation to contemporary life."

EWHT's remit includes historic buildings grants, conservation area issues, advice to Scottish Ministers and the local authority on policy and development issues, monitoring the site on behalf of Scottish Ministers, initiating projects (and securing finance) for the enhancement of the site, and promoting the World Heritage Site. EWHT staff includes an urban design officer, conservation architect, buildings adviser, business manager, grants officer and a revenue officer.

The City of Edinburgh Council has agreed to adhere to [a World Heritage Site Manifesto](#). This includes regarding World Heritage Site status as a material consideration when considering planning applications in the area.

In addition, a World Heritage Partnership Group has been established with members from the City of Edinburgh Council, EWHT, Historic Scotland, Edinburgh and Lothians Tourist Board and Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothians.

New Lanark is currently the only Scottish site under consideration by UNESCO as a potential World Heritage Site. The World Heritage Committee meets every six months to consider possible new sites - the next meeting at which designation decisions on sites will be taken is in December 2001. Responsibility for drawing up

⁸ EWHT website

the New Lanark Management Plan fell initially to Historic Scotland. Responsibility for the Plan now lies with South Lanarkshire Council⁹.

The [World Heritage Information Kit](#) gives further details on World Heritage Sites.

Research Notes are compiled for the benefit of Members of Parliament and their personal staff. Authors are available to discuss the contents of these papers with Members and their staff but cannot advise members of the general public.

⁹ Personal correspondence, Historic Scotland.