



The Lake District and World Heritage Site Inscription

Questions and Answers

What is World Heritage Site Status?

World Heritage Sites form an international register of sites that have great natural or cultural value. Some sites are listed because of their spectacular or unique scenery, others because of their importance as part of humanity's cultural heritage. Some areas possess both natural and cultural importance.

The World Heritage List was established at a General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1972. The aim is to protect, conserve, and transmit the cultural and natural heritage to future generations. The list includes monuments, buildings, and cultural and natural sites. Sites are included if they are judged to have outstanding universal value from a historic, artistic, or scientific viewpoint.

How does a World Heritage Site differ from a national heritage site?

World heritage is our shared heritage; it is by definition considered irreplaceable. It refers to a country's or area's history and historical buildings and sites that are considered to be of importance and value to present and future generations.

What makes the concept of World Heritage exceptional is its universal application; sites belong to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of the territory on which they are located.

It is the term 'outstanding universal value', which signifies the difference between a national heritage site and a World Heritage Site. World Heritage is considered to be the very best possible examples of cultural and natural heritage.

Where did the idea of preserving World Heritage come from?

The idea of creating an international movement for protecting heritage developed from two separate movements: the first focusing on the protection of cultural sites, and the other dealing with the conservation of nature.

The catalyst for the merging of these two movements was the decision to build the Aswan High Dam in Egypt, which would have flooded the valley containing the Abu Simbel temples, a treasure of ancient Egypt. Following an appeal from the governments of Egypt and Sudan, UNESCO launched an international safeguarding campaign in 1959. Archaeological research was accelerated in the areas to be flooded, resulting in the Abu Simbel and Philae temples being dismantled, moved to dry ground and reassembled.

Some 50 countries contributed to the costs of this enormous effort, illustrating the value of solidarity and shared responsibility for protecting global heritage assets. Its success led to other safeguarding campaigns across the world and to the preparation of a draft Convention on the protection of cultural heritage. By regarding heritage as both cultural and natural, this Convention is a reminder of the fundamental need to preserve the balance between the two.

World Heritage Sites are irreplaceable source of inspiration, considered to have a value that demands a collective responsibility. This shared responsibility is expressed through the World Heritage Convention, an international agreement that aims to secure the necessary financial and intellectual resources to protect World Heritage sites.

How many World Heritage sites are there worldwide?

The World Heritage list currently contains 812 sites which the World Heritage Committee considers as having outstanding universal value. These include 628 cultural, 160 natural and 24 mixed properties. Places as diverse as the Pyramids of Egypt, the Great Barrier Reef, the Taj Mahal, Stonehenge and Hadrian's Wall.

How many sites are there in the UK?

The UK has 26 World Heritage Sites, with 'Liverpool's – Maritime Mercantile City' being the most recent addition in 2004. Twenty one sites are designated Cultural sites, including, Canterbury Cathedral, St Augustine's Abbey, and St Martin's Church (1988), the City of Bath (1987), Ironbridge Gorge (1986), Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (2003), Saltaire (2001) and the Tower of London (1988). One site is designated as Mixed, while the remaining four are designated as Natural sites, including the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast (1986) and Henderson Island (1988).

In the UK, only Blaenavon Industrial Landscape (designated in 2000) is designated under the Cultural Landscape criteria for World Heritage Site status.

Why is World Heritage Site status relevant to the Lake District?

The quality and importance of the landscape and the cultural heritage of the Lake District make it a potential World Heritage Site. The area submitted bids in 1986 and 1989 and on both occasions the application was deferred. The bids didn't fail but the criteria which were used to assess World Heritage Site proposals at that time didn't accommodate the Lake District's submission. As a direct result of this, a new category was established in 1992 which is ideally suited to the Lake District (see below).

A number of organisations in the Lake District re-examined the case for WHS inscription in 1999 when the Lake District was placed on the UK Government's Tentative List of World Heritage Sites and came to the conclusion that it offered many potential benefits. The benefits would include a supportive framework for sustainable development, better landscape management and protection, increased profile for the Lake District and a stronger local partnership.

If anything, the relevance and potential benefit of WHS inscription has increased since 1999 with increasing pressure on upland farming and social and economic pressures within Cumbria.

What is a World Heritage Site 'Cultural Landscape'?

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) encourage the identification, protection and conservation of both cultural and natural heritage considered to be of outstanding value to humanity.

The Lake District bids for WHS inscription in the 1980s led directly in 1992 to the establishment of a new category of WHS called Cultural Landscape.

The Cultural Landscape category considers the interchange between human activity and the landscape and incorporates recognition for landscapes that are associated with cultural traditions, ideas and beliefs of an artistic or literary kind.

What qualifies the Lake District as a 'Cultural Landscape'?

The landscape history of the Lake District is inextricably linked to a range of cultural, literary and artistic movements, along with a strong association with the birth of the conservation movement in the UK and internationally. These factors, combined with the stunning landscape quality and the heritage-rich assets of the Lake District amount to an outstanding Cultural Landscape.

The Lake District has a long history of human settlement beginning with hunter-gathers at the end of the last Ice Age (c. 12,000 BC). There remains a legacy of prehistoric settlements, Roman forts, medieval abbeys, industrial and agricultural remains and settlements that shapes the unique character of the area. This 'historic environment' combines in the Lake District with spectacular natural features to form a rich, distinctive and highly significant landscape.

The Lake District landscape has also inspired generations of painters, poets and writers and has played a crucial role in the development of the internationally significant Picturesque and Romantic movements. What's more, the Lake District has provided the impetus for the genesis of the conservation movement, with the formation of the National Trust and UK National Parks movement.

These factors in combination rank the Lake District as internationally significant. There is no guarantee that the Lake District would succeed in gaining World Heritage Site inscription but the evidence-base is strong and is continuing to develop.

What are the potential benefits of WHS inscription?

The benefits of World Heritage Site inscription are different for each country and each location. The benefits for the Iguacu National Park in Brazil are inevitably going to differ from the benefits experienced by Liverpool in Northwest England. World Heritage Site inscription is a prestigious accolade but the benefits in terms of funding, image enhancement, tourism, education and economic growth are dependent on a host of locally determined factors.

World Heritage Site status for the Lake District has the potential to bring significant benefits to the area and to Cumbria as a whole. The extent of these benefits will depend on local support, the scale of the vision and the enthusiasm of the many communities and stakeholders who care deeply about the Lake District and its future.

At this stage there can be no certainties, but the obligations that central government would have for the protection and support of a Lake District WHS may prove to be of crucial importance in the future. At the very least this could result in a heightened profile for the Lake District and the benefits might extend to assistance with agricultural subsidies and support through the economic development agencies. This has certainly been the case with other World Heritage Sites in the UK.

Other benefits could include international recognition of the value of the Lake District, further protection of the landscape from inappropriate developments, increased opportunities to attract a new type of visitor to the area, new international funding opportunities, new public/private partnerships, a broadening of the tourism offer and a boost to the rural regeneration of Cumbria.

What will World Heritage for the Lake District mean for the rest of Cumbria?

World Heritage Site Status is an opportunity to increase the profile and image of Cumbria and build a destination brand that is of international stature. This will require partnership working, including engagement with central and regional government, and a carefully considered marketing effort.

Cumbria has a great deal to offer beyond the Lake District, including the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site, and it is vital that the economic benefits experienced within the Lakes World Heritage Site extend well beyond the geographical boundary of the area. This may involve the development of gateways to the Lakes World Heritage Site and would provide a valuable tool for attracting inward investment.

How do you achieve World Heritage Site status?

Only countries that have signed the World Heritage Convention, a commitment to protecting their natural and cultural heritage, can submit nomination proposals for properties on their territory to be considered for inclusion in UNESCO's World Heritage List.

Nationally, a country must make an 'inventory' of the important natural and cultural heritage sites located within its boundaries. This 'inventory' is known as the Tentative List, and provides a forecast of the properties that a State Party may decide to submit for inscription in the next five to ten years and which may be updated at any time. The Lake District is currently on this list.

For a World Heritage Site bid to be successful it requires local, regional, national and international support and there are a number of steps to go through before this is achieved.

Already, a substantial amount of work has been undertaken to assess the potential, benefits and value of World Heritage Site status for the Lakes.

Once the UK submits a nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the submission is reviewed and the relevant advisory body is advised to carry out an evaluation. The final decision rests with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

What are the obligations of World Heritage inscription on central Government and Cumbria?

By joining the World Heritage Convention, nation states are pledged to care for the World Heritage Sites in their territory as part of protecting their national heritage. Inscription of the Lake District as a World Heritage may therefore have far-reaching implications in terms of government support for the area. The obligations on Cumbria would be defined and agreed partly through the World Heritage Site Management Plan process and partly through the inclusion of appropriate policies in Local Development Frameworks (LDF). However World Heritage Site Inscription does not bring any planning constraints over and above those already put in place for the National Park.

Appropriate policies will deal with a wide range of issues including landscape and environmental protection, access and interpretation, transport, economic development and the social well being of local communities.

Can World Heritage Site inscription be revoked?

UNESCO can remove a site from the World Heritage List if the universal value of the site is damaged or degraded.

Who has been involved in the Lake District World Heritage bid so far?

A broad range of local, regional and national organisations have already considered the opportunities for taking forward the Lake District's World Heritage Site proposal.

The Steering Group currently includes representatives of the Northwest Regional Development Agency, LEADER Plus, Countryside Agency, English Heritage, English Nature, the Forestry Commission, the Lake District National Park Authority, the National Trust, Rural Development Service, Government Office Northwest, United Utilities, NFU, and ICOMOS-UK.

If the process is to develop, there will need to be extensive local consultation and engagement and additional organisations will be encouraged to take part.

World Heritage Site status presents a plethora of new opportunities for the area. It is an opportunity for organisations to unite behind a new shared vision for the future of the Lake District. This new vision will capture the imagination of local people, visitors to the area, the international cultural and conservation communities and the many organisations working to conserve and enhance the quality of the landscape, its economic prosperity and the well-being of local people.

What is the NWDA's position with reference to a potential Lake District World Heritage Site?

NWDA will continue to work with the Lake District World Heritage Site Group to advocate that any WHS designation is pursued only where it has true cultural landscape significance and helps positively address the issues faced in the communities and economy of the Lake District. NWDA's position is set out in more detail in its Lake District Economic Futures Study Policy Statement.

What is the Lake District National Park Authority's position?

The Lake District National Park Authority is currently committed to renewing its vision as well as the vision for the National Park. It will also bring forward a review of the National Park Management Plan if necessary. The Authority is also due to begin development of the Local Development Framework (LDF) for the National Park. We therefore have a unique opportunity to develop a suite of aligned plans for the Lake District including a World Heritage Site management plan. All these will require wide and detailed engagement with partner organisations and the local community and it is likely that much of this can cover several of the plans at the same time.

Where is the boundary for the Lake District World heritage Site?

A mapping exercise is underway which will help determine the most appropriate boundary for the World Heritage Site. It is common practice to also define a 'buffer zone', which provides a protective area around the main site.

This initial mapping exercise has identified a potential World Heritage Site boundary and buffer zone within the Lake District National Park area. The final agreement regarding the definitive site will require further detailed work.

Will World Heritage Site status hinder economic development, regeneration or planning?

World Heritage Sites are not ‘museum’ landscapes forever trapped in time. The Lake District will continue to develop as land uses change and as a result of existing and new planning and regeneration initiatives. This activity will not stop as a result of World Heritage Site inscription.

There are no extra legislative regulations attached to World Heritage Sites.

How much does it cost to submit a proposal for World Heritage Site status?

A great deal of time and effort has already been invested in the process of taking forward the World Heritage Site proposal.

A bid will take two to three years and the experience of other World Heritage sites indicates that a budget of approximately £350,000 will be required to prepare the bid and co-ordinate the process. The funding for this is likely to be found from a combination of local, regional and national sources.

What are the next steps?

The next steps are to implement extensive local consultation and to develop an active partnership to take the bid forward. This partnership will be responsible for putting the case to Government and working to develop the various aspects of the proposal over the next two to three years. The partnership must have the full backing of the local community in the Lake District and support and participation from key organisations across a range of sectors.

The partnership will decide on the details of leadership and management of the bid process.

Once submitted, the final decision rests with the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and their chosen advisory bodies.

For further information

You may well have questions about World Heritage Site status and the Lake District which are not covered here. For further information or to comment on this paper please contact:

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