

GIANT'S CAUSEWAY AND CAUSEWAY COAST WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Management Plan Summary



FEBRUARY 2005



INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

The WHS Management Plan for the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site is a key element of a three strand initiative announced on the 14th April 2003 by Northern Ireland Office Ministers Ian Pearson MP and Angela Smith MP to provide integrated visitor management at the Site. The two other strands of the initiative comprise:

- Causeway Coast and Glens Tourism Masterplan (published by Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) in April 2004); and
- an international competition to design a new visitor centre and associated facilities.

The WHS Management Plan was prepared by Chris Blandford Associates in discussion with and on behalf of a Steering Group which included the key stakeholders with an interest in the management of the Site. Organisations represented include:

- Department of the Environment: Environment and Heritage Service
- National Trust
- Moyle District Council
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
- Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust
- Northern Ireland Tourist Board
- Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside
- Geo-Conservation Commission

What are World Heritage Sites?

The concept of World Heritage lies at the core of the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention. The Convention defines '*World Heritage Sites*' as places or buildings of Outstanding Universal Value recognised as constituting a world heritage '*for whose protection it is the duty of the international community as a whole to co-operate*'.

The Convention came into force in 1974 and the United Kingdom ratified it in 1984. In July 2004, there were 179 contracting parties to the Convention and the World Heritage List contained 788 Sites in 134 Countries, of which 611 are cultural, 154 natural and 23 mixed sites.

The Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site was inscribed on the World Heritage list in 1986 as a natural site under criteria (i) and (iii) in recognition of its geological and geomorphological values, its history of scientific study and its exceptional landscape values.

Why is a Management Plan needed?

As an early WHS nomination in 1986, the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS was not required to prepare a Management Plan at the time of nomination. However, it is now Government policy that all UK sites have a management plan in order to fulfil our obligations under the Convention.

Within Northern Ireland, as in the rest of the UK, World Heritage Sites are not statutory designations and their Management Plans have no statutory basis but are implemented within the context of a hierarchy of local, regional, national and international policies. The Management Plan provides an agreed framework for the sustainable management of the Site and will help guide current and future action on and around the Site. Achieving a sustainable future for the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS depends on those supporting the WHS Management Plan working effectively in partnership towards the agreed aims and objectives.

Why is the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site so important?

The Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site is a spectacular and complex landscape. It is a classic locality for the study of Tertiary basalts and has played a fundamental role in the historical development of geological interpretation. The wild landscape it exhibits is designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The physical, geological and geomorphological landscape of the WHS is the primary reason for the global significance of the Site and forms the framework for all its other values. The physical geology of the Site comprises an unparalleled display of geological formations, representing local volcanic activity during the Tertiary some 50-60 million years ago. The most famous feature of all is the Grand Causeway pavement, formed out of geometric columns of volcanic basaltic lava.

The Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site was inscribed on the World Heritage list as a natural site under two criteria:

- ***Criterion i - Be outstanding examples representing the major stages of the earth's evolutionary history.***
- ***Criterion iii - Contain superlative natural phenomena, formations or features, for instance, outstanding examples of the most important ecosystems, areas of exceptional natural beauty or exceptional combinations of natural and cultural elements.***

The Site was therefore inscribed for its geological, geomorphological and landscape values as well as its role in the history of geological research. The full WHS Management Plan details these values in a Statement of Outstanding Universal Value.

In addition, the Site is also notable for a range of other aspects including its ecology, cultural heritage, intangible heritage and its role as Northern Ireland's premium tourist attraction. These are described in the full WHS Management Plan in a Statement of Other Values.

ISSUES FACING THE SITE

Overview of the Current Situation and Opportunities/Threats

The Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS is a globally significant geological site, internationally important ecological reserve and Northern Ireland's leading tourism attraction. The Causeway Stones are an instantly recognisable iconic form and one of the first images to be conjured up in national and international perceptions of Northern Ireland.

The myths and folklore associated with the Site have played a significant role in the development of identity for communities across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Since the Site was 'discovered' in the 17th century it has played a major role in the development of geological thought, particularly in the field of volcanology.

All of these values and roles need to be addressed by the Site managers in their day-to-day work and in strategic decision making. This WHS Management Plan has been developed to assist in this process through supplying a broad overview of the importance of the Site, the issues facing it and an agreed framework for delivering a sustainable future for the Site and its setting.

The most significant single issue facing the Site is the effective management of large numbers of visitors. The accommodation and management of visitors needs to be achieved in a manner that delivers a high quality visitor experience without compromising the conservation values of the Site or contravening any statutory designations that apply to the Site. Achieving this will ensure that these values are passed on to future generations with no significant degradation of quality.

The management of the Site is currently sustaining and conserving the geology/geomorphology, landscape and ecology to a level that should ensure that they are able to be studied, appreciated and enjoyed by future generations. There are, however, localised issues relating to impacts on the geological and landscape values of the Site resulting from the management of visitors. These impacts arise from the provision of infrastructure necessary for visitors' comfort, information, access and safety. The impacts are predominately visual in nature, but some elements, such as the road and turning circle by the Causeway Stones, are also having a physical impact. These impacts are to some extent the direct result of the limitations placed on the site managers by the available resources.

The quality of the visitor experience on the Site was substantially degraded by the fire in 2000 which all but destroyed the visitor centre. The present temporary facilities are acknowledged to be of inadequate quality for a World Heritage Site. Currently, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) is preparing to announce an international competition to provide world-class visitor facilities for the Site. This should deliver significant benefits for the visitor in enjoying and understanding the Site as well as enhancing its landscape and conservation.

Visitors have expectations and needs that extend beyond a reception centre and affect the Site as a whole. The delivery of a new visitor centre and associated facilities will need to be undertaken in parallel with schemes to address on-site issues. These include enhancing visitor access, improving interpretation, maintaining high levels of visitor safety and general improvements in the quality of on-site furniture and surfaces. This creates an ideal opportunity to deliver benefits for the conservation of the Site as well as delivering a better visitor experience.

The Site does not reside in a vacuum. It is an integral element of the tourism economy of Northern Ireland and the North Antrim Coast area in particular. The Giant's Causeway is Northern Ireland's premier 'must see' attraction and draws upwards of 400,000 visitors per annum. Although it contributes to the local economy through visitor expenditure in the surrounding area and region, considerable work remains to be done to deliver greater benefits for the region and local area. This, along with many other issues, led to the publication in 2004 of the Causeway Coast and Glens Tourism Masterplan 2004-2013 (DETI 2004). The Site plays a key role in the Masterplan and the future management and development of the Site will have to be cognisant of the needs and aspirations of regional and local communities and other tourism providers. The Site also lies within the Causeway Coast AONB and therefore forms an integral part of the AONB Management Plan (EHS, 2003).

Central to the successful resolution of the above issues is a structure for the future management of the Site. Traditionally, the National Trust and Moyle District Council have led in managing the Site. However, a WHS Management Plan Steering Group was established to guide the development of this document and has brought together a wider group of stakeholders and interested parties to develop a long-term strategy for managing the Site. Although details remain to be finalised, it is anticipated that a WHS Management Group will be established to replace the Steering Group and will work to deliver the integrated management set out in this WHS Management Plan.

The opportunity therefore now exists to enhance the conservation and management of the Site in a way that will deliver major visitor experience benefits in the context of maintaining the geological/geomorphological, landscape and ecological integrity of the Site.

It is the responsibility of the Site owners, Management Group members and other stake holders to work in partnership to realise this opportunity and deliver a sustainable future for the Site that will benefit today's visitors and local communities as well as future generations of both.

Key Issues

The full Management Plan provides a detailed analysis of the following key issues:

- management of the Site;
- conservation values of the Site;
- socio-economic context;
- visitor management and experience;
- setting of the Site; and
- site boundary.

MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES

From an analysis of the issues the Management Plan has identified five broad overarching management principles and twenty-four specific management objectives to help guide the future management of the Site.

Management Principles

The Management Principles are intended to guide the actions and decisions of both the on-site management bodies and the external organisations that make decisions affecting the Site. They are intended to be long-lived and should remain relevant to future revisions of the Management Plan.

Principle 1: Sustain and conserve the Outstanding Universal Value of the Site's geology and landscape for future generations.

Principle 2: Sustain and conserve the ecological, intangible heritage and cultural heritage values of the Site.

Principle 3: Deliver tangible socio-economic benefits for local communities through the management and promotion of the Site.

Principle 4: Maintain an appropriate setting and 'sense of place' for the Site.

Principle 5: Deliver and maintain a world-class and sustainable visitor experience at the Site.

Management Objectives

The management objectives complement the management principles and respond directly to the six key issue areas identified above. The objectives provide a broad policy context for future decision-making and are intended to be reviewed every six years.

Management of the Site

Objective 1: Implement, monitor and review the WHS Management Plan through the formation of an active and effective partnership of bodies with responsibility for making and implementing decisions that may affect the Site.

Objective 2: Integrate the management of the visitor centre and associated facilities and the management of the Site.

Objective 3: Involve local communities in the strategic management of the Site.

Objective 4: Ensure adequate information is available to all Site managers.

Objective 5: Establish links with other similar World Heritage Sites.

Conservation Values of the Site

Objective 6: Accept the management consequences of a dynamic Site.

Objective 7: Support geological research programmes and projects.

Objective 8: Ensure that the unique character, distinctiveness and aesthetic quality of the Site's 'natural' landscape is recognised, conserved and enhanced.

Objective 9: Improve knowledge and understanding of the landscape character of the Site and its setting.

Objective 10: Balance the management requirements of visitors with the Site's ecology.

Objective 11: Update and use the SAC conservation objectives, NNR Draft Management Plan and additional ASSI objectives to manage the Site's ecology.

Objective 12: Develop management proposals for the sub-tidal zone.

Objective 13: Interpret and promote the intangible values and cultural heritage of the Site.

Socio-Economic Context

Objective 14: Support the delivery of the Causeway Coast and Glens Tourism Masterplan.

Visitor Management & Experience

Objective 15: Seek to increase visits to the Site using public and/or other forms of sustainable transport.

Objective 16: Signage and information on transport links to the Site should be easily available within the Causeway Coast and Glens Region and at the principal arrival points.

Objective 17: Enhance the visitor experience without compromising the significance of the Site.

Objective 18: Reduce the impact of 'assisted access' vehicle from the Visitor Centre to the Stones.

Objective 19: Develop a Visitor Access Masterplan for the Site.

Objective 20: Identify, monitor and address visitor safety issues at the Site.

Objective 21: Develop a co-ordinated approach to the maintenance and improvement of the interpretation facilities on the Site.

Objective 22: Maintain and improve the educational programmes and facilities on the Site.

Setting of the Site

Objective 23: Encourage the protection of the setting of the Site to secure the overall integrity of the WHS.

Site Boundary

Objective 24: Review the WHS boundary by the end of 2010.

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

The WHS Management Plan provides a vision for the future of the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS to guide the management of the Site over the next six years. This vision reflects the five underlying management principles and supports the management objectives. The WHS Management Plan also contains an action plan that outlines actions required to deliver these objectives, to prepare the baselines for the required monitoring and to achieve the vision. The WHS Management Plan contains details on an approach to monitoring change at the Site. This monitoring is critical to ensuring that the Plan is delivered effectively and that the Site is managed in a way that conserves its Outstanding Universal Value and full range of Other Values.

Vision for Giant's Causeway WHS (2005 to 2011)

The ***Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site*** will become an international exemplar in the integrated sustainable management of complex natural landscapes. The Site will be managed in a considered and consensual manner to deliver an effective balance between:

- the conservation of the Site's dynamic geological landscape;
- the conservation of the Site's ecological values;
- the delivery of a world class visitor experience; and
- the need to provide positive benefits for local communities.

This will be achieved through the programmed delivery of the WHS Management Plan's actions and objectives by the stakeholders through the proposed WHS Management Group and other agencies. Key amongst these deliverables will be the:

- development of integrated management structure and tools for the Site;
- enhancement of public, scientific, physical and intellectual access across the Site;
- provision of new world-class visitor facilities for the Site;
- improved interpretation and educational facilities; and
- preparation of clear planning policy for the setting of the Site.

Taking the Plan Forward

The organisations that have worked together to develop this WHS Management Plan need to face the challenge of implementing the objectives, action plan and vision to secure the protection of the Site and its Outstanding Universal Value for future generations. The implementation of the WHS Management Plan requires the support and participation of these and other organisations and individuals. The WHS Management Plan itself can provide the focus for co-ordinating this effort, but it requires a significant level of continued commitment and resources if it is to succeed.

The recognition of this commitment is implicit in the work of the current Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS Management Plan Steering Group. This group was responsible for guiding the preparation of this WHS Management Plan, and it represents a long-term commitment by its members to conserving and improving the WHS. The members of the group have a continuing role to play in creating a sense of ownership of, and support for, the WHS Management Plan among all users of the Site and those that may be affected by it. These include the local community, landowners and visitors, and those bodies with statutory responsibilities within and around the WHS.

A copy of the full Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS Management Plan can be downloaded by visiting the following web site:

www.ehsni.gov.uk/natural/designated/WHS.shtml

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