

Sam Rose, opening speech, 2015 Saltaire conference

Good morning Councillor, Ladies and Gentlemen. My name is Sam Rose, I manage the Dorset and East Devon Coast / Jurassic Coast WHS, and I am Chair of the newly formed Charity World Heritage UK, speaking on behalf of the board and wider committee, who's collective effort has brought about this conference.

More importantly, I am delighted and proud to be able to welcome you to the Inaugural conference of World Heritage UK. Thank you for coming – the organisation is for you, and for World Heritage more widely, and without your desire to learn, share and work collaboratively, we wouldn't be here today. But more on that later.

I am also delighted to see delegates from all of the home nations and regions, from France, Germany and from a wide range of NGOs and other organisations. I am also a little relieved, as putting on the conference was a bit of a punt, and could have gone horribly wrong if no one of you wanted to come. My last welcome might also deserve a round of applause, as I believe that we do have in the room a representative of the UK's newest World Heritage Site – the Forth Bridge. Give it up for the Forth Bridge.

I'm going to talk for mainly about World Heritage UK, and then at the end touch on the Theme of the conference.

So, here we are Saltaire. When I was an impoverished student at Leeds University I sometimes used to come here for a day out. I gazed longingly at the expensive kitchenware, admired the Hockney exhibition pretending that I understood Art, and drank a Café latte feeling quite smug – I mean this was Leeds Bradford in the late 80s where caffè latte was 'new' and 'not from round here'! It was a really special place to visit, but I had no idea of the significance, the 'value' of Saltaire. I know it wasn't a World Heritage Site at the time, but you know, it still had Outstanding Universal Value, and at that time – it had a certain something, even to a naïve 19 year old from down south who, shockingly, gave up history when he was 14!

When I look back at that, I like to think that Sam from the 80s might would have been interested in this value, and would have wanted to tell other people about it – I certainly suggested friends visit.

In a sense, that is what World Heritage UK is all about, trying to help raise the profile and awareness of, and excitement about the UK's world heritage Sites so that today's breed of student visit Saltaire because it is special, because it is a World Heritage Site, and because of the amazing story it tells in our social history. As they have their salted-caramel Macchiatos, maybe they can perhaps sit round a table not talking to each other on their smartphones, but instead of facebook, they might be finding out about why Saltaire is such a brilliant place.

So, a little more about World Heritage UK. The organisation was set up as a response to our changing context in which we manage our World Heritage Sites. In particular there were more sites being managed from organisations other than Local Authorities, less money with which to manage them, and over the last 10 years, a perception of a decrease in Government backing for World Heritage initiatives what was absolutely necessary. Moreover, there has been a long term understanding amongst many Site practitioners that quite simply the World Heritage 'brand' is very poorly known, understood and used in the UK.

To give you an example, when I give talks about the Jurassic Coast I tend to start with one of those annoying interactive bits – you know, how many WHS in the UK can you name? The audience enthusiastically gets to 5 or 6, feeling pretty happy with themselves, then someone pops up with one that no-one else knew of – say Derwent Valley Mills (sorry Mark and Adrian) – which gets appreciative nods, and then everybody starts to mumble and look at the floor. When I say 29, they all look genuinely surprised and slightly ashamed. Why is that?

Well, I don't know, but it is quite the contrast to many other countries around the world, where, cultural differences notwithstanding, they really make a big deal out of their World Heritage Sites. I was lucky enough to be in Vietnam earlier this year, and coincided with the official launch 'week' of the Trang An scenic landscape complex mixed WHS. The culmination of the proceedings was a banquet for about 2000 people and a hour-long show all about the Site's OUV with hundreds of singers and dancers - including the country's leading pop star. This was followed by fireworks that put new years eve in London to shame. Whether you like that kind of thing or not, it certainly opened my eyes to the value other cultures put on World Heritage.

On a very different note, we have all been moved by the abhorrent behaviour towards Khaled-al-Assad, the custodian of Palmyra who stayed on to protect the ancient city when others fled, even

though he knew he had every chance of being killed by ISIS. It shows just how much a World Heritage Site – the heritage that has that label - can mean to the people who live and work there.

To return to the UK, the initiative to create the new organisation followed the excellent work of LAWHF, the Local Authority World Heritage Forum, but taking into account a changing world. LAWHF was formed in 1995 to give a voice for local authority-run World Heritage Sites, and achieve success in many areas. However, membership was dwindling and those of us on the Committee agreed to instigate a change process, without throwing the baby out with the bath water. (Kind of like changing the bath but keeping the baby wet and happy!)

We had a consultant, John Keiffer, do a bit of work to give us a start, and then gradually over the next couple of years we put together a vision, aims and basis of a constitution – all the time keeping the existing LAWHF membership included in the conversation. If there had been a desire to stop the change, it would have been heard and acted on.

This culminated in a proposal at the 2014 LAWHF AGM to disband LAWHF and set up the new Charity, which was finally approved by the Charity Commission on September 1<sup>st</sup> 2015. So I guess you could call this the official launch! Champagne with curry tonight??

To sum up our vision

“Our Vision is that the **United Kingdom will have a coherent approach to World Heritage Sites**, which will be better known and understood, and supported through sustainable funding so that their Outstanding Universal Values can provide inspiration, learning and enjoyment for society”.

This is a vision I hope all of you aspire to, and it one that can be achieved, but only by working together.

Our Mission is to raise the profile and secure the future of UK World Heritage Sites by **advocating for support and resources, promoting the Sites values, and facilitating networking, training and sharing of good practice.**

This last sentence really sums up what we are going to be doing, and what this conference is all about, and to come back to the point I made earlier, this organisation is all about you. It is

overseen by the voting members, the Sites and Site representatives – that is written into the constitution - but any member will be able to come to the member meetings and have their say in the running, the direction, and ultimately the success of the organisation.. This will be measured by the benefits to the World Heritage properties in the custodianship of ourselves here in the UK.

So what have we done so far, well I will put this speech and a full list of outcomes on the Web site blog – I hope you are all signed up to that?? – but they broadly fall into three areas:

WH:UK is a new, independent organisation with Charitable status, for Tentative list sites as well as existing WHS. This comes with a clarity of vision, mission and aims and an opportunity for brand development and collaborative working. This has been shown tangibly through linked activity across the nations and sites in the shape of the 30 years of WHS logo.

It is a body that is inclusive, that is for those WHS not linked to a LA or who are in all of the nations and regions of the UK, and open to individuals, companies, academic bodies, and small and large NGOs alike, that is shown by the early interest in membership, including 25 voting members

We have already reached the attention of DCMS, HE, HS, CADW and DoENI, UKNC, UNESCO and others, including being asked to sit on expert panels and comment on strategies.

An also tangibly we have held one very positive networking meeting in Liverpool in March – joint with Historic England - with more than 15 Sites represented, and now are hosting the first National World Heritage conference in the UK for as long as any of us can remember.

I think that is not bad going for 6 months and with your support, enthusiasm and involvement, this list will only grow, and the impacts should be exponential. As for what next well, I might touch on that with the closing remarks tomorrow, as now I think it is important to bring us back to the theme of the conference.

So our theme – World Heritage Tourism, unlocking the potential. My colleague referred to World Heritage Sites as the sleeping giants of Tourism. I like this analogy, although some of our World

Heritage Sites are, of course far from sleeping in this context. Stonehenge, Ironbridge gorge, Giants Causeway, City of Bath, Edwardian Castles, Edinburgh, others – they are all very well visited, popular with national and international visitors alike. Of course there are others that are less well known, and perhaps a little less obvious at first glance in terms of their offer, but equally special.

There are also others that perhaps don't want or can't manage large numbers of visitors – St Kilda for example or some parts of the Jurassic Coast.. however, in my view, and coming back to what I said earlier, it is the **World Heritage concept** that is the sleeping giant of Tourism in the UK, and the recognition that these places all have reasons for which they are seen as globally important. World heritage, their global importance and their outstanding universal values – often very linked – are what binds these places together, and in my view, is the overriding reason why the UK's Sites should be seen collectively and collaboratively, and responsibly, in terms of the Tourism offer.

So, I hope that over the next day and half, we will explore this in detail, we will look at case studies, hear national perspectives, find out more about UNESCO's approach to sustainable tourism, and get to the nub of what is the potential for World Heritage Tourism, and how we can unlock it in the right way for different people and different places.

So to end, a short anecdote, my boys, 7 and 10 said one evening “daddy, you've got such a cool job”, and I, having had a rather tortuous day at the office played it down, telling the about the meetings, the emails, the planning applications, and so on. ... but being boys they of course just dismissed all that and say - because I have trained them well – “but daddy, you look after a World Heritage Site – and it's even got dinosaurs – how can that NOT be cool”. At which point I had to concede, with a smile on my face, that it did have its moments of being cool! And it is conversations like that, and days like this remind me what a privilege it is to do my job, and to be part of a small and dedicated community who put their heart and soul into looking after our very special places.

Thank you and have a good conference,