



WORLD HERITAGE UK

# UK WORLD HERITAGE ASSET FOR THE FUTURE

A Review of the State of UK World Heritage Sites

## Executive Summary



## Image copyright

Crown copyright and database right (2017) Produced by Ordnance Survey Limited, Southampton, United Kingdom

Cover

Esteban

1

Crown copyright and database right (2017) Produced by Ordnance Survey Limited, Southampton, United Kingdom

Back Cover

© 2019 WH:UK

Published by World Heritage UK

[worldheritageuk.org](http://worldheritageuk.org)

All rights reserved. This report or parts thereof may not be reproduced in any form, stored in any retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission of WH:UK, except as provided by UK copyright law.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

World Heritage UK (WH:UK) is an independent charitable body that represents the UK's Collection of World Heritage Sites. It has undertaken an independent Review of the state of the UK's World Heritage Sites to assist the UK Government and other stakeholders in planning and supporting the future sustainable management of the Sites.

The Review was carried out during 2018 and early 2019 and focussed on the 27 UK mainland World Heritage Sites prior to the inscription of the most recent UK Site at the Jodrell Bank Observatory (July 2019). Site management was assessed at an individual World Heritage Site level. This was used to highlight the key issues for the UK World Heritage Sites as a whole, and generate a plan of action to realise the national and local potential of the UK World Heritage Collection.



# OPPORTUNITY FOR GLOBAL AND LOCAL BRITAIN

---

The UK's World Heritage is a remarkable opportunity – a sleeping giant of cultural and economic potential. It includes the most important heritage assets in the UK, helping to spell out our island story capturing Britain's greatest global impacts, and offering the potential for local socio economic benefits to WHS communities. The Sites are a central part of the UK's cultural inheritance.

Government has an international responsibility to protect, nurture and enhance our World Heritage, so that it is protected for generations yet to come. With effective management the Sites can remain (and in many cases become) the crown jewels of heritage tourism in the UK, contribute to the projection of our soft power, whilst helping to regenerate and give greater identity to local communities and reshape the image of some of the less favoured parts of the UK.

At the present time the UK is not turning World Heritage to its advantage. Some Sites are exemplars of effective sustainable planning and management, but good management, promotion and interpretation is patchy, and at too many Sites it is underfunded and under resourced. Well-known Sites are coming under visitor pressure that must be carefully managed, whilst less well-known Sites would often welcome (and could with benefit accommodate) additional visitors.

Collectively the UK is not yet making the most of its inheritance. It is not properly delivering the international commitments made as a States Party when the Sites were inscribed. The UK is not making the best use of the Sites, either as tools for regeneration or for securing our national cultural identities and cohesion, especially in England.

# CHALLENGES FACED BY THE UK WORLD HERITAGE SITES

Over 50% of UK World Heritage Sites are managed and primarily funded by local authorities or by mixed public partnerships. Reductions in public funding are putting at risk the future resilience and sustainable management of these Sites. By contrast, Sites managed and supported directly by central Government sponsored agencies or independent trusts to a degree have greater funding resilience and capacity to absorb costs, especially where the trusts concerned can generate income streams, for example through ownership or guardianship of land and property.

The Review revealed numerous local issues and management challenges which vary from Site to Site across the Collection. At a strategic level for all Sites, but in particular for the ‘publicly’ managed Sites, the five central challenges faced by the UK World Heritage Collection include:

- Low awareness of the UK World Heritage Site Collection and lack of understanding of Outstanding Universal Value both nationally and locally.
- The need for increased capacity, resources and diversification of skills in Site management and promotion.
- The emerging need for alternative governance and management models which offer greater scope for self-sustaining finances and less dependence on traditional public sector support.
- The need for improved Government support coupled with alternative and consistent funding sources for management and conservation.
- Improved integration of tourism marketing and World Heritage Site promotion at local and national levels.

Addressing these interrelated challenges is critical if a coherent UK wide World Heritage Site strategy, together with more consistent and sustainable World Heritage Site local management, is to be achieved. An initial priority should be the raising of awareness of the national importance and local benefits of the World Heritage Site Collection and individual Sites. Without greatly raising World Heritage Site awareness, improving management capacity, governance and funding the integration of tourism will continue to be challenging.

# UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL

The World Heritage Site Collection is very important for the UK. The potential for the Sites to further contribute to UK Government achieving its current broader goals in the areas of social, cultural and economic wellbeing is great. Unlocking the potential for this and for increasing the benefits for all from UK World Heritage Sites, both nationally and locally, requires some joint Government led action. The Review concludes by recommending an eight point Plan of Action as follows:

---

**1. National World Heritage Sites Strategy and Vision - The UK Government, in collaboration with the devolved nations and other key stakeholders, should commit to developing a vision and preparing, implementing and regularly reviewing a coherent strategy for the planning, management and conservation of the UK's World Heritage Sites.**

---

**2. UK World Heritage Fund – A fund should be established, bringing together public funds and philanthropic contributions, specifically to enhance the promotion and management of all Sites in the Collection, especially where greater resilience for maintaining future management is needed.**

---

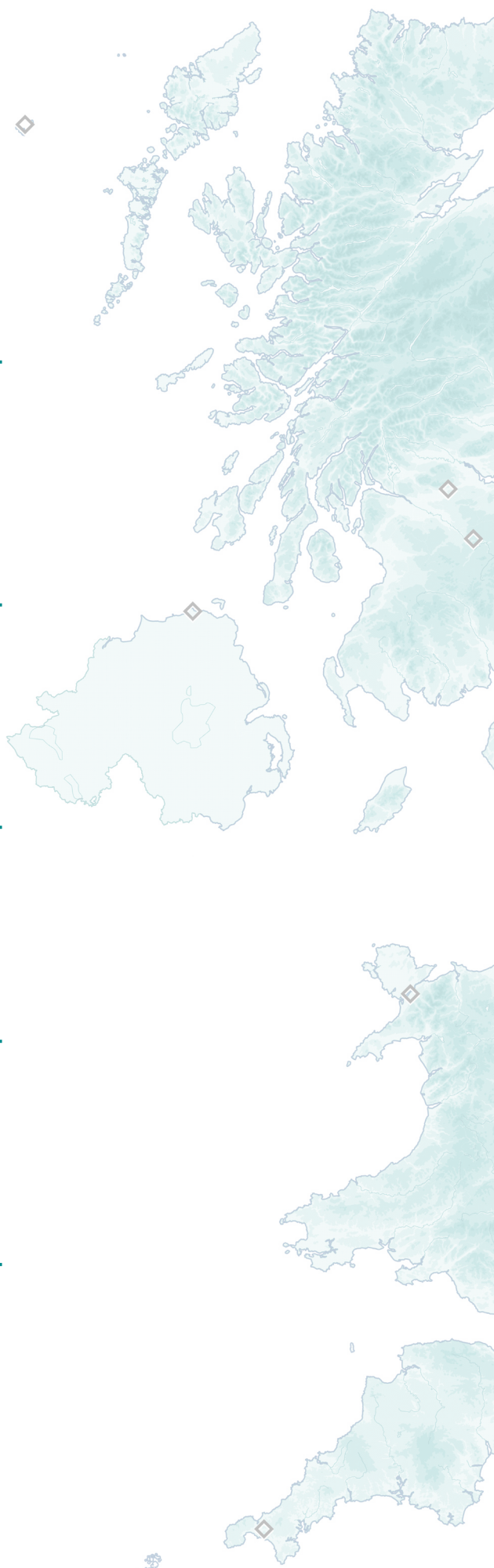
**3. Independent National Body for World Heritage - The UK should support and resource an independent national body for World Heritage, coordinating World Heritage Site Collection promotion, policy and action, and sharing best practice nationally and internationally.**

---

**4. Campaign for Raising World Heritage Awareness - The UK should commit to running a series of coordinated national campaigns to raise the awareness of the World Heritage Sites and their values, involving Government departments and agencies, the private and voluntary sectors, and the individual Sites.**

---

**5. UK Planning Policy and World Heritage Convention – A dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders and research should be initiated to engender and investigate how a more effective relationship between the UK national and local planning policy frameworks and the principles enshrined in the World Heritage Convention can be achieved.**





**6. Local World Heritage Sites Upskilling** - Steps should be taken to ensure that all Sites have properly funded and multi skilled management teams which are more resilient and not over dependent for their resourcing on local government and wherever possible with independent sources of long term income.

---

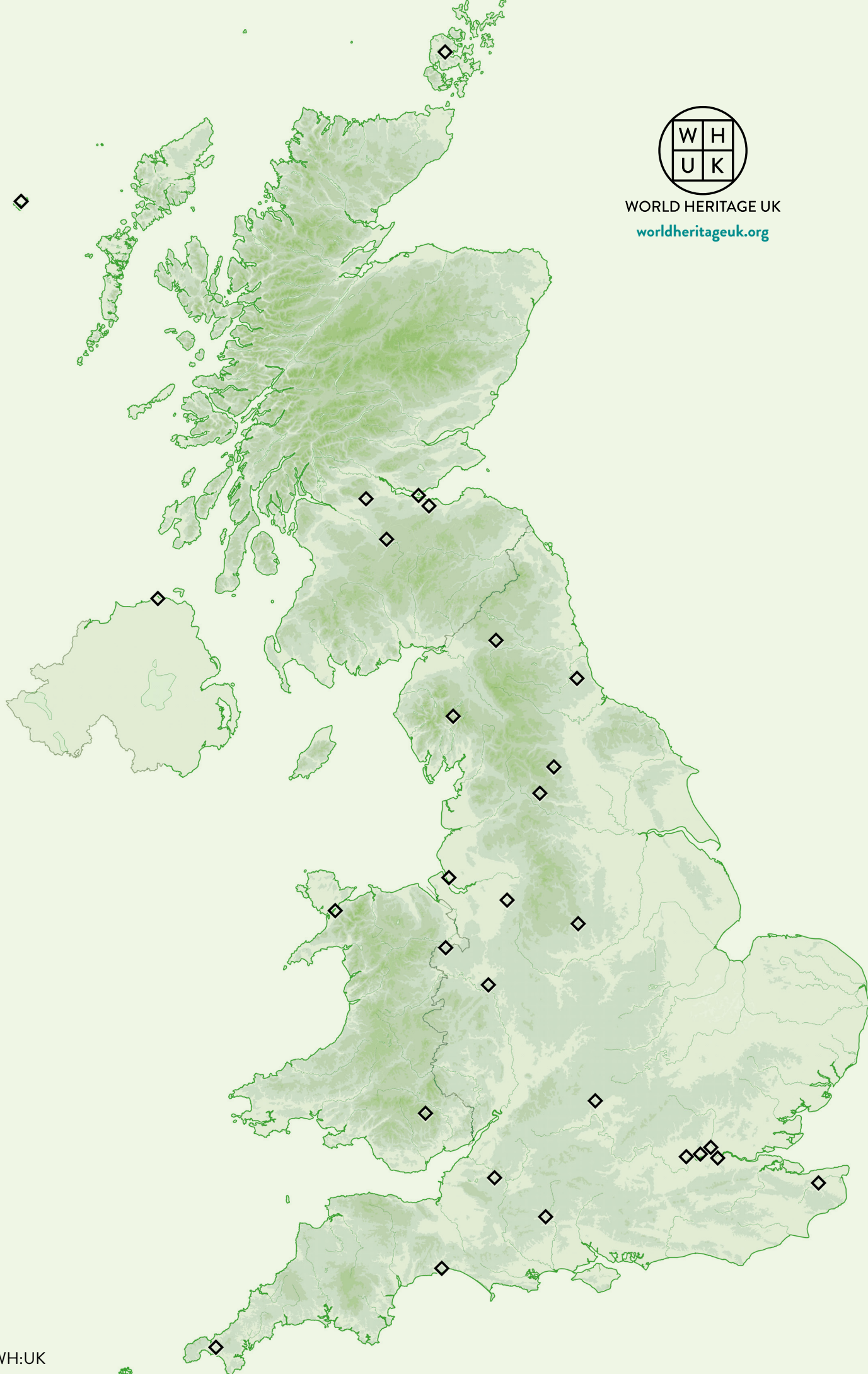
**7. Alternative World Heritage Site Governance** - A more detailed review should be undertaken of the alternative mechanisms for World Heritage Site governance to highlight opportunities and options for some publicly managed Sites to be more self-sustaining and less dependent on public structures and support.

---

**8. Integration of Tourism and World Heritage Sites** - Steps should be taken to secure a much closer and effective working relationship between tourism promotion and the effective management of Sites.

The overall message of the Review is that alternative and more sustainable and consistent levels of resourcing and support are critically needed to unlock the potential for improved national promotion of UK Sites and for more resilient local management of the Collection. Government wellbeing, cultural, tourism and international standing agendas will greatly benefit from this when achieved. Some central Government public funding will be needed to kick start awareness raising, upskilling and greater World Heritage Site resilience allowing the most vulnerable Sites to develop a better blend of public and other funding sources to support management. The initiation of a UK wide World Heritage Strategy would facilitate collaboration by the many stakeholders in the World Heritage sector for the further refinement and detailing of other propositions highlighted in the Review.

World Heritage UK (WH:UK) is at the heart of the UK World Heritage community and is the only body which is entirely focused on representing and promoting all the UK's World Heritage Sites. Already working with colleagues and partners in central and local Government, the private and voluntary sectors, WH:UK stands ready to assist in the implementation of the strategic priorities proposed by the Review, enabling positive change in the World Heritage sector.



WORLD HERITAGE UK  
[worldheritageuk.org](http://worldheritageuk.org)