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BUILDING · CONSERVATION

Making Heritage Work

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Dear Ms Gibson

DURHAM CASTLE AND CATHEDRAL WORLD HERITAGE SITE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) is the professional body for building conservation practitioners and historic environment experts working in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, with connections to the Republic of Ireland. The Institute exists to establish, develop and maintain the highest standards of conservation practice, to support the effective protection and enhancement of the historic environment, and to promote heritage-led regeneration and access to the historic environment for all.

Thank you for inviting us to participate in this consultation. The IHBC does not normally comment on casework but given the importance WHS status inherently represents we feel we ought to set before you some principles we think you might consider. Consequently our comments follow the strategic conservation principles that lie at the heart of our corporate and charitable objects.

Much of this letter is composed of our reasoning. The important points for consideration by your team are the paragraphs in **bold**.

Context

The need for management plans is relatively recent, Durham was inscribed in 1986 and the plans were required from 2005. Durham is currently at the consultation draft stage of its second plan, the first having been issued in 2008. Many sites are on their second management plan or even their third. A plan is required with new nominations.

UNESCO advice on plans was issued in 2008 (Management Plans for World Heritage Sites A practical guide - Birgitta Ringbeck). Historic England advice of 2009 is superseded by the changing requirements of the NPPF but is still considered of practical help (The Protection & Management of World Heritage Sites in England, English Heritage Guidance Note on management plans). There is also advice and practice for the natural sites that can be instructive for cultural sites.

Management Plans have to find their place in relation to the new Local Plans for their area, the current NPPF policy and guidance and also their frequent coincidence with conservation areas. Linkage should be found in the relevant conservation area appraisals.

NPPF Planning Practice Guidance is:

'Given their importance in helping to sustain and enhance the significance of the World Heritage Site, relevant policies in management plans need to be taken into account by local planning authorities in developing their strategy for the historic or natural environment (as appropriate) and in determining relevant planning applications.'

Where the site is also covered by a neighbourhood plan, lies close by or its setting is linked, there is likely to be shared appreciation of the significance of the WHS.

The context, variations between sites of their ownership and management leads to differing approaches sharing common requirements for reporting. The attitude of the owners of the site can shape the recommendations within the plan. Multiple ownerships cause both practical issues of liaison and also agreement of actions.

Issues

Variability between sites and their needs.

Evolving statutory framework and updated guidance since previous management plan submission.

Potential for links to Neighbourhood Plans.

World Heritage UK

This was established last year, replacing the Local Authority World Heritage Forum. It recognised the presence of non-local authority owners and managers and opened up scope for membership to interested professional.

Their aims are:

'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".

'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".'

True to their mission there has been a helpful two-day training seminar on management plans and this is also supported by linking the WHS coordinators closer together for mutual support.

IHBC members and the IHBC as an organisation are aware of this and will give support to this valuable organisation where appropriate.

Issues

New WHS support organisation, providing mutual exchange.

IHBC being willing to provide liaison or support.

Resources

The production, consultation and publishing of a revised management plan are substantial tasks and can occupy staff who otherwise would be concentrating on carrying out management. The funding of the publishing of the plan is an issue. At a time of declining conservation support available within local authorities the production of the plan and integration with the formal planning process is demanding.

The availability or otherwise of resources can start to shape the management plan. This is linked with a need to reduce publishing costs and at the same time make the plans more readily available through websites.

The Hadrian's Wall plan is web based, while others make their plans available through downloads. Web access can lead to a cumbersome process to build up a coherent and full version of the plan. There can be difficulties with the fragmentation due to perceived difficulties in file size. Linking the plan with the site's web page is particularly useful in drawing visitors into the consultation process.

In looking at Durham's example it is interesting to see the impact of the extensive academic drive towards cultural heritage through the University. The Institute of Modern and Early Medieval Studies was launched in 2010 (based on an earlier group) and the University hosts the UNESCO Chair in Archaeological Ethics and Practice in Cultural Heritage and delivers the MA in International Cultural Heritage Management. Capitalising on this the University conferred an honorary Doctorate on Irina Bokova, the UNESCO Director General, in 2012. The weight of this resource shows in the balance of input within the management plan.

Issues

The depth of academic as opposed to management input, and the need to get the Plan to be fully accessible and legible through web availability.

Raising sufficient resources to adequately cover all topics and produce a plan.

Adequate local authority support.

Research and Intangible Heritage

Inscription of World Heritage Sites is based on the enduring legacy formed by these internationally significant cultural assets. The means of inscription and management of that process and the orientation of selection have developed substantially since the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage Convention came into force in 1975. One of the developments has been the recognition of intangible heritage, in Durham's example something that is now seen as integral to and developing with its physical assets.

As sites mature as World Heritage Site designations there is substantial research that enriches the understanding of the site. This process also informs the description of attributes rounding out the Statements of Outstanding Universal Value and understanding of the site's significance.

Where there is substantial academic involvement or support for a site this can evolve its own direction but it can also show the need for change in site description or boundaries. Using the research product in effective management and establishing site significance can be challenging. Establishing sufficient research can also prove a challenge for resources.

Issues

The need to increase awareness of intangible heritage and increasing research on sites.

Challenges of using research in management and generating research where resources are limited.

Management System

Although mentioned in the 2013 UNESCO Operational Guidelines this has not been a particular emphasis for management plans:

Section 109 - The purpose of a management system is to ensure the effective protection of the nominated property for present and future generations.

The management of natural sites has to relate more closely to the means of ongoing management that effectively shapes them and this is reflected in a more dynamic management planning approach.

IUCN Management Planning for Natural World Heritage Properties Interim 2008, basic requirements for a management plan:

A commitment to implementing the plan to fulfil the obligations of the World Heritage Convention.

An initial assessment and factual statement of the condition of the property's natural values, including its features of Outstanding Universal Value, and an indication of their relationship to its other characteristics.

The issues and challenges facing the property.

The long term ambition for the property, i.e. its vision and objectives.

The means of delivering the ambition, i.e. the range of management policies and associated actions.

Looking at Durham's draft plan the successful achievement of management actions from the preceding plan is noted and the basic system touched upon. This leaves undocumented the way in which the WHS is coherently managed against its values through the differing major ownerships – Cathedral, University and Colleges. The relationship to the formal planning process is touched upon but the timetable and mechanism for engagement is not explained this includes the recent Conservation Area Appraisal and the emerging Local Plan. The issues surrounding the delayed County Durham Plan have had a direct impact but in its first consultation draft this did not deal in detail with the WHS and simply cross referred to the WHS Management Plan. What is not explored is how the landowners' (including the County Council's) development and management actions that fall below planning application/Fabric Advisory Committee level engage with supporting the site's values.

Description is needed of how the Cathedral and University are organised in dealing with the Peninsula and its buildings and how WHS values are embedded in the decision making processes. Reference is also needed to how these get drawn together to make coherence in managing the Peninsula as the WHS and through the WHS Committee. The overall vision for the site is left to evolution through topic areas rather than being made explicit.

Issues

The management system and vision for the WHS site need adequate reference within the management plan.

The approach to planning for natural sites is more dynamic and references actions to protect values and avoid harm. This approach may be gaining strength and was referenced in the recent WHUK Management Plan training seminar.

Integration with the formal planning process is essential.

Risk

A key area of risk is the causing of harm by development either individually or cumulatively to views, quality and setting. Investment and positive conservation can prove difficult to encourage. Ensuring the balance of change against the risk of harm tends to split opinions, in Durham's case raising issues of sufficient input from the key statutory conservation bodies. In Durham, assessment of impact for development has tended not to look at cumulative impact and not use the ICOMOS guidelines for assessment. This leads to underestimating the degree of harm and the corresponding requirement to justify or mitigate the change.

Durham has not fully explored environmental factors particularly climate change and the risk of heavier, less predictable and more frequent flood events. Localised flood events can be a threat to buildings and spaces and streets. There have been two landslips, one of which has closed access to one of the riverbanks minor historic assets. Given that Prebends' Bridge (part of WHS) was a replacement for the one lost in a storm in 1771 and bank flooding remains an issue this can be an appreciable risk.

Under the natural sites approach to management by risk focuses on monitoring and action by risk. This could reorientate cultural site management planning.

Issues

Encouraging adequate assessment of development impacting on WHS values, promoting positive change and investment.


Ensuring adequate assessment of risk including environmental risk and particularly climate change.

Using the ICOMOS guidelines for assessment.

The potential for increasing management by risk.

We hope these comments are helpful

Yours sincerely



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