

English World Heritage Sites to get strongest ever protections

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The nation's most important historical landmarks are to receive greater protection than ever before, Communities Minister Baroness Andrews announced today.

The Government is taking action to protect all 17 English World Heritage Sites, which include the Tower of London, Hadrian's Wall, the Ironbridge Gorge, Maritime Greenwich and Durham Castle.

For the first time the government wants to put all English World Heritage Sites on the same national footing as its conservation areas, national parks and areas of outstanding beauty by including them in national planning protection rules.

World Heritage status is only granted by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) for major world cultural and natural heritage locations considered to have outstanding universal value. The UNESCO World Heritage Committee will meet in July to review new and existing sites.

Currently over half of our World Heritage sites are not in previously protected conservation areas. The changes which are being consulted on will prevent minor development occurring without specific planning permission. Seemingly minor changes such as roof alterations, new buildings nearby or artificial stoning could when added together have a devastating impact on a World Heritage Site.

This will mean that the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape, the most recently recognised site which is particularly vulnerable, will be covered for the first time. The development controls are also extended across Stonehenge, Blenheim Palace, the City of Bath, Christchurch College in Canterbury, the Dorset and Devon 'Jurassic' Coast, Derwent Valley Mills and Lime Street Station in Liverpool.

In addition English Heritage is publishing guidance today that gives detailed advice on how to give proper consideration and protections to World Heritage Sites.

Communities Minister, Baroness Andrews said:

"Britain has a unique heritage with many famous buildings and landmarks stretching from Stonehenge to the Royal Botanic Gardens. We want to ensure that our historic buildings and landmarks and our cultural treasures are preserved for current and future generations.

"We are changing the planning rules to give all English World Heritage Sites the best protection from potentially damaging developments that could threaten the authenticity, accessibility and charm or character of our most important places."

Dr Christopher Young, Head of World Heritage and International Policy for English Heritage, said:

"One of the significant threats faced by World Heritage Sites in England is the incremental damage to those that fall outside of the protection provided by conservation areas, national parks or areas of outstanding natural beauty. We welcome that this destructive anomaly that threatens these few vulnerable sites has now been addressed by the planning system. This new planning circular will offer the basic protection that should be expected for sites of such outstanding international importance.

"As important as providing planning protection for these sites is the inclusion of expert guidance on the protection and enhancement of their universal value. The supplementary advice provided by English Heritage is guided by our published Conservation Principles and will make sure that England has some of the most beautiful, historically important and competently cared-for sites in the world."

The Government has already consulted this year on whether all major planning applications on World Heritage Sites should automatically be considered for a national ['call-in' decision](#).

The planning system already provides the strongest rules ever for heritage sites. However, the government is committed to protecting places in Britain of real historical importance which is why the Department of Culture, Media and Sport has published the first Heritage Bill in 30 years.

The bill will seek to unify heritage protection regimes, devolve decisions to English Heritage with greater public involvement and place heritage at the heart of the planning system. Planning is central to the government programme of heritage reform which is creating a clear and effective policy that seeks to protect our national assets from inappropriate development.

Notes to editors

1. The Planning circular consultation extending Article 1 (5) coverage of World Heritage Sites will recognise the need to protect World Heritage Sites in national policy, and introduce a legislative change giving planning authorities greater control over certain small-scale types of development such as artificial cladding or the installation of dormer windows. This sort of development could, on a cumulative basis, erode the outstanding universal value of a World Heritage Site. The

consultation is available at:

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/worldheritagesitesconsultation.

2. The Government is consulting on proposals to enhance WHS ahead of the UN World Heritage Committee's meeting in Quebec in July to review new and existing sites.

3. World Heritage Sites are created by UNESCO with the aim of identifying and protecting sites of outstanding universal value that transcend national barriers. The current list of 851 sites includes forests, mountains, lakes, deserts, monuments, buildings, complexes and cities.

4. The 17 English sites are as follows (date of inscription by UNESCO in brackets):

- Durham Castle and Cathedral (1986)
- Ironbridge Gorge (1986)
- Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites (1986)
- Studley Royal Park including the Ruins of Fountains Abbey (1986)
- Blenheim Palace (1987)
- City of Bath (1987)
- Frontiers of the Roman Empire (Hadrian's Wall) (1987)
- Westminster Palace, Westminster Abbey and St Margaret's Church (1987)
- Canterbury Cathedral, St Augustine's Abbey and St Michael's Church (1988)
- Tower of London (1988)
- Maritime Greenwich (1997)
- Derwent Valley Mills (2001)
- Dorset and East Devon 'Jurassic' Coast (2001)
- Saltaire (2001)
- Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (2003)
- Liverpool - Maritime Mercantile City (2004)
- Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape (2006).

5. The United Kingdom ratified the 1972 UNESCO *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* in 1984. Details of the UNESCO Convention can be found at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/convention> (external link).

6. The *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention 2005*, which include guidance on the protection and management of WHS, are published by UNESCO and can be found at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines> (external link).

7. The new proposals follow commitments made in the 2007 White Paper *Heritage Protection for the 21st Century* (external link), published by the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS).

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