

## IMPACTS OF CORONAVIRUS ON WORLD HERITAGE SITES IN SCOTLAND

26 MARCH 2020

### 1. General overview from Historic Environment Scotland

Plans for celebrating World Heritage around World Heritage Day in April, including events planned as part of the Edinburgh International Science Festival, have been cancelled, but we intend to have a strong social media presence on the 18<sup>th</sup> April. Sites are looking at what digital material can be supplied to UNESCO as well as what online resources we all have which can be promoted.

More broadly there will likely be wider impacts for all six WHS in Scotland in the aftermath of the pandemic: e.g. grant funding may be in very high demand, making it harder to build funding packages for projects associated with the various Site Management Plans; budgetary constraints on management partners may force a focus on delivering core actions only; staffing freezes at management organisations and their partners may also have wide ranging impacts. Finally, it is hard to predict what the longer term social, political and economic changes of the pandemic will be and what this may mean for management of WHS. These are likely to be profound, and to require similarly deep changes to how we work.

### 2. St Kilda – Susan Bain, National Trust for Scotland

Visitors contribute approximately 35% of the budget for St Kilda which helps fund the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) conservation work, so we are anticipating a significant drop in this income stream. Our season on St Kilda is mid- April to end August and it is not accessible after that, so realistically we are not expecting any visitor income. We are not employing staff until further notice nor procuring any goods or services; so our entire work programme of repair, maintenance and monitoring has been postponed. This year we had hoped to repair the pier, undertake maintenance on the Church roof and carry out drystone dyking on several falls in the Village. In addition, we will not be carrying out our full programme of seabird monitoring and research and the Soay Sheep Project, the longest running large mammal research project in the UK, will also be compromised so there will be a significant gap in our data, which shows long term trends in population and productivity.

We can potentially catch up on a maintenance back-log, but this will require additional resources which may not be forthcoming. We will lose wildlife data this year, which we cannot get back.

The MOD facility on St Kilda is still currently staffed and there is one sheep researcher on island. While there are people on St Kilda we can maintain the site security, including some

form of biosecurity. NTS are looking at measures to mitigate risk to the buildings and artefacts in the event that St Kilda becomes uninhabited, as there is a security threat from private vessels and travellers.

The biggest risk is no-one implementing the St Kilda biosecurity plan, this may have disastrous consequences.

NTS and MOD are discussing the future of the construction project which is heading into the final season of demolition and reinstatement, and decisions are still being made.

NTS staff cannot get to St Kilda with the current restrictions on non-essential travel, so nothing can happen on the islands. They may make some headway on the biosecurity plans, management plan and health and safety issues but liaising with key stakeholders and partners may be more difficult.

The NTS as a whole is a membership organisation and relies on support of its membership and also visitor numbers. At the moment, there are no figures on membership rates, but as people lose their jobs then they may look at what they can cut from their expenditure. Some members may not see the point of remaining a member if they cannot visit properties. The other big income stream to the NTS is from shops and cafes, all closed.

St Kilda has additional support from the St Kilda Club which contribute approximately 10% of the budget annually, however their income is predominantly from the souvenir shop they run, so this income stream will dry up. NTS also have a grant from HES, but as the post (St Kilda Archaeologist) that delivers the majority of the outcomes relating to this grant is currently on hold, we will not be able to deliver most of the outcomes, so we have provisionally agreed a grant reduction of 25%.

### **3. New Lanark – Jane Masters, New Lanark Trust**

Our whole operation - visitor attraction, hotel, café, shop, leisure facilities, office - is closed. The site remains accessible to visitors for walks. Around 65% of our income is through these areas and, as such, we face a difficult year, even after this crisis abates, due to the seasonality of the Site.

We have a resident population and are not overly worried about the security of the site, but all on-site projects have ceased, including our Townscape Heritage / Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme, which was due to end this year and as a result we will need to seek an extension from NLHF / HES. Development work on certain projects continues with approved extensions from funders, including an electric bus project, and securing funding for major repairs to our historic turbine. However, these projects will not be able to move to delivery phase as a result of contractors closing their operations.

All of New Lanark's staff, with the exception of 8 key staff have been furloughed, as most of the staff are operational in our Visitor Attraction, Hotel, Catering, Maintenance and administration, and cannot work from home. Some core staff in the Trust have also been furloughed through lack of work due to cancellations for learning groups, exhibitions etc. Key staff still working are covering site maintenance and security, operational diversification and planning for reopening, existing project management and securing funding, and finance. The site has a population of c.120 and the buildings are all secured.

With all areas of the Site closed, New Lanark is generating no income to cover our ongoing revenue costs, and existing grant funding is project specific. The job retention scheme has given us some breathing space, but not much, as we are aware of the length of time it will take our visitor numbers to return to normal when we are able to reopen.

Asks from Government:

The Government job retentions scheme needs more clarity, and quickly and the grant scheme. Also, an understanding that cultural heritage sites have longer term issues regarding the return of visitors and high running costs.

#### **4. The Heart of Neolithic Orkney – Alice Lyall, Historic Environment Scotland**

Two of the four HES Properties in Care which make up the World Heritage property are now closed to the public, with subsequent loss of income from ticket sales. The other two are open access, unstaffed sites – while HES as officially closed all sites the Orkney Islands Council-owned car parks at these sites remain open. However, the WHS Rangers are maintaining a skeleton system of brief checks at the open access sites and report that there are no obvious increases in local visits for exercise. Remotely accessible visitor counter data will be useful to confirm. RSPB has closed all its nature reserves, including the unstaffed Brodgar reserve that surrounds one component of the WHS – however, this is an unstaffed and un-ticketed site so potentially still in use by walkers. HES Conservation staff based in Orkney are working to the emergency on-call system only at present. Formal site inspections and works are suspended for the time being. All office-based staff involved in the management of the WHS are working from home.

A Community Consultation exercise to inform the current WHS Management Plan review took place over January and February just before the coronavirus shut-down. As expected, responses focused quite heavily on concerns about over-tourism etc. However, tourism is a major economic driver for the Orkney Isles and it will be important in drafting the new management plan to strike the right balance between recognising these concerns and addressing the impacts of the current complete cessation of tourism, and the likely impacts

on the local community. The completion of the new Management Plan is likely to be delayed – previously planned to launch in autumn 2020.

The key management partners are strongly affected by the lockdown: all HES ticketed sites across Scotland are now closed and other income streams from event bookings are now absent. This will have major implications for available funding for non-essential delivery in the 2020/21 financial year. There will also be impacts from the consequent hiring freeze if staff leave and are not replaced. Orkney Islands Council have announced a focus on essential services during the pandemic in order to protect staff and service users and to preserve vital services. There will be a loss of income to the Council from cruise berthing fees, tourism, etc. across the islands, amongst other effects. Currently also awaiting an opportunity to discuss with the other partners in the management plan (RSPB; SNH) how their operations are affected.

Although not part of the WHS, the well-known Ness of Brodgar excavation is in the buffer zone adjacent to the WHS. Usually open in July/August this has now been cancelled for 2020. Key annual events in the Orkney calendar that offer opportunities for engagement and education such as the annual Agricultural Shows are also likely to be cancelled.

## **5. The Frontiers of the Roman Empire: the Antonine Wall – Patricia Weeks, Historic Environment Scotland**

This is an open access site, although the museums with associated collections (Hunterian, National Museum, Falkirk and Kirkintilloch) have all closed. Communications from volunteers living along the Wall suggest that last weekend saw higher than normal numbers of visitors to many of the unmanned parts of the Wall, and time will tell if this continues to be a potential problem. All of the capital projects running through the NLHF supported 'Rediscovering the Antonine Wall' project are now on hold as they require site access / landscape and construction works / supply chains etc. We don't yet know what the financial impact of this will be e.g. need to pay to maintain site security etc. However, we have recently received word from both our key funding bodies NLHF and LEADER that they will extend their respective grant deadlines so that we can accommodate these problems and complete work as soon as we can. One member of staff in this project is now home working from France, but the positive side to this is that the project now has a little time to release digital materials in German and French (thanks to her input). Another member of the project staff has volunteered for emergency duties / redeployment of services within her local authority, but this should have minimal impact in the short term. A LEADER funded visit of project volunteers and key staff from along the Wall to Rhineland-Palatinate in May has been postponed, as has the reciprocal visit in June. It is hoped to reschedule this for the autumn. All community and outreach events have been cancelled till the end of May so there will also be some significant slippage in the community projects we were undertaking

but the project team is trying to use the time to put in place a considerable amount of virtual planning to move as quickly as possible when we are allowed.

The Management Plan review, scheduled for 2020, has been put on hold and will probably be delayed by a year. The Research Strategy, almost complete, will now undertake consultation by email rather than host a workshop in June, as was originally planned.

The Climate Vulnerability Index workshop, scheduled for May, has been postponed.

## **6. The Old and New Towns of Edinburgh – Jenny Bruce, City of Edinburgh Council**

The coordinator, based in the City of Edinburgh Council, has been asked if she can be redeployed elsewhere during the current crisis. All staff are now homeworking. The drafting of the City Plan (Local Development Plan) and the City Mobility Plan is still underway as all scheduled face-to-face public consultation was carried out and on-line consultation has been extended to 25 April 2020 to accommodate a move to remote working.

All museums, galleries, visitor attractions and guided tours across the city are closed with unknown implications as a result of income loss. Most of the planned festivals have been cancelled or postponed, including the Science Festival (held in April each year), the Edinburgh International Film Festival (held in June each year), the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, the Edinburgh International Festival and the International Book Festival (all August). There will be significant knock-on effects on tourism-related industries and visitor numbers to the city.

Edinburgh World Heritage have closed the Tron Kirk visitor centre for the foreseeable future. They also suspended work on several ongoing conservation projects. It is hoped that these can be picked up again and will not be significantly affected. All staff are working from home.

The Climate Vulnerability Index workshop, scheduled for May, has been postponed.

## **7. The Forth Bridge – Miles Oglethorpe, Historic Environment Scotland**

Negotiations continue with Network Rail and Transport Scotland over the appointment of a WHS coordinator, but this is on hold. The new Management Plan, scheduled for 2020, will also be delayed.

The Forth Bridge is still carrying trains, albeit on a reduced timetable. As everywhere, local businesses are suffering, and we will be moving to virtual meetings of the Forth Bridges Forum and its subgroups in the short term.