



United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural Organization

# United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO

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## Memorandum of Evidence to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee Inquiry on Tourism 2007

### Submitted by the UK National Commission for UNESCO

#### Key points of the submission

#### **Tourism Promotion of the UK's World Heritage Sites**

1. The 24 World Heritage Sites in the UK have significant potential to contribute more to the tourism industry. They can contribute to more environmentally friendly forms of dispersed tourism in both urban and rural areas. However, in order to realise their full potential, more resources are required in order to promote them. There needs to be a comprehensive UK-wide strategy to develop the brand and promote the sites better to a wider local, national and international visitor market.

#### **Stonehenge and 2012**

2. The World Heritage Site of Stonehenge is a truly iconic site on a global level. However, the current setting of the site and the arrangements for its one million-plus visitors each year have been described as a "national disgrace". It is imperative that this issue is resolved quickly, so that a permanent solution can be put in place in time for the London 2012 Olympic Games. These are expected to generate significant additional visitors to the site, as well as shining a spotlight on the UK's management of this universally important heritage and tourism destination.

#### The UK National Commission for UNESCO

3. The UK National Commission (UKNC) was re-established by Hilary Benn in March 2004. UNESCO is unique in the UN system in operating through National Commissions in its Member States. Under the UNESCO Charter, National Commissions are tasked to advise their governments on all matters to do with UNESCO. The UKNC is an independent body working in partnership with Her Majesty's Government and in close collaboration with the UK Permanent Delegation to UNESCO in Paris. The UKNC comprises an overarching National Steering Committee and five Sector Committees, including Culture. UKNC members are independent experts, appointed *ad hominem* in fields covering the range of UNESCO's programme of activities. Meetings are also attended by Government Department representatives, including those from DFID, DCMS, DFES and FCO.
4. The principal objectives of the UKNC include:
  - to provide expert analysis, comment and advice as input to UK policy-making on key UNESCO programmes and issues;
  - to bring to the attention of Government aspects of UK policy towards UNESCO or matters in which UNESCO has legitimate interest;
  - to facilitate the management of UNESCO activities in the UK.

5. The UKNC Culture Committee was re-established in summer 2005. Its twenty members were nominated by organisations representing the whole spectrum of the culture sector in the UK, including the arts, museums and cultural heritage.

The Culture Committee's key aims include:

To advise and work with HMG on UNESCO's cultural activities which have specific relevance to the UK including UNESCO requests and initiatives, Conventions, World Heritage Sites' matters, and cultural education.

### **Tourism Promotion of the UK's World Heritage Sites**

6. Sites inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List are recognised as being of outstanding universal value. The World Heritage Site "brand" is one that is globally recognised and has the potential to attract visitors from all over the world, especially in growing markets. The 24 natural and cultural World Heritage Sites in the UK are widely dispersed across the country and cover a huge timespan from the geological treasures of the Devon and East Dorset Coast to the 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial monuments of Saltaire in West Yorkshire. All have their own individual ownership and management arrangements. Together, they form a powerful resource for dispersing tourists, especially overseas tourists, away from "honeypot" centres into a broader range of urban and rural areas. They can also link in to a number of environmentally sustainable activities such as walking and cycling.
7. Although the sites are promoted individually (or, sometimes, in limited groups) to a greater or lesser extent, the joint marketing of this rich resource, particularly for tourism purposes, falls far short of that undertaken in many other tourist destination countries. A comprehensive strategy is needed to promote UK World Heritage Sites to home and overseas visitors through consistent joint branding and marketing activity.
8. The UKNC requests the Culture, Media and Sport Committee to recommend increasing the resources available centrally for the joint marketing and brand development of the UK's World Heritage Sites to a level that is comparable with that seen in other developed countries. This is particularly important in the context of the lead-up to 2012, and its succeeding legacy.

### **Stonehenge and 2012 - the urgent need for improvement**

9. Stonehenge is an iconic site. It is one of the few UK sites immediately recognised by the local, national and international community. It is used as a symbol of Britain, acting as a magnet and raising the profile of Britain as a cultural tourism destination. A far higher proportion of the one million annual visitors attracted to the Stonehenge site are from overseas than any other heritage site outside London. It also, of course, is an important heritage site in its own right, a collection of prehistoric monuments that are without parallel on a global basis.
10. The UK has an excellent reputation as an international leader in setting standards of excellence for the management of cultural heritage assets. The Stonehenge World Heritage Site Management Plan was praised in 2000 by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee for its high quality and is used as a model for other inscribed sites. The actions of the UK over the management of its own cultural heritage of "*outstanding universal value*" will therefore be closely scrutinised by the international community and should maintain the highest practicable standards.
11. Since the Inscription of Stonehenge as a World Heritage Site in 1986, there has been a commitment by Government to improving public access to this internationally-renowned monument and its surroundings, and to enhancing its environment by removing the nearby roads. Nearly twenty years have passed and the issues remain, despite significant investment in exploring over fifty route options, looking at over half a dozen options for a new visitor centre, and the full democratic process of a Public Inquiry into proposals for the improvement of the A303, a key strategic route to the South-West, which crosses the site.
12. The Public Inquiry resulted in the Inspector's recommendation of the Published Scheme, a 2.1km bored-tunnel and associated works. The roads would be removed from the viewshed of Stonehenge itself and there would be a substantial degree of re-unification of the landscape, significantly reducing an existing disfigurement. The Published Scheme would also facilitate the construction of a new visitor centre outside the WHS.
13. The current course of the A344 where it crosses the Avenue immediately adjacent to Stonehenge itself, presents a dire and dangerous experience for visitors. We understand that this cannot be easily rectified without a contemporaneous solution for the A303. This has been one of the key issues which the UNESCO World Heritage Committee have been concerned over since 1986. The Committee has been supportive of the careful process of evaluation, and has indicated that the Published Scheme would be an appropriate solution.

14. A further public consultation on the A303 Stonehenge Improvement Scheme Review was undertaken by the Highways Agency in 2006. The UKNC recommended that HMG should seek without delay to implement the Published Scheme, not least because it is the only one that could be completed within the next five years, if started promptly. Further delay would continue to deprive the public, including the many international visitors, of the high quality and holistic experience of the Stonehenge WHS that they expect and deserve. However, to date, there has been no response from the Government to this consultation and we are no nearer to resolving the long-standing issues affecting the site.
15. The combination of improved, safer transport links to the South-West and a significantly improved visitor and learning experience and greater access to the landscape, for local people and other cultural tourists is now even more urgent and important in the context of 2012. If, as the Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport, and the Minister for Culture have said, part of the economic benefits of the Olympics will derive from the promotion of the UK as a quality tourist destination, then the matter of enhanced access to Stonehenge (and the South-West of England) must be addressed *now*.
16. The resolution of the 'national disgrace' that has been the visitor experience at Stonehenge in time for the 2012 Olympics and for longer-term gain by commissioning the implementation of the Published Scheme and the enhancement of this iconic World Heritage Site is of the utmost urgency.
17. The UK National Commission for UNESCO therefore urges the Culture, Media and Sport Committee to recommend that Government approve the Published Scheme for implementation without further delay.

Yours sincerely



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Chair  
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