

HS Consultation Response ref: ORK/WHS/001
RESPONSE FORM:

HEART OF NEOLITHIC ORKNEY WORLD HERITAGE SITE MANAGEMENT PLAN 2008–13

Please complete your name and address below and add your comments on the consultation beneath each question. Please return it with your respondent information form.
Thank you for your help.

Name	Bryan Rendall
Postal Address	
HEART OF NEOLITHIC ORKNEY WORLD HERITAGE SITE MANAGEMENT PLAN 2008–13	
Question 1	
Do you have any comments on the current Buffer Zone?	
<p>The whole "buffer zone" concept is rather bizarre, in that whilst one might imagine it puts a complete stop on any development within the zone, in reality, it does little to preserve the setting of the World Heritage Sites. By way of example, the current Buffer Zones include many types of modern developments, from modern styles of houses, through roads, car parks, industrial style farm buildings to electricity poles, wires and transformers. In January 2008, I visited the Ring of Brodgar with a friend visiting from France. He admitted to being very disappointed, as the immediate setting of the site he felt was "ruined" by developments as described above. In fact, his biggest point of note was the large area of tarmac, walkways, "bridge" and gates created to facilitate visitor access to the site. His feeling was that the site was not what he expected at all, which was a site of complete isolation, with no other signs of modern inhabitation present. Instead he saw many signs of modern life, within 1 km of the site. It was only when we travelled to areas of Orkney completely untouched by development, did he feel that he had found somewhere approaching what he expected.</p> <p>The whole "buffer zone" concept is therefore fatally flawed, in that even suppressing development 10 km away is pointless, as the area in the immediate vicinity has numerous developments which have already ruined the setting as described in the Atkins report. Further suppression of development through "buffer zones" does little if anything to preserve a setting already lost.</p>	
Question 2	
Do you have any comments on the proposed Buffer Zones?	
<p>Further to the above, the proposed "Buffer Zones" are even more bizarre, in that they will suppress development in areas of Orkney beyond the Zone of Visual Influence. This is perhaps most relevant when read in conjunction with the Orkney Islands Council document - Orkney Wind Energy Development - Supplementary Guidance. This document is relevant in that it leans heavily on the proposed Buffer Zones around the World Heritage Site. Yet, the buffer zone extends beyond the ZVI, reaching areas in the West Mainland well out of sight of many parts of the WHS.</p> <p>For example, the OIC document considers that a wind turbine with a tip height >15m shall not be permitted anywhere within the outer (large) buffer zone. Practically, this means that a domestic householder residing in Costa (or many other places in the West Mainland) would be prevented from installing a 6 kW turbine on a 15m tower, as it falls within the Buffer Zone.</p>	

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This is despite the fact that the Atkins report suggests that in some of these sites, a construction would have to be over 150m tall to even be seen from the World Heritage Site. In fact, there are areas in the West Mainland that go "off the scale" on the Atkins "Theoretical Height to be seen from the Ring of Brodgar" chart, yet still form part of the Outer (Large) Buffer Zone. This is beyond rational explanation.

If the "buffer zone" concept is to be continued, despite the heavy development within the existing buffer zones, then it is pointless to even consider extending these.

Question 3

Do you have any comments on the Other Values of the World Heritage Site; is anything missing?

One of the principle characteristics of many of the values listed, is that they are only relevant for those looking in from the outside. This is the case with virtually all the Values listed. People come to look into Skara Brae and see these values. They don't go to Skara Brae, stand inside it and look out. The same is the case at Maeshowe, and even the Ring of Brodgar. This is exceptionally important and puts the sites into context. Taking a wider view, the sites are more important to those outside (visitors) looking in from the outside.

Question 4

Do you have any comments on the range of Stakeholders that have an interest in the World Heritage Site; are any missing?

I am afraid I cannot see the connection between the importance of the Neolithic sites and the RSPB. Whether or not the area around the sites is bird reserve or not, makes no difference to the preservation of the site. Each site is, after all, a man made creation, and that is what visitors come to see. There are plenty other bird reserves on Orkney for birdwatchers to go and see. It could be argued that encouraging certain species of bird to proliferate beside the sites, (bonxies for example) could result in a reduction of other species, as well as scaring off the tourists during the nesting season when the bonxies become very aggressive towards people.

Question 5

Do you have any comments on the Evaluation of the Aims and Actions of the 2001 Management Plan; is anything missing?

There are key areas missed in the plan, especially as it makes reference to sectors such as the agricultural industry. For example, the plan strives to take account of the needs of the agricultural industry, and make allowances for it. Yet, at a time when the agricultural industry is in decline, and the renewable energy industry is on the rise, the plan fails to take this into account, and make provisions for the renewable energy industry.

Other parts of the plan, for example the new car park at the Ring of Brodgar, directly conflict with the other aims of the plan, in that not only has it resulted in the creation of an industrial area akin to a retail park, it actively encourages a higher number of visitors at any one time. This along detracts from one of the very objectives of the whole plan. How can you gain an

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understanding of the setting of the site in neolithic times, when you are competing with a few hundred other tourists, a car park with 3 or 4 big tour buses idling away, and more cars coming and going than the high street in a medium sized town?

Question 6

Do you have any comments on The Vision or Long-term Aims for the World Heritage Site?

Again, this is hard to comprehend given the developments that have taken place on site already. Even in my time, a visit to Skara Brae has changed out of recognition. When I was a peedie boy, you saw Skara Brae in its natural context. Now, there is a man (Historic Scotland) made "visitor centre, complete with Audio Visual displays, a gift shop and a . Maybe I am missing something, but in Neolithic Orkney, there were no AV displays, gift shops and cafes. So Historic Scotland have gone and done exactly what they are trying to prevent others doing - Inappropriate development in the vicinity of the sites. For me, Skara Brae is ruined by the commercialism of an agency trying to capitalise as much as they can on the visitors to the site.

Question 7

Do you have any comments on the Issues identified for the World Heritage Site over the next five years; is anything missing?

Many of the issues are at odds with the actual preservation of the sites. Building cafes, shops and improving access as discussed above being a prime example. Having a cafe on site for example does nothing to enhance the site, but seems to be part of the standard "kit" required for a tourist attraction these days. And I for one cannot interpret history from plasma screen near as well as I can from getting in about hands with it. The issues as listed appear not to be geared so much towards conservation and preservation, but to increasing visitor numbers and resultant revenue. A prime example of this is the fact that you cannot buy a ticket to visit Skara Brae without buying a joint ticket to visit Skaill House. Yet, Skaill House is not part of the WHS, and is certainly not neolithic. It is separated from Skara Brae by about 4,400 years. Yet, you cannot visit Skara Brae without also paying to visit Skaill House. Opportunism? Tell me that its not.

However, the biggest, and most important issue of all, is that the World Heritage Site MUST co-exist with Orcadians and their way of life in the 21st Century. It is unreasonable to expect Orcadians to be suppressed when it comes to development. The tourism industry in Orkney is worth a mere £25 million to the Orkney economy, with perhaps 75% attributable to the WHS. This realitively minor contribution to the Orkney economy, which according to the Orkney Islands Council Economic Review for 2008, amounts to £243 million (not including tourism). Tourism attributable to the WHS therefore accounts for less than 7% of the Orkney economy. This compares well with the part of the Economic Review which states that tourist account for only 6% of retail expenditure in Orkney.

Question 8

What in your opinion is/are the Issue(s) of the highest priority and why?

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The issue with the highest priority is the Missing one above, that is, that WHS must co-exist with the rest of the Orkney population and economy, without detriment to either. As a "small fish" in a "big pond", the WHS, which contributes ~6% to the Orkney economy, should not do so to the detriment of the remaining 94%, whether that be agriculture, renewable energy or other industry.

Question 9

Do you think that there any issues in the Management Plan that may affect an equality group (age, disability, religion and belief, gender, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender), race); if so, how, and what can be done to mitigate them?

The average Orcadian, seeking to move with the times, may well be disadvantaged by this plan.

Anyone even vaguely connected with renewable energy will be severely disadvantaged by this plan.

Question 10

Do you have any comments on any of the specific Objectives, how they relate to the Issues and how they have been prioritised?

Question 11

Do you have any comments on how any of the specific Objectives will be monitored?

Question 12

Do you have any general comments about how the Management Plan will be implemented

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and progress reported?

Question 13

Do you have any other comments about the Management Plan that you have not covered in your responses to other questions?

ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT

Question 14

Do you have any comments on the baseline information, or the environmental problems/issues?

Yes, but these are all covered below

Question 15

Do you have any comments on the approach taken for the environmental assessment?

The environmental assesment seems to gloss over some of the fundamental issues that put the WHS at greatest risk.

Rising sea levels resulting from climate change present an immense risk to site such as Skara Brae. Yet the Management Plan for the WHS seeks to suppress development of alternative forms of energy production, especially onshore wind power, one of the most commercially advanced methods available today to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and carbon emmissions.

Meanwhile, initiatives seek to increase the numbers of visitors to both Orkney and the WHS, with the resultant increase in emissions caused by transport in its various forms. The

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Environmental Assessments states that it does not believe the management plan will increase carbon emissions. Yet, one of the objectives of the Plan is to "Maximise access for all". This is completely conflicting.

Question 16

Do you agree with the results of the environmental assessment? Have we identified the key issues?

No - The assessment has completely failed to acknowledge the key issue of climate change, other than in things like "retail operations". The assessment and the plan together, should acknowledge the importance of reducing reliance on fossil fuels, not just from a global perspective, but also more locally to ensure that Skara Brae is not devastated by rising sea levels.

Question 17

Do you have any comments on the environmental mitigation measures, including the schedule of commitments?

There is not one environmental mitigation or measure that promotes the use of renewable energy to ensure that future generations can continue to enjoy the World Heritage Site as we can today. This is especially relevant since the WHS is now such an intensive energy user - Plasma screens in the visitor centre, spotlights in the gift shop, tea urns in the cafe etc. When I was peedie, Skara Brae required hardly any energy to visit. Now, it seems it needs lots, and this is currently expected to come from fossil fuel sources.

Question 18

Do you have any comments on the proposed additional environmental monitoring indicators?

It would be good if a performance indicator was established whereby every inch of sea level increase observed in Skaill Bay was plotted against every renewable energy development blocked in the West Mainland. I am sure that would make interesting reading! It would also be interesting if energy consumption on the Skara Brae site was used as a performance indicator, with the baseline data predating the construction of the current visitor centre.