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23 November 2015

Dear Dr Rossler,

**Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (N369))**

In accordance with Decision 38 COM 7B.80 of the 38<sup>th</sup> session of the World Heritage Committee, I am submitting the State of Conservation Report for the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site. We have used the format stipulated as far as is possible. The text of Decision 38 COM 7B.80 is shown below in italic print to distinguish it from the State Party response which forms the body of the report.

I can confirm that I am content for the report to be posted on the UNESCO World Heritage Centre website.

Kind regards,

Hannah Jones  
World Heritage Site and Underwater Policy Advisor

cc  
HE Matthew Sudders, UK Permanent Delegate to UNESCO  
UK National Commission for UNESCO  
Henry Owen-John, Historic England



**STATE PARTY REPORT 2015: STATE OF CONSERVATION OF GIANT'S CAUSEWAY AND CAUSEWAY COAST (UNITED KINGDOM) (N369)**

In accordance with **38 COM 7B.28** Paragraph 9, the State Party wishes to report on the State of Conservation.

**1. Executive Summary of the report**

In relation to Decision 38 COM 7B.80, the State Party wishes to: provide an update on the golf resort development project and the termination of Petroleum Licence PL3/10; and advise further on the context of petroleum licences in Northern Ireland and associated environmental safeguards.

In compliance with Decision 37 COM 7B.28, the State Party has prepared a request for a Minor Boundary Modification to the landward boundary of the inscribed Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS (the WHS Property). The IUCN advisory mission of 2013 held that the original inscribed boundary had been made too close to the top edge of the sea-cliffs, a key feature of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). The State Party was advised to seek minor modification of the boundary to ensure this feature remained within the WHS Property, taking account of the natural processes of natural erosion which are recognised as key to the rationale for inscription.

The Application for Minor Boundary Modification is being submitted separately but is also attached for information at Annex A.

**2. Response to the Decisions of the World Heritage Committee**

*Decision: 38 COM 7B:80*

*The World Heritage Committee,*

- 1. Having examined Document WHC-14/38.COM/7B,*
- 2. Recalling Decision 37 COM 7B.28, adopted at its 37<sup>th</sup> session (Phnom Penh, 2013),*
- 3. Notes the information provided by the State Party that the majority of the recommendation from the 2013 IUCN advisory mission are being implemented;*

**RESPONSE TO PARAGRAPH 4:**

The State Party notes the World Heritage Committee's acknowledgement that the majority of the recommendations from the 2013 IUCN advisory mission have been implemented.

4. *Reiterates its request to the State Party to consider, in consultation with the World Heritage Centre and IUCN, potential modifications and alternatives to the golf resort development project to avoid potential adverse impacts;*

RESPONSE TO PARAGRAPH 4:

As part of the recent Periodic Review of the State of Conservation of the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS (the WHS Property) the State Party considered carefully the potential impact of the golf resort development project and concluded that it poses no threat to the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the WHS Property.

The State Party reiterates that the consent for the golf resort development project took full account of potential adverse impacts and was granted in accordance with relevant State Party planning legislation, policies and procedures. This was confirmed by the High Court in Northern Ireland.

Since the decision of the World Heritage Committee in 2013, the lands associated with the golf resort development project have been sold to a new owner and have remained undeveloped. Development works relating to the golf resort must begin on or before 29 March 2017 otherwise the consent expires. At present we do not have any indication whether or not the new owner is going to start construction works for the golf resort development project. The new owner of the lands has not submitted any modifications or alternatives to the golf resort development project. Noting the interest of the World Heritage Committee the State Party will notify the Committee if the new owner submits any development proposals which may affect the OUV of the WHS Property.

5. *Expresses concern that a petroleum exploration license was awarded in February 2011, which overlaps with the property, and that the State Party did not inform the Committee as required by paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines;*

6. *Also notes the confirmation provided by the State Party that no exploratory works have taken place within the property to date, nor that any planning applications for such work within the property have been submitted, and urges the State Party to ensure that no exploration activities will take place within the boundaries of the property and that any exploration activities outside the property do not have an adverse impact on its Outstanding Universal Value;*

7. *Reiterates its position that oil and gas exploration and exploitation are incompatible with World Heritage status, and also urges the State Party to exclude the property from the petroleum exploration license;*

8. *Takes note of the State Party's intention to submit a proposal for a boundary modification of the property, and strongly encourages the State Party to ensure that any planned modifications of the property's boundaries would not result in a further overlap between the petroleum exploration license and the property;*

## RESPONSE TO PARAGRAPHS 5-7:

The Petroleum Licence in question (PL3/10 – Rathlin Energy Limited) included conditions which required the area of the Licence to be reduced after five years (i.e. February 2016). The licensee wrote to the State Party in October 2015 giving notice to terminate the Petroleum Licence. Due to the termination of the Licence (in February 2016) there will be no overlap between any retained licence area associated with PL3/10 and the World Heritage property in its current form, or in its modified form, should the Committee agree to the minor boundary modification.

The WHS Operational Guidelines will be taken into account in granting any further licence in the future.

It is important to note that the State Party has in place a regulatory and policy framework to control potential negative environmental impacts arising from petroleum exploration activities. A Petroleum Licence in Northern Ireland does not itself grant or imply any permission to a Petroleum Licensee to undertake any prospecting work on the ground. Any survey work, drilling or construction must be the subject of further applications. Any such application is assessed in the context of the relevant legislation, including planning, and takes into account constraints such as World Heritage Sites and Natura 2000 sites. Applicants for a Petroleum Licence will be advised of these constraints at the outset in order to inform their consideration of whether or not to proceed with a licence or applications for associated prospecting work.

No intrusive site works associated with the Petroleum Licence in question (PL3/10) were consented within the WHS Property or its Distinctive Landscape Setting. There are existing and specific planning policy safeguards which would apply should consent have been requested for intrusive work in these areas. As the initial works associated with this Petroleum Licence was for remote, non-intrusive survey only, the State Party considered this type of work, in itself, has no potential impact on the OUV of the WHS Property. No exploration work has been done or is proposed for the WHS Property or the near vicinity.

Since the inscription of the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast as a World Heritage Site in 1986 the following exploration has been undertaken in the broad area of this and preceding petroleum licences:

- Seismic surveys, using Vibroseis trucks, along roads in 1995. This work did not approach closer than 6 km to the WHS.
- Drilling of Ballinlea No. 1 exploration well, drilled in 2008 and abandoned. This well is located approximately 10 km from the WHS.
- A small Vibroseis seismic survey in the vicinity of the Ballinlea well location. This work did not approach closer than 8 km to the WHS.
- Airborne gravity surveys.

The holder of the licence in question, Rathlin Energy Limited, submitted a Planning

Application (E/2013/0093/F) for Ballinlea No 2 well, which would lie approximately 10 km from the WHS Property. The proposal targeted Carboniferous sandstones in a conventional structural trap which is local to the Ballinlea vicinity.

An Environmental Statement was produced for the Planning Application in accordance with the requirements of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive 2011/92/EU (as amended). The Environmental Statement concluded that the proposed drilling rig will not be visible in views from the WHS Property as confirmed by ZTV mapping and that remaining phases of the development will have no indirect or direct effect on the landscapes of the WHS Property due to intervening topography, vegetation and attenuation by distance. It also concluded that there would be no significant effect on ecological environments and that there are no designated sites of geological or earth science (geomorphology, hydrology) importance in close proximity to the proposed development (The Giant's Causeway and Dunseverick Area of Special Scientific Interest is approximately 20km from the site).

The Planning Authority was still in the process of critically evaluating the Environmental Statement and associated representations when the planning application was withdrawn by the applicant in October 2015.

*9. Requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by 1 December 2015, an updated report, including a 1 page executive summary on the state of conservation of the property, including on the implementation of actions outlined above, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 40<sup>th</sup> session in 2016.*

**RESPONSE TO PARAGRAPH 9:**

This Report, and the application for Minor Boundary Modification, submitted separately, but also included as Annex A is in compliance with the Request.

**3. Other current conservation Issues identified by the State Party which may have an impact on the property's Outstanding Universal Value.**

No new issues that are considered to have a negative impact on the OUV of the WHS Property have arisen since the most recent Periodic Report was submitted.

The Distinctive Landscape Setting of the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS was designated in the Northern Area Plan 2016 which was adopted by the Department of the Environment Northern Ireland and became operational on 22 September 2015. The Plan also contains associated policies for the WHS Property and its Distinctive Landscape Setting which will help to ensure the preservation of its OUV (see Annex B). These policies supplement the interim planning policy for the WHS Property that were contained in Policy BH 5 of Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage.

The Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland was published on 28 September 2015. The provisions of the SPPS must be taken into account in the preparation of Local Development Plans and are material to all decisions on individual planning applications and appeals. The document notes the outstanding international importance of the WHS Property as a material consideration in the determination of planning and listed building consent applications, and appeals. It directs planning authorities to carefully consider applications affecting the OUV of such sites, particularly taking into account the safeguarding of critical views to and from the site, the access and public approaches to the site and the understanding and enjoyment of the site by visitors. Development that would adversely affect the OUV of a World Heritage Site or the integrity of its setting must not be permitted unless there are overriding exceptional circumstances.

**4. In conformity with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines, describe any potential major restorations, alterations and/or new construction(s) intended within the property, the buffer zone(s) and/or corridors or other areas, where such developments may affect the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, including authenticity and integrity.**

Although not major works, a planning application was submitted to add new buildings, accommodating 10 guest bedrooms, to a listed building that is within the Distinctive Landscape Setting of the WHS Property and is situated adjacent to its road entrance (E/2013/0130/F). The planning authority scrutinised the proposal and concluded that although the principle of some development is acceptable at the specific location there were concerns with the scale and design of the proposal. To address these concerns the applicant submitted amended proposals which are being carefully considered by the planning authority.

There is no inter-visibility between the proposal and key features of the WHS property. Affects on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property are unlikely.

**5. Public access to the state of conservation report**

The State Party is content for this report to be made available for public access on the World Heritage Centre's State of Conservation Information System.

**6. Signature of the Authority**

Ms Hannah Jones  
World Heritage Site and Underwater Policy Advisor

## **Annex A**

### **Proposed Minor Boundary Modification to Giant's Causeway & Causeway Coast World Heritage Site property**

In accordance with the Annex 11, Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention 2015, the following information is submitted:

#### **1. Area of the property in hectares:**

- As inscribed: 236.775 hectares
- As proposed to be modified: 239.405 hectares (an increase of 1.1%)

#### **2. Description of the modification:**

The dynamic nature of the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS (the WHS Property) is a rationale for its inscription. Active erosion of sea-cliff faces is part of the natural processes occurring in the WHS Property. The 2013 IUCN advisory mission recommended modification of the WHS Property boundary to ensure the sea-cliff faces remain within the inscribed boundary for some time to come.

Research has been undertaken at the WHS Property to gauge the rates of erosion and to identify those sections of sea-cliff most affected. The nature of the rocks of the WHS Property are of a hard type and State Party's experts have advised that an extension of 5 metres inland from the current WHS Property boundary should be sufficient to accommodate erosion of the sea-cliffs for the foreseeable future. It is therefore proposed to set back the WHS Property boundary by a distance of (on average) 5 metres inland.

#### **3. Justification for the modification:**

The modification was requested by the World Heritage Committee in response to the recommendation made following the 2013 IUCN advisory mission to address concerns that, should there be significant erosion, the cliff faces (key features of OUV) would no longer lie within the inscribed boundary of the WHS Property.

In addition site management and advances in mapping techniques provide a further rationale for proposing the minor boundary modification.

Since 1986, when the WHS Property was inscribed, there have been significant advances in mapping technology and the current boundary, when digitised using Geographic Information Systems and mapped on the Land and Property Services (LPS) Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland® (OSNI®) base at a scale of 1:2,500, does not align with the fence-line that is currently in place to assist with management of the WHS Property. Technological advances now allow us to provide greater accuracy in positioning and to relate the boundary line to actual site management features.

At the time of Inscription (1986), the inland boundary line of the WHS Property was intended to reflect the line of a management post and wire fence that restricted public access to adjacent farmland. The line of the fence varied in distance from the top of the sea-cliffs. Since the Inscription date the management fence line has been repaired and realigned in places.

The minor modification would match the WHS Property boundary with the current management fence-line where possible.

#### **4. Contribution to the maintenance of the Outstanding Universal Value:**

The WHS Property inscription recognizes the dynamic nature of the site (natural cliff erosion) as a key attribute. Erosion rates are relatively low (by comparison with other WHSs such as Dorset and East Devon Coast) but there may come a time when the active sea-cliff edge has moved back beyond the current WHS Property boundary. The proposed minor modification will postpone that eventuality and will have the effect of retaining the key features within the boundary of the inscribed WHS Property and maintaining its OUV for many years to come.

#### **5. Implications for legal protection:**

Ownership of the additional lands proposed to be included in the WHS Property will be unaffected by this minor boundary modification. The land will remain in the ownership of the existing three property owners. The land owners have been informed of the proposed modifications and have raised no objections.

No legal charge will be made on the land to be included in the WHS Property.

The additional lands inside the WHS Property will become subject to different planning policy as they will now be subject to specific planning policies associated with lands inside the Property (see Annex B).

#### **6. Implications for management arrangements:**

The minor modification will match the boundary of the WHS Property with the existing management fence-line where possible. This boundary change will clarify to WHS Property managers and adjacent landowners the boundary line of the inscribed WHS Property.

There is no management requirement to adjust either the existing management fence-line or the public path that runs between the cliff-top and the fence. Public access will continue to be permitted on the strip of land between the cliff edge and the existing management fence. However, the sea-cliff edge is actively eroding in areas and there

may come a time when both the path and fence have to be moved further inland for practical and safety reasons.

There is no need to amend the current management of the proposed extension strip in order to protect the OUV of the WHS Property. The lands affected are currently already managed as part of the WHS Property or are in agricultural production (mainly rough grazing).

The management of this additional strip will be discussed in future management plans for the WHS Property and risks to OUV will be assessed. Landowners are already represented on the World Heritage Site Steering Group and will have the opportunity to contribute to any future management plans.

## **Annex B**

Copy of current planning policy for World Heritage Sites

### **Strategic Planning Policy Statement (Operational from 28 September 2015)<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Regional Strategic Policy**

**6.5** The following strategic policy must be taken into account in the preparation of Local Development Plans (LDPs) and in the determination of planning applications.

#### **World Heritage Sites**

**6.6** Development that would adversely affect the Outstanding Universal Value of a World Heritage Site (WHS) or the integrity of its setting must not be permitted unless there are overriding exceptional circumstances.

**6.7** Inclusion of a WHS on a list published by UNESCO highlights the outstanding international importance of the site as a material consideration in the determination of planning and listed building consent applications, and appeals. Planning authorities must carefully consider applications affecting the Outstanding Universal Value of such sites, particularly taking into account the safeguarding of critical views to and from the site, the access and public approaches to the site and the understanding and enjoyment of the site by visitors.

### **Northern Area Plan 2016 (Operational from 22 September 2015)<sup>2</sup>**

#### **POLICY COU 2: The Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site**

No development will be approved within the World Heritage Site unless there are very exceptional circumstances directly related to the provision of essential facilities for visitors and which would not be detrimental to the landscape or scientific interest of the Site.

#### **DESIGNATION COU 3: The Distinctive Landscape Setting of the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site**

The Distinctive Landscape Setting of the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site is designated as identified on the Countryside Maps.

#### **POLICY COU 4: The Distinctive Landscape Setting of the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site**

No development within the Distinctive Landscape Setting outside of settlement development limits will be approved except:

1. exceptionally modest scale facilities, without landscape detriment, which are necessary to meet the direct needs of visitors to the World Heritage Site;
2. extensions to buildings that are appropriate in scale and design and represent not

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/final\\_spps\\_september\\_2015-2.pdf](http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/final_spps_september_2015-2.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/dev\\_plans/devplans\\_az/northern\\_2016.htm](https://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/dev_plans/devplans_az/northern_2016.htm)

more than 20% of the cubic content of existing buildings;

3. replacements of existing occupied dwellings with not more than a 20% increase in the cubic content.

These allowances will be permitted once only.