

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Nara (Japan)

No 870

Identification

Nomination Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara

Location Nara Prefecture

State Party Japan

Date 30 June 1997

Justification by State Party

The majority of the temples in Nara represent a Buddhist architectural style introduced from the Korean peninsula and the Chinese mainland in the 8th century which underwent a unique process of development in Japan. These buildings illustrate the high cultural and artistic levels of the wooden architecture of 8th century Japan and exhibit the close cultural interchanges with Korea and China. In view of the fact that nearly all the wooden buildings from that period in those countries are no longer in existence, the nominated property may be considered to be of special significance from the point of view of world history. Moreover, these buildings had a profound influence on later architecture of similar type, since it was to them that later builders turned: for example, the reconstruction of Tōdai-ji in the Kamakura period (1192-1333) produced a new architectural style by incorporating details of the *Daibutsuyō* (Great Buddha style) into the conventional Japanese *Wayō* style.

Criterion ii

The cultural assets that constitute the nominated property represent the most typical elements of Japan's ancient capital city, Heijō-kyō, among which the Nara Palace site has a special historical value as the archaeological remains of an ancient imperial palace. By comparison with the Heian-kyū (the Kyoto Imperial Palace), which existed from the 9th to the 11th century, the Nara Palace was in use for a very limited period of 74 years (710-84). Moreover, from the medieval period the town of Nara developed to the east of the former imperial capital, far from the site of the 8th century Palace. For this reason, unlike the Kyoto Palace, the Nara Palace site was not subject to urban development, and as a result it survived untouched after being abandoned. Since the buildings were of wooden construction, most of the above-ground structures disappeared, leaving only indirect traces in the form of changes to the topography, but much of what remained

underground has survived untouched to the present day. The copious collection of buried material remains, in the form of ceramics, roof tiles, and even records on wooden tablets, provides information on the customs, economy, and culture of the 8th century, which adds greatly to the historical and archaeological value of the site.

Criterion iii

The buildings included in the nominated property form an architectural ensemble that gives a vivid impression of the commanding appearance that Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines assumed in a socially and politically significant period of Japanese history when the previously unknown *Ritsuryō* system of legal and penal codes was being formulated under Buddhist influence. At the same time, these buildings are of outstanding value in studying the ancient Japanese forms of temple architecture.

Criterion iv

The nominated buildings are outstanding manifestations of the use of religious space which is unique to Shintoism and Buddhism in ancient Japan. Among the natural environments surrounding these man-made constructions, the woodlands behind the Kasuga-Taisha shrine, which have long been revered as sacred areas, are exceptional examples of the cultural landscapes associated with the Shinto religion, which is indigenous to Japan. These sites also continue to be the locations of living traditions, since important religious rites and ceremonies relating to Shintoism and Buddhism continue to be practised at them.

Criterion vi

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the temples and shrines constitute a *group of buildings*, the Nara Palace Site, the Kasuga-Taisha Compound, and the Kasugayama Primeval Forest are *sites*, whilst the latter two are also *associative cultural landscapes*.

History and Description

History

In 710 the capital of Japan was transferred by Empress Gemmei from Fujiwara to Nara, which prospered as the political, economic, and cultural centre of the country for the next 74 years, during what is known as the Nara Period. The site of Heijō-kyō was carefully selected in accordance with the Chinese geomantic principles governing the location of an imperial palace. A grand city plan, based on Chinese examples such as Chang'an, was laid out, with palaces, Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines, public buildings, houses, and roads on an orthogonal grid. It covered an area of 2500ha, and its population is estimated to have been around 100,000.

The palace itself, located at the northern end of the central avenue, occupied 120ha. It comprised the official buildings where political and religious ceremonies took place, notably the Daigokuden (imperial audience hall) and Chōdō-in (state halls),

and the imperial residence (Dairi), together with various compounds for administrative and other purposes.

During this period an integrated imperial policy for the promotion of Buddhism was developed and applied from Nara. Emperor Shōmu ordered temples and convents to be built in all the provinces, and built Tōdai-ji in 745 as the central provincial temple in Japan.

In 784 the imperial capital moved to Nagaoka for a mere nine years, and then to Kyoto (Heian), where it was to remain until 1184. The site of the abandoned Nara capital became paddy fields. However, most of the temples and shrines survived intact; they maintained their high status and imperial patronage. As a result a new town developed around them which became known as Nanto (South Capital). The temple area around Tōdai-ji, Kōfuku-ji, Gangō-ji, and Kasuga-Taisha was particularly prosperous, and it was here that the modern city of Nara was to develop in the 16th century.

In 1180, however, Tōdai-ji and Kōfuku-ji were burnt to the ground in a period of internal strife. They were to be rebuilt soon afterwards, at the beginning of the Kamakura Shogunate (1185). Whilst Kōfuku-ji adopted the traditional Japanese *Wayō* style, however, Tōkai-ji was to be rebuilt in the *Daibutsuyō* (Great Buddha) style, introduced from Sung Dynasty China.

The Nara temples were to lose their prestige in the Muromachi Period (1333-1572). They suffered grievously from damage by fire: at Tōdai-ji, for example, the Tōtō (east pagoda), Kōdō (lecture hall), Sōbō (priests' living quarters), Kondō (Great Buddha Hall), Chūmon (middle gate), and Kairō (cloister) were all destroyed in different periods of unrest. Some buildings were reconstructed during the early Edo Period (1615-1867), with the assistance of the Shogunate. Although the Kondō was reduced to two-thirds of its original floor area, it is still the largest extant wooden structure in the world.

Description

Heijō-kyō (the Nara capital) lies in a basin, open to the south and enclosed by low mountains on the north, east, and west.

The nomination covers groups of buildings and sites in eight separate locations: five Buddhist temples, one Shinto shrine, one forest, and one archaeological site.

- The Buddhist temples

The *Tōdai-ji* consists of a group of buildings. The Kondō (Great Buddha Hall), which houses the seated image of the Vairocana (Great) Buddha, owes its present form to a major restoration campaign that ended in 1709. It is a monumental seven-bay wooden structure (reduced from an original eleven bays), and the bronze statue is nearly 15m high. Other elements that have survived successive fires are the Nandaimon and Tegaimon (south and west gates), Hokkedō (two earlier buildings merged to form a Buddha hall), Shōshō-in Shōshō (large repository in "log-house" style for documents and treasures raised on tall pillars), Kaisandō (founder's hall, which combines *Wayō* and

Daibutsuyō features), Hombō-Kyōko (sutra repository, also in "log-house" style and raised on pillars), and Shurō (bell house, owing its present form to a 13th century rebuilding).

The *Kōfuku-ji* was originally erected in Fujiwara and rebuilt in Nara when the capital moved there in 710. It was the temple of the influential Fujiwara clan, and so was specially protected and embellished up to the Edo Period. In the early Meiji Period it fell into a steep decline following the promulgation of the Shintoism and Buddhism Separation Decree and was saved only in the nick of time. Its main features are the Hokuendō (north octagonal hall, with the earliest evidence of the introduction of the *Daibutsuyō* style), Sanjunōtō (three-storey pagoda from the late 12th century), Tōkondō (east main hall, a seven-bay structure with hipped roof rebuilt in the 15th century in pure *Wayō* style), and Gōjunōtō (five-storey pagoda), at 50m the second highest pagoda in Japan and a symbolic landmark in Nara.

The *Gangō-ji* was the first Buddhist temple in Japan, built by the powerful chieftain Soga-no-Umako in the 6th century and originally known as Asuka-dera. It was transferred from Asuka in 718 when the capital moved to Nara. Much of it was destroyed by fire in 1451 and only a few components survive to give an impression of its striking appearance in its prime. The Zenshitsu and the Hondō were originally a single long building, known as the Sōbō and used as living quarters for the priests. The Zenshitsu consists of four of the twelve original components of the Sōbō, whilst the Hondō (main hall) is its Buddha hall remodelled so as to provide an outer chamber for the use of devout Buddhists to pray. Both buildings are in an eclectic style incorporating *Daibutsuyō* and *Wayō* features.

The *Yakushi-ji* was also relocated from Fujiwara to Nara, where it was considerably enlarged. It has suffered a number of disasters during its long history. The Tōtō (east pagoda) remarkably survived all of these and retains its original form, which dates back to the 8th century; it has three storeys, but intermediate pentice roofs give the illusion that it has six storeys. The Tōindō (Buddha Hall) owes its present form to a late 13th century reconstruction (although its orientation facing south was changed in 1733 so that it now faces west). Its interior with wooden floors and a ceiling is typical of Kamakura Period architecture.

The *Tōshōdai-ji* was originally built by the Chinese high priest Jian Zhen (Ganjin) in 759 for students of Buddhist precepts. It is unusual in having suffered very little from fire or other forms of disaster. Its main features are the Kondō (main hall, the only extant example built in the Nara Period and very important in the study of Japanese temple architecture), Kōdō (lecture hall, originally a state assembly hall in the Nara Palace and the only surviving example of the architecture of the Palace), Korō (sutra repository in the Kamakura Period eclectic style), and Hōzō and Kyōzō (two Nara Period repositories in "log-house" style).

- The Kasuga-Taisha

According to legend the *Kasuga-Taisha* (Kasuga Great Shrine) was founded in 768, but its origins are believed

to go back to the beginning of the Nara Period. It is located at the foot of two sacred mountains, Kasugayama and Mikasayama, which have long been revered as sites where the deities descend to earth. During the later Heian Period it was united with the Kôfuku-ji, as part of the prevailing view that Kami (the deity of Shintoism) and Buddha existed as a single body.

The buildings of Kasuga-Taisha have been restored and reconstructed on many occasions following decay and destruction. The Honden (main shrine) was demolished and reconstructed in exactly the same form every twenty years, regardless of its condition, in accordance with the principle of *Shikinen-zôtai*; this policy continued until 1863.

The buildings are all within the shrine precinct and, according to tradition, are roofed with cypress-bark shingles, so as to harmonize with their natural environment. The Honsha Honden consists of the four main shrine buildings in the *Kasuga-zukuri* style, much favoured for Shinto shrine architecture and thought to have originated in the Nara Period. The buildings have gabled roofs, with the main canopied entrance on the gable end. There are many other buildings within the overall enclosure, all in similar style.

- The Kasugayama Primeval Forest

The natural environment is an integral element of all Shinto shrines. In the case of Kasuga-Taisha this is provided by Kasugayama, which has been preserved as a sacred forest where no hunting or tree-felling has been permitted since 841. There is no form of human intervention beyond the provision of footpaths for the use of worshippers and pilgrims.

- The Nara Palace Site

This vast compound, 1.3km east-west and 1km north-south, contains all the elements necessary to meet the official and private requirements of the imperial family. These included the Daigokuden (imperial audience hall), Chôdô-in (state halls), Dairi (imperial residence), offices, workshops, stores, stables, etc.

The compound was enclosed by earthen ramparts (*Tsuji-ogaki*) some 5m high and crossed by twelve gates. The main entrance was the Suzaku Gate in the middle of the south wall, giving access to the Daigokuden and Chôdô-in, the most important buildings in the imperial complex, used for political ceremonies and banquets. The buildings within these compounds were arranged symmetrically on a central north-south axis. Each building was on a podium, with a tiled roof and pillars lacquered in vermilion in the style of the contemporary Chinese Tang Dynasty.

A little to the east was another state hall, the East Chôdô-in, to the north of which the Dairi was located. Here the buildings were, by contrast, in traditional Japanese style: roofed with cypress-bark shingles and supported on unpainted pillars set directly in the ground.

The compound also included a number of gardens, details of one of which have been found by archaeological excavation. In the centre there was a shallow pond, the bottom of which was paved with

stone; all around were pavilions from which to appreciate the beauty of the garden.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The 78 buildings included in the nomination are designated as National Treasures (26) or Important Cultural Properties (52) under the terms of Article 27 of the 1950 Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties. The areas in which they are located are also designated, under Article 69 of the same statute, as Historic Sites or Places of Scenic Beauty, and this article is used for the designation of the Kasugayama Primeval Forest as a Special Natural Monument and the Nara Palace Site as a Special Historic Site.

This law has very strict provisions relating to the protection, preservation, and management of designated properties and sites. Any infringements entails severe penalties.

Management

Ownership of the various properties is diverse. The places of worship (the Buddhist temples and the Shinto shrine) are the property of their respective religious communities. Certain parts of the Tôdai-ji are owned by the Ministry of Finance (which also owns the Kasugayama Primeval Forest and part of the Kôfuku-ji) and by the Imperial Household Agency. The Agency for Cultural Affairs is the official proprietor of the Nara Palace Site.

It is the responsibility of owners of designated buildings and areas to manage, repair, and open them to the public. Any alterations require the permission of the national government.

There are clearly defined and adequate buffer zones and historic environment harmonization areas around all the nominated properties. These are provided for in the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties, the Law concerning Special Measures for the Preservation of Ancient Cities, and various prefectural and municipal laws and regulations related to urban planning, notably the very comprehensive 1990 Nara Municipal Ordinance concerning the City Landscape.

Overall supervision of the nominated properties is the responsibility of the Agency for Cultural Affairs. It carries out this work in collaboration, where appropriate, with the Council for the Protection of Cultural Properties (for matters relating to the 1950 Law), the Ministry of Finance, the Imperial Household Agency, the Prime Minister's Office (for matters relating to the Ancient Capitals Preservation Law), the Ministry of Construction (for matters concerning the City Planning Law), the Environment Agency (for matters related to the Natural Parks Law), the Forestry Agency (for matters related to the Forest Law), Nara Prefecture, Nara Prefectural Board of Education, Nara City, and Nara Municipal Board of Education.

Direct management, and in particular matters relating to research and investigation, conservation, repair, and

maintenance, comes within the purview of the Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute, the Management Office of Nara Park, and the Boards of Education of Nara Prefecture and Nara City, all of which have highly skilled conservation sections.

There is no overall management plan for the whole body of properties included within the nomination. However, each has an annual conservation and maintenance survey programme, and special projects are programmed as parts of short-term planning exercises. Substantial financial aid (50-85%) is available for non-governmental owners from central government for conservation and restoration projects, and there are also funding possibilities from the prefectural and local governments.

In the case of the Nara Palace Site, a basic plan was adopted for its future development in 1978 as a "field museum" for research and educational purposes. This includes the reconstruction of certain components.

Nara City formulated in 1992 a Basic Scheme for City Landscape Formation, the objective of which is to preserve significant landscapes resulting from the coming together of nature and the works of man. This regulates and manages the overall appearance of the historic city and its surroundings. It is being used to ensure that the projected Keinawa Motorway, which is planned to pass through the southern part of Nara City, will not have an adverse impact on any of the cultural properties or landscapes.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Respect for tradition and for sacred places resulted in the creation of special maintenance and restoration organizations by the imperial and shogunate administrations. Modern conservation began with the enactment of the Ancient Shrines and Temples Preservation Law in 1897, when professional architects and conservators were appointed in Nara Prefecture.

At first some of the techniques applied were at variance with what is now acceptable as good practice: the use of steel reinforcing frameworks, for example. Current Japanese practice, which is recognized to be of the highest quality both in terms of conception and workmanship, began with the restoration of the Horyu-ji temple in 1934. Since that time it has been applied systematically in Nara. It operates at two levels: major repair works, involving total or partial dismantling of buildings, and minor repair work/maintenance (roofing, painting, partial repairs).

Work in Kasugayama Primeval Forest has involved reforestation following damage by a typhoon in 1961 and by a fire in 1978. The latter resulted in the installation of fire-fighting equipment along the forest trails. Human impact was reduced when vehicle access was eliminated in the early 1970s.

The Palace Site was covered with rice paddies after the move of the capital to Kyoto. It came under national protection as an Historic Site in 1922. In 1953 archaeological excavation revealed that the remains of

the Palace had survived in a good state of preservation underground, and a major excavation programme began in 1955. The entire area of the imperial Palace is now in public ownership.

Authenticity

The level of authenticity of the various properties included in the nomination is high. Japanese conservation principles have ensured that replacement of damaged or degraded architectural elements has respected the materials and techniques used by the original builders.

There has been some *in situ* reconstruction on the Nara Palace Site. The continuity of traditional architecture in Japan and the substantial amount of data recovered by archaeological excavation has ensured that the reconstructed buildings have a high level of authenticity in design and materials.

The same holds good for the garden reconstructions. The only reconstruction that might be considered to involve a significant element of conjecture is that of the Suzaku (south gate). Much of the constructional and decorative details depends upon archaeological evidence and that from surviving structures from the same period elsewhere.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Nara in February 1998.

Qualities

The properties that make up the nomination of the Historic Monuments of Nara provide a vivid picture of the religious and cultural life of Japan during a relatively short but politically and culturally very significant period of its history.

Comparative analysis

By the very nature of Japanese history, each of the successive imperial capitals may be deemed to be unique. The special value of Nara lies in the fact that its monuments represent a period of profound cultural and political change influenced by China.

Brief description

The historic monuments of Nara - temples, shrines, the excavated remains of the great imperial palace - provide a vivid picture of the capital of Japan in the 8th century AD, which was a period of profound political and cultural change.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii and iv*:

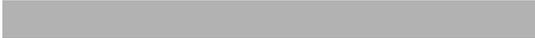
Criterion ii: The historic monuments of ancient Nara bear exceptional witness to the evolution of Japanese

architecture and art as a result of cultural links with China and Korea which were to have a profound influence on future developments.

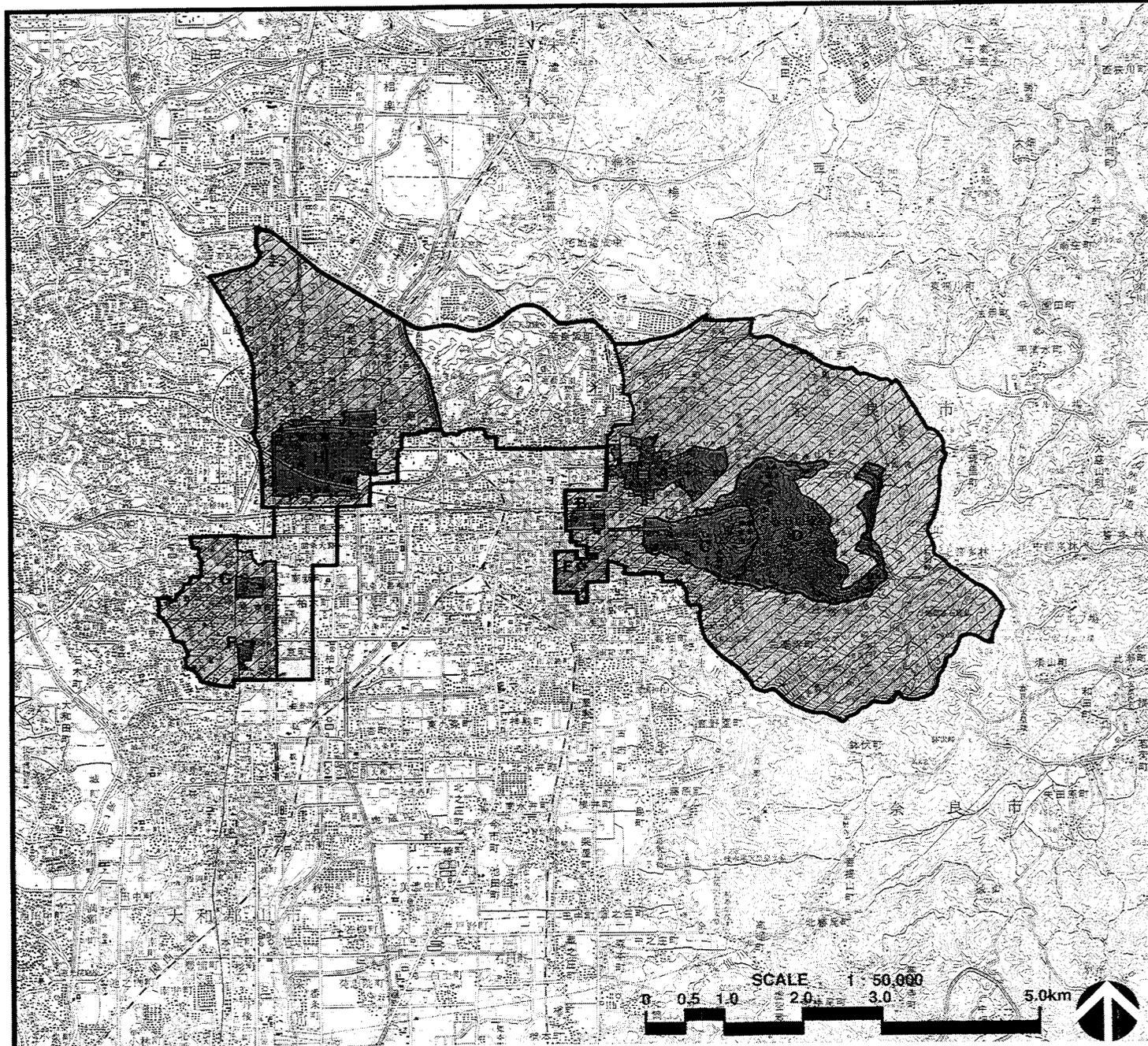
Criterion iii: The monuments of ancient Nara vividly illustrate a critical period in the cultural and political development of Japan.

Criterion iv: The 8th century Nara Period was a crucial one in Japanese history and culture, when it took a significantly new direction, and this is reflected in the historic monuments of Nara.

ICOMOS, October 1998

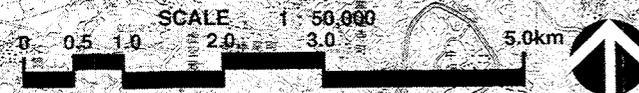


MAP INDICATING THE NOMINATED PROPERTY AND THE SURROUNDING NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT



	Nominated Property	616.9 ha
	Buffer Zone	1,962.5 ha
	Historic Environment Harmonization Area	539.0 ha
Total		3,118.4 ha

A: Tōdai-ji Area	68.9 ha
B: Kōfuku-ji Area	12.4 ha
C: Kasuga-Taisha Area	93.1 ha
D: Kasugayama Primeval Forest Area	298.6 ha
E: Gangō-ji Area	0.8 ha
Buffer Zone	1,311.6 ha
F: Yakushi-ji Area	5.1 ha
G: Tōshōdai-ji Area	9.1 ha
Buffer Zone	186.3 ha
H: Nara Palace Site Area	128.9 ha
Buffer Zone	464.6 ha



Monuments historiques de l'ancienne Nara / Historic Monuments of ancient Nara :
Plan indiquant la zone proposée pour inscription et la zone tampon / Map showing nominated property and buffer zone