

# UNITED KINGDOM

## Blenheim Palace

### Brief description

Blenheim Palace, near Oxford, stands in a romantic park created by the famous landscape gardener 'Capability' Brown. It was presented by the English nation to John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough, in recognition of his victory in 1704 over French and Bavarian troops. Built between 1705 and 1722 and characterized by an eclectic style and a return to national roots, it is a perfect example of an 18th-century princely dwelling.

### 1. Introduction

**Year(s) of Inscription** 1987

#### Agency responsible for site management

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### 2. Statement of Significance

**Inscription Criteria** C (ii) (iv)

#### Justification by the State Party

Blenheim Palace as it stands today

- represents a unique architectural achievement
- is an outstanding example of the work of two of England's most notable architects.
- is a building which, with its associated landscape, has exerted considerable influence on subsequent developments in architecture and landscape design.
- is associated with two of England's great national heroes, the first Duke of Marlborough and Sir Winston Churchill.

As such it is nominated for inclusion in the World Heritage List under UNESCO Criteria a(i), (ii) and (vi).

#### As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

Criterion II. By their refusal of the French models of classicism, the Palace and Park illustrate the beginnings of the English Romantic movement which was characterized by the eclecticism of its inspiration, its return to national sources and its love of nature. The influence of Blenheim on the architecture and the organization of space in the 18th and 19th centuries was greatly felt both in England and abroad.

Criterion IV: Built by the nation to honor one of its heroes, Blenheim is, above all, the home of an English aristocrat, the 1st Duke of Marlborough, who was also prince of the Germanic Holy Roman Empire, as we are reminded in the decoration of the Great Drawing Room by Louis Laguerre (1719-1720)

In virtue of this criterion, just like the residence of Wurtzburg (included in 1981), and the Castles of Augustusburg and Falkenlust in Bruhl (included in 1984), Blenheim is typical of 18th-century European princely residences, a category which is still under-represented on the World Heritage List.

#### Committee Decision

The Committee made no statement.

- The State Party will discuss and agree a revised Statement of outstanding universal value which will be submitted in due course for consideration by the World Heritage Committee.
- No change required to UNESCO's official description of the site

#### Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate
- Buffer zone: no buffer zone has been defined
- The management plan steering group will be considering the extent to which the park wall, together with current local plan policies, create an adequate buffer zone to the World Heritage site

#### Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained

### 3. Protection

#### Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- County structure plan policies; local plan policies; listed buildings; site of special scientific interest; scheduled ancient monuments; registered historic park and garden; Cotswolds AONB designation on western boundary; national heritage legislation; and ecological legislation
- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

### 4. Management

#### Use of site/property

- Visitor attraction, rural landscape
- Also: home of 11th Duke of Marlborough

#### Management /Administrative Body

- Steering group formally set up on 01 October 2004 to guide the preparation of the management plan process
- No site manager but none is needed
- Managed as a private landed estate: this site is owned and managed by the Blenheim Estate who have the primary responsibility for its management. It does, however, operate within national planning legislation as delivered by West Oxfordshire District Council. English Nature provide advice on the SSSI management; the Historic Buildings Inspector at English Heritage, together with the local planning authority Conservation Officer provide advice on management and conservation of listed buildings, and the Countryside Agency advise on issues relating to the national heritage landscape
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: national (DCMS)
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

### 5. Management Plan

- No management plan but one is in preparation
- Implementation commenced: July 2006
- The following are responsible for over-seeing the preparation of the management plan: steering group comprising representatives from Blenheim Palace, County Council, District Council, English Heritage, Countryside Agency, ICOMOS, DCMS, English Nature. Historic Landscape Management, consultants, writing and co-ordinating plan. Thereafter, the

Blenheim estate will be responsible for implementing the plan with advice as required from specialist consultants. A decision has not yet been taken about the extent to which the plan production steering group will remain involved in the implementation, although it is likely that this will be the case

### 6. Financial Resources

#### Financial situation

- There is no core funding. The management and finances relating to the running of the estate are inextricable from the World Heritage site.
- All funding by the 11th Duke of Marlborough. Grant aid from English Heritage and the Countryside Agency in relation to the preparation of the management plan
- No funding drawn in through the World Heritage Fund WHF
- Insufficient

### 7. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: not provided
- Also access to the following staff: Heritage consultants; historic landscape consultants; archaeological consultants; historic buildings conservation architects - all commissioned by the estate to provide advice on an as-and-when-needed basis

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Very good: education
- Good: conservation, management, promotion interpretation, visitor management
- Staff resources are adequate

### 8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- Estate staff receive continued professional development training as necessary. Staff working on the conservation of the built fabric are trained, as are those who work on the landscape and within the palace. Since Blenheim is a private estate, there are no opportunities for non-staff members to be trained in heritage and conservation techniques on the site
- Training on site management for stakeholders

### 9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 662,088 in 2004
- Visitor facilities: Blenheim Palace, formal gardens and 2,100 acres of surrounding parkland. Pleasure Gardens area comprising: antique gardening machinery exhibition and information centre; shop and coffee shop; miniature train; butterfly house; maze; adventure playground; visitor tea room and restaurant at the Palace plus two further retail outlets; parking areas on gravel and grass conference and private function facilities in the courtyard
- Information material includes leaflets, guidebooks and more detailed coffee table books; guided tours of the Palace; changing exhibitions (this year the theme is Churchill Destiny; events in the park and gardens
- Visitor facilities are inadequate
- Visitor needs: more hard standing areas for car/coach parking and better traffic circulation; more exhibition/interpretation facilities.
- There is a tourism/visitor management plan for the site

### 10. Scientific Studies

- There is no agreed research framework/strategy for the site
- Studies related to the value of the site, condition surveys, archaeological surveys, visitor management
- Condition surveys include external fabric inspection of all listed and non-listed buildings and structures with the park wall boundary.
- Studies used for management of site: they will be used to inform the management plan and help define policies for conservation and management in the future. The briefs were prepared on the basis that the work would be used to inform a World Heritage site management plan

### 11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- An adequate number of signs referring to World Heritage Site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on some publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: visitors, local communities, local authorities. Inadequate: businesses
- There is an education strategy for the site

- Regular visits from schools are encouraged and older students training in tourism and heritage use Blenheim as a case study example. At higher education levels, the site has been used by academics as a location of conferences and seminars on the historic landscape and heritage matters
- The Estate employs a full time education officer who organises school visits and provides input which includes sessions on heritage and on the World Heritage status of the site. They have won the Sandford Award for Heritage Education every year since its inception in 1982. The Head Gardener has recently completed and opened a visitor information and education centre in the Pleasure Grounds which focuses on the history of gardening and garden machinery
- There are special events and exhibitions, some of which relate to the World Heritage criteria, but none specifically about World Heritage
- Website available
- Local participation: Charity use of the park, otherwise none

### 12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

#### Reactive monitoring reports

- N/A

#### Conservation interventions

- Rolling programme of building repairs and conservation. Major conservation work on the Palace, including re-wiring. A smaller area of parkland is now under the plough. A major parkland replanting programme has been devised and partly implemented. Restoration of garden buildings for use as new exhibition area. New conference and visitor facilities.
- Present state of conservation: good

#### Threats and Risks to site

- Environmental pressure, visitor/tourism pressure, agricultural/forestry regimes
- Environmental pressure – with regard to parkland trees responding to due to changing environmental conditions – these effects are already being noticed. Also Environment Agency requirements in relation to damming works on the water through the park in preparation for the 1 in 10,000 flood – this could potentially effect water levels in the Lancelot Brown lakes
- Visitor/tourism pressure – there is potential for this to be an issue

Agricultural/forestry regimes – changes could affect the parkland setting, for example the pressures of creating a good shooting environment/or future changes in tax or agricultural regimes

- the world heritage site to the local trade community of shops, hotels and restaurants
- No WH Funding is sought. Timeframe: not known

### **13. Monitoring**

- No formal monitoring programme
- A programme of monitoring will be included in the management plan which may include the development of key indicators

### **14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions**

- Main benefits of WH status: Sense of place: The estate are proud of their World Heritage Status but do not believe it brings any specific benefits. Partnership working: the Estate have good relations with EH, CA and EN; Local council involvement: the Estate already work closely with local councils
- Strengths of management: 1- New visitor and education facilities; 2- Completion of one of the first UK designed historic landscape restoration plans by Colvin and Moggridge together with Cobham Resource Consultants. This plan was commissioned early in 1981 to a format which was developed in consultation with the then Countryside Commission and was considered to be a pioneering approach at the time; 3- Environmental Audit undertaken. 4- Building conservation work including the Palace, the park lodges and the park wall. 5-Setting up Steering Group and instigation of management plan process
- Weaknesses of management: 1- Previous lack of a management plan. 2- Greater support in terms of resources would allow much more to be achieved in the way of conservation activities. 3- Community links have, in the past, been minimal

#### **Future actions:**

- 1- A management plan is now being prepared; 2- External funding for conservation projects will continue to be sought; 3- The process of preparing the management plan and undertaking public consultation will hopefully begin to improve community involvement. The estate is also creating links with the local business community through joining a recent joint marketing campaign called 'Wake up to Woodstock' which recognizes the benefits of